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PhD Dissertation

M F - Norwegian School of Theology

2017
Summary of PhD dissertation

Theology of Inculturation and Liberation
in the People to People Peacemaking Process in Southern Sudan (1997-2002)

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The present PhD dissertation is a theological-empirical study of the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted in Southern Sudan in the years 1997-2002.

The theoretical profile, or ‘framework’ as referred to in the literature on the peace process in question, has been defined as a synthesis of three elements: the first is African Traditional beliefs, values and methods of conflict resolution, particularly in the Dinka and Nuer traditions; the second is Christian values and beliefs; and the third is contemporary approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking.

The research question I aim at answering is: What kind of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, African Traditional Religion, and peacebuilding theory and praxis?

In the process of analysing the intersection of contextual theology, or theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war, African Traditional Religion and peacebuilding, both in the literature about the People to People Peacemaking Process and in empirical material (interviews), I have defined a model of contextual theology that I use as analytical tool. In such a model, I highlight a movement from theology to Traditional Religion and culture via peacebuilding in the frame of inculturation, and a movement from theology to peacebuilding through Traditional Religion and culture in the frame of liberation.

Literature on African theology shows the ways in which in the African theological landscape inculturation theology and liberation theology have often been developed by different groups of theologians, in different geographical areas, with different hermeneutical assumptions and agendas. Literature refers to tension and even conflict among inculturationists and liberationists in the African continent.

My thesis is that the theology of the People to People Peacemaking Process is a contextual theology that has managed to hold in a positive, productive relation the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation/peace (in the Southern Sudanese context liberation includes the dimension of peacebuilding). In this respect, I aim at contributing to the field of African theology with this study.

This dissertation also aims at producing knowledge on the People to People Peacemaking Process as a faith-based, grassroots peacebuilding and peacemaking initiative. It is my hope that the present study of the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process and the theology there developed, may provide lessons for inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding to be applied in the context of South Sudan, currently once more at war.

I define this research as theological-empirical. I consider my study theological because its main aim is to answer a theological question, namely what type of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process. It is empirical because, given the limited amount of literature available on the subject, an answer to the research question can be given only on the basis of information empirically gathered through interviews. I have conducted thirty in-depth, individual, semi-structured interviews with key-actors in the People to People Peacemaking Process.

The paradigm for this research is abductive, as theory and information empirically gathered are in a circular relation where theory guides the analysis of empirical material and the study of empirical material in turn offers new insights to existing theory.
The dissertation is structured in five sections. The first section consists of introduction, research design, and methodology.

The second section concerns theory in relation to the theoretical framework chosen for the present dissertation, namely contextual theology and the elements of inculturation and liberation within African theology. I also make use of the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation to read the theology of inculturation and liberation developed in the frame of the People to People.

In the third section, I provide information on the contexts of the case-study, both historical and hermeneutical. In the historical chapter, I present the history of the People to People Peacemaking Process with references to the history of conflict in Sudan and Southern Sudan.

In relation to the hermeneutical contexts, in the subsequent three chapters I provide background information on the three elements that contributed to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, namely African Traditional Religion, particularly in the Dinka and Nuer traditions; Christian theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war; and peacebuilding theories, in particular as elaborated in the work of peace practitioner and theoretician John Paul Lederach. I argue that the elaboration of Lederach had absorbed lessons learned in the context of Southern Sudan.

The fourth section is devoted to the analysis of interview material and is divided into six chapters. The first deals with the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People Peacemaking Process as perceived by actors in the process. The second and the third chapters address the inculturation aspect of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People. These deal with different approaches and theological responses to the synthesis of African Traditional Religion, Christian theology and peace by participants in People to People events, and with the perceived relation between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist in the context of the People to People. The third and the fourth chapters address the liberation aspect of the theology elaborated in the frame of the People to People. The fourth chapter explores the position of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army towards Marxism, religion and Christian theology, while the fifth chapter looks at the issue of liberation theology as developed in relation to the People to People Peacemaking Process. The sixth chapter of the analysis section examines perceptions among interviewees concerning the possible influence of international partners on theological elaboration in the frame of the People to People.

The fifth and last part of the dissertation is devoted to discussion and conclusions.
PART ONE: INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH DESIGN, AND METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

2. Research design
   1. Introduction
   2. Choice of research area, personal motivation, and definition of the research question
   3. Social location of the researcher and personal normative stands
      3.1. Contextual theology
      3.2. The circle of theory and praxis
   4. From theorising to theologising in first and second level theological elaborations
      4.1. Context of discovery and context of justification
      4.2. ‘Bottom-up’ approaches
   5. Normativity in the relation between empirical material and theological elaboration

3. Methodology
   1. Introduction
   2. Research approach: case study
   3. Data sources: documents and interviews
      3.1. Documents
      3.2. Interviews
         3.2.1. Type of interviews and questions asked
         3.2.2 Choice of interviewees
   4. Epistemological considerations
      4.1. On the ‘neutrality’ of the interviewer
   5. Ethical considerations
      5.1. On the amount of preliminary information to be shared with the interviewee
      5.2. The issue of confidentiality
      5.3 On power asymmetry between interviewer and interviewee
   6. Epistemological and ethical considerations about contextuality
   7. Transcribing
   8. Analysing
   9. Reliability, validity, and quality
   10. Generalisation and replication

PART TWO: THEORY

4. Contextual theology
   1. Introduction to contextual theology
   2. Methods of contextual theology
      2.1. On the authority of scripture and tradition and the normativity of contextual theology
   2.2. Goals of contextual theology
   3. Implications
      3.1. Role of the trained theologian
      3.2. Role of the foreigner theologian
   4. On terminology: indigenisation, inculturation, and contextualisation
   5. Models of contextual theology
      4.1. Robert J. Schreiter: three models of local theologies
      4.2. Stephen B. Bevans: six models of contextual theology
         4.2.1. The translation model
         4.2.2. The anthropological model
         4.2.3. The praxis model
         4.2.4. The synthetic model
         4.2.5. The transcendental model
         4.2.6. The countercultural model
5. Contextual theology in the frame of the People to People: what model?

5. African theology between inculturation and liberation
1. Introduction
2. The debate between John Mbiti and James Cone
3. Definitions: inculturation and liberation
4. An issue of hermeneutics
4.1. Biblical hermeneutics
4.2. Hermeneutics of context
4.3. Hermeneutics of African Traditional Religion
5. Differences in historical and cultural backgrounds
5.1. Panafriicanism and nationalism
5.2. The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa
5.2.1. Liberation as theological category in the South African context
6. The role of ecumenical associations
7. Martey’s proposal for a synthetic approach
8. Contribution of the present study to African theology

6. Inculturation and liberation as a response to the need for orientation, transformation, and legitimation
1. Introduction
2. A pragmatic approach to religion
3. The priority of practice over doctrine
4. Orientation, transformation, and legitimation
5. The hermeneutical function of orientation, transformation, and legitimation

PART THREE: THE CONTEXTS OF THE CASE STUDY

A. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

7. The History of the People to People Peacemaking Process
1. Introduction
2. The foundation of the Sudan and New Sudan Councils of Churches
3. The Split within the SPLM/A and the deteriorating situation in the South
4. NSCC’s commitment to peace work
5. The churches take a critical standpoint towards the SPLM/A
6. The Akobo conference
7. The IGADD track I peace process
8. The SPLM civil society conference
9. “Here we Stand United in Action for Peace”
10. The Kejiko Dialogue between the SPLM/A and the churches
11. The Lokichoggio chiefs meeting
12. Preparing for Wunlit
13. Dinka-Nuer West Bank peace and reconciliation conference in Wunlit
14. The Lokichoggio women’s meeting
15. The Chukudum NSCC – SPLM/A meeting
16. The second Akobo conference
17. The immediate results of Wunlit
18. Attempts at expanding the People to People Peacemaking Process to the East Bank
19. Strategic linkages
20. “Let My People Choose”
21. The Entebbe meetings
22. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement

B. THE HERMENEUTICAL CONTEXT

8. African Religion
1. Introduction
2. African Religion
2.1. African Religion or Religions?
2.2. The principle of abundant life
2.3. The interconnectedness of life
2.4. The relationship imperative
3. Elements of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion
   3.1. Understandings of God
   3.2. God as One and many
   3.3. The ambivalence of God
   3.4. The role of cattle
   3.5. Sin or human fault
   3.6. Sacrifice
      3.6.1. Sacrifice and the making of community
      3.6.2. Sacrifice and communal meal
   3.7. Wei, life
   3.8. Peace and peacemaking
      3.8.1. Traditional religious leaders and peacemaking
      3.8.2. Ceremonies of peacemaking
      3.8.3. The ideal of coolness-peace
      3.8.4. On the symbolism of right and left, right and wrong, and war and peace among the Nuer
      3.8.5. The Nuer ideal of integral peace
4. Elements of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion in the frame of the People to People

9. Christianity in the context of Southern Sudan at war
   1. Introduction
   2. Indigenous mission and grassroots Christianity
   3. Conversion in refugee camps
   4. Christianity among the Nuer
   4.1. Reasons for Nuer conversion to Christianity
   5. The Dinka Bor and Christianity
      5.1. The role of Bishop Nathaniel Garang
      5.2. Grassroots church and Christian prayer
      5.3. Grassroots church and a contextual theology of inculturation
      5.4. The role of Dinka women in the church
      5.5. Dinka Christian songs
         5.5.1. Dinka songs and contextual theology
         5.5.2. Opposition to the jaak
         5.5.3. Apocalyptic Christianity
         5.5.4. The ambivalence of God
         5.5.5. “Death has come to reveal the faith”
         5.5.6. Songs of liberation
      5.6. The Dinka Cross as an example of inculturation
         5.6.1. The Dinka Cross as an elaboration of traditional objects
         5.6.2. The Dinka cross invested with new meanings
         5.6.3. The Dinka cross as an expression of contextual theology
      6. Southern Sudanese contextual theology as inculturated theology
         6.1. God is One
         6.2. Christ mitigating the ambivalence of God
         6.3. Suffering as a consequence of human fault
         6.4. Identifying the causes of suffering
         6.5. Traditional sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ
         6.6. Confession and forgiveness
         6.7. New religion, same culture
      7. Inculturation as a response to the need for orientation and transformation

10. John Paul Lederach on peacebuilding
    1. Introduction
    2. In need of new paradigms
    3. The role of middle-range leaders
4. Principles supporting Lederach’s framework
4.1. Contextual approaches to peacebuilding
4.1.1. Culture as resource for peacebuilding
4.1.2. People’s full involvement
4.1.3. The spiritual dimension of peacebuilding
4.2. Training
4.2.1. The circle of theory and praxis
4.3. Internal and external actors
5. Lederach’s peace framework and the People to People
6. Peacebuilding in Sudan and Southern Sudan and Lederach’s framework

PART FOUR: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW MATERIAL

11. The theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People and its contributing elements
  1. Introduction
  2. The theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People
  2.1. Traditional elements in the ‘framework’
    2.1.1. Rituals
    2.1.2. Storytelling and truth telling
    2.1.3. Songs
    2.1.4. The concept of time
    2.1.5. Focus on community relations
    2.1.6. A holistic understanding of peace
    2.1.7. Compensation and restorative justice
  2.2. Christian elements in the ‘framework’
    2.2.1. Bible reading and prayer
    2.2.2. Peace as key biblical message
    2.2.3. Focus on the people
    2.2.4. Forgiveness
    2.2.5. Reconciliation
  2.3. Modern elements in the ‘framework’
    2.3.1. The contribution of John Paul Lederach to the theoretical profile of the People to People
      2.3.1.1. Option one: key actors were aware of the work of Lederach and were influenced by his ideas
      2.3.1.2. Option two: there was no influence of the ideas of Lederach
      2.3.1.3. Option three: a resonance between the work of Lederach and the ideas that inspired and supported the People to People was discovered at a later stage
      2.3.1.4. Option four: an indirect influence of Lederach
  2.3. Conclusions

12. Perspectives on inculturation I: different attitudes towards the coexistence of Traditional rituals and Christian beliefs at People to People events
  1. Introduction
  2. The five groups
    2.1. The Traditionalists
    2.2. The conservative Christians
      2.2.1. Compromise
      2.2.2. Confessional differences
      2.2.3. Coexistence or mixture?
      2.2.4. A theological solution to the dilemma
      2.3. The ‘in-betweens’
  2.4. Respect for other traditions
  2.5. Those open to reviewing theology in light of Traditional practices
  3. Considerations on syncretism and dual religious systems
  4. Conclusions

13. Perspectives on inculturation II: connections between Traditional sacrifice, Old Testament sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ, and the Eucharist in the frame of the People to People
  1. Introduction
2. Five responses to the relation between Traditional sacrifice, Old Testament sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ, and the Eucharist
   2.1. The relation is not acknowledged
   2.2. The relation between Traditional sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist is excluded due to theological reasons
   2.3. A relation is established between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifices of the Old Testament
   2.4. A relation between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist is established

3. A much needed theological debate

4. Conclusions

14. Perspectives on liberation I: The SPLM/A between Marxism and Christianity
1. Introduction
2. The “historical Dialogue” between the SPLM/A and the NSCC
   2.1. The Marxist rhetoric of the SPLM/A and their standpoint toward religion
   2.2. John Garang, the churches, and the liberation struggle
   2.3. John Garang, the churches, and Traditional Religion and culture
   2.4. John Garang, the churches, and liberation theology
   2.5. The NSCC-SPLM/A Yei Declaration
3. Analysis of interview material
   3.1. Garang, Traditional Religion, Christianity, and the role of the churches in the liberation struggle
   3.2. Garang and Marxism
   3.3. The move of the SPLM/A toward Christianity
   3.4. The elaboration of liberation theology as an alternative to Marxism
4. Conclusions

15. Perspectives on liberation II: liberation theology in the frame of the People to People
1. Introduction
2. Liberation theology in Sudanese ecumenical documents and publications
   2.1. A comparison between key concepts of liberation theology and the content of core publications in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process
   2.1.1. Results of the comparison
3. A Sudanese liberation theology
   3.1. Option one: a contextual theology of liberation is developed independently from external influences
   3.2. Option two: talking the language of partners
   3.3. Option three: aware of other liberation theologies and influenced by them
4. Conclusions

16. The Influence of partners on the theological elaboration of the NSCC
1. Introduction
2. International ecumenical organisations
   2.1. Financial support, advocacy, credibility, and authority
   2.2. Theological influences
3. The Kenyans: NCCK, Samuel Kobia, Agnes Abuom and the theology of John Mbiti
   3.1. The influence of African theology
4. The South Africans
5. International staff in the NSCC
6. The role of the NSCC in the People to People
7. Conclusions

PART FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

17. Discussion and conclusions
1. On contextual theology, inculturation, and the praxis model of liberation and peace
2. Defining a framework for both inculturation and peace/liberation
3. A contextual theology of peace and liberation
4. Political theology as liberation theology
5. Syncretism and dual faith-systems
6. Orientation, transformation, and legitimation
7. From peace to inculturation
8. Contextual religious peacebuilding
9. Need for a theological debate
10. Perspectives on religious grassroots peacebuilding
11. Conclusion

Annex I: Themes of liberation theology

Annex II: List of Interviewees

Bibliography
Abbreviations

AACC All Africa Conference of Churches
AIC Africa Inland Church
CPA Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DoP Declaration of Principles
EAAT Ecumenical Association of African Theologians
EATWOT Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECS Episcopal Church of Sudan
EMU Eastern Mennonite University
GoS Government of Sudan
IGADD Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development
IGAD Intergovernmental Authority on Development
NCA Norwegian Church Aid
NCCK National Council of Churches of Kenya
NGO Non-governmental Organisation
NSCC New Sudan Council of Churches
PCOS Presbyterian Church of Sudan
RCC Roman Catholic Church
SEF Sudan Ecumenical Forum
SIC Sudan Interior Church
SCC Sudan Council of Churches
SPC Sudan Pentecostal Church
SPDF Sudan People’s Defence Forces/Democratic Front
SPLM/A Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army
SSLM South Sudan Liberation Movement
SWAN Sudanese Women’s Association in Nairobi
SWG Sudan Working Group
SWVP Sudanese Women’s Voices for Peace
WCC World Council of Churches
1. Introduction

Studies on Religion and Peacebuilding⁠¹ aim at highlighting and exploring the resources of religious traditions to mitigate conflict and contribute to positive social transformation and peace. As theologies are counted among such resources,² the broad question motivating the present study is: what theologies have the potential to support inclusive, sustainable peacebuilding?

As religious peacebuilding is a relatively new field of studies, most of the literature consists of case studies. More empirical studies are called for to develop tools for analysis while theories are expected to emerge from the description of practice.³ To explore the theme of theology as a positive resource towards peacebuilding, I have chosen to work theologically-empirically, looking at the case of the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted by the churches and ecumenical networks in Southern Sudan⁴ from 1997 to 2002.

In 1991, in the course of the Second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005) fought primarily between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), a split occurred among the leaders of the SPLM/A on issues of power management within the Movement/Army and disagreement about the goals of the liberation war. The split soon

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³ Hertog, Katrien, The Complex Reality of Religious Peacebuilding, p. 47

⁴ As South Sudan became an independent Country in 2011, when touching upon events preceding independence, I refer to the region as ‘Southern Sudan’
acquired ethnic connotations and led to deliberate attacks on civilians by various armed groups as well as extended conflict among neighbouring Southern communities.

Since the year 1992, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), the ecumenical body connecting churches in the South of Sudan, had made several attempts at reconciling the factional leaders to contribute to the betterment of people’s living conditions. Such attempts had remained ineffective. A new strategy was therefore chosen: first, to reconcile people at the grassroots level, and move from there to peace and reconciliation efforts among military and political leaders. In 1997, the NSCC received from the SPLM/A official mandate to reconcile both people at the community level and the leadership of the military factions. By the year 1998, the People to People Peacemaking Process was officially launched as peace “of the people, by the people, for the people”. In a so-called bottom-up approach, grassroots peacebuilding initiatives were meant to prepare the ground for reconciliation among factional leaders and eventually contribute to achieving peace at the national level.

The case study of the People to People has been chosen as the subject of the present dissertation for four main reasons: the process was faith-based; it had an acknowledged theoretical profile (‘framework’); it was inclusive in terms of gender, age and social location; and it can be considered an example of sustainable peacebuilding as peace agreements achieved in the frame of that process, such as the Wunlit peace agreement (1999), held until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), in 2005.

In reference to the second reason mentioned, namely that the People to People had an acknowledged theoretical profile, literature on the People to People refers to the ‘framework’ of the process defined as a synthesis of three elements: African Traditional beliefs, values and methods of conflict resolution; Christian values and beliefs; and current approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking. On the basis of references in literature to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the process, the research question leading the present study is: What kind of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, African Traditional Religion and peacebuilding theory and praxis? The thesis I aim at substantiating is that the theology developed in the frame of the People to People is a contextual theology of inculturation and liberation.

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5 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan. The Story of People-to-People Peacemaking in Southern Sudan. A Peace of the People, by the People, for the People, NSCC, Nairobi, 2002
6 The term is bracketed to distinguish the theoretical profile of the People to People from the theoretical framework chosen for the present work, namely contextual theology
7 For references to the ‘framework’ see New Sudan Council of Churches, Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan. People-to-People Peacemaking Process, Methodologies and Concepts Among Communities of Southern Sudan, NSCC, Nairobi, 2004, pp. 11, 12, 16, 59 and 71
8 New Sudan Council of Churches, Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan
In the African theological landscape, inculturation theology and liberation theology have often been developed by different groups of theologians, in different geographical areas, with different hermeneutical assumptions and agendas. Literature refers to tension and even conflict among inculturationists and liberationists in the African continent. This study contributes to the field of African theology, offering the example of a contextual theological elaboration that has managed to hold in a positive, productive relation the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation.

The present work furthermore aims at contributing to the area of research on theology and peacebuilding by providing an account – until this point not available – of the theology that developed in the frame of the People to People.

Furthermore, the present study contributes to the area of research on contextual theology. Contextual theology is the theoretical framework chosen for the present work, defined by North American scholar Stephen Bevans as theology developed in relation to four dimensions of context: experience, culture, social location and social change.

The dimensions of inculturation and liberation that I identify in the theology developed in the frame of the People to People, can respectively be read through two models of contextual theology among the six offered by Bevans: the anthropological model and the praxis model. While the praxis model suggested by Bevans is closely related to liberation theologies, the author chooses to refer to it as praxis model to indicate that the specificity of the model concerns more the method than a particular theme, namely the method of relating theological reflection to praxis. For this reason, I apply Bevan’s praxis model to peacebuilding and in the course of this work refer to the praxis of peace/liberation.

Still, among the models offered by Bevans, there is not one that addresses simultaneously the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation. On the basis of empirically-gathered data (interviews), I have developed a matrix to describe such a model of contextual theology. The matrix I elaborated exemplifies how, in the People to People, the articulation of Christian theology and African Traditional Religion and culture is in the frame of inculturation, while the articulation of theology and peacebuilding is in the frame of liberation. The matrix or model I have elaborated assumes the context of theological elaboration as both religio-cultural and socio-political. Such a model further holds the three elements of Christian values and beliefs, African Traditional Religion and culture and peacebuilding in a circular, constructive relation: theology approaches

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11 See Bevans, Stephen B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 54-69 and 70-87
peacebuilding via Traditional Religion and culture, and in the other direction, theology addresses Traditional Religion and culture via peacebuilding.

The paradigm of the present work is abductive, as theory developed in the discipline of contextual theology and the related areas of African theology, inculturation theology and liberation theology supports an understanding of data empirically gathered, while data contribute with new insights and perspectives to the just-named research areas.

The present dissertation is organised in five parts. The first includes the present introduction and deals with issues of research design and methodology (Chapters 1, 2 and 3).

With the chapter on research design (2), I aim at elaborating on the reasons behind the choice of the research area and the process leading to the definition of the research question; on my social location and personal normative stands; on the articulation of two levels of theological elaboration, namely theology as developed in the frame of the People to People and my theological analysis of such theological elaboration; and on contextual theology both as the theoretical framework for the present dissertation, and in relation to an understanding of normativity at the two levels of theological elaboration I address with this work.

In the chapter on methodology (3), I elaborate on case study as the research approach chosen for the present dissertation. I will look at data sources - documents and interviews - elaborating on the type of interviews conducted and the choice of interviewees. I will address epistemological and ethical issues in relation to the theoretical framework chosen for the present work, namely contextual theology and, in light of the same theoretical framework, I will address issues of reliability, validity and quality, as well as generalisation and replication.

The second part is devoted to theory in relation to the theoretical framework chosen for the present work, namely contextual theology (Chapter 4), African theology (5) in its two strands of inculturation and liberation, and the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation (6) outlined by Norwegian Theologian Jan-Olav Henriksen.12

In Chapter 4, I give a presentation of the models of contextual theology elaborated by North American theologians Robert Schreiter and Stephen Bevans, to see which models can be applied to the theology developed in the frame of the People to People.

In Chapter 5, I provide an account of the themes and principal actors of the controversy within African theology on inculturation and liberation. I move from the debate between Kenyan theologian John Mbiti, an inculturationist, and North American theologian James Cone, a liberationist. I then present the analysis Ghanaian theologian Emmanuel M artey provides of the

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12 Henriksen, Jan-Olav, Religion as Orientation and Transformation. A Maximalist Theory, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2017
elements of the debate, and his suggestion for a way out of the impasse through a macro-understanding of culture that includes social, political and economic factors. Still, Martey points to the fact that a study on the synthesis of inculturation and liberation is not yet available. The present dissertation aims at filling this gap.

In Chapter 6, I propose a reading of inculturation and liberation through the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation defined by Jan-Olav Henriksen.

The third part of the dissertation aims at setting the case study of the People to People in its contexts, both historical and hermeneutical. In Chapter 7, I delineate the historical context of the case study, looking at the history of the People to People Peacemaking Process with references to the history of conflict in Sudan and Southern Sudan.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 delineate the hermeneutical context of the case study, providing background information on the three elements that contributed to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, namely African Traditional Religion, Christian theology and peacebuilding theories.

In Chapter 8, I introduce African Religion and explore it, particularly in its Dinka and Nuer expressions. As the main People to People event, the peace conference held in Wunlit in 1999, aimed at reconciling Dinka and Nuer people, and since a great portion of the reflection conducted around the People to People is supported by the experience of the Wunlit process, knowledge of the main elements of Dinka and Nuer religion will be useful in two ways. First, such knowledge will facilitate an understanding of what is meant by the contribution of African Traditional Religion to the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process. Secondly, it will facilitate an understanding of what is implied in interview material concerning Traditional religious values, beliefs and practices in Southern Sudan, and in the frame of the People to People.

Chapter 9 will focus on the theology that developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war, and which contributed to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People. I will describe this theology relying on literature on the history of Christianity in Sudan and Southern Sudan, and on theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war. I argue that such a contextual theology had a marked inculturated character. In other words, it was a theology that had developed in relation to aspects of traditional culture and religion. I will then elaborate on those elements of Traditional Religion that in my understanding were assimilated by Christian theology.

Chapter 10 will deal with peacebuilding theories as articulated by peace practitioner and theoretician John Paul Lederach. Lederach envisions an infrastructure for sustainable peace to which several ideas and principles contribute. In this chapter, I address the issues of contextual approaches to peacebuilding; the circle of theory and praxis; the focus on culture as resource for
peacebuilding; the spiritual dimensions of peacebuilding; focus on the people; and the transformative function of training. I argue that similarities between the peace framework proposed by Lederach and main features of the People to People are due also to the fact that Lederach included in his elaboration lessons learned from grassroots peace processes in Southern Sudan.

The fourth part of this dissertation (Chapters 11 to 16) is devoted to the analysis of data gathered through interviews. The aim of Chapter 11 is to analyse interview material on the perception actors in the People to People had of the theoretical ‘framework’ of the peace process and of the elements – Traditional, Christian and so-called modern – that contributed to it.

Chapters 12 and 13 deal with the inculturation aspect of the theology elaborated in the frame of the People to People.

In Chapter 12, I present elements of theological elaboration prompted by the encounter of Traditional ritual and Christian faith at People to People events. I also look at the issues of syncretism, dual faith systems and inter-religious cooperation to see which interpretative categories are most suitable to understand and define the religious practices of different groups of Christians attending or maintaining Traditional ritual.

In Chapter 13, I look particularly at the articulation of Traditional ritual slaughtering to seal peace agreements and the Eucharist or Holy Communion in the frame of the People to People. I examine whether Christians who participated in Traditional slaughtering would make a connection between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, or between the communitarian meal following Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

Chapters 14 and 15 deal with the liberation aspect of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People.

In Chapter 14, I look at the attitude of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) towards religions and Christian theology. On the basis of my study of related literature, I will explore the implications of the request issued by John Garang, the SPLM/A leader, to the churches to elaborate a contextual theology of liberation. Garang also asks the churches to hold a positive attitude towards Traditional Religion and culture. I argue that liberation and inculturation are held together already in the expectations the Liberation Movement harbours towards the churches as supporters in the liberation struggle.

Chapter 15 deals specifically with the issue of the elaboration of a contextual form of liberation theology by Sudanese church actors and in relation to the People to People.
Chapter 16 deals with the role of international ecumenical partners in the theological elaboration by Sudanese actors. Here, the discussion will mirror in theological terms the issue of the relation between external and internal actors in peacebuilding efforts.

Discussion and conclusions (Chapter 17) are the content of the fifth and last part of the present work. My main conclusion is that the theology that developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, Traditional Religion and peacebuilding, is a theology of inculturation and liberation (where liberation includes peacebuilding), a theology that addresses peace engagement and liberation through inculturation, and that, inversely, in view of the urgent need to achieve peace is led to reconsider issues of inculturation.

I suggest that the theology of inculturation and liberation developed in the frame of the People to People be read as an attempt at providing spiritual orientation and leading individual and social transformation vis-à-vis the experience of chaos determined by war. I also indicate the ways in which practices of orientation and transformation in the frame of the People to People call for theological justification (Henriksen).

This study offers in this way an account so far not available, of the theology that developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process. It also offers lessons on theologies that have the potential to support inclusive, sustainable peacebuilding.
2. Research design

1. Introduction

This dissertation is a theological-empirical qualitative study of the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted by churches and ecumenical structures in Southern Sudan from 1997 to 2002.

I consider my study theological because its main aim is to answer a theological question, namely what type of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process. It is empirical because given the limited amount of literature available on the subject, an answer to the research question can be given only on the basis of information empirically gathered through interviews.

Publications by the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) on the People to People refer to the ‘framework’ of the process, defined as a synthesis of three elements: African Traditional beliefs, values and methods of conflict resolution; Christian values and beliefs; and current approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking.13

The research question I more specifically aim at answering is: What kind of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, African Traditional Religion and peacebuilding theory and praxis?

The thesis I aim at substantiating is that the theology developed in the frame of the People to People is a contextual theology of inculturation and liberation.

The chosen research approach is that of a single exploratory case study, namely the People to People Peacemaking Process. Data sources are documents and thirty individual, in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Issues of method will more specifically be dealt with in the next chapter. With the present chapter, I aim at elaborating on the reasons behind the choice of the research area and the process leading to the definition of the research question; on my social location and personal normative stands; on the articulation of two levels of theological elaboration, namely theology as developed in the frame of the People to People and my theological analysis of such theological elaboration; and on the choice of contextual theology as the theoretical framework for the present dissertation in relation to an understanding of normativity at the two levels of theological elaboration I am addressing with this work, namely theology elaborated by actors in the People to People, and my own analysis of such theology.

13 New Sudan Council of Churches, Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan
2. Choice of research area, personal motivation, and definition of the research question

The larger question and source of personal interest motivating the present research is: what theologies have the potential to support inclusive, sustainable peacebuilding? The question was formulated in relation to previous research on the theme of women’s participation in peacebuilding and faith-based peacebuilding.

One of the issues raised and addressed by research on Women, Peace and Security\textsuperscript{14} is the lack of visibility of women’s engagement in peace work, its causes and possible solutions as well as the limited inclusion of women in high-level peace processes.

If inclusive participation in peacebuilding and faith-based peacebuilding is considered a goal to be achieved both in view of durable peace and from a right-based perspective, to achieve that goal it is necessary to understand what the obstacles to inclusive participation are, and in what ways such obstacles can be removed.

In relation to religious peacebuilding, the systemic factors that limit inclusive participation are, among others, religious structures, interpretation of authoritative texts and theologies. The issue of women as full participants in faith-based peacebuilding calls for a reflection on the participation of women in the life of religious communities, as decision-makers, leaders and clergy. It also creates a challenge to re-think peace, peacebuilding and its effectiveness starting from where women are already active, namely at the grassroots and community levels. Finally, the issue of women’s participation in peacebuilding and faith-based peacebuilding calls for a reflection on theologies and peace theologies that are at their core inclusive. If the exclusion of women from leadership is considered a theological and ecclesiological issue, then the full inclusion of women in the life of religious communities - including their peacebuilding engagement - is an equally theological issue. It is here that my interest in theological elaborations that have the potential to support inclusive, not only in gender terms, sustainable peacebuilding originates.

In the period 2009 to 2011, I lived and worked in South Sudan where I had the chance to learn more about the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted by churches and ecumenical structures during the years 1997 to 2002.

The case of the People to People soon became interesting in relation to the issue I was pursuing, namely the issue of the relation between theological elaboration and inclusive, effective peacebuilding praxis, for the following four reasons: the process was faith-based, it was inclusive, it had an acknowledged theoretical profile, and it had proved effective at achieving and maintaining peace at the grassroots level. To further elaborate, the People to People was a faith-based peace process, building on both Christian values and beliefs and African Traditional religious peacemaking practices; it was inclusive and gender inclusive as literature about the process refers to the important role played by women, youth and elders; references to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the process in the related literature had already established a relation between the theories that supported the process, its methodology and its outcome (in other words, a relation between theory and praxis); and lastly, in the frame of the People to People, peace agreements achieved at the grassroots level lasted until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. Such elements made the People to People a suitable case study to search for an answer to the question: what theology has the potential to support effective, inclusive peacebuilding?

Studying the subject, and particularly the theoretical profile of the People to People, I realised that theological reflection in the frame of the process had been ‘work in progress’: it had developed as the process was conducted also as reflection on practice. I needed to shift the focus from the theology that inspired the People to People to the theological elaboration that was conducted in the frame of the process. As the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People is defined, as mentioned, a synthesis of three elements: African Traditional beliefs, values and methods of conflict resolution; Christian values and beliefs; and current approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking; the question was then reformulated: What kind of theology was developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, African Traditional Religion and peacebuilding theory and praxis?

My thesis, as mentioned, is that such a theology is a contextual theology of inculturation and liberation, where liberation includes the dimension of peacebuilding.

3. Social location of the researcher and personal normative stands

From the perspective of contextual theology, there is neither neutral theological enterprise nor value-free, interest-free research. Studies on normativity and contextual theology underline that it

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is necessary to make explicit personal interests and experience not to invalidate the results of the research conducted.

I am a Sicilian, an Italian Protestant and a feminist. This means that I carry with me the multiple experience of having been raised as a woman in a culturally conservative context, in an economically depressed, peripheral area of Europe marked by criminality, as a member of a religious minority, and engaging in social and at times countercultural activities both as an individual and as part of a religious community.

In Sicilian culture, gender roles are rather stereotyped and expectations about the role of women generally conservative. Engaging in feminist reflection over a period of more than twenty years has meant being aware of social and cultural oppression, reflecting on liberating theories and theologies and engaging in a liberative and transformative praxis.

Sicily is a region notoriously affected by the mafia. For most people, this means being affected by insecurity, bearing the consequences of lack of infrastructures and services and generally living in a constant condition of social emergency created by the mafia to pursue its interests. I grew up aware of the impact the mafia had on our quality of life and, as an individual and as part of my religious community, I engaged in anti-mafia activities.

As the 1980s were years of heavy armament that saw the expansion of North American military bases in Sicily, from a young age and together with my religious community I engaged in anti-military, pacifist demonstrations and activities both locally and nationally. Later, I have been professionally engaged in peace work.

There is a link between my social location, experience, values and interests and the theme of the present research through which I try to understand what type of theology has the potential to support peacebuilding as a form of positive social change.

Two normative principles condition and guide the present work, the choice of the subject and the related methodology: the first one is that all theology is contextual, all theology is the product of specific contexts and experiences; the second one related to the first one, is the circle or interrelation of theory (theology) and praxis.

3.1. Contextual theology

My first normative assumption is that all theology is contextual. As contextual theology has been chosen as the theoretical framework for the present work, a full chapter of the theory section will be devoted to this issue. I will also return to issues related to contextual theology in the section of this chapter dealing with the articulation of first and second order theological elaborations.
3.2. The circle of theory and praxis

In *Teología de la liberación. Perspectivas*, Gutierrez defines liberation theology as “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God”. I subscribe to the principle and methodological choice of liberation theology of the circularity of theory and praxis: theology influences praxis (the concept of praxis includes the idea of action inspired by theory), and praxis in turn affects renewed elaboration of theology. While the normative stand discussed here is influenced by liberation theology, I normatively extend the principle of the circularity of theory and praxis to theological elaboration in general. I assume that all theological elaboration (that does not remain confined to the privacy of one’s room) has practical implications, as well as that practical choices made by individuals with a religious identity and by religious communities, are supported, possibly with varying degrees of awareness, by theological standpoints. Such a normative stand, that praxis and practical choices are in a circular relation with theoretical preferences and elaborations, guides my empirical work. Questions asked during interviews aimed at gathering data on what ideas and theories inspired, supported and were articulated in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process.

4. From theorising to theologising in first and second level theological elaborations

In this section I will refer to the contribution of Swedish sociologist Richard Swedberg to the process of theorising or constructing theory, and explore some of the implications of Swedberg’s elaboration for my research on the theology developed in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process.

I define my project as theological-empirical. As mentioned, I consider it theological because its main aim is to answer a theological question, namely what type of theology supported the People to People and was further developed in its context. It is empirical because, given the limited amount of literature produced on the subject, an answer to this question can be given only on the basis of information gathered empirically through interviews. My project is also theological-empirical on

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18 Gutierrez, Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. xxix
another level, namely at the level of the theology that develops in the frame of the People to People, a contextual theology that evolves around the life experiences of those people who produced it.

The paradigm I use is abductive. I have studied and trust that I have reached a sufficient understanding of the disciplines that concern my research project, such as contextual theology and the related areas of African theology, inculturation theology and liberation theology. At the same time, I aim at gaining from data (interview material) new insights and perspectives on the just-named research areas. With Swedberg, I would say that while I am rooted in already established theoretical realms, I engage in a process of theorising that has its starting point in data, and aims at contributing with new theory or at least providing new perspectives on existing theory on contextual theology, inculturation, liberation and religious peacebuilding.

Swedberg is in search of types of theory formation that are suitable for sociology and social sciences. The author supposes a movement from empirical material and experience to theory through a process of theory formation that he terms ‘theorising’. I wish to apply his suggestions about the process of theorising to theology, and therefore suppose a process of theory formation from empirical material and experience to theology that I term ‘theologising’.

While reflecting on the movement from empirical material to theology and from experience to theology through the process of theologising, in my research I will have to distinguish between the two levels I have already referred to, namely theologising by those who are producing theology in the context of the People to People, and the level of theologising, or theory construction in theology, I am moving along in the process of studying theology elaborated by others. Practical theologian Ruard Ganzevoort calls the two levels ‘first order’ and ‘second order’ of theological discourse. While studying others’ theologising, I do in turn theologise. I will return to this point.

In calling the work carried out by communities in the context of Southern Sudan at war ‘theologising’, I rely on theories already developed in the fields of contextual theology and liberation theology.

In his *Constructing Local Theologies*, Schreiter refers to the role of the community in developing theology as a reminder of the fact that theology is meant, first and foremost, for the community itself. In being agents of theological elaboration, people engage in an emancipatory praxis. The expression of faith in theology should make a difference in people’s lives. Theology, in the frame of contextual theology, is understood as expression of faith and reflection around faith.

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22 Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, pp. 16-17
in a specific context, often a context of oppression that requires a process of conscientisation, of acquisition of awareness, and the enactment of a related praxis of liberation. In such a frame of understanding, the community is the producer as well as the beneficiary of a given theological discourse, and theological elaboration derives its validity from its relevance.

Contextual theology is empirical, as it has its starting point and consciously takes into consideration the role played by life experience in the process of theologising, and it often has a communitarian character, as it is the result of a communitarian effort, produced for the benefit of extended communities. Theorising, says Swedberg, should be a communal and cooperative enterprise among all kinds of social scientists, linked to each other as well as to people around the world. Peirce liked to point out that scientific inquiry is profoundly communal in nature ...

Inquiry and community, Peirce said, must come together in a true community of inquiry. 23

While the step from the community of scientists Peirce and Swedberg had in mind to the communities of Southern Sudan is long, I find their focus on the desirable communitarian character of the process of theorising interesting.

In exploring the implications of Swedberg’s suggestions on the circle of data, theorising and theory, following the indications of the author, I might need to identify a starting point, a process of development of ideas and a theoretical/theological point of arrival, both at the level of theologising carried by the communities I am studying, and at the level of theologising that is implied in my theological-empirical analysis.

Concerning the theology that is produced in the context of Southern Sudan, the starting point is life experience, the experience of war with its consequences, and the desire and need to achieve peace. 24 Christians engage in the task of finding religious meaning and strengthening hope in the midst of huge suffering. They engage in a process of theological reflection on the role of God vis-à-vis war, on the responsibility they carry in the reality of war and on their mandate as Christians to realise peace. The result is a biblical theology focusing on the need of conversion and to engage in active peacebuilding. For the more theologically articulated actors, the result is the expression of elements of a contextual theology that I further connote in terms of inculturation, liberation and inclusive peace. Social, economic and political conditions as well as personal experiences are the context of such a process of theologising.


24 As interview material will indicate. See particularly Chapter 11
In my process of theorising and theologising, I start from the empirical material gathered through interviews on theologising in the context of Southern Sudan at war and the People to People as well as from literature on the context of Southern Sudan, the spread of Christianity in Sudan and the history of the People to People. In the process of theologising – the process of reflecting theologically on the empirical material I am analysing – I make use of theoretical perspectives from contextual theology and the related areas of African theology, inculturation theology and liberation theology. My point of arrival is an assessment and critical evaluation of the theology that was produced in the context of the People to People, an operation that Ganzevoort describes in the following terms: “We can describe the first order discourse, analyse the constructions and the way these constructions function in the relation to God and in relation to other individual and social phenomena”.25

Following Swedberg, I also privilege the movement from empirical material to theory, as I believe that a study of the People to People and the theology developed in its context, requires specific interpretative lenses (a contextual theology of inculturation and liberation) and that such a study can contribute with new insights to existing research on contextual theology and the field of study on religion and peace.

4.1. Context of discovery and context of justification

In reference to the natural sciences, Reichenbach, quoted by Swedberg,26 introduces the distinction between context of discovery and context of justification. The context of justification is the context of theory, as only the process of justification can rationally and scientifically be accounted for. Swedberg chooses to apply such categories to the social sciences, and on this distinction bases his new programme of creative theorising: the more creative, the more the context of discovery is allowed to be the place to develop and express new, unconstrained insights. What perspectives might such a distinction open when applied to the two levels of theologising I am exploring here? What are the contexts of discovery and justification in the contextual theologising by actors in the People to People and in my own theologising?

In relation to theologising by actors in the People to People, the context of discovery would be the context of elaboration of new theological ideas in response to an all too concrete life experience conditioned by war. The context of justification would be the context of testing the relevance of the theology that has been produced. In the context of justification, says Reichenbach, a theory needs to be verified, and justification has to do with “the form in which thinking processes

26 Swedberg, Richard, “From Theory to Theorizing”, p. 3
are communicated to other persons”.\textsuperscript{27} In contextual theology, scientific value is replaced by relevance: new ideas are verified by being communicated to other persons and being submitted to the test of relevance in a specific time and place. Here, relevance is not the only criterion of justification. The theology produced in the context of Southern Sudan at war was deeply biblical, and had as a point of reference the opinion of church leaders theologically trained. Still, biblical interpretation is inevitably contextual, as is the judgment expressed by church leaders, who are in turn influenced by the context they are part of. Contextual approaches to theorising call for a redefinition of the criteria and goal of general validity.

At the level of my own theorising and theologising, the context of discovery is both the time and place where the interview is carried out and the process of analysis of the interview material. Here, I inevitably make use of theories I have already absorbed and also, as Swedberg recommends, make use of my personal knowledge, experience, intuition and imagination. As I am accountable to an academic community, in the context of justification, I will have to provide evidence that I have gathered empirical material and analysed it in a systematic and transparent way. I will have to illustrate how I relate my analysis of interview material to already existing theory and theology, and I will have to relate observation of data to explanation. The theory that will emerge from the theorising process, will have to be tested against existing data and existing theory.

4.2. ‘Bottom-up’ approaches

Theologising from the ground, from contextual conditions and experiences, beside the goal of being relevant to a specific context, has the ambition of contributing with its own insights to wider theological discourses. In the context of the People to People Peacemaking Process, peace efforts are also ‘bottom-up’, they start from the local level and have as a goal contributing to peace at the national level. A research approach that moves from empirical material to theory could also be defined as ‘bottom-up’, an approach that moves from the ground with the aspiration to contribute to a larger theorising effort. The theoretical approach chosen, namely contextual theology, matches both the method of theological elaboration and of peacebuilding praxis followed in the frame of the People to People. Such an approach also has the potential to create a bridge between first and second level theological discourses.

\textsuperscript{27} Swedberg, Richard, “From Theory to Theorizing”, p. 4
5. Normativity in the relation between empirical material and theological elaboration

In this section, I will address the issue of the normative character of the theology produced in the frame of the People to People, theology that I explore through interview material.

In her article “Empirical research and theological normativity”, Ulla Schmidt poses two questions that are relevant to the theme of my research: what role does contextuality play in the articulation of empirical research and theological normativity, and is it feasible to consider ordinary beliefs (or ordinary theology) as significant to normative reflection within theology?

About the first question, the author writes:

Contextual theologies, such as liberation theology, have asserted that normative propositions cannot be defined and validated independently of the social, cultural and historical context in which theology is immersed and done.

In the frame of contextual theology, validity and normativity are also defined in terms of contextual relevance. As one of the aims of the present research is to explore mainly through interviews the theology produced in the frame of the People to People, and since such theological elaboration is contextual, as it is developed by local actors as a response to contextual issues (the reality and consequences of a long running war and the engagement of churches and ecumenical structures in peacebuilding and peacemaking), we could conclude that the theology produced in the frame of the People to People is normative for the very fact of being contextual.

Contextual theology, in the terms in which Bevans expresses it, links normativity to the relevance of a theological discourse linked in turn to the consistency among the three loci of theological elaboration: context, scripture and tradition. Theological normativity is related to the relevance of a theological discourse determined by the correspondence among the three loci. On the basis of what has just been said, it is the turn of theology not aware of its contextual character and therefore not relevant according to the criteria to which I refer her to argue for its normative character. To what extent can we consider normative a theology that is disconnected from the context it aims at addressing and does not pass the test of relevance?

In dealing with the issue of the relevance of empirical research for normativity, Schmidt refers to ordinary beliefs and ordinary theology accessible to empirical studies through qualitative, ethnographic and quantitative research. In addressing the issue of the normative relevance of such

29 Schmidt, Ulla, “Empirical research and theological normativity”, p. 41
30 See B evans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 4
31 Schmidt, Ulla, “Empirical research and theological normativity”, p. 44
ordinary theology, Schmidt seems to reach the conclusion that its normativity is precluded by methodological difficulties:

> It would miss the point and serve no purpose to level out the difference between theology as an academic, specialized and trained activity with inherent standards of conceptual clarity, methodological care and theoretical insight, and the kind of reflection implied by ordinary beliefs. Nonetheless, it seems more adequate to describe this as a difference in degree along a continuum of theological activity, rather than a difference in nature or kind.32

The theological qualities measured along the continuum referred to in the quotation are academic, specialised, trained, clear, methodologically sound and theoretically articulated. From the perspective of contextual theology, the criteria to evaluate sound theology are its contextual character and relevance, and the correspondence of the three normative loci of context, scripture and tradition. Is it still appropriate to talk of variations of degree along a continuum, or should we rather talk of understandings of sound theology of different if not contrasting character? As I am choosing contextual theology as the overarching theoretical framework of the present research project, the definition of normative theological principles and of the normativity of the empirical material gathered through interviews, will be assessed according to the same principles of normativity defined by contextual theology, namely relevance and the three loci of experience, scripture and tradition.

In the framework of contextual theology, theological elaboration also gathers its normativity from the fact that it is produced by ordinary people:

> As theology becomes more of a reflection on ordinary human life in the light of the Christian tradition, one might ask whether ordinary men and women might not, after all, be the best people to theologize. 33

Schmidt’s article prompts a further question: does theology accessed through empirical research methods need to be ‘ordinary’, a term that Bevans also uses? What if a contextual theology is not recorded in writing but only accessible through interviews or qualitative research, and still it is all but ordinary in the sense that it is produced by the most qualified theologians in a specific context? A good portion of the theological elaboration that I gather through interviews is expressed by the most profiled church leaders and theologians in South Sudan.34 While being contextual and accessible only through empirical research, it is the expression of non-ordinary theological actors.

32 Schmidt, Ulla, “Empirical research and theological normativity”, p. 47
33 Bevans, Stephan B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 17
34 Ten out of thirty interviewees are South Sudanese church leaders and theologians
Furthermore, as will be shown in the course of this work, such contextual theology produced in the frame of the People to People has a quite distinct biblical character. Although accessible through empirical research, such theology draws its normativity from the fact of being contextual, biblical and in part the expression of most profiled theologians who also represent the tradition of their historical churches. It is my understanding that such theological elaboration meets the three normative criteria proposed by contextual theology of experience, scripture and tradition.

3. Methodology
1. Introduction

In the present chapter, I will look more closely at the method chosen to conduct the present research. I will start with a presentation of the case study as research approach. I will look at data sources – documents and interviews – elaborating on the type of interviews conducted and the choice of interviewees. I will address epistemological and ethical issues in relation to the theoretical framework chosen for the present work, namely contextual theology, and in light of the same theoretical framework I will address issues of reliability, validity and quality, as well as generalisation and replication.

2. Research approach: case study

The chosen research approach is that of a single exploratory case study, namely the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted in Southern Sudan by ecumenical structures and their member churches from 1997 to 2002.

The unit of analysis is the theology that was developed in the frame of the process at the intersection with African Traditional Religion and culture on the one hand, and peacebuilding on the other. Such a study of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People requires an understanding of that peace process.

Robert Yin defines a case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, and relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion.\(^{35}\) The contemporary phenomenon investigated by the present research is the theology that was elaborated in the frame of the People to People. The real-life context of the phenomenon investigated is the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted by the New Sudan Council of Churches and its member churches from 1997 to 2002. The investigation of the phenomenon relies on multiple sources of evidence, namely documents and interviews. Triangulation is carried out on at least three levels: among the outcome of various interviews; between the outcome of interviews and documents; and between data collected through interviews and documents, theory on each of the subjects analysed and the researcher’s knowledge of the subject matter. The present enquiry is theological-empirical, as it explores theological concepts and issues also with the help of data empirically collected. The in-depth investigation is carried out also through thick description of the context of the case study, both historical and hermeneutical.

As the context of the phenomenon investigated is a process, a clarification might be due about the reasons why a case study has been chosen as research strategy over a work of history.

According to Robert K. Yin,

Histories are the preferred method when there is virtually no access or control. The distinctive contribution of the historical method is in dealing with the “dead” past—that is, when no relevant persons are alive to report, even retrospectively, what occurred and when an investigator must rely on primary documents, secondary documents, and cultural and physical artifacts as the main source of evidence ... The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history, but it adds two sources of evidence not usually included in the historian’s repertoire: direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events. Again, although case studies and histories can overlap, the case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations. 36

Since the People to People Peacemaking Process happened in the relatively recent past and its main actors are still alive, and since, given the gaps in documents, crucial information, particularly on theological elaboration, can be gathered only through interviews, the choice has fallen on the case study research strategy.

The case study chosen is further classified as exploratory:

For yet other topics, the existing knowledge base may be poor, and the available literature will provide no conceptual framework or hypotheses of note. Such a knowledge base does not lend itself to the development of good theoretical statements, and any new empirical study is likely to assume the characteristic of an “exploratory” study. 37

As there is little material on the theology that was developed in the frame of the People to People at the intersection with African Traditional Religion and peacebuilding, the present case study, in an exploratory manner, aims at developing theory on the contextual theology of inculturation and liberation developed in the frame of that process.

3. Data sources: documents and interviews

Documents and interviews are the chosen data sources for the present research. Through documents and interviews, data are collected on the People to People as a process, on key events, on the people who designed, attended and supported such events and the role they played in them, on the ideas

36 Yin, Robert K., Case Study Research, p. 11
37 Yin, Robert K., Case Study Research, p. 37
that inspired and supported the process, and on the ideas that were developed in the frame of that process.

3.1. Documents

The documents analysed as data sources are the programmatic documents,\(^38\) the minutes,\(^39\) texts of final agreements and the reports\(^40\) of the main conferences and meetings of the People to People Peacemaking Process issued by its main actors, the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) and Sudan Council of Churches (SCC); as well as evaluations by ecumenical international partners\(^41\) and research institutions.\(^42\)

Programmatic documents give information on the ideas that inspired and supported the process. The minutes of the key events of the People to People, texts of agreements and reports, provide information on locations, the number of people involved, the role they played, the content of the discussions, and the outcome of such events. Evaluations by partners and research institutions provide a perspective different from that of the Sudanese ecumenical structures, and in some cases more critical and articulated, on single events, their actors and the impact and outcome of the process.

3.2. Interviews

Although the People to People Peacemaking Process has been defined one of the best documented grassroots peace processes,\(^43\) and in already available documents, as mentioned, several references are made to the theoretical ‘framework’, detailed information is still scarce. The function of the interviews is to complement information provided by documents and to provide data on those issues


\(^39\) Wunlit - Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference, Rift Valley Institute, Sudan Open Archive, 1999


\(^41\) Ashworth, John, Five Years of Sudan Focal Point Briefings, Sudan Focal Point-Africa, Nairobi, 2004


\(^43\) See Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and K wes Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan
that the documents don’t address, specifically an articulated description of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People. In this respect, interviews are essential to the completion of the present research project as they provide information not available in writing. As the main actors of the People to People, especially the South Sudanese, have not to this day and to my knowledge published on the theology developed in the frame of the process, the only way to access their opinions on events, ideas and their implications, is through interviews. Still, the content of interviews is better understood on the background of data gathered from documents as well as on the background of information on the different aspects of the People to People such as the history of the People to People and the history of Sudan at war; information on the spread of Christianity in the context of Southern Sudan at war; an introduction to African Traditional Religion with a special reference to Dinka and Nuer religion; literature on contextual theology, African theology, liberation theology; theological perspectives on inculturation; and peace theories.

3.2.1. Type of interviews and questions asked

The thirty interviews conducted are individual, in-depth and semi-structured.

Given the profile of the majority of interviewees as people who played a key-role in the People to People Peacemaking Process (I will return to the concept of elite interviews), individual interviews have been found suitable to achieve the most open and content-rich exchange of information.

An interview can be defined as ‘in-depth’ when the researcher facilitates an open discussion while at the same time leading the way “with well-prepared, thought-through questions, and following the interviewee through active, reflective listening”.44 The research method of in-depth interviewing is suited to gain an articulated understanding of individual perspectives. Yin defines an in-depth interview as an interview where respondents are asked about facts as well as their opinions about such facts. The insights verbalised by interviewees are used as the basis of further inquiry.45

An in-depth interview is aptly supported by a semi-structured list of questions.46 In the case of the present project, I had formulated a list of questions on the basis of my knowledge of the subject matter. Questions were slightly adapted to each interviewee to make the most out of her or his personal experience and knowledge. Still, all questions posed aimed at gathering information on the theoretical and theological elements that contributed to the theoretical profile of the People to

45 Yin, Robert K., Case Study Research, p. 107
46 Höglund, Kristine and Magnus Öberg (eds.), Understanding Peace Research, p. 130
People and the way people reacted to the intersection of Traditional Religion and Christian theology in the frame of that process.

The first question on each topic was posed in the most open way to allow the interviewee to take the preferred direction in formulating the answer and also to allow the interviewee to raise new themes. Second questions were asked to follow up on the interviewees’ answers and control questions were asked to facilitate the validation of interpretations. The goal was to clarify, by the time the interview was over, the meaning of the information shared, if necessary by asking additional clarification questions, a procedure known as validation *in situ*. In the final phase of the interview, interviewees were given the chance to make additional comments. I have therefore employed a so-called funnel-shaped model of interviewing, aimed at both letting interviewees raise new issues and making sure that the interview stayed on track. Such a model of interviewing also aimed at getting an as much articulated as possible exchange on the themes addressed.

Conducting semi-structured interviews has meant moving between open questions and more specific ones, letting the interviewees express their thoughts as freely as possible to be able to hear ‘their voice’, and at the same time maintaining a leading role, to be sure that most of the issues relevant to this research project would be touched upon. Given the high number of issues I needed information on (primarily the theoretical profile of the process, its components and the outcome of their intersection), I often had to make a choice between letting the interviewee talk as much as he or she liked on one subject and gently moving the conversation forward to make sure that there would be enough time to deal with all the key issues. It was not always clear how much time the interviewee would have devoted to me. All interviewees gave their verbal consent to the interview process, but not all had the same openness to the interview or showed the same interest in being interviewed. At times, I had to register their impatience and quickly move through key questions.

Despite my lower level of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter at the beginning of the interview process, triangulation or comparison of data gathered shows that the outcome of the first interviews was not less articulated or relevant than the outcome of the most recent ones and similar issues were raised by interviewees in the first and the last interviews. What I believe allows for relative homogeneity in the outcome of interviews is that the list of main questions has remained the same.

One difference between the earlier and the later interviews is that, once I understood that some issues were controversial, issues such as a possible influence of liberation theology (in the

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47 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews. Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage, Los Angeles et alia, 2009, p. 82
48 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 111
49 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 249
50 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 71
Latin American and South African versions) on the contextual theology produced in Southern Sudan or about the relation between Christianity and African Traditional Religion in the frame of the People to People, I tried to submit such controversial issues to later interviewees, even if the interviewees themselves had not raised them. Still, even in the last interviews, first questions on each area were asked as openly as possible.

As the level of knowledge of the subject matter increased during the course of the study and, accordingly, expectations about what information to gain from interviewees, a third factor arose, namely the risk of taking a more directive role in the interview process. Being aware of that risk, I have consciously tried to be as little leading as possible. Still, on the basis of a constructionist epistemological understanding of the interview process, an issue to which I will return in the course of this chapter, I am aware of the fact that there cannot be bias-free knowledge production. The outcome of an interview understood as a knowledge-construction activity is unavoidably conditioned both by the interviewer’s interests and pre-understanding of the subject matter, as well as by those of the interviewee.

Three research trips were conducted to South Sudan in November 2012, April-May 2013 and February 2015. For the rest of the time, research was conducted from Nairobi. Of the thirty interviews, fifteen were conducted in Juba, eleven in Nairobi, three over Skype and one via email (sending one question and waiting for the answer before sending a new question) as requested by the interviewee.

All the interviews except one have been conducted in English. In one case, the interviewee brought along a translator. Although the interviewee understood my questions (she didn’t need much translation before starting to reply), she spoke to me in Dinka.

In two cases, interviewees at some point asked me to switch off the recorder as what they were going to say was politically sensitive. The recorder was switched on again when the conversation had moved towards other subjects and after having received permission from the interviewee.

During the first three interviews, I took only hand notes. During the following three interviews, I both took hand-notes and audio-recorded. While one interview was conducted over email, the successive twenty-three interviews were only audio recorded.

3.2.2 Choice of interviewees

The thirty interviews were conducted with nine women and twenty-one men who played a role in designing, managing and accompanying different aspects of the People to People Peacemaking Process. The original list of potential interviewees was defined on the basis of information gathered.
through documents such as reports and minutes of events, and through literature on the People to People.

‘Respondent’, ‘informant’ and ‘interviewee’ are terms applied to the interlocutor in an interview process. While the term respondent doesn’t go further than connoting a person who answers questions, the term informant indicates a person who provides “the case study investigator with insights into a matter and also can initiate access to corroboratory or contrary sources of evidence”. The term informant is therefore applied to a person who provides articulated information about facts and opinions about such facts. Interviewee is the term preferred by Kvale and Brinkmann, as it points to the cooperation between interviewee and interviewer in the knowledge-construction activity that are interviews. In the present work, I will mainly employ the term ‘interviewee’, as I also subscribe to a constructivist understanding of interviewing, although ‘informant’ might also be appropriate.

Prospect interviewees were divided into five categories: core staff of the New Sudan Council of Churches who launched the process, and staff of the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC); profiled South Sudanese church leaders and theologians; peace mobilisers who, in preparation of and during the People to People, were asked to establish first contacts with members of conflicting communities; international ecumenical partners who either closely cooperated with NSCC staff in planning and managing the People to People process or who participated in People to People events; and participants in the People to People conferences.

During the first interviews, interviewees suggested names of other people to meet. It successively became part of my routine to ask interviewees who, in their opinion, I should have talked to. In that way, I got information and confirmation about who were considered the key people in the process and the most relevant informants. In that respect, I can say that I have reached a sort of saturation of information about prospective informants. I can also say that with the thirty interviews conducted, I have met the most central people in the process, and those who are recognised as the most relevant sources of information on the topics addressed with this work.

Because of the training and experience that staff of the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) and Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) received and developed in the frame of the People to People, many of them, since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, have become part of the political structures of South Sudan as advisors to the President, Ministers, Parliamentarians or are in charge of special commissions, such as Human Rights. Others were and

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51 See Yin, Robert K., *Case Study Research*, p. 107
52 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews*, p. 302
still are profiled church leaders and theologians. Most of the interviews conducted were therefore ‘elite interviews’. As Kvale and Brinkmann express it:

Elite interviews are with persons who are leaders or experts in a community, who are usually in powerful positions. Obtaining access to the interviewees is a key problem when studying elites ... When an interview is established, the prevailing power asymmetry of the interview situation may be cancelled out by the powerful position of the elite interviewee ... Elites are used to being asked about their opinions and thoughts, and an interviewer with some expertise concerning the interview topic may provide for an interesting conversation partner. The interviewer should be knowledgeable about the topic of concern and master the technical language, as well as be familiar with the social situation and biography of the interviewee. An interviewer demonstrating that he or she has a sound knowledge of the interview topic will gain respect and be able to achieve an extent of symmetry in the interview relationship.53

Interviews with elites are challenging in the sense that profiled people are not easily accessible, they sit with the position, authority and choice to share or withdraw information, and because a considerable amount of preparation is required in order to conduct a successful interview. An elite interview can be rewarding as it can provide a satisfactory quality and quantity of data on the issues explored. Elite interviews have positive implications concerning the level of reflection and articulation of the information shared. They also challenge the power dynamic between interviewer and interviewee. I will return to this point.

4. Epistemological considerations

Considering interviewing as a knowledge-production activity, Kvale and Brinkmann underline the difference between a positivistic and a post-modern, constructivist epistemology. Their understanding of a positivistic epistemology is exemplified by the metaphor of the interviewer as a miner. In this frame of understanding, interviewing is seen as a process of knowledge collection of pre-existent data. In a post-modern epistemological frame of understanding, exemplified by the metaphor of the interviewer as a traveller, interviewing is understood as a process of knowledge construction:

A miner approach will tend to regard interviews as a site of data collection separated from the later data analysis. A traveller conception leads to interviewing and analysis as intertwined phases of knowledge construction, with an emphasis on the narrative to be told to an audience. The data-mining conception of interviewing is close to the mainstream conception of modern social sciences where knowledge is already

53 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, Interview, p. 147
there, waiting to be found, whereas the traveller conception is nearer to anthropology and a postmodern constructive understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research.\textsuperscript{54}

In the second case, knowledge is not collected but jointly produced, constructed in the exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee.\textsuperscript{55}

The post-modern understanding of interviewing as knowledge construction is the position preferred by the authors, probably because it better suits the type of interview the authors mainly address, namely the life world interview,\textsuperscript{56} aiming at getting access to the perspectives and perceptions interviewees have about their own life.

Kvale and Brinkmann nevertheless acknowledge other models of interviewing, such as factual interviews aiming at obtaining valid factual information\textsuperscript{57} and oral history interview, recording the oral history of a community:

In the case of oral history interviews, it is less the subject’s experiences as such, which are of interest, than the information they provide about social and historical events. The interviews may also go further than charting subjects’ experiences, or using the subjects as informants about events, and attempt to get beyond the self-presentations of the subjects and critically examine the personal assumptions and general ideologies expressed in their statements.\textsuperscript{58}

[Here the interviewee is an informant, recording the oral history of a community.\textsuperscript{59}]

The purpose of the interviews I conducted is that of collecting data on interviewees’ understanding of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People, but also on facts and events that constituted the People to People, in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the process and provide the ‘thick description’ of the case study to which I have referred and, as we will soon see, Kvale and Brinkmann also refer. In other words, in the course of the interview I also aimed at retrieving the oral history of the People to People. In principle, I deal with two types of information: factual data that can be considered pre-existent to the interview process, and data on opinions and perceptions that are constructed in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, both the frames of understanding to which Kvale and Birkemann refer, the miner and the traveller,

\textsuperscript{54} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{Interviews}, p. 49
\textsuperscript{55} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{Interviews}, p. 302
\textsuperscript{56} Or “interviewee’s lived everyday world”, see Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{Interviews}, p. 29
\textsuperscript{57} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{Interviews}, pp. 150-151
\textsuperscript{58} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{Interviews}, p. 106. See also p. 151
could be considered valid, depending on the type of information searched for. Still, even interviews dealing with facts imply a considerable amount of subjectivity, as the value attached to facts is a matter of personal perception. In my experience with the interview process, facts cannot be mined, retrieved, or accessed, bypassing the process of knowledge-construction during the interview. In the interview process, as well as in the process of data analysis, the subjectivity of the interviewee will have to be taken into consideration as much as that of the interviewer.

4.1. On the ‘neutrality’ of the interviewer

Is neutrality achievable in a quality research project? And what does neutrality imply when knowledge is understood as constructed in the encounter between interviewer and interviewee, or when, in the case of this research project, knowledge is considered accessible only through the experience and the process of interpretation by both interviewer and interviewee, in both instances conditioned by personal experience and being situated in a specific context? While in the frame of a post-modern epistemology there is no place for a positivist understanding of neutrality or objectivity, it is still possible to distinguish between an unacknowledged biased subjectivity to be avoided, and a perspectival subjectivity to be aware of.\(^6^0\) In designing and conducting the interview part of the present work, I have tried to be aware of my perspectival subjectivity, of the assumptions I carry with me in the interview process, of the expectations I harbour concerning the information I wish to acquire and of the role my perspectival subjectivity plays in the process of analysing the data collected.

5. Ethical considerations

All interviewees were informed orally\(^6^1\) or in writing about the purpose of the interview and the nature of the research project. All have been informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time and of their right to remain anonymous unless they preferred otherwise. I will return to the issue of anonymity.

5.1. On the amount of preliminary information to be shared with the interviewee

Ethical guidelines require that prospect interviewees are duly informed about the purpose of the interview and the main features of the research project.\(^6^2\) At the same time, in my experience, not

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\(^6^0\) Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 170

\(^6^1\) As allowed by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD)

disclosing all the details about the purpose of the research project at the beginning of an interview has in fact allowed more freedom to the interviewee to express his or her opinions. Still, the right balance needed to be found between the ethical responsibility to fully inform the interviewee about the purpose of the project and the principle of influencing as little as possible the process of data collection. Kvale and Brinkmann suggest providing full information in a debriefing after the interview.63 The procedure I chose and followed was that of disclosing the aims of the interview as I was posing more specific, focused questions. By the end of the interview, the interviewee was informed of the purposes of the interview and of the research project.

5.2. The issue of confidentiality

A further ethical requirement of interview processes is the right of interviewees to anonymity. The interviewees I met were informed of their right to remain anonymous unless they preferred otherwise. Only six out of thirty chose to remain anonymous. Some even complained about researchers who fail to give credit to their sources. The issue is addressed in literature about interviewing:

One of the more easily resolved issues of confidentiality involves interviewees who do not want to be anonymous subjects: they have become engaged in a project and want to take responsibility for their statements by having their full names on them.64

Ethical considerations should therefore be made also on granting interviewees recognition for their contribution to research.

The issue of confidentiality acquires specific tones in relation to elite interviewees. Several of the people I met had already been interviewed by other researchers on the same peace process and had done so publicly. One more problem in relation to the anonymity of elite interviewees is that for those who are familiar with the subject of the People to People Peacemaking Process, the validity and reliability of information gathered depends on the number of key persons interviewed, as these are considered the depositary of the oral history and inside knowledge of the process. In this respect, there seems to be contradiction between full confidentiality and reliability of the information gathered through elite interviews.

63 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 71
64 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 273
5.3 On power asymmetry between interviewer and interviewee

Literature on interviewing enumerates among ethical considerations in relation to the interview process the issue of power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee. The role of the interviewer as the one who takes the initiative to contact the interviewee, sets the theme, leads the conversation, asks the questions and decides when to start and when to end the interview, generally places him or her in a position of power over the interviewee.

The role and position covered by the interviewees of the present research project as church leaders, community leaders and key actors in the People to People Peacemaking Process from 1997 to 2002, and currently as top politicians in the Government of South Sudan, in other words elite interviewees, questions when it does not altogether invert the power relation between interviewee and interviewer. Elite interviewees are aware not only of their social and political power, but also of the power deriving from knowledge of the theme that is being researched. The interviewer nevertheless retains the power to choose what questions to ask, to move between subjects and to finally interpret the information acquired.

6. Epistemological and ethical considerations about contextuality

In a postmodern approach to epistemology, the ideal of universal knowledge is replaced by an awareness of the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge. Such an understanding of knowledge as contextually produced redefines the concepts of generalisation of the research findings and sets limits as to the extent to which results from one context can be applied to other contexts:

Hermeneutic philosophy has emphasized the fact that human life and understanding is contextual ... Knowledge obtained within one situation is not automatically transferable to, nor commensurable with, knowledge within other situations. The interview takes place in an interpersonal context, and the meanings of interview statements relate to their context. ... When it comes to ethical judgements of an interview procedure, and qualitative analytical generalizations of the knowledge produced, thick contextual descriptions of the setting are required.

Such an idea of contextually-produced knowledge also has consequences on the reproducibility of research results. The role played by the interviewer’s knowledge of and sensitivity to the interview

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65 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 33
66 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 34
67 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, pp. 54-55
topic, and the personal perspectives of interviewees limit the extent to which findings may be reproducible.\textsuperscript{68}

The contextual enterprise of knowledge construction also has contextual ethical implications. Thick description of a case study and its context is understood as a requirement of ethical research behaviour:

\begin{quote}
We thicken events by describing them in their context ... Thick description situates an event in a context, and the experienced ethical reasoner knows which features of a context are relevant in order to judge adequately.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

In order to perform an ethically sound judgment, a thick description of the context of the case studied is required (and in this work provided in Chapter 7). In this way, contextuality and ethics become related.

Epistemological and ethical concerns are also related in the idea of useful and beneficial knowledge, the idea of knowledge that improves the human situation investigated:

\begin{quote}
Today, the legitimacy question of whether a study is scientific, or whether it leads to true knowledge, tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether it provides useful knowledge. Good research is research that works.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Knowledge worth knowing is knowledge that is beneficial to the human situation, both on the individual and the collective level, and that consciously minimises the harmful consequences of the research project. Such harmful consequences might be breeches of confidentiality and set interviewees in danger by the very fact of participating in the research project. On the positive side, a research project can contribute to enhancing the situation of the participating subjects by giving visibility to their action, contribution, reflection, making it available to other people, and telling a story that can be appreciated and appropriated by others.\textsuperscript{71} The interview process can be beneficial to interviewees as they may discover new aspects of the themes they are describing, and suddenly see relations they had not been aware of earlier. The questioning can thus instigate processes of reflection.\textsuperscript{72} In my experience with leading interviews for the present research project, I have seen the interviewees in most cases relaxing during the course of the interview and enjoying the process as well as the chance to reflect and elaborate on events that happened several years ago. A considerable number of interviewees have expressed their regret that at the time the People to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{68} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{InterViews}, p. 58 \\
\textsuperscript{69} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{InterViews}, p. 78 \\
\textsuperscript{70} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{InterViews}, pp. 55-56 \\
\textsuperscript{71} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{InterViews}, p. 68 \\
\textsuperscript{72} Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, \textit{InterViews}, p. 31
\end{flushleft}
People was conducted, given the situation of war and the hard conditions under which they had to act, there was not enough time for reflection. I can confidently say that most of the interviewees reached the end of the interview with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

It is also my hope that the results of the present research may constitute useful, beneficial knowledge that contributes to the amelioration of conditions of the people of South Sudan by honouring their legacy and providing inspiration for effective faith-based peacebuilding work. Further, it is my hope that the findings of the present research can be applied and be beneficial in other contexts.

7. Transcribing

Except for the first three interviews that were only hand-written and the one that was conducted over email, all the other interviews were audio-recorded. Audio-recordings have successively been transcribed verbatim and saved, protected by password, on a computer. Verbatim or word-by-word transcription includes elements such as repetitions, pauses, laughter and other sounds. Audio-recordings and transcriptions constitute the empirical material analysed.

I have personally transcribed all the interviews both to respect the agreement on confidentiality with the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and with some of the interviewees, and because the process of transcription, although time consuming and physically tiring, has constituted an important first round of analysis of the interview material.

8. Analysing

Analysis of data gathered starts in the course of the interview and continues in the processing of audio-recordings and transcriptions.

Interviews have been analysed further in more depth by organising their content and meaning through codes under categories. Such categories were already included in the questions posed during the interview. Additional categories were defined on the basis of the issues raised by the interviewees.

I have conducted analysis of the content and meaning of data, namely documents and both the audio-recordings and transcripts of interviews. Analysis of meaning implies the interpretation of meaning of texts. In the case of the present research, the ‘texts’ are both scripts and audio-

73 The present research project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) in October 2012. The approval was renewed in May 2017
recordings. I primarily analysed the meaning of statements on the elements that contributed to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People and the theology that was there elaborated. In line with the hermeneutical understanding of the process of analysis, the researcher’s pre-knowledge of the subject matter gathered from literature on the themes dealt with, guides and supports the process of analysis of meaning of texts and recordings.

The analysis of the meaning of interviews proceeded through three phases: meaning coding, meaning condensation and meaning interpretation. During the first phase, sections of one interview were coded according to their content. The main codes employed are: the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, Christian theology, African Traditional Religion and culture, political issues and peace theories. Further codes are combinations of those just named, for example Christian theology and African Traditional Religion, Christian theology and peace and so forth. In the second phase, the meaning of the coded sections was condensed in order to be more easily classified and analysed. In the third phase, the unities of meaning were expanded again in a further process of analysis: meaning interpretation re-contextualises the statements within broader frames of reference. In the third phase of meaning interpretation the two main topics of inculturation and liberation emerged, as well as the issue of the influence of partners on theological elaboration in the frame of the People to People. For this reason, the fourth section of this dissertation dealing with analysis of interview material, is divided into six chapters addressing the theoretical ‘framework’ of the process (Chapter 11), issues of inculturation (Chapters 12 and 13), issues of liberation (Chapters 14 and 15) and finally the role of partners (Chapter 16).

The information collected and categorised was analysed in light of literature on the subject matters, in light of the outcome of other interviews and documents and, in general, in light of the knowledge of the subject matter acquired by the researcher.

9. Reliability, validity, and quality

The term reliability is understood to mean the consistency and trustworthiness of the research findings and, by validity, the adequacy of the design and the methods used to achieve the research goals, or whether the method applied investigates what is intended to be investigated. Reliability
and validity are therefore related in the sense that validity presumes reliability. \(^{79}\) I will need to assess the reliability of the research findings in order to assess whether the method applied is suitable to the object of investigation.

In order to assess the consistency and trustworthiness of the research findings (reliability) I rely on two strategies: transparency of procedure and triangulation. By transparency of procedure I mean being explicit about the procedures followed in the present research, from designing the project, stating the aims, clarifying the research question and the techniques of collection and analysis of data. By triangulation is meant using more than one source to establish the veracity of the information. \(^{80}\) In the frame of this research, triangulation is carried on at least three levels: among the outcome of the different interviews, interpreting one set of answers in light of other answers; between the outcome of interviews and the content of documents; and in light of literature on related themes and of the knowledge of the subject matter acquired by the researcher. As mentioned, findings from interviews were further tested in the course of the interview by means of clarification and interpretation.

As far as validity or the consistency of the method applied to the matter to be investigated is concerned, I consider the four factors of a single exploratory case study, the collection of data through documents and interviews, support by literature on the various themes addressed and knowledge of the subject matter by the researcher, as suitable strategies to answer the questions the present research poses.

One further criterion is added by Kvale and Brinkmann, and it is that of the quality of data produced. Such quality relies to a large extent on the skills of the interviewer and her or his knowledge of the subject matter. In qualitative research interview, the production of data rests upon the interviewers’ skills and situated personal judgment in the posing of questions. Knowledge of the topic of the interview is in particular required for the art of posing second questions when following up the interviewee’s answers. The quality of the data produced in a qualitative interview depends on the quality of the interviewer’s skills and subject matter knowledge. \(^{81}\)

Besides the knowledge of the research topic, other quality criteria for research interviewing mentioned are sensitivity to the social relation between interviewer and interviewee, an awareness of epistemological and ethical aspects of research interviewing, and familiarity with the environment in which interviews are to be conducted:

\(^{79}\) Bryman, Alan, *Social research methods*, p. 173

\(^{80}\) Höglund, Kristine and Magnus Öberg (eds.), *Understanding Peace Research*, p. 7 and Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 252

\(^{81}\) Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 82
Familiarity with the content of an investigation is not obtained only through literature and theoretical studies. Just hanging out in the environment where the interviews are to be conducted will provide the interviewer with an introduction to the local language, the daily routines, and the power structures, and so provide a sense of what the interviewees will be talking about.82

Living in South Sudan for two years prior to the beginning of the present research project has provided me with knowledge of the history of the Country as well as of the cultural, social and political context that forms the background of this study and in which most interviewees live. Such lived experience has contributed to the knowledge of the subject matter, to the cultural sensitivity required to conduct respectful interviews, and accordingly, it is my hope, to the quality of the interview material collected.

10. Generalisation and replication

Generalisation refers to the operation of drawing general conclusions from specific observations or data analysis and formulating theories that can be further applied to other cases. The research strategy chosen for the present project is that of a single exploratory case study. There are limits to how generalizable the conclusions gathered from one single case study are, and referring to Yin,83 Philipp Mayring84 suggests expanding the case basis (from one case to several) to increase the possibility of generalisation. Within a one-case research strategy, the procedure suggested by Mayring is that of analysing the context of the case study and generalise the results to similar contexts. I share in the opinion that to better draw general conclusions it is necessary to carefully take into consideration the context of the case studied. In the same way, Kvale and Brinkmann assert that “Analytical generalization rests upon rich contextual descriptions and includes the researcher’s argumentation for the transferability of the interview findings to other subjects and situations”.85 Generalisation requires a reasoned judgment by the researcher “about the extent to which the findings of one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation”.86 I consider my task within the limits of the present research, to draw conclusions about what theology was developed in the frame of the People to People at the intersection with Traditional Religion and

82 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, pp. 107-108
83 Yin, Robert K., *Case Study Research*
85 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 265
86 Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews*, p. 262
peacebuilding. It shall be the task of further research to see if such results can be applied to other contexts with similar results.

PART TWO: THEORY

4. Contextual theology
1. Introduction to contextual theology

The overarching theoretical framework chosen for the present work is that of contextual theology. I hold that all theology is contextual, that all theology is inevitably conditioned, consciously or unconsciously so, by the context in which it is produced. On this basis, the expression ‘contextual theology’ may appear redundant: the adjective ‘contextual’ reinstates what is implicit in the noun ‘theology’. Still, I maintain the adjective for two reasons. The first one is to draw attention to the very fact that all theology is contextual. The second one is to underline that for theology to be relevant, it should be contextual in the sense that it should consciously be elaborated in response to the cultural, religious, historical, economic, social and political aspects of a specific context.

Before elaborating further on the two statements just expressed, it might be useful to suggest a definition of context. Stephen B. Bevans defines context as the sum of four factors: (personal and communal) experience; culture (secular or religious); social location; and social change. The author assumes that personal and communal experiences are possible only within the context of culture, that experience is conditioned by personal or collective social location (such as gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) and that cultural and social contexts are bound to change, both because culture is not static, and because socio-political factors change (or might require action for change). The sum of the elements that compose context, has an impact on theological elaboration.

About the first assumption expressed above, namely that all theology is inevitably contextual, theorisers of contextual theologies refer to the fact that location and experience influence understandings of God and the expression of faith. Theology as discourse on God is considered human, subjective discourse influenced by personal location and experience. In the words of Schreiter: “all theologies have contexts, interests, relationships of power, special concerns”. As theology has been defined as ‘faith seeking understanding’ (fides quaerens intellectum), contextual theologies, says Schreiter, make us aware of the fact that understanding is in itself contextual, and that “to start with a “universal” anthropology means starting with a local anthropology extended beyond its cultural boundaries. How human knowledge is experienced, although communicable across cultural boundaries, is nonetheless largely shaped by local circumstances”. Contextual theologies question the alleged neutral, universal character of predominantly Western theological discourses.

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87 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, pp. 5ff
88 The assumption is shared among contextual, liberationist theologians. In this introductory section I will refer mainly to the works of Stephen B. Bevans and Robert J. Schreiter. See Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, and Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies
89 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 4
90 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 75
Scripture and tradition, the two traditional loci of theological elaboration, are here also understood as products of human beings and their contexts.\textsuperscript{91} The same elements of context that influence theological elaboration – experience, culture, location and cultural and social change – influenced the development of scripture and tradition.\textsuperscript{92}

The second assumption referred to above is that theological elaboration should be contextual, should consciously take into consideration factors of experience, culture, location and change to provide relevant answers to questions raised by specific people in defined times and places, to provide suitable, satisfactory answers to new questions. In the course of this chapter, I will elaborate on how different models of contextual theology address the relation between theological elaboration and context.

2. Methods of contextual theology

On the conscious, reflexive level, says Bevans, contextualisation is a new way of doing theology.\textsuperscript{93}

to the two traditional theological loci of scripture and tradition, contextual theology adds a third: present human experience with the related elements of culture, location and change,\textsuperscript{94} in other words the context in which people experience God.

The addition of a third locus to the previous two affects the order of factors. In the words of Bevans, “no longer do we speak of culture and world events as areas to which theology is adapted and applied; culture and world events become the very sources of the theological enterprise, along with and equal to scripture and tradition. Both poles – human experience and the Christian tradition – are to be read together dialectically”.\textsuperscript{95} In this new theological frame, context acquires a status that is equal to that of scripture and tradition, as we have seen, also affected by the contexts in which they have been elaborated and transmitted. Contextual theology assumes culture and history as valid sources for theological expression.\textsuperscript{96}

2.1. On the authority of scripture and tradition and the normativity of contextual theology

Contextual theology is elaborated in a creative tension between past and present where the faith experience of the past recorded in scripture and transmitted in tradition engages the present context

\textsuperscript{91} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{92} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, pp. 7 and 33
\textsuperscript{93} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 16
\textsuperscript{94} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 17
\textsuperscript{96} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 4
(individual and social experience, secular or religious culture, social location, and social change). Contextual theology aims at taking seriously both the faith experience of the past and that of the present.

The addition by contextual theologians of a third theological locus does not diminish fidelity to the biblical message and therefore the biblical and normative character of the theology produced. On the contrary, it is assumed that “the gospel can only really be faithful to the past if it is in touch with the present”. Bevans refers to de Mesa and Wostyn in defining three criteria to assess the orthodoxy of the contextual theological enterprise. The first is reference to a basic religious proposal such as ‘God is love’. The second is the criterion of Christian orthopraxis. The third is acceptance or proper reception of a theological elaboration by believers, the so-called sensus fidelium. All the three criteria here suggested are, as we will see, relevant in relation to the theology elaborated in the context of the People to People. That theological elaboration is guided by what is perceived as the central message of the Bible, peace, which also functions as a biblical hermeneutical principle; such theology is elaborated around an orthopraxis – active engagement in peace work – perceived as response to the biblical command of being peacemakers; and thirdly, such theological elaboration aims at being relevant for the people, at providing answers to the questions of faith that people at the community level pose in the specific context of Southern Sudan at war.

2.2. Goals of contextual theology

Among the goals of contextual theology, three can be mentioned here. The first is to create theologies that are sensitive to cultures. This implies both producing theology attuned to what is positive in different cultures and critical of oppressive cultural elements.

Related to this goal is that of redressing situations of cultural oppression by unmasking together with the concept of a neutral theology universally valid, or theologia perennis, assumptions about Western cultural supremacy.

The third goal is that of relevance. While theologia perennis is questioned in the name of relevance, contextual theologies aim at taking seriously and addressing the questions people pose in specific contexts.

97 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, pp. xvi-xvii
98 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 25
99 De Mesa, José M. and Lode Wostyn, Doing Theology, p. 86
100 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, pp. 23-24
101 See Robert J. Schreiter in the preface to Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. ix
102 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 10
103 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 10
2.3. Implications

Theology that is elaborated in different cultural and social contexts can be expressed through a variety of means that are contextually specific. Theology is not just expressed through word and text, but it can be effectively expressed and conveyed visually, or through songs, rituals, and poems.  

A second and more significant implication is that such theology can be elaborated by ordinary women and men. As I have already mentioned, Bevans writes: “A s theology becomes more of a reflection on ordinary human life in the light of the Christian tradition, one might ask whether ordinary men and women might not, after all, be the best people to theologize”. New definitions of theology and its purposes open space to new actors and communitarian participation in the theological enterprise. Theology is here understood as an activity wider than scholarship: “when theology is conceived in terms of expressing one’s present experience in terms of one’s faith, the question arises whether ordinary people, people who are in touch with everyday life ... are not the real theologians – with the trained professionals serving in an auxiliary role”.  

I will return to the role of the trained theologian in contextual theologies. Methods and goals of contextual theology, the third locus represented by experience, and the goal of sensitivity to culture, call for a new understanding of the agents of such theology: “If theology is truly to take culture and cultural change seriously, it must be understood as being done most fully by the subjects and agents of culture and cultural change”.  

As I have referred to in Chapter 2, along the same line, Schreiter asserts that the role of the community in developing theology points to the fact that theology is primarily meant for the community itself:

The emphasis on the role of the community as theologian has been an important one in correcting the idea that only professional theologians could engage in theological reflection.

While emphasising the role of the entire believing community in theologising, both as agents and recipients, Schreiter also differentiates, as we will soon see, among the roles different actors play within a community.

104 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 17
105 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 17
106 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 18
107 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 18
108 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 17
2.3.1. Role of the trained theologian

The focus on the role of agents of culture and cultural or social change as authors of contextual theology, leads to questioning the legitimacy of the theological contribution by those who do not participate in a particular context.\(^ {109} \) In other words, issues of method will have to consider the relation of the person elaborating theology to the context for which that theology is meant. From which standpoint is theology produced, and for whom? About the trained theologians, Bevans affirms that “The role of the trained theologian (the minister, the theology teacher) is that of articulating more clearly what the people are expressing more generally or vaguely”.\(^ {110} \) In this respect, theology is thought of in terms of a constant dialogue between the subjects of culture and cultural or social change. The subjects of this dialogue are ‘ordinary people’ according to the definition of Bevans, who seek to understand Christian faith in a particular context, and the professional theologian who articulates, deepens and broadens the theological elaboration by ordinary people. The professional theologian is also in a position to relate one contextual elaboration to other contexts. As theology cannot be the simple recording of what ‘the people think’, contextual theology should rather be understood as the result of dialogue between trained theologians and ‘ordinary’ women and men.

Schreiter is more explicit in referring to the role of different actors within a community:

> In many instances it is helpful to make a distinction between the role of the whole community of faith, whose experience is the indispensable source of theology, and whose acceptance of a theology is an important guarantor of its authenticity, and the role of smaller groups within the community who actually give shape to that theology. ... The poet, the prophet, the teacher, those experienced with other communities may be among those who give leadership to the actual shaping into words of the response in faith.\(^ {111} \)

While the community is understood to be a key source for theology’s development and expressions, it would be inaccurate, says Schreiter, to call it a theologian in the narrow sense of authorship. It is rather considered the task of significant members within the community, often working as a group, to give voice to the theology of the community.\(^ {112} \) At the same time, Schreiter is clear about the fact that the trained theologian should not develop theology in isolation from the community’s experience.\(^ {113} \)

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\(^ {109} \) Bevans, Stephen B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 18

\(^ {110} \) Bevans, Stephen B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 18

\(^ {111} \) Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 17

\(^ {112} \) Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 17

\(^ {113} \) Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 18
2.3.2. Role of the foreigner theologian

What role does Bevans envision for the foreigner theologian, the teacher, the researcher, the missionary who enters a context different from his or her own with ambitions to develop theology in that context? Three options are available: the foreign theologian can start by learning as much as possible about the new culture; can engage in dialogue to provide a constructive critique of culture; and thirdly can stimulate people from a specific culture or situation to engage in their own theological thinking.114

3. On terminology: indigenisation, inculturation, and contextualisation

Bevans highlights the importance of several aspects of context in view of developing contextual theology: cultural identity, popular religiosity, and social change;115 social location and particular experience; and the two traditional loci of scripture and tradition. Given the wide spectrum of elements to be taken into consideration, Bevans considers the term contextualisation116 as more suitable than indigenisation or inculturation to describe this theological programme: “the term contextualisation includes all that is implied in the older terms indigenization and inculturation, but seeks also to include the realities of contemporary secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice”.117 While indigenisation seems to refer mainly to the cultural dimension of human experience, “contextualization broadens the understanding of culture to include social, political, and economic questions”.118 The terms contextualisation furthermore opens for a critique of culture, more than the term indigenisation would allow for: “Contextualization points to the fact that theology needs to interact and dialogue not only with traditional cultural value, but with social change, new ethnic identities, and the conflicts that are present”.119 Contextualisation is therefore a more suitable term to describe a theological enterprise that wants to take into consideration human experience, social location, culture, and cultural change. As the topic of this work is the theology elaborated in the context of the People to People at the intersection with Traditional Religion and culture on the one hand, and commitment to peacebuilding on the other, I consider the terms contextualisation and related contextual theology as most suitable to describe the theology developed in the frame of the People to People. Furthermore, as I take into consideration religious,

114 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, pp. 19-21
115 In the context of the People to People, such three aspects of context are represented by Traditional Religion and culture, grassroots theology, and engagement in peacebuilding
116 Bevans writes that the term was introduced by the Theological Education Fund of the International Missionary Council in 1972, see Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, pp. 26 and 153
117 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 26
118 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 26
119 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 27
cultural, historical, social, political and economic elements of the same context, I consider both inculturation and praxis for peace and liberation as expressions of contextual theology. As I will illustrate in the course of this work, I refer to the religio-cultural aspects of context in relation to inculturation and to the socio-political aspects of context in relation to praxis for peace and liberation.

4. Models of contextual theology

Both Schreiter and Bevans suggest different models of contextual theology, or local theologies in the preferred definition of Schreiter. The three models of local theologies described by Schreiter are translation, adaptation and contextual approaches. Bevans, for his part, suggests six models of contextual theology that he defines as the translation model, the anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural model.

All these models of theological elaboration take context into consideration, each model presenting its own presuppositions and a specific theological starting point. Bevans warns about the fact that each model is limited in its attempt at describing specific theological projects, and functions best when used in conjunction with others.120

4.1. Robert J. Schreiter: three models of local theologies

Schreiter, as anticipated, suggests three models to both understand and construct local theologies. The first is the translation model. The basic idea is that the Christian message can be freed from previous cultural accidents and translated into a new situation. The example provided by Schreiter is that of the kernel and the husk. The gospel (kernel) is thought as detachable from the original husk (original culture, being that of the biblical text or of the culture of the missionary churches) and, as a naked kernel, can be implanted in a new husk or cultural context. Such a model of local theology requires efforts in cultural analysis to find parallels between patterns in the receiving culture and in the culture in which the Christian message was previously contextualised.121

The second is the adaptation model. Schreiter brings the example of Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti, who uses elements from African traditional culture and religion to construct a philosophical system parallel to Neo-Thomist ones. The method followed here is that of building

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120 Bevans, Stephen B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 31
121 Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 7
systematic theology on an articulated philosophical foundation. The resulting theology is mainly meant for the academy.\textsuperscript{122}

The third option is that of contextual models of local theologies. Such contextual models are further distinguished by Schreiter in ethnographic and liberation models. Ethnographic models of local contextual theologies are primarily concerned with cultural identity, and the need to reconstruct identities that have been denied or treated as inferior. Liberation models, on the other hand, have focused on issues of oppression and the need for social change: “If ethnographic models look to issues of identity and continuity, liberation models concentrate on social change and discontinuity”.\textsuperscript{123}

Liberation theologies are, according to Schreiter, the most prominent, important and enduring expression of current contextual models of local theologies.\textsuperscript{124}

4.2. Stephen B. Bevans: six models of contextual theology

While for Schreiter contextual theologies reflect one model among the three he envisions, Bevans refers to all his six models as models of contextual theology. As we will see, what Bevans defines as the praxis model presents similarities to the contextual, liberation model suggested by Schreiter. As anticipated, the six models described by Bevans are the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural model. I will address all of these devoting more space and attention to the anthropological and praxis models, as I consider them most suitable to analyse the theologies of inculturation and liberation developed in the frame of the People to People.

4.2.1. The translation model

The translation model suggested by Bevans presents features quite similar to the translation model defined by Schreiter. Bevans makes use of the same similitude of the kernel and the husk, in which the kernel of the gospel is wrapped in a disposable, nonessential cultural husk.

Bevans clarifies that every model of contextual theology is to a certain extent a model of translation. According to every model, a content needs to be adapted to a particular culture. What is typical of the translation model Bevans describes, is the understanding of the message of the gospel as an unchanging message.\textsuperscript{125} The basic assumption of the translation model is that the essential message of Christianity is super-cultural and super-contextual, and as such it can be separated from a contextually constrained mode of expression.

\textsuperscript{122} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, pp. 9-10
\textsuperscript{123} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, p. 15
\textsuperscript{124} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, pp. 15-16
\textsuperscript{125} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 37
4.2.2. The anthropological model

The anthropological model differs from the translation model as theology here is not primarily a matter of relating an external message to a new context, but of understanding the new context as the possible site of the revelation of God.

The central and guiding insight of the anthropological model is that human nature, and therefore the human context are good, holy and valuable. In this frame, religions other than the Christian and cultures other than Western contain “seeds of the word”. Referring to the work of theologians Karl Rahner and Raimon Pannikar, Bevans associates with this model the theological principle that God’s grace in Christ is hidden in every culture and religious tradition.

The anthropological model “focuses on the validity of the human as the place of divine revelation and as source (locus) for theology that is equal to the other two sources of scripture and tradition”. The Bible is here seen as the product of socially and culturally conditioned religious experiences. Likewise, doctrines are understood as conditioned by cultural and socio-political concerns. Bevans borrows from Schreiter the definition of scripture and tradition as a “series of local theologies”.

The starting point of the theological enterprise, according to this method, is with people: “The insight of the anthropological model is that the theologian must start where the faith actually lives, and that is in the midst of people's lives.”

Bevans suggests the work of Kwame Bediako, Theology and Identity, as an elaboration of this theological model. The divine presence of God is manifested within every person, society, social location and culture. The term inculturation can be applied to the theological enterprise that recognises the value of culture and is concerned with the preservation of cultural identity.

In the African context as well as in the African American, culture is seen as strictly intertwined with Traditional Religion. Bevans refers to the work of Robert E. Hood who takes African culture and religion as a starting point for his African American theology.

In the theological enterprise that acknowledges a plurality of cultures and religions as valid theological loci, is recognised the value of insights from interreligious dialogue: “the

126 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 54
127 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 57
128 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 56
129 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 59. See Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, pp. 93-94
130 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 61
132 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 54
133 See Hood Robert E., Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990
anthropological model uses the wisdom gleaned from interreligious dialogue as material from which a truly culturally sensitive theology can be articulated”. I will return in Chapter 12 to the issue of interreligious dialogue as a useful tool to understand the relation between Christian theology and Traditional Religion in the frame of the People to People.

4.2.3. The praxis model

In the frame of the praxis model, context is primarily understood in terms of social change. Such a praxis model, tells us B evans, is also called the ‘liberation model’, as it was developed by liberation theologians, and has been identified with the basic structure of the theologies of liberation. Still, B evans prefers to call it the praxis model to highlight that “the specificity of the model is not one of a particular theme but one of a particular method. As valid as liberation theology is, its revolutionary impact has come more from its method as “critical reflection on praxis””. The particularity of the praxis model is therefore its method more than the theme of liberation, and for this reason the model supports theologies of praxis engaged for social change in relation to a variety of issues. This point is relevant in terms of relating the praxis model suggested by B evans to the theology developed in the frame of the People to People, engaged for social change on issues of peacebuilding and reconciliation as well as liberation.

The core of the theological method or model here examined is therefore a commitment to praxis. Praxis is a technical term that has its roots in Marxism, in the Frankfurt school (J. Habermas, A. Horkheimer, T. Adorno), and in the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire. For people to gain knowledge of their social reality, says Freire, they have to act together. Action is related to critical reflection on reality which is then transformed through further action and critical reflection. Knowledge is achieved in reflective action.

From a method or model of thinking in general, the term praxis has been applied to a method or model of theologising. Such a method of theologising finds support in the biblical prophetic tradition focusing on action as expression of faith.

The method, as mentioned, has been developed by liberation theologians who understand theology as “critical reflection on praxis”. Suggesting an inductive procedure in theologising, for

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134 B evans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 59
135 B evans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 72
136 B evans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 70
137 B evans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 73
139 B evans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 71
140 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, A Theology of Liberation, p. 8
Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff, the first act of theology is action informed by faith, the second act is theorising or theologising on such action, the third is again action informed by reflection. While Boff and Gutierrez insist on action as the first act of theology, Bevans would rather see “theologizing as taking place in the entire process ... The articulation of faith is in the intelligent action (praxis) itself”. In line with Bevans, I would not suppose a first act of action that is not informed by knowledge and reflection. It is actually my argument (see Chapter 2) that action is supported by presuppositions, ideas, priorities and values, even if such a relation is not fully elaborated. Yet, what is important for liberation theologians, including Gutierrez and Boff, is to link faith, practice and theological elaboration in a circle of theory and praxis, and to understand theology rather in terms of orthopraxis than of orthodoxy.

In what terms is context understood in the frame of the praxis model? Action is meant to oppose unjust structures and bring forth liberation and transformation. The context of which unjust structures are part is also where God is revealed. God reveals Godself in everyday life, in social and economic structures, in situations of oppression, and in the experience of the poor and marginalised. History is both the site of revelation of God and the arena of transformative praxis.

Scripture and tradition preserve their normative authority as they inform reflection on praxis. In the frame of this model, theologising can be understood as the expression of wrestling with God’s presence in specific contexts, wrestling with the role and purpose of God vis-à-vis suffering and injustice, an issue particularly relevant in relation to theological elaboration in the context of Southern Sudan at war.

With this focus on the socio-political context and on social change, in what ways are the religio-cultural aspects of context understood? In relation to cultural identity, would the praxis model contemplate continuity beside change? According to Bevans, the practitioner of the praxis model presumes the importance of the culture aspect of context more in terms of cultural change than preservation: “Constitutive of culture itself is cultural and social change, and this needs to be taken into account as much as do traditional customs, values, and expressions of language”. Culture is here seen by Bevans as part of the context that is to be changed.

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142 See also Gutierrez, Gustavo, On Job: God-Talk and Suffering of the Innocent, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1987, p. xiii
143 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 76
144 See also Sobrino, Jon, Christology at the Crossroads. A Latin American Approach, Orbis Books, New York, 1978
145 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 73
146 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 75
147 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 77
148 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 78
149 Bevans, Stephen B., Models of Contextual Theology, p. 74
The articulation of cultural continuity (traditional methods of conflict resolution) and social change (peacebuilding and reconciliation) is of central importance in understanding the theology that is developed in the frame of the People to People. The two elements of inculturation (continuity) and liberation (change), are more generally important elements of debates within African theology, as we will see in the next chapter.

In the frame of the praxis model, the social location of the poor and the oppressed is seen as a privileged starting point in the work of theologising. A consequence of this assumption is that all women and men are called to theologise. Within the praxis model, says Bevans, theology is produced in community rather than by individuals. We have seen how Schreiter nuances this position by referring to the different roles of leading individuals and the rest of the community in producing local theologies. We will see in the following chapters what roles community and community leaders take in the theological elaboration that is the subject of this study.

4.2.4. The synthetic model

The fourth model or method suggested by Bevans is the synthetic one. The focus here is on a dialectic relation between revelation as expressed through scriptures and tradition on the one hand, and context understood primarily as culture or cultures on the other. Theology is here seen as the product of this dynamic relation.

Although the synthetic model is contextual and therefore meant to be applied to one specific context, it allows for the encounter and exchange among several cultures, for example the culture of the missionary in addition to the culture of the context in which theological elaboration takes place. One example of theology according to the synthetic model suggested by Bevans is the programme of inculturation by Aylward Shorter, articulating the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.

4.2.5. The transcendental model

The fifth model suggested by Bevans is termed transcendental. The starting point of the theological enterprise is neither the essence of the gospel message (or the content of tradition) nor the analysis

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150 Bevans, Stephen B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 73
151 See Shorter, Aylward, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Orbis, New York, 1999, p. 11. While the synthetic model envisages creative dialogue between revelation and cultural context, it also contemplates dialogue among various cultures in the work of theologizing. One culture is seen at the same time as unique and complementary to others in the task of providing a theological synthesis. Bevans suggests that in this frame, every culture can borrow and learn from every other culture and still preserve its uniqueness. Here truth emerges in the conversation among people and cultures, and in the encounter between culture and revelation. See Bevans, Stephen B., *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 90ff. Because of the focus of the synthetic model on the encounter among several cultures, I am not resorting to this specific model to analyse the theology developed in the frame of the People to People.
of a particular context, but the subjective experience one has of him or herself and of his or her experience of faith. The subjective experience in the frame of this model is also understood as place of revelation. Scripture, events and values are all understood as expression of subjective experiences. Revelation is understood as an event, rather than content of a message.\textsuperscript{152}

4.2.6. The countercultural model

The last model, the countercultural one, applies to those contexts that are considered antithetical to the liberating, life-affirming message of the gospel. For the gospel to take root in them, it needs to challenge and transform such contexts. In this frame, the gospel represents an alternative worldview, radically different from human experiences and culture as human product.\textsuperscript{153} Contrast is perceived also between communities inspired by the message and values of the gospel, and what is experienced as a hostile, oppressive environment.\textsuperscript{154}

5. Contextual theology in the frame of the People to People: what model?

The theology developed in the frame of the People to People is contextual theology and consciously so, as it is developed in the specific context of the People to People and of Southern Sudan at war, in relation to the dimensions of experience, culture (and Traditional Religion), social location and social change. It is theology produced by local actors, using traditional cultural and religious resources (such as traditional methods of conflict resolution), it is prompted by the experience of war and suffering and it aims at social change towards peacebuilding and liberation.

The study of literature on the People to People and of interview material indicates that theology in the frame of the People to People develops at the intersection with African Traditional Religion and culture, on the one hand, and peacebuilding on the other. Furthermore, I argue that the theology elaborated in the frame of the People to People is a theology of both inculturation and liberation. To understand the theology of the People to People, we therefore need a model of contextual theology that takes into account both the dimension of praxis for peace and liberation, in

\textsuperscript{152} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, pp. 103-116
\textsuperscript{153} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 117
\textsuperscript{154} Bevans, Stephen B., \textit{Models of Contextual Theology}, p. 120. The countercultural model of doing contextual theology finds inspiration in the countercultural character of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. It also finds expression, says Bevans, in the South African \textit{Kairos Document}. The Kairos document was a theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa in the mid 1980s and a critique of the theological models that supported the apartheid regime. For the full text of the Kairos document see \url{http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/challenge-church-theological-comment-political-crisis-south-africa-kairos-document-1985} (accessed 12.09.2017). In my understanding, the South African black theology that finds expression in the \textit{Kairos Document}, could also be read in light of the anthropological model, with its emphasis on a particular experience as site of revelation, and the praxis/liberation model, exactly for the focus of black theology on a liberation praxis
other words, a model that addresses the issue of social change, and a model that helps in understanding the articulation of theology and culture, therefore stressing continuity.

The two theological dimensions of inculturation and liberation are most suitably captured by the ethnographic and liberation contextual models suggested by Schreiter, and by the anthropological and praxis model proposed by Bevans as I will now illustrate.

The ethnographic model suggested by Schreiter is concerned with the restoration and preservation of cultural identity, and therefore with continuity, while the liberation model the author suggests is concerned with social change specifically in relation to issues of oppression. We will see in the next chapters how the issue of restoration and preservation of religio-cultural resources is of considerable importance in the frame of the People to People while peacebuilding is, at its core, commitment to positive social change.

Bevans expressly relates his anthropological model to the issue of inculturation. As the ethnographic model proposed by Schreiter, the anthropological model of Bevans recognises the value of culture and is concerned with the preservation of cultural identity. Context, local culture and religion are further acknowledged as sites of God’s grace and revelation, an issue that as we will see, is referred to in interview material. The anthropological model for contextual theology suggested by Bevans also helps in capturing an important element of the theology of inculturation developed in Southern Sudan and in the frame of the People to People, namely the fact that inculturation is mainly understood as an issue of articulation of Christian faith and African Traditional Religion. Furthermore, as in the frame of this model the theologian is invited to assume as a starting point for her or his theologising the faith experience of ordinary people, such a model captures an important feature of the theological elaboration of the People to People that focuses exactly on the faith and religious practices of people at the community level.

As the anthropological model suggested by Bevans provides useful lenses through which to read the inculturation aspects of the theology of the People to People, the praxis model helps in analysing the contextual theology of peace and liberation there articulated.

The thesis of this work is that the theology elaborated in the frame of the People to People is a theology of inculturation and liberation. While the models offered by Schreiter and Bevans can help in capturing aspects of such theology, a comprehensive model is still missing capable of holding together and articulating the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation, cultural continuity and praxis for change. On the basis of analysis of interview material, I have elaborated a model of contextual theology that holds together in creative tension cultural continuity and social change, inculturation and liberation. I will present such a model in the final chapter of this dissertation.
5. African theology between inculturation and liberation

1. Introduction
With the present chapter, I aim at introducing the topic of African theology and its two main expressions: inculturation and liberation, two trends that since the 1970s have been perceived in tension. I will refer to the debate between representatives of African theology and American and
South African exponents of black theology of liberation to see what the actual points of contention between the two theological trends are. I will then refer to the work of Emmanuel Martey who, while analysing the current status of theological elaboration in Africa, suggests a macro definition of culture as a synthetic solution to the contention and way out of the theological impasse. Finally, I will argue that the theology of the People to People constitutes a positive example of theological elaboration that holds in constructive relation the two elements of inculturation and liberation.

2. The debate between John Mbiti and James Cone

The publication in 1974 of the article “An African Views American Black Theology” by Kenyan theologian John Mbiti, opened a rift between inculturationists and liberationists in the African theological landscape. The article was primarily meant as a critique of the Black theology of liberation elaborated in North America by James Cone.

In his *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone defines Christianity as a religion of liberation. For Cone the struggle for justice is consistent with the message of Christ and what is not related to the liberation of the poor is not to be considered Christian message.

Theology, says Cone, is human speech written for times and places, in other words it is contextual language. In a society where people are oppressed because they are black, Christian theology must be black theology, a theology engaged in the task of interpreting the divine character of the struggle for liberation. As with all liberation theologies, Black theology is produced in the face of the concreteness of human oppression.

The gospel of Jesus needs to be related to the pain of being black in a white racist society. God is revealed in Jesus Christ and the black community is where Jesus Christ is at work. God takes sides. For the black theologian, God is at work in the black community.

Drawing on the work of Paul Tillich, Cone understands ‘blackness’ as a symbol. Blackness is the symbol of oppression in America. That oppression requires liberation from whiteness. Cone can therefore say that in order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease being white theology and become black theology by denying whiteness as an acceptable form of
human existence and affirming blackness as God’s intention for humanity.\textsuperscript{164} God has chosen to make the black condition God’s condition.\textsuperscript{165} Black theology is survival theology because it seeks to define and provide the theological dimension of the struggle for black identity.\textsuperscript{166}

For Cone ‘blackness’ is therefore a symbol of both oppression and liberation,\textsuperscript{167} not only in the United States but in any society. The gospel needs to be related to the black struggle for justice because four hundred years of slavery and segregation in North America have been justified as ordained by God. African-American Christians need to hear the gospel of liberation from slavery, segregation and all forms of oppression. A fresh start in theology is therefore needed, a new way of doing theology arising out of the black struggle for justice.\textsuperscript{168}

There is no abstract revelation independent of human experience, says Cone, and for this reason the Bible needs to be read in light of African-American history and culture. The Bible and the black struggle for freedom are to be considered the primary sources for doing theology.\textsuperscript{169}

The search for black identity is the search for God, because God’s identity is revealed in the black struggle for freedom.\textsuperscript{170} God is involved in black history and Black theology aims at being the prophetic voice of the Church.\textsuperscript{171}

Incited by the radical character of Cone’s black theology, John Mbiti issues his at times quite sarcastic article “An African Views American Black Theology”.

Mbiti recognises that the harsh character of black theology is due to the context in which it is born. Black theology is a response to a history of humiliation and oppression and is meant to be a judgement on American (white) Christianity. Black theology was “forced into existence by the particularities of American history”.\textsuperscript{172} Black theology was born from pain, says Mbiti and communicates that pain. Still, the vision of Mbiti is that theology should arise “out of spontaneous joy in being a Christian”.\textsuperscript{173} Here comes the first item of critique by Mbiti to black theology, considered “full of sorrow, bitterness, anger and hatred”.\textsuperscript{174}

The second clear critique of Mbiti is the extreme concentration on ‘blackness’ seen in everything, as Mbiti phrases it, as black theology speaks of a “Black God, Black Church, Black Liberation, Black this and Black that”.\textsuperscript{175} Mbiti sounds provoked by Cone’s affirmation that “white

\textsuperscript{164} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. 10
\textsuperscript{165} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{166} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. 14
\textsuperscript{167} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. 108
\textsuperscript{168} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. xvii
\textsuperscript{169} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, pp. 31-32
\textsuperscript{170} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{171} Cone, James H., \textit{A Black Theology of Liberation}, p. 16
\textsuperscript{172} Mbiti, John S., “An African Views American Black Theology”, p. 41
\textsuperscript{173} Mbiti, John S., “An African Views American Black Theology”, p. 41
\textsuperscript{174} Mbiti, John S., “An African Views American Black Theology”, p. 41
\textsuperscript{175} Mbiti, John S., “An African Views American Black Theology”, p. 42
theology is not Christian theology”. As Mbiti underlines that racial colour is not a theological concept in the scriptures, he is worried by what he considers an excessive emphasis on blackness in black theology.

Mbiti furthermore criticises the key concern of black theology with liberation and is preoccupied with the highly politicised character of black theology that he sees as “designed to shape, advance and protect a popular ideology within the American scene”. In Mbiti’s opinion, the theology of Cone is too subservient to political ideologies such as that of the Black Power. What Mbiti sees as an excessive preoccupation with liberation, is also considered by the Kenyan theologian as the chief limitation of black theology. Mbiti’s issue is that when the immediate concerns of liberation are realised, black theology might remain without a clear orientation and direction. Along the same line, another limit of black theology identified by Mbiti, is that while it claims to be deeply eschatological, black theology’s eschatological hopes are not clearly defined as there are no clear references as to when the paradise of liberation is finally reached.

Still, the greatest limit highlighted by Mbiti is that, with its focus on liberation, black theology does not sufficiently take into consideration other major theological themes. The treatment of topics such as “the Church, the Community, the Bible, the World, Man, Violence and Ethics” is submitted to the primary emphasis on blackness and liberation.

Cone’s black theology is for Mbiti an “American phenomenon”, the product of a specific context and history, but for this reason, asserts Mbiti, “Black Theology cannot and will not become African Theology”, the reason being that black theology and African theology emerge from quite different historical and contemporary situations. Mbiti admits that, given the similarity in the condition of black people oppressed by whites, black theology deserves a hearing in Southern Africa. Still, due to the highly oppressive character of the apartheid regime, Mbiti adds that “it is impossible to see how that hearing could be translated into practical action”. In Southern Africa people need liberation, not a theology of liberation.

For Mbiti the concerns of black theology are radically different from those of African theology. While African theology is the expression of joy in the experience of the Christian faith, black theology is the expression of pain caused by oppression. African theology has the advantage,
according to Mbiti, to have a wider scope as it does not have an ideology to propagate. Among the issues on which African theology is engaged, Mbiti lists “religious dialogue between Christianity and African Religion and between Christianity and Islam. Relations between Christianity and African culture, between Church and State, together with innumerable pastoral and liturgical problems”.185

Black theology is therefore considered outright irrelevant to the African continent. In a quite harsh conclusion to his argument, Mbiti asserts that “it would seem healthier if Black Theology and African Theology were each left to their own internal and external forces to grow in a natural way without artificial pressure and engineering”.186 Mbiti’s words were to be proven wrong, as South African black theology, clearly inspired by its North American counterpart, did in fact become relevant not only to South Africa but to the African continent, particularly, as we will see, through its influence on regional and international ecumenical structures. The critique of Mbiti to South African black theology was expressed in a new article entitled “The South African Theology of Liberation: Appreciation and Evaluation”.187 The main critique expressed by Mbiti to South African black theology, concerns its subservience to theological categories and methods defined in a foreign context (North America).

Mbiti’s articles highlight and further mark a rift in the African theological landscape between African theologians, or inculturationists, meaning primarily theologians in independent Africa, or the portion of Africa south of the Sahara and north of the Zambesi river, and black theologians or liberation theologians, primarily in South Africa but also, as we will see, in other African contexts.

The tension between African inculturationists on one side, and black liberationists on the other, has from the 1970s been addressed in several fora and involved a number of theologians and biblical scholars. It might be useful to clarify, also in view of attempts at overcoming the dialectic, that despite the definitions of inculturation theology as African theology and liberation theology as black theology, the actors involved in the theological enterprise and in the debate are, almost exclusively, both African and black.

The issue of the still enduring tension or dialectic between African theology and South African black theology is extensively addressed by Emmanuel Martey in African Theology. Inculturation and Liberation.188 In his work, as I will illustrate, Martey aims at showing how the

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188 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology
two theological trends emerge from different historical and contemporary situations and how the hermeneutical choices that support the different theological discourses are to be considered a matter of different understanding of the principal characteristics of the African condition, of causes of oppression and means for liberation.

3. Definitions: inculturation and liberation

According to the definition provided by Martey, “Africanization represents the beginning of a new theological trend toward a search for an authentically relevant African perspective on the Christian faith”.189 ‘Africanization’ is the name given to the first phase of a theology of inculturation that aims at expressing the Christian message in African idioms and conceptual tools. Justin Ukpong, an inculturationist, clearly relates African theology and African culture when he provides the following definition of African theology as “Christian faith attaining African cultural expression”.190

Ghanaian scholar Kofi A sare Opoku defines culture as “the sum total of all the traditions, ideas, customs, modes of behaviour, patterns of thought, ways of doing things and outlook on life that have been received from God, learned and passed on from one generation of Africans to the other”.191 The definition of (traditional) culture provided by A sare Opoku and presented by Martey as the ground and starting point of the first phase of African theology, describes culture as the sum of practices as well as ideas and beliefs that support such practices. Such an idea of culture relies on a communitarian understanding of practices and values as instituted by God. African theology in its early phase follows the programme of reclaiming the value of traditional culture to develop within its parameters a theology that is authentically Christian and African. The choice of traditional culture as a starting point for theological elaboration relies on the assumption that God has spoken to the ancestors before the arrival of Christianity, in other words it is grounded on natural theology.

While the term ‘Africanization’ is used in reference to the early phase of (modern) African theological elaboration going from the early 1960s to the 1980s, by the mid-1980s the term ‘inculturation’ comes into common use among Catholics and Protestants, both French and English speaking African theologians.192

The expression ‘liberation struggle’ in theological terms, refers to the effort of the poor toward full humanity and meaningful, abundant life (John 10:10). ‘Liberation struggle’ is

189 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 65
190 Ukpong, Justine, African Theologies Now: A Profile, Gaba Publications, AM ECEA Pastoral Institute, Eldoret, 1984, p. 30, quoted by Martey, African Theology, p. 68
192 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 68
understood as the struggle, spiritual and material, to be fully human. In this frame, theology is seen as part of the struggle against enslaving and dehumanising forces and for the affirmation of fullness of life.¹⁹³

Still, the language of ‘liberation’ and ‘struggle’ is drawn by theologians from the political arena. With the rise of nationalism and independence movements in the 1960s, the African revolution pushed African Christians and theologians to relate theologically to the political reality. Political revolution became the ground for theological elaboration and ‘liberation’ became the language of the African church.¹⁹⁴

4. An issue of hermeneutics

According to Martey, the key reason for the theological tension here addressed is an issue of hermeneutics or of two different hermeneutical choices. The starting point for the theological enterprise of inculturationists is the religio-cultural sphere seen as the main area of dehumanisation and exploitation of African people.¹⁹⁵ Inculturationists opt for an inculturation hermeneutics that sees African culture and religion as prominent sources for the theological enterprise. Black theologians, on the other hand, see socio-political and economic structures as main factors of oppression. For this reason, they opt for a liberation hermeneutics as the privileged tool for a theological effort that aims at transforming oppressive structures.

Africanisation versus liberation, writes Martey, is, in fact, a “hermeneutical debate between two different schools of theological interpretation in Africa”,¹⁹⁶ interpretation in relation to the defining characteristic of African reality.

4.1. Biblical hermeneutics

The contention between inculturationists and liberationists concerns to a large extent the way scripture is used as a basis for theological elaboration.¹⁹⁷ In Mbiti’s opinion, Black theology lacked biblical backing. For their part, liberationists underlining how biblical hermeneutics should be aimed at the transformation of society and unjust structures, identified as a limit of African theology the lack of concern for transformative praxis and, accordingly, limited focus on biblical texts that deal with transformation.

¹⁹³ Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 7
¹⁹⁴ Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 8
¹⁹⁵ Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 2
¹⁹⁶ Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 37
¹⁹⁷ Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 106
Martey relates the choices of each party in the matter of biblical hermeneutics to specific goals: cultural continuity on one side, and socio-political transformation on the other. Inculturationists hold that the Bible must be explored against the background of traditional African life and thought, as they are interested in identifying continuities and discontinuities between the Bible and African Traditional Religion and culture. Liberationists, on the other hand, highlight how the Bible has been used as a tool for both liberation and oppression, as scriptures are ambiguous and biblical hermeneutics is not neutral. In their effort at making of the Bible an instrument of liberation, liberationists approach the Bible with a hermeneutics of suspicion.198

4.2. Hermeneutics of context
The issue at stake in the debate between inculturationists and liberationists concerns not only the scriptures but also the context of interpretation and the course of action that both faith and context call for. In this frame, Africanisation and liberation “can be described as hermeneutic procedures that seek both understanding of the African cultural-political reality and interpretation of this reality in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so as to bring about transformation of the oppressive status quo”.199 One element contributing to the tension between inculturationists and liberationists concerns definitions of oppression understood mainly in religio-cultural terms by the former, and in socio-political and economic terms by the latter.

4.3. Hermeneutics of African Traditional Religion
Martey refers to a difference between inculturationists and liberationists in their approach to African Traditional Religion. While in the inculturation theological endeavour the approach to Traditional Religion tends to be mainly descriptive or phenomenological, among the liberationists, emphasis is placed on a functional analysis.200 In other words, it is held by liberationists that African Traditional Religion must fulfil certain needs in society: “Unlike Mbiti, who considers ATR a præeparatio evangelica and unsalvific, Mveng considers African religions as “religions of salvation” and the religious praxis in traditional Africa as totally centered on the liberation of human life”.201 The difference of approaches to African Traditional Religion therefore further highlights the differences between inculturation and liberation theological elaborations. In the context of the People to People, as we will see, Christians resort to African Traditional rituals, as

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198 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 106
199 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 55
200 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 74
these are seen as the most effective tools to achieve and maintain peace at the community level. In light of the analysis offered by Martey, it is possible to say that in the frame of the People to People, Traditional rituals are functionally resorted to, as recommended by liberationists, as they serve the specific purpose of promoting social change. At the same time, resorting to Traditional ritual aims at stressing cultural and religious continuity with the past. Resorting to Traditional ritual in the frame of the People to People places the theological elaboration there conducted in the frame of both cultural continuity and social change, inculturation and liberation.

5. Differences in historical and cultural backgrounds
Martey describes how the differences and polarisations between the two theological-hermeneutical enterprises of inculturation and liberation are due to differences in the historical and cultural as well as social, economic and political contexts in which the two theological projects are born and develop, namely independent (and neo-colonial) Africa on the one hand, and on the other South Africa under the apartheid regime.

The cultural backgrounds of the two enterprises identified by Martey are Panafricanism and Nationalism in independent Africa, and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

5.1. Panafricanism and nationalism
The term ‘Africanisation’ was first used in the political arena by the nationalist movement. It indicated the programme aiming at placing Africans in key positions in the newly established civil service. The term was subsequently adopted by theologians and reinterpreted to indicate the expression of the Christian message in African languages and patterns of thought.

Nationalism, says Martey, had a considerable impact on the African churches. At the inauguration of the All Africa Conference of Churches in a meeting held in Kampala in 1963, the theme of theology of nationalism was central. At that meeting, a statement was issued with the title “The Church and Nationalism”.

Panafricanism as a cultural movement was launched in the 1920s with the goal to unify all people of African descent and to commit to the empowerment and liberation of all black people. Panafricanism called on theologians to “participate in the historic task of unearthing, rehabilitating

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202 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 63
and developing [black] cultures so as to facilitate their being integrated into the general body of world culture".204

African theology was an expression of the churches’ response to the political struggle for independence. Still, Martey considers a limit of African theology its narrow focus on the cultural-religious dimension of the African revolution, a focus that did not sufficiently address political and economic factors. Such a narrow focus, in Martey’s opinion, was the result of the adoption by African theologians of the Western missionaries’ agenda to find the most effective means to convey the Christian message. In the terms offered by Schreiter and Bevans (see Chapter 4), the missionaries’ agenda adopted by African theologians, was that of finding a suitable ‘husk’ to convey the ‘kernel’ of a universal Christian message. Political liberation and a theology that would support processes of political liberation were not high on the agenda of missionaries, hence, according to Martey, the limited interest of exponents of African theology in issues of liberation.205 Nevertheless, as Martey himself acknowledges, the fronts of inculturation theology and liberation theology have never been monolithic. Cultural rehabilitation can be seen as part of a larger programme of liberation and, in this respect, liberation has been a goal for exponents of African theology in the same way as cultural liberation has been on the agenda of liberationists.

5.2. The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa

At the end of the 1960s, the Black Consciousness Movement developed in South Africa, drawing inspiration from Panafri

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5.2.1. Liberation as theological category in the South African context

Liberation as the focus of the black theology produced in South Africa emerges out of the specific context and experience of apartheid. In such a context and on the basis of the experience of oppression, God is experienced and confessed as the one who liberates.\(^{208}\) “Since Black theology developed as a conscious and systematic reflection on the black experience of suffering, it cannot be fully understood or appreciated apart from this experience, which serves as its hermeneutic point of departure”.\(^{209}\)

The Bible is read and interpreted from the starting point of the South African context and the experience of apartheid. The message of the gospel is seen as announcement of transformation of a dehumanising social system while radical transformation is seen as the goal of Christians and theology. While salvation is understood as the sole work of God, liberation is seen as a joint task for both God and humankind.

6. The role of ecumenical associations

Ecumenical organisations such as the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT), the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) played an important role in the attempt to reduce tension and polarity between inculturationists and liberationists.\(^{210}\) The meetings of these organisations became important fora where issues related to the polarisation and need for a new synthetic approach were identified and discussed. Particularly important was the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held in Accra, Ghana, in 1977, attended by African theologians and key actors in the AACC.\(^{211}\) The Final Communiqué of the EATWOT Ecumenical Dialogue explicitly links cultural re-appropriation to the struggle for liberation: “This cultural vitality is the support of the African people in their struggle for complete liberation and for the construction of a human society”.\(^{212}\)

The Accra Dialogue also provided an opportunity for North American and African theologians, particularly Cone and Mbiti, to meet again and try to compose their dissent.\(^{213}\)

\(^{208}\) Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 95
\(^{209}\) Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 100
\(^{210}\) Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, pp. 63ff
\(^{211}\) The papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians held in Accra, Ghana, in December 1977, are collected and published under Appiah-Kubi, Kofi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology en Route*
\(^{212}\) Appiah-Kubi, Kofi and Sergio Torres (eds.), *African Theology en Route*, p. 192
At the Accra Dialogue, the theme of liberation was seen as transversal in various African theological efforts. At the same time, indicates Martey, such transversal focus on liberation contributed to the further diversification of the African theological landscape, shedding light on new theological orientations such as African liberation theology and Women’s theologies: “Following the Pan-African Conference that injected the theme of liberation into African theology and EAAT’s acceptance of inculturation as a theological concept, a sharp distinction began to be drawn within African theology itself between inculturation theology and African liberation theology. These two trends are to be distinguished from Black theology in its South African manifestation and from African feminist or women’s theology among African women”. Four interrelated issues became points of departure for four theological systems: culture, for inculturation theology; poverty, for African liberation theology; gender, for African women’s theologies; and race, for black theology.

Since, as we will see in the next chapters, interview material shows that South Sudanese church actors were influenced by the type of theological elaboration that was conducted within the AACC and particularly by the theological contribution of Desmond Tutu, it might be assumed that the synthetic approach promoted by the AACC encouraged the synthesis of inculturation and liberation in the frame of the People to People.

7. Martey’s proposal for a synthetic approach

African inculturationists have been criticised by liberationists for not being sufficiently engaged with political and economic issues as well as for not sufficiently acknowledging the racial issue. Inculturationists have also been accused of being disconnected from the masses, being insufficiently in contact with the grassroots level, also on account of their predominantly bourgeois social location.

Liberationists, for their part, have recognised the interconnectedness of different forms of oppression - including cultural - as well as of different expressions of liberation. Liberationists have acknowledged that the multidimensionality of oppression demands multidimensional liberation. Still, Martey highlights a major limit of liberationists as they tend to ignore the culture, particularly popular culture, of the people they intend to liberate. South African Black

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214 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 69
215 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 69
216 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 123
217 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 124
218 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 115
219 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 123
Theologian Itumeleng Mosala relates such myopia of Black theologians also to their social location: “Black theology’s inability to connect adequately with the culture of resistance of the oppressed and exploited black people needs to be considered in the light of the class bases and commitments of the black theologians”.\textsuperscript{220}

Still, Martey asserts that inculturation versus liberation is a false dilemma.\textsuperscript{221} There is more that unites black Africans than divides them. The two foci of inculturation and liberation are to be seen as complementary: “the common underlying motif in the two struggles – cultural and political – suggests the need to come to a dialectic understanding of these factors as two sides of the same liberation process”.\textsuperscript{222}

Martey’s study is a contribution to the inculturation-liberation debate and ongoing search for a synthetic interpretation. In his work, he tries to recognise the importance of both the effort to retrieve the cultural heritage of Africa and of the goal of liberation while linking the two: “The liberation struggle is also a struggle for the retrieval, conservation and survival of the cultural values of black Africans. The primary phase of an authentic liberation struggle begins with the cultural challenge posed by the oppressed group against their oppressors”.\textsuperscript{223}

Martey refers to the work of Amilcar Cabral, intellectual and revolutionary from Guinea-Bissau who, in the time of nascent African nationalism, articulated the interconnectedness of political and cultural liberation.\textsuperscript{224} Cabral highlights how liberation struggles have generally been preceded by an upsurge of cultural manifestations. The context of Southern Sudan and the case of the People to People are examples of how cultural re-evaluation is linked to political liberation. As I will refer to in Chapter 14, literature on the People to People shows how John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), asked the churches and theological actors to contribute to the appreciation of traditional culture and religion as a means of strengthening the cultural identity of the South, the Southern military front and contributing through cultural revival to the struggle for liberation of the South from the North.\textsuperscript{225}

As I have mentioned, Martey understands the present tension between inculturation and liberation theologies as a problem of two hermeneutical approaches, as each group concentrates on one dimension of African reality at the expense of the other, failing to take into consideration their interconnectedness.\textsuperscript{226} The author calls for a synthetic hermeneutical approach:

\textsuperscript{220} Mosala, Itumeleng J., \textit{Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa}, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989, pp. 24-25, quoted in Martey, Emmanuel, \textit{African Theology}, p. 123
\textsuperscript{221} Martey, Emmanuel, \textit{African Theology}, p. 123
\textsuperscript{222} Martey, Emmanuel, \textit{African Theology}, p. 27
\textsuperscript{223} Martey, Emmanuel, \textit{African Theology}, p. 123
\textsuperscript{225} See New Sudan Council of Churches, \textit{Come Let Us Reason Together}, p. 7
\textsuperscript{226} Martey, Emmanuel, \textit{African Theology}, p. 39
Today, the African call is earnest and powerful because of the socio-political liberation it aims to achieve and the religiocultural dignity it seeks to attain. It demands a response, a theological response that must be at once political and cultural. It is upon the pillars of both culture and politics that a meaningfully relevant theological hermeneutics would emerge that can radically face the challenges of the future... It is when both the liberationist and inculturationist analyses of African theological reality are integrated that we arrive at a new perspective in the creation of a unified theology of cultural and political liberation.227

While advocating for a synthetic theological and hermeneutical approach that sufficiently addresses issues of cultural and political liberation, Martey suggests a point of departure for such a synthetic theological enterprise, namely history, and a goal in relation to what he calls the anthropological pauperisation of the African person.

History is the methodological starting point Martey suggests for a synthetic African theological enterprise. History cannot be reduced to only one dimension, cultural or political: “The African historical reality is not a unidimensional reality but consists of different aspects”.228

The unitary and unifying theological focus Martey suggests, is the anthropological pauperisation of the African person,229 deprived at the political-socioeconomic as well as at the anthropological-religio-cultural level: “The struggle against this anthropological pauperization of the African person is what gives Africa its theological agenda”.230

Martey’s most significant contribution to a solution to the African theological dilemma is a macro understanding of culture that includes social, political and economic factors:

A analysis of contemporary African culture cannot therefore be limited to “traditionalism”. It must include the whole totality of African existence – politics, economics, religion, precolonial worldview and thought forms, philosophy, language, ethnicity, music, arts, sexuality, and changes brought about by modern science and technology that have had impact on African people... they are intersecting dimensions of the African experience and African existence.231

Any attempt at understanding African culture must take into consideration both continuity and change.232

Martey’s project of enlarging the concept of culture to include the present is a critique of both inculturationists and liberationists. The correction to inculturationist positions is that culture

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227 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 131
228 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 37
229 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 38
230 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 38
231 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, p. 126
232 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, pp. 125-126
stretches beyond an idealised, pre-colonial past; the exhortation to liberationists is to enlarge the concept of culture to include social, political and economic issues.

In the frame of the People to People, as I will explain in the next chapters, cultural practices employed for peacemaking are traditional and indigenous, still very much part of the present lives of people. Among the pastoralist and conservative cultures of Dinka and Nuer on the West Bank of the Nile, peace is achieved by retrieving traditional practices that are considered meaningful in the present. The study of the People to People, as we will see, indicates that the traditional and indigenous is very much part of the present cultural and religious experience of people involved. Martey’s focus on contemporary African culture, beside serving his goal of finding a synthetic hermeneutical ground for the African theological enterprise, is probably due to the fact that in his macro perspective, the author focuses more on culture than religion.

Calling for a synthetic interpretation of the two main theological-hermeneutical directions, inculturation and liberation, Martey advocates for a new theological project, a new theological enterprise that he calls Black African theology: “A theology with such a synthetic interpretation of the two foci is what I envision as Black African theology”. The new theological-hermeneutical project Martey calls for is to be supported by a new theological methodology grounded in history and focused on the multidimensional liberation of the African person.

8. Contribution of the present study to African theology

Martey tells that a number of African theologians – among them Desmond Tutu, as we will see an important actor in the theological development of the People to People – have identified the need to get out of the impasse and have suggested ways to hold together a cultural and political perspective on liberation. Nevertheless, the tension between inculturationists and liberationists is presented as still actual: “even if it is remarkably reduced, the tension between the two approaches is not over”. While the two major theological directions continue to coexist in Africa often still in tension, “The future task of theologians in Africa is to develop a synthesis between these seemingly conflicting approaches, since the African theological reality cannot be reduced exclusively to the politico-socioeconomic or to the religiocultural existence of African life”. Even if a few black African theologians have tried to emphasise such a need, “there has not been a major study undertaken on the synthesis of inculturation and liberation in Africa”, and the “theological study

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233 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 132
234 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 70
235 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, pp. 69-70
236 Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 2
of the connection between religiocultural and sociopolitical and economic realities of the African continent is still in its infancy”. While Martey offers his work as a study on the need and possibility of a synthesis of inculturation and liberation in Africa, the study I am conducting aims at presenting the theology developed in the frame of the People to People as an example of a theological synthesis of inculturation and liberation where inculturation is elaborated in view to liberation and where active engagement in liberation leads to a new understanding and appreciation of inculturation.

237 Martey, Emmanuel, African Theology, pp. 2-3
6. Inculturation and liberation as a response to the need for orientation, transformation, and legitimation

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the debate among African and African-American theologians on issues of inculturation and liberation. There I argued that the present dissertation aims at exploring an example of contextual theology, the theology developed in the frame of the People to People, that holds in a positive relation the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation. In this chapter, I claim that the articulation of Traditional Religion and Christianity in the context of Southern Sudan at war, and more specifically theological elaboration around issues of inculturation and peace/liberation in the frame of the People to People, can be suitably interpreted through the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation suggested by Jan-Olav Henriksen.
2. A pragmatic approach to religion

Henriksen proposes a pragmatic approach to religion to be primarily understood as a source of orientation and transformation: “religions offer symbolic resources for orientation and transformation in the different realms of experience. They provide resources for order and stability in a world that is constantly on the threshold of chaos”.\textsuperscript{238} The fact that the world is constantly changing and often threatened by chaos, leads human beings into a religious quest for orientation.

Henriksen constructs his maximalist theory on an understanding of religion as a way of life, “as something that provides humans with resources for a specific mode of being in the world”.\textsuperscript{239} The aim of religion is here defined in terms of helping people come to terms with life experiences and challenges.\textsuperscript{240}

3. The priority of practice over doctrine

Religions, says Henriksen, offer such resources for orientation and transformation primarily through religious practices, which in turn mediate specific values.\textsuperscript{241}

In the frame Henriksen suggests, practices of orientation and transformation are analytically prior to belief and doctrine: “belief is shaped by experience and practice more than practice and experience are shaped by doctrine and belief”.\textsuperscript{242} In this way, Henriksen questions approaches to religion that take as their fundamental starting-point doctrine.\textsuperscript{243}

The pragmatic approach to religion suggested by Henriksen, also concerns doctrine: beliefs, in the same ways as practices, can be examined from the point of view of what they do, or how they are “used, applied, or engaged”.\textsuperscript{244}

4. Orientation, transformation, and legitimation

Orientation concerns what people do, the way they relate to what is, and the use they make of their knowledge of the world: “Orientation makes people aware of what is important and what is not”.\textsuperscript{245} Religion provides resources for this task of orientation, mediating knowledge and values. Changes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{238} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 12
\item \textsuperscript{239} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 13
\item \textsuperscript{240} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 186
\item \textsuperscript{241} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 186
\item \textsuperscript{242} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 25
\item \textsuperscript{243} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 9
\item \textsuperscript{244} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 13
\item \textsuperscript{245} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 18
\end{itemize}
in circumstances, concerns and interests as well as in the life-situation of the individual, require a constant process of orientation and reorientation.\textsuperscript{246}

Henriksen refers to North American theologian Gordon D. Kaufman on the relation between religion and orientation. Kaufman writes: “Religious rituals and symbol-systems [...] orient, energize, and furnish guidance for human life by providing men and women with meaningful pictures or conceptions of the world, and of the place of human life within that world; and by offering ways to participate actively in that meaning”.\textsuperscript{247} While referring to Kaufman, Henriksen stresses the priority of religious practices over faith and doctrine in contributing to the understanding of ‘what matters’. It is primarily religious practices such as storytelling, symbols, rituals, reflection and cooperation\textsuperscript{248} that provide a framework for orientation.

When religions prescribe forms of action, continues Henriksen, they may also offer resources for personal and social transformation. The transformative element of religion has both personal and social relevance. The two dimensions of orientation and transformation are held together as “the orientational frame directs such transformative elements”.\textsuperscript{249}

In addressing the issue of the potential of religious traditions for individual and social transformation, Henriksen also refers to identity marking and community making. A sense of identity is a requirement for orienting ourselves in the world, says Henriksen, and for interpreting our experience.\textsuperscript{250} The notion of religion as identity marker points to the potential of religion in binding people together and creating community.\textsuperscript{251} The focus here is on the connecting rather than dividing potential of religion.

Elements of practice and doctrine are held together in the maximalist theory suggested by Henriksen, as practices of orientation and transformation lead to practices of justification and legitimation,\textsuperscript{252} where legitimation refers to the doctrinal, normative content of religion: “Legitimizing aims to justify and regulate practices of orientation and transformation”.\textsuperscript{253} Theological elaboration is the outcome of reflection on religious practices as resources for orientation and transformation. While the three elements of orientation, transformation and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[246] Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 19
\item[248] Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 19
\item[249] Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 24
\item[250] Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 95
\item[252] Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 22
\item[253] Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 24
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
legitimation are in this way held together, theological elaboration is here understood as a second step.

5. The hermeneutical function of orientation, transformation, and legitimation

The categories of (contextually relevant) orientation and transformation perform a hermeneutical function in relation to justification or doctrine as well as religious practices: “Based on O and T, it is possible to ask if the resources within a given tradition are stewarded in the best way possible in a given context”.\textsuperscript{254} In other words, religious practices, beliefs and doctrines can be evaluated on the basis of their potential to suitably orient and guide personal and social transformation in a given context. A study of religion as orientation and transformation calls for empirical and contextual approaches to religious practices leading to theological reflection.

It is my contention that the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation can be employed as useful interpretative lenses in the analysis of theological elaboration as inculturation and liberation conducted in the frame of the People to People. Such categories help both in understanding the relation between religious practices (such as Traditional ritual) and theological elaboration as well as in evaluating their contextual relevance.

More specifically in the course of this work, I will look at how inculturation, understood as an articulation of African Traditional Religion and Christian theology in the context of Southern Sudan at war and of the People to People, responds to the need for orientation. Preserving the resources offered by both Traditional Religion and Christianity, theological inculturation offers orientation to elaborate the experience of war and provides direction for Christian praxis (peacebuilding).

I will also look at how the inculturation of theology aiming at supporting peacebuilding can be understood as a resource for social transformation.

In such a process of orientation in life, vis-à-vis war and towards the individual and collective transformative task to achieve peace, religious practices play a crucial role. I will look primarily at the significance and function of Traditional ritual (animal slaughtering) but also suggest an interpretation of peacebuilding as religious practice.

Furthermore, I claim that theological elaboration as both inculturation and liberation, responds to the need of legitimation, to the need of justifying, also theologically, religious practices aiming at peacebuilding.

\textsuperscript{254} Henriksen, Jan-Olav, \textit{Religion as Orientation and Transformation}, p. 201
PART THREE: THE CONTEXTS OF THE CASE STUDY

A. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

7. The History of the People to People Peacemaking Process

1. Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to present a thick description of the chosen case study by providing a historical account of the People to People Peacemaking Process conducted by the Sudanese ecumenical structures and their member churches from 1997 to 2002. While introducing its main events, I will refer to how the process attempted to move from the level of inter-community conflict management to the level of resolution of the national conflict and how such efforts aiming at extending the scope of the peace process, contributed to its termination.
2. The foundation of the Sudan and New Sudan Councils of Churches

The Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) was established in 1965 by the initiative and with the support of the World Council of Churches (WCC). In 1972, the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement had ended nine years of civil war between the North and the South of Sudan. The Addis Ababa Peace Agreement had been reached thanks to the facilitation of the SCC, WCC and of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

The peace brought by the Addis Ababa Agreement, however, did not last long. In 1983, war between the North and the South of the country broke out again. The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) led by John Garang and fighting for a reformed, secular and democratic Sudan, took control of large parts of the South. For the Khartoum-based SCC it became increasingly difficult to access those areas that were not under government control. The need arose for a council of churches that could access and serve the so-called ‘liberated areas’.

Sudanese people escaping the war fled in great numbers towards Ethiopia, where many were gathered in refugee camps. Given the high level of need in such camps, church leaders came under pressure from potential donors to establish one organisation that could function as receiver of relief and development funding. The need for material assistance in the camps furthermore encouraged cooperation between the churches and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), and the idea of establishing a new Council of Churches started to take shape with the approval of the SPLM/A’s leader John Garang.

The NSCC was officially established in Torit, Eastern Equatoria, in 1989 by Bishop Nathaniel Garang of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) and Catholic Bishop Paride Taban of the Diocese of Torit. It was established as a Council of Churches for Sudanese people in SPLM/A held territories, “to provide material and spiritual guidance to the people of the New Sudan who were not being served by the SCC based in Khartoum under the Government of Sudan. The primary aims of NSCC were to achieve strength in unity and a viable means of expression for the churches, and to promote justice, peace, reconciliation and human rights in the New Sudan”.

In Ethiopia, the NSCC served mainly as an umbrella organisation to enable the Sudanese churches to get assistance for their communities in the camps. In the ‘New Sudan’ the NSCC had a

255 Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, A History of South Sudan. From Slavery to Independence, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 105
257 New Sudan Council of Churches, Come, Let Us Reason Together, p. 25. The following confessions and denominations were members of the NSCC from the outset: the Episcopal Church of the Sudan (ECS), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Presbyterian Church of the Sudan (PCOS), Africa Inland Church (AIC), the Sudan Interior Church (SIC), and the Sudan Pentecostal Church (SPC) as an associate member. The SPLA-controlled areas of Southern Sudan were called ‘New Sudan’ to reflect John Garang’s vision of a united, liberated Sudan
different focus. The formation of the NSCC enabled Bishop Paride Taban and Bishop Nathaniel Garang to speak with a united voice about the war, the widespread abuse of human rights by both the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the SPLM/A, and about the need for peace. The NSCC was formed to be a ‘voice for the voiceless’, the voice of the suffering people of the South.258

At the first General Assembly of the NSCC held in Torit in April 1991, Bishop Paride Taban and Bishop Nathaniel Garang were confirmed chairperson and vice-chairperson respectively. Rev. George Schrock of the Church of the Brethren in the United States was appointed as first Executive Secretary.259 The pacifist identity of its first General Secretary and of the Church of the Brethren that substantially supported the work of the NSCC since its early days affected the future peace engagement of the NSCC.260 Theological education was at the same time identified as one of the top priorities of the NSCC’s work. Other priorities were the promotion of ecumenism, strengthening of church leadership, facilitation of church programs, advocacy and, as mentioned, peacemaking.261 The newly established NSCC and the SCC in Khartoum were to be understood as two expressions of one ecumenical reality.

3. The Split within the SPLM/A and the deteriorating situation in the South

Very soon after the April 1991 General Assembly, however, the situation in the South worsened, pressuring the NSCC into reviewing the vision established in Torit in 1989.

In May 1991, the Ethiopian Mengistu regime that had until that time been the main supporter of the SPLM/A, collapsed. Three hundred thousand Sudanese refugees were forced back into Sudan under air assault by the Sudanese Government and repeated attacks by the Ethiopian army. In great numbers, people embarked on long journeys to reach refugee camps in Kenya. Many of them were unaccompanied minors.

In August 1991, commanders Riek Machar, Lam Akol, and Gordon Kong issued a radio message from the town of Nasir in Upper Nile to all SPLM/A units, termed “Why John Garang must go now”.262 In what was to be known as the Nasir Declaration, the three commanders accused

258 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, pp. 488-489
259 Rev. George Schrock served as Executive Director of the NSCC for 4 years. He was succeeded by Dr Harun Ruun in 1995
260 The Church of the Brethren has been radically committed to peace since its inception in 1700 and together with Quakers and Mennonites belongs to the historic peace communities. See www.brethren.org. For the commitment to pacifism of Roger Schrock see Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, *Local Peace Processes in Sudan*, pp. 37-38; “The Secretary General of the NSCC, Roger Schrock, drew on ideas of his church and other pacifist churches in the US”
261 See Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, pp. 483-484
262 See Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan*, p. 120
Garang of violations of human rights and authoritarian leadership in the Movement/Army. They asked for a reform of the SPLM/A and leadership change. The split was also caused by divergent political visions: while Garang fought for the liberation of a reformed Sudan, Machar, Akol and Kong wanted the SPLM/A to fight for an independent Southern Sudan.263

As Garang was a Dinka Bor, armed forces under the control of Machar, launched a series of attacks in November 1991 on the towns of Bor and Kongor and their Dinka population. Thousands of people were killed and all cattle killed or raided. A higher number of people died because of displacement and famine. The Bor massacre, remains one of the saddest chapters in the long history of war in Sudan and South Sudan, with consequences reaching to the present.

As Garang was a Dinka and Machar a Nuer, the split between the military and political leaders had devastating consequences on the level of fighting, particularly between Dinka and Nuer communities, but also internally among the Dinka and the Nuer. Still, ethnic conflict is to be read as the result of political divergences, not as the cause.264 The ethnic ‘card’ was used to mobilise people to pursue political and military goals. The high level of segmentation within ethnic groups provided military leaders with the opportunity to more effectively mobilise people along ethnic lines.265

Conflicts between neighbouring groups determined by issues such as sharing of grazing lands, cattle, access to rivers and other natural resources, had been a constant feature of coexistence in Southern Sudan, but the split within the SPLM/A paired with the broad availability of modern weapons, brought confrontations to an unprecedented level both in terms of conflict among civilians and because of deliberately targeting civilians by SPLM/A and government factions.

Following the split, and particularly after the events of Bor, the strength of the SPLM/A under the leadership of Garang was considerably reduced. Having lost military support from Ethiopia, Garang’s troupes had to evacuate Ethiopian bases. In the early 1990s, Garang lost several towns in Southern Sudan, among them Bor, Pibor, Yirol, Kapoeta and Torit.266 The NSCC, until that point based in Torit, had to relocate to Nairobi.

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263 Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan*, p. 120
264 Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan*, p. 124
265 Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan*, p. 125
266 Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan*, p. 122
4. NSCC’s commitment to peace work

Repeated breaches of human rights by SPLA soldiers severely affected relations between the SPLM/A and various NGOs working in the South. When a number of NGOs withdrew from the region, the churches were left with the task of managing the humanitarian crisis.267

The second General Assembly of the NSCC, held in 1992, made emergency humanitarian aid an absolute priority. The burden of humanitarian work, however, caused a severe financial and administrative crisis within the NSCC and this crisis pushed the organisation into reviving the vision of 1991. The NSCC began to reorder itself as a facilitating organisation, dedicated to “enhancing the ecumenical cooperation of the churches and taking up ... advocacy on behalf of the suffering people of Southern Sudan, and peacemaking, at the grassroots community level, between the factions, and at the national and regional level”.268 The humanitarian task, relief and development activities, were left with the newly established CEAS (Christian Ecumenical Action in Sudan) and the NSCC could revive its role as voice of the voiceless and peace actor from the grassroots to the national level.

Pressure from the WCC and other international ecumenical networks contributed to bringing the NSCC back to its responsibility for the solution of Sudan’s conflict at the national level. In such a revision of the NSCC’s priorities, a major role was played by the Sudan Working Group convened by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)269 and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) under the leadership of Kenyan Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat.

During the years 1991 and 1992, NSCC led a series of meetings with the leadership of the various armed factions to promote unity of the South in view of official peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A. Talks between the Garang and M’achar factions took place in Nairobi during 1991 and 1992, facilitated by the NSCC and the NCCK. Such talks led to the “Limited Peace Agreement” signed by the two military leaders on 26 November 1991.270 The mediation of the NSCC and of its ecumenical partners also resulted in the SPLM/A Mainstream (under Garang) and Nasir faction sending a joint delegation to the Abuja talks with the Government of Sudan in 1992.271 The church sat in Abuja as observer. When the short-lived Abuja talks collapsed, the NSCC withdrew, at least temporarily, from its role of mediator between Southern

267 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 494
268 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 484
269 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, pp. 495-496
270 Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, *Local Peace Processes in Sudan*, p. 37 and Flint, Julie, *Consolidating the Process*, p. 8. The meetings were facilitated and chaired by the National Council of Churches of Kenya, the Nairobi Peace Initiative and the Catholic-based group People for Peace. See also Jenner, Hadley, *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project*, pp. 15-17
271 The Abuja Talks took place in Nigeria in May 1992, facilitated by the Nigerian Government. These talks were the first serious attempt to bring the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A to the negotiating table.
military and political factions and decided to redirect its efforts to peace and reconciliation among local communities.

NSCC’s commitment to peace also lead to establishing a Peace Department in 1992. The responsibility for this department was given to Rev. Phil and Louie Rieman, radical pacifists from the Church of the Brethren in the United States. The Riemans, who remained in charge of NSCC peace work until 1996, worked with church leaders and other community and traditional leaders carrying out seminars and workshops on biblical perspectives on peacemaking, and developing peacemaking skills at the community level.

5. The churches take a critical standpoint towards the SPLM/A

As mentioned above, while the purpose of the NSCC in the Ethiopian refugee camps was to channel funding from donors, in Southern Sudan the organisation soon took on the task of being ‘the voice of the voiceless’, advocating against breaches of human rights by the Government, the SPLM/A and other armed groups. On 4 February 1993, the churches published the letter “To Our Flocks”, specifically addressed to the SPLM/A leaders, with which church leaders expressed the following concerns:

We are filled with pain for the suffering of our people. We have longed for a true liberation from the oppressors in Khartoum. We have tasted liberation but now the taste has turned sour as some of our liberators have become oppressors of our people ... Church leaders will not stay quiet or accept the present conditions. Change must come soon in the SPLM, in the armed forces, among civilians and with the churches. We are willing to risk all, even our very lives to make this change happen.

Church leaders personally delivered the letter to SPLM/A leaders in the bush. The letter did not achieve the goal to affect the behaviour of the soldiers. Its main result was to communicate both to the military factions and to international partners the position of the Sudanese churches on the inter-factional fighting in Southern Sudan.

While pastoral letters did not achieve their hoped-for results, the NSCC and the churches in the South did challenge the SPLM/A to move from an exclusively military structure towards one in

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272 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 495
273 Back in the United States, the Riemans were so-called war-tax resisters. They gave about 60 per cent of their taxes to civil rights and peace programmes, despite Internal Revenue Service’s threats of liens against bank accounts, wage garnishments, and seizure of family possessions. See [http://www.kauffmanpost.com/2008/12/newspaper-article-about-phil-and-louie.html](http://www.kauffmanpost.com/2008/12/newspaper-article-about-phil-and-louie.html) (accessed 12.09.2017)
274 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, pp. 489-490
275 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 489
which civilian rule could be established. In April 1994, the SPLM convened its first National Convention in Chukudum, Eastern Equatoria. It was presented as a first step towards the creation of a civil administration, independent of the army and answerable to the people and the law.\textsuperscript{276}

6. The Akobo conference

In 1993, in the Akobo county, a dispute risen between the Lou and Jikany Nuer groups over fishing rights resulted in the death of three men. The conflict escalated to the point that 1,300 people were killed and around 150,000 displaced. A conference to reconcile the Lou and Jikany was convened by Riek Machar, with the involvement of Presbyterian Church leaders and traditional chiefs.\textsuperscript{277} The Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS) received financial and logistic support from the NSCC and the Akobo conference was opened on 31 July, attended by 500 delegates and 1,500 observers.

According to the Nuer tradition, a jury of chiefs acted as prosecutor, defence and judge. The final agreements were reached by consensus. Each day began and ended with worship led by Presbyterian Church leaders while the peace covenant achieved was sealed by the Traditional sacrifice of a white bull, the \textit{mabior}. In the words of North American pastor and researcher William Lowrey, one of the facilitators on behalf of the PCOS, the conference was

an indigenous process that gave a role to the religious community, used methods that were built on the concepts and cosmology of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and allowed for the rituals and symbols of both Nuer religion and the Christian Faith. The significant lesson learned at Akobo was that the combination of the resources of traditional religious authorities, civil authorities, and church leaders with the mediating and integrating insight of the educated elite could achieve a revitalisation of traditional peacemaking traditions and achieve durable reconciliation within the turbulent conditions of Southern Sudan.\textsuperscript{278}

The Akobo Conference did not achieve the goal of reconciling Lou and Jikany nor of bringing together different Nuer military factions, but it taught the NSCC some important lessons that were to be applied at future People to People Peace events, among them, the revival of Traditional


methods of conflict resolution, the involvement of both the church and traditional leaders, and the active involvement of people at the grassroots level.  

7. The IGADD track I peace process

In 1994, the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) took on the responsibility to facilitate a peace process between the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the SPLM/A. The mediation of IGADD assisted in the issuing of a Declaration of Principles (DoP) in the same year, agreed upon by SPLM/A Mainstream and the SPLM/A United of Riek Machar, and finally subscribed by GoS in 1997. According to this Declaration of Principles, a military solution could not bring lasting peace and stability in the Country. The right of self-determination of the people of Southern Sudan was to be exercised through a referendum. The Declaration of Principles also referred to a secular and democratic state to be established in Sudan.

8. The SPLM civil society conference

The 1994 SPLM Chukudum Convention was followed in 1996 by a conference on civil society. The reforms initiated at Chukudum strengthened the role of the chiefs, distanced the military from local administration and helped to improve relations with civilians. By the end of 1996, the SPLM/A of John Garang was again the major rebel organisation opposing the Government and the relationship with rural populations improved. Larger tolerance of civil society and the emergence of legal institutions were important developments in creating a political environment within which the People to People Peacemaking Process could take off.

9. “Here we Stand United in Action for Peace”

In 1996, the Ecumenical Forum on Peace and Justice in Sudan was convened in response to repeated requests from the WCC to know the stand of the Sudanese Churches on peace issues. A

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279 See also Jenner, Hadley, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, pp. 12-13 and Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan, p. 39

280 IGADD was established in 1986, to promote economic cooperation among Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. In 1996, it was renamed IGAD, Intergovernmental Authority on Development. In 2011, South Sudan was admitted as a new member


282 Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan, pp. 34-35

283 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment, pp. 495-496
series of consultations were held in Sudan, Kenya, Switzerland and Norway, the outcome of which was the joint SCC-NSCC paper entitled “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace”. Among other principles, the document states that a lasting and true peace must be based on justice and full and equal rights for all citizens, as well as all people having the right to participate in political processes and decision making.

The document worked as a tool for international ecumenical partners to raise international awareness on the conditions of the Sudanese people and advocate internationally for a durable peace process. For the Sudanese churches “Here We Stand” would become the basis for all subsequent statements on the conflict and the need to engage in peace work.285

10. The Kejiko Dialogue between the SPLM/A and the churches

The SPLM/A had not appreciated the letters and press releases issued by the NSCC on SPLA’s abuses, and questioned the commitment of the churches to the struggle for liberation. Given the increasing misunderstandings between both parties, a historic dialogue between the SPLM/A and the NSCC was held in Yei, Southern Sudan, in July 1997, under the name Kejiko Dialogue.

By the mid-1990s, Garang had understood that the war could not be won anytime soon, and that reforms in the SPLM/A were necessary to regain the confidence of the people and improve the SPLM/A’s image on the international scene.286 In this frame are to be read the consultations conducted by the SPLM/A on civil society and with the churches.

John Garang and Bishop Joseph Marona, Chairperson of the NSCC, presided over the Kejiko meeting, the main aim of which was to “seek effective and constructive ways for Church and Movement to collaborate and cooperate in their search for just and lasting peace and freedom for the peoples of New Sudan”.287 At that meeting, the churches advocated for the Declaration of Principles (DoP) to be used as a basis for negotiations between the SPLM/A and GoS at the IGAD288 talks scheduled for the same year.289 The document “Here we Stand United in Action for Peace”, to which I have referred above, was used as a basis for discussion in seeking a common vision for the Movement and Church.

284 See note 38
286 Rolandsen, Øystein H. and Martin W. Daly, A History of South Sudan, p. 128
287 New Sudan Council of Churches, Come, Let Us Reason Together, p. 3
288 IGADD was renamed IGAD in 1996. See note above
289 New Sudan Council of Churches, Come, Let Us Reason Together, pp. 3-4. The talks were held in Nairobi in October-November 1997
The relations established in Yei between the churches and the SPLM/A, prepared the ground for future cooperation. While the dialogue consolidated the churches’ role as the defender and advocate for the people, the churches, for their part, made a clear commitment to the liberation struggle.\(^{290}\)

One of the recommendations of the Kejiko Dialogue was to establish a chaplaincy within the SPLA as soon as possible, for the education of the military in human principles, human rights, democracy and good governance.\(^{291}\)

In Yei, the churches were strongly criticised for undermining cultural values. The NSCC, in response, opened to a wider collaboration with African Religion, traditional chiefs and spiritual leaders in its work for peace.\(^{292}\) We will see in the course of this work what role this openness on the side of the churches to Traditional beliefs and practices played in defining the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process.

The NSCC/SPLA Yei Declaration gave the NSCC a mandate to explore ways to pursue reconciliation efforts among Southern political and military groups\(^{293}\) as well as among the people of Southern Sudan. A wish was also expressed that the Presbyterian Church of Sudan would assist the NSCC in its attempt at dialogue with Riek Machar.\(^{294}\) As a follow up to this recommendation, collaboration was established between William Lowrey who had played a crucial role in the 1994 Akobo conference, and the NSCC. William Lowrey was in the position to travel to Khartoum and serve as the NSCC link to Riek Machar.\(^{295}\)

11. The Lokichoggio chiefs meeting
The first major peace activity conducted by the NSCC after Yei and following the directions of that event, was the Chiefs Peace Meeting held in Lokichoggio in June 1998.\(^{296}\) The NSCC asked William Lowrey to act as consultant and facilitator given the competence he had acquired through his research on the role of chiefs in peacemaking at the 1994 Akobo conference.

Thirty leaders attended the meeting in Lokichoggio, both Dinka and Nuer traditional leaders, as well as church leaders.

\(^{290}\) See Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 491

\(^{291}\) See Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 492

\(^{292}\) See New Sudan Council of Churches, *Come, Let Us Reason Together* and Jenner, Hadley, *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project*, p. 18

\(^{293}\) See New Sudan Council of Churches, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, pp. 4, 7 and 10

\(^{294}\) See New Sudan Council of Churches, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 25

\(^{295}\) Jenner, Hadley, *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project*, p. 18

The first three days were devoted to storytelling. Participants could speak for as long as they wanted, without interruption or argument, of the pain and suffering experienced in the previous seven years. On the fourth day, the chiefs worked on recalling traditional methods of conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{297}

The main themes dealt with at Lokichoggio were relationship building and reconciliation, developing skills of conflict analysis and designing peacemaking strategies.\textsuperscript{298} A Nuer-Dinka Loki Accord was signed on 10 June 1998.

First at the Akobo Conference, and then at the Lokichoggio Meeting, as already referred to, traditional methods of conflict resolution, among them animal sacrifice, were revived and performed. Such practices would become a trademark of future People to People events. At Lokichoggio the road was also open to the synthesis of traditional and Christian approaches to peacemaking that will be another important characteristic of following People to People events.

With the Lokichoggio Chief meeting, the People to People Peacemaking Process was officially launched.\textsuperscript{299} Commitments were made by all participants to work together towards a more comprehensive conference to take place in Wunlit in February-March 1999, a conference that would become the main event and trademark of the People to People.

12. Preparing for Wunlit

For almost three months prior to the Wunlit conference, a team of mobilisers organised by the NSCC travelled across the West Bank of the Nile meeting chiefs, local authorities, women and youth to share information about the upcoming conference and to gain support.\textsuperscript{300} The choice of women as peace mobilisers met a precise request by community representatives. Women were better trusted than men for the sensitive work of establishing first contacts.

Two weeks before Wunlit, in February 1999, a preparatory meeting was held in Thiet, attended by Dinka and Nuer chiefs. Five Nuer chiefs and a woman leader from Upper Nile were flown with church leaders to a meeting with Dinka Chiefs in Bahr el Ghazal. At that meeting, attended by Traditionalists and Christians, Traditional rituals were performed to underline commitment to reconciliation and peace.\textsuperscript{301} A second pre-Wunlit meeting was held in Leer, this

\textsuperscript{297} Flint, Julie, \textit{Consolidating the Process}, p. 15 and New Sudan Council of Churches, \textit{Inside Sudan}, p. 50
\textsuperscript{298} Jenner, Hadley, \textit{Reflecting on Peace Practice Project}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{299} New Sudan Council of Churches, \textit{Inside Sudan}, p. 51
\textsuperscript{300} Flint, Julie, \textit{Consolidating the Process}, p. 19. Awut Deng together with Telar Deng was Peace Mobiliser for Bahr el Ghazal, while Anna Kima and Matthew Mathiang Deng were in charge of Upper Nile. Peace mobilisation was conducted also in other areas of Southern Sudan. For example, Gladys Mananyu was Peace Mobiliser for Equatoria
\textsuperscript{301} Flint, Julie, \textit{Consolidating the Process}, p. 20 and New Sudan Council of Churches, \textit{Inside Sudan}, pp. 54-55
time attended by five Dinka chiefs and a woman leader. The example set by the chiefs motivated people at the community level to participate in the Wunlit peace conference.

13. Dinka-Nuer West Bank peace and reconciliation conference in Wunlit

The Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference started in Wunlit, Bahr el Ghazal, on 27 February 1999. Wunlit had been chosen as site for the conference because of its small size and location in scarcely inhabited territory, and for these reasons considered safe from Government attacks.

Military groups had to ensure the participants’ safety, both during the event and while travelling to and from Wunlit. Salva Kiir, second in command in the SPLM/A, was appointed as contact person between the SPLM/A and the NSCC. His address on the opening day of the conference confirmed his commitment to that “historic Conference” and to “wholeheartedly embrace peace and reconciliation”. Although not physically present, Machar expressed full support to the Wunlit conference through his representatives.

Given the small size of the town Wunlit, the venue for 1,000 participants and observers in the peace conference had to be entirely built. The 360 official delegates were selected from the six counties of Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile where Nuer and Dinka border each other, thirty delegates from each county for a total of 180 Nuer and 180 Dinka. Each county selected 15 chiefs and 15 delegates from other social groups such as elders, women, youth and ‘intellectuals’, the way educated people were referred to in Southern Sudan. Women were one-fifth of the 360 official delegates, and a larger portion of the 1,000 participants.

A most significant part of each People to People conference, including Wunlit, was storytelling. In the Nilotic tradition, reconciliation can only be achieved when the wrongs suffered and inflicted are known and acknowledged. Four days were devoted to storytelling at the Wunlit conference, stories of raids, battles, abductions, rapes and slavery. As in Lokichoggio, also in Wunlit Dinka and Nuer were allowed the same amount of time during which the person speaking could not be interrupted. Storytelling was to become a central element of the methodology of People to People events. Issues raised in the four days of storytelling then became the subject of

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302 Horjen, Stein Erik, Reconciliation in the Sudans, Peter Lang, New York et alia, 2016, p. 79
303 See the minutes of the Wunlit conference Wunlit - Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference, pp. 9-11
304 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan, p. 58
305 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan, p. 64 and Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment, pp. 498-500
discussion of six working groups in charge of producing recommendations to be adopted by all delegates. Each resolution was approved by consensus.

The Wunlit Covenant was signed and thumb-printed on 8 March 1999 by all participants. As part of the agreement, all signatories agreed to share the results of Wunlit within their communities and become active peacemakers in their areas.

Each day started with Christian worship, while Traditional rituals played a major role in each part of the conference. In Wunlit, it became clear that the NSCC as a Christian organisation was ready to respond to the request formulated in Yei to revive Southern Sudanese traditional culture.

14. The Lokichoggio women’s meeting

Following the Wunlit conference, and to further strengthen women’s participation in the People to People Peacemaking Process, a Peace and Reconciliation workshop for twenty-one women from Nuer, Dinka and Murle communities, was held in Lokichoggio in June 1999, led by Dr Agnes Abuom of the National Council of Churches of Kenya, and NSCC Peace Mobiliser Anna Kima. The purpose of the meeting was to promote, through women, peace and reconciliation at the local level with the aspiration of contributing to the resolution of the national conflict.

The meeting produced a resolution that was signed by all women present. The resolution referred, among other things, to the intention to conduct peace mobilisation and training for women in the Lokichoggio refugee camp.306

15. The Chukudum NSCC – SPLM/A meeting

A joint NSCC – SPLM/A committee headed by Rev. John Okumu, Chairperson of the NSCC and a senior authority in the SPLM/A, met in Chukudum in August 1999. The main theme of the meeting was the issue of human rights abuses on the civilian population by SPLA and GoS backed militias, such as the Ugandan Lord’s Resistance Army active in Eastern Equatoria. The emphasis was on fact-finding, and the role of the leaders in meliorating the conditions of civilians in war-torn areas.

The Chukudum Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation was signed in August 1999, recommending, as was done in Wunlit, a broadening of the peace process to other areas and ethnic groups of Southern Sudan.\textsuperscript{307}

16. The second Akobo conference

The Lou, the largest Nuer section on the East Bank, were divided among the SPLA Mainstream, Riek Machar’s army and other pro-Government militias. All three forces had been fighting for control of Akobo since May 1999, with consequent enormous loss of civilian lives.\textsuperscript{308}

The mounting conflict among the Nuer had caused the withdrawal of humanitarian organisations and consequently a worsening of the food crisis among the local population.

Following the meeting held in 1994, a second meeting was held in Akobo in August 1999 facilitated by the NSCC and supported by the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. The meeting was attended by military leaders, local chiefs and church leaders. On 18 August, after three days of talks, an agreement was signed to cease fighting immediately\textsuperscript{309} and allow the access of NGOs to all parts of Lou Nuer territory.\textsuperscript{310}

17. The immediate results of Wunlit

In September 1999, the first Wunlit-ordained Peace Council Meeting took place in Yirol.\textsuperscript{311} The meeting was supported by SPLA commanders and had as a goal listing the achievements of the recommendations agreed upon in Wunlit. A complete halt to cattle raiding and inter-factional fighting was registered at the Yirol meeting, it was noted that 148 abductees had been returned, among them almost all the abducted children, marriages involving abductees had been finalised, trading routes opened, thousands of displaced Nuer received and that grazing areas and fishing grounds had been peacefully shared.\textsuperscript{312} The peace achieved in Wunlit was recognised as successful and motivated both actors at the grassroots level and the NSCC to extend peace efforts beyond the West Bank of the Nile.

\textsuperscript{307} Jenner, Hadley,\textit{ Reflecting on Peace Practice Project}, pp. 25-29
\textsuperscript{308} Flint, Julie,\textit{ Consolidating the Process}, p. 29
\textsuperscript{309} Flint, Julie,\textit{ Consolidating the Process}, p. 29
\textsuperscript{310} Jenner, Hadley,\textit{ Reflecting on Peace Practice Project}, pp. 26-28
\textsuperscript{311} Jenner, Hadley,\textit{ Reflecting on Peace Practice Project}, p. 22
\textsuperscript{312} Flint, Julie,\textit{ Consolidating the Process}, p. 36 and Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge,\textit{ Local Peace Processes in Sudan}, pp. 47-48
18. Attempts at expanding the People to People Peacemaking Process to the East Bank

Focusing again on Nuer internal conflicts, in November 1999, the NSCC held a Lou-Lou reconciliation conference in Waat. The meeting was attended by chiefs, church leaders, youth, women, representatives of the different military commands, all sections of the Nuer and invited guests.\(^{313}\) 100 official delegates and 1,000 additional participants attended the event. Military leaders played a prominent role in this meeting, as it was believed that any agreement made without the commanders would not be sustainable.\(^{314}\)

The meeting aimed at building a common system of governance, rebuilding the civil administration, establishing a police system and re-empowering the traditional court system of chiefs.

The one-week conference ended with the issuing of a covenant signed and confirmed, as in Wunlit, by the Traditional sacrifice of the white bull, the *mabior*. The closing Christian worship was attended by 3,000 people. A Lou Nuer Peace and Governance Council was elected to rebuild the civil administration, and the Upper Nile Provisional Military Command Council was established to bring together the major commanders in the region and to promote the cause of self-determination of the South from the North.\(^{315}\)

Immediately after the Waat meeting, Wal Duany, a Nuer scholar living in the United States, planned the formation of a political group to be known as South Sudan Liberation Movement. This initiative by Wal Duany caused a severe conflict between Duany and M achar.\(^{316}\) Several commanders and chiefs gathered around Duany, ending the unity the Nuer had achieved at Waat, and dividing the Presbyterian church along factional lines.

Such events involving the Nuer political and military leadership marked a rift between the SPLM/A of John Garang and the NSCC. Duany’s move from being an active advocate of peace at Wunlit to a factional leader in the aftermath of Waat brought the neutrality of the NSCC into question.\(^{317}\) William Lowrey and the NSCC were accused by Garang as well as M achar of siding with Duany, of facilitating the formation of new political groups and of a military bloc in the East Bank. William Lowrey was accused of having his own political agenda and was advised to leave.

\(^{313}\) Jenner, Hadley, *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project*, p. 27
\(^{316}\) Flint, J Julie, *Consolidating the Process*, p. 30 and Jenner, Hadley, *Reflecting on Peace Practice Project*, p. 28
\(^{317}\) Bradbury, M ark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and K wesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, *Local Peace Processes in Sudan*, p. 51
the NSCC. In February 2000, the NSCC had to dismiss William Lowrey as he had lost the protection of Machar and was no longer safe in Nuer territory.318

On 7 April 2000, the first anniversary celebrations of Wunlit were held in Rumbek. Beside Dinka people from the area, 400 Nuer attended the celebration. Youth and women were still involved in spreading the resolutions of Wunlit at the community level. The Rumbek meeting was a further occasion to acknowledge the positive outcome of Wunlit.

The Liliir East Bank Nilotic peoples Peace Conference was held in May 2000 in the renewed attempt to bring the People to People Process to the East Bank of the Nile.319 Before the conference, a series of local peace meetings were held to identify and resolve disputes between neighbouring militias and groups. Military and political leaders of the Nuer Lou met for three days and a cease-fire was signed. Such achievements set the stage for a larger Lou-Lou Peace meeting.

In the spirit of Wunlit, the components of Liliir were storytelling, work in groups, discussion, amendment and consensus approval. Traditional leaders played a crucial role and the conference opened and closed with the ritual sacrifice of the white bull.320

By the time of the Liliir conference (May 2000), both Garang’s SPLM/A and Machar’s SPDF suspected the People to People Peacemaking Process, and the NSCC behind it, of undermining their ultimate control and authority, and providing dissidents with an arena to build their power base and establish alliances.321

The Liliir conference was held despite significant threats by military leaders. Although only half of the 200 expected participants eventually attended, the conference was considered successful among people at the grassroots level, as it did in fact contribute to expanding the process of local reconciliation to the East Bank of the Nile.322

19. Strategic linkages

The first Strategic Linkages Conference was held in Wulu on the West Bank in November 2000 with the goal of linking peacemaking at the grassroots level with efforts to facilitate peace at the national level.323 The name ‘strategic linkages’ was chosen as a reference to theories popularised by

318 Flint, Julie, Consolidating the Process, p. 30
319 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan, pp. 71 and 74
320 Jenner, Hadley, Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, pp. 29-30
321 Flint, Julie, Consolidating the Process, p. 33
322 Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan, p. 52
323 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan, pp. 77 and 79; Flint, Julie, Consolidating the Process, p. 43; Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan, p. 48
John Paul Lederach about the need to strategically link peace efforts at different levels, from the grassroots level to that of military and political leadership, to achieve sustainable peace.324

The conference was attended by elders, chiefs, intellectuals, representatives of civil society groups, women, church leaders and community leaders. The chiefs agreed that grassroots peacemaking had brought new hope to the people, but issued a number of warnings: conference resolutions were not being sufficiently implemented; the peace process required the support of all Southern leaders - Traditional, religious and political; and the exploitation of oil by the Government was posing an immense threat to peace. Participants in the conference asked the NSCC to organise a series of Nuer-Nuer dialogues in order to facilitate two successive conferences: a meeting of chiefs with the diaspora and middle-level political leaders, as well as a meeting with the factional leaders. The NSCC was again asked to facilitate dialogue between civil society and the political leadership.325

The NSCC responded to such requests by organising a second Strategic Linkages meeting between Southern tribal leaders, civil society organisations, the diaspora and the SPLM/A. The meeting was held in Kisumu in June 2001 under the name of ‘Strategic Linkages II’, and took the NSCC in a markedly political direction.326

By the time of the Kisumu Conference, tensions between the SPLM/A and NSCC were high. John Garang prohibited all SPLM/A units from sending representatives to the Linkages conference. SPLM/A officials at airstrips would prevent participants, including chiefs, from boarding planes.327 As a result of the SPLM/A’s opposition, attendance from SPLM/A-controlled areas was very limited. The SPLM/A’s official reason for opposition, expressed in the March 15th letter of John Garang to the NSCC, was that the SPLM/A had not been involved in the planning of the conference and that there were more urgent issues to be dealt with at the grassroots level, such as reconciliation among the Nuer in Upper Nile and between Didinga and Dinka people in the Chukudum area. Opposition to the Kisumu conference has been attributed to the fact that Garang feared that the Strategic Linkages meeting would provide a forum for self-determination that would undermine the SPLM/A’s project of a united Sudan.328 The opposition of Garang to the Kisumu meeting can also be attributed to the unwillingness of Garang to sit at a table as one leader among

324 See Lederach, John Paul, Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, United States Institute of Peace Press, W ashington D.C., 1997. See also Chapter 10
325 Flint, Julie, Consolidating the Process, p. 44
326 Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan, p. 52
327 Flint, Julie, Consolidating the Process, p. 44
328 Flint, Julie, Consolidating the Process, p. 44 and Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, Local Peace Processes in Sudan, p. 53
many in a process facilitated by a third party - the NSCC and the churches - that would have questioned his position as undisputed political and military leader in Southern Sudan.\textsuperscript{329}

A new letter sent after Kisumu to the NSCC,\textsuperscript{330} clearly stated that the SPLM/A considered the Kisumu process as a political initiative intended to challenge the leadership of the Movement by providing an arena for politicians from the diaspora to promote their personal political aspirations and interests.

Various attempts were made by international partners to compose the dissent between Garang and the Executive Director of the NSCC Dr Harun Ruun and, in so doing, preserving the People to People Peacemaking Process.\textsuperscript{331}

The SCC in Khartoum had decided not to participate in the Kisumu conference, as they saw that neither the people of Southern Sudan nor the churches had anything to gain from a sustained conflict with John Garang.\textsuperscript{332}

Despite Garang’s opposition, the NSCC had been discussing the idea of linkages conferences with Salva Kiir for almost six months. Kiir had given his full support to such meetings. Conflict between the NSCC and Garang became part of a conflict internal to the SPLM/A between Garang and Kiir, a conflict that to a large extent was animated by different understandings of the goals of the liberation struggle, namely independence of the South versus unity of the Country, as well as by Kiir’s dislike of the authoritarian leadership style of Garang.\textsuperscript{333}

The Strategic Linkages Conference eventually took place in June 2001, and was attended by 200 participants.\textsuperscript{334} The Kisumu Declaration agreed upon on 22 June reaffirmed the twin goals of liberation and self-determination and urged the Nuer to work to unite the forces of Riek Machar and Wal Duany. It was also felt urgent to improve dialogue with the SPLM/A.

Kisumu did not manage to establish linkages with the SPLM/A but helped Nuer to focus on strategies to address internal conflicts.\textsuperscript{335} Seventy-two Nuer from twelve ethnic groups remained in Kisumu after the conference ended, to discuss inter-Nuer issues. On 23 June they produced a new set of resolutions calling on the Sudan People’s Defence Forces/Democratic Front (SPDF) of Machar and the South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) of Duany to cease all hostilities, implement organic unity without delay, and to enter into dialogue with other liberation movements.

\textsuperscript{329} Horjen, Stein Erik, \textit{Reconciliation in the Sudans}, p. 90
\textsuperscript{330} Horjen, Stein Erik, \textit{Reconciliation in the Sudans}, p. 92
\textsuperscript{331} Horjen, Stein Erik, \textit{Reconciliation in the Sudans}, p. 93
\textsuperscript{332} Horjen, Stein Erik, \textit{Reconciliation in the Sudans}, p. 93
\textsuperscript{333} Horjen, Stein Erik, \textit{Reconciliation in the Sudans}, pp. 94-95
\textsuperscript{334} Flint, Julie, \textit{Consolidating the Process}, p. 45; Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sanscullette-Greenidge, \textit{Local Peace Processes in Sudan}, p. 53
\textsuperscript{335} Flint, Julie, \textit{Consolidating the Process}, p. 46
At the Kisumu meeting, the same methodology was applied as at other major People to People events: sufficient time to allow for a thorough narration of the events leading to conflict, as well as of experiences of conflict; full involvement of leaders, women and youth and direct participation of the people in the peace process; acknowledgement of the pain inflicted and confession as steps towards reconciliation; peace understood primarily as restoration of relationships; and a negotiated understanding of truth.336

Participants in Kisumu once again gave churches the task of mediating between and reconciling the leaders of the Southern political and military factions, but the gravity of the conflict between the NSCC and John Garang posed severe limitations to the mediating capacity of the NSCC.

20. “Let My People Choose”

At the General Assembly of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum held in London in March 2002, the main issue to be dealt with was self-determination for Southern Sudan, to be discussed among churches and their partners as a contribution to the liberation struggle and the national peace process.

Ecumenical partners attending the meeting expressed their concern that the Sudanese churches were getting involved in political issues beyond their mandate and competence. Still, the NSCC and Sudanese church actors were not ready to question their position in favour of self-determination. Tension rose to the point that it required separate meetings of Sudanese and partners. The outcome of such separate sessions was a “double yes”:337 the Sudanese churches unanimously reconfirmed their support to the right of self-determination, while international partners agreed to support the churches in their struggle and be their advocates internationally.338

The position of the Sudanese churches on the right of self-determination for the peoples of Southern Sudan and other marginalised areas, were articulated in the document “Let my People Choose”.339

Four months after the London General Assembly, the Machakos protocol reaffirming the right of self-determination, was signed in the frame of the IGAD negotiations, by the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A. As the Machakos protocol paved the way to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, churches’ firm stand on the right of self-determination,

336 Horjen, Stein Erik, Reconciliation in the Sudans, pp. 100-104
337 Horjen, Stein Erik, Reconciliation in the Sudans, pp. 126-128
338 Horjen, Stein Erik, Reconciliation in the Sudans, p. 127
339 Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan Council of Churches, “Let my People Choose”
particularly as expressed in London, can also be understood as an important contribution of the People to People to the national peace process.

21. The Entebbe meetings

A few weeks after the signing of the Machakos protocol by the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A, Sudanese church leaders gathered in Entebbe to attend a consultation requested by the Sudan Ecumenical Forum and organised by the NSCC. Two more conferences would be held in Entebbe during the same year under the leadership of the NSCC.

The first Entebbe conference aimed at connecting church leaders with representatives of the civil society in Southern Sudan.

The second Entebbe conference was attended by civil society representatives of the whole of Sudan. Here, churches tried to connect to Muslim and secular organisations in the North to coordinate support for the national peace process and promote the inclusive character of the process. Government and SPLM/A representatives also attended the meeting. Several proposals made at this Entebbe conference, among them one concerning the relation between Southern and Northern Armies, were included in the IGAD negotiations and the formulation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The second Entebbe conference also recommended that the CPA should contain an article about reconciliation.

A third Entebbe conference was held in December 2002, designed as a follow-up to the 2001 Kisumu conference. The theme chosen for this meeting was reconciliation among armed groups in Southern Sudan. The outcome of the conference was once more a recommendation to the NSCC to facilitate a broad reconciliation process among Southern armed groups. The proposal was welcomed by the churches but rejected by the SPLM/A. As in relation to Kisumu, again Garang opposed a church-led inclusive process, not controlled by the SPLM/A, that could have strengthened opposition.

The three Entebbe conferences can be considered the epilogue of the People to People Peacemaking Process. The process of empowerment of various actors in the frame of the People to People, both in relation to peace and political initiatives, arouse the opposition of military and political leaders and determined the end of the process.

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340 Horjen, Stein Erik, *Reconciliation in the Sudans*, p. 135
341 Horjen, Stein Erik, *Reconciliation in the Sudans*, p. 136
342 Horjen, Stein Erik, *Reconciliation in the Sudans*, p. 136
343 Horjen, Stein Erik, *Reconciliation in the Sudans*, p. 138
344 Horjen, Stein Erik, *Reconciliation in the Sudans*, p. 141
22. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement

First track mediation between GoS and the SPLM/A continued to be led by the Inter-Governmental Agency on Development (IGAD). The Machakos Protocol, signed in July 2002, addressed the issue of self-determination. Finally, on 9 January 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Nairobi, officially ending twenty-two years of civil war.

Despite the efforts of the churches to make the national peace process as inclusive as possible, civil society representatives, and among them church actors, were denied even observer status at the IGAD-led CPA negotiations. Churches were not part of the final stages of the official peace process, but in great numbers staff of the Sudanese ecumenical structures and key players in the People to People were co-opted in the State apparatus of the about-to-be-born South Sudan. Empowerment of the people through participation in peace work had given its results.

B. THE HERMENEUTICAL CONTEXT

8. African Religion

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the main elements of African Traditional Religion, particularly in its Dinka and Nuer expressions. As the peace conference held in Wunlit, the most important People to People event, aimed at reconciling Dinka and Nuer people, and since a great portion of the reflection conducted around the People to People is supported by the experience of Wunlit, knowledge of the main elements of Dinka and Nuer religion will be useful in two ways: firstly, it will facilitate an understanding of what is meant by the contribution of African Traditional Religion to the theoretical profile of the People to People Peacemaking Process, and secondly, it will facilitate an understanding of what is implied in interview material concerning Traditional religious values, beliefs and practices in Southern Sudan and in the frame of the People to People.

After an introduction to African Religion, I will address key-themes of Dinka and Nuer religion such as understandings of God as supreme Divinity, the simultaneous unicity and multiplicity of God, the perceived ambivalence of God, the social, economic and religious significance of cattle, sin as human fault, sacrifice as the supreme expression of Dinka and Nuer religion, ritual and community making, the role of traditional leaders in relation to peacemaking and the related ideals of the abundance of life and holistic peace.

In the final section of this chapter, I will indicate the ways in which the themes here addressed are relevant in the frame of the People to People.

2. African Religion

African Religion is the expression of the questions and the answers African peoples have developed over the centuries about the universe, the place of God in it, the reality in which they live and their experience of it: “By giving people a way of interpreting the world, a way of understanding their own existence, African religion has equipped them emotionally, intellectually, and culturally to go through life and face its many experiences”. 346

A principle of African Religion is that morals – meaning principles about right and wrong – were given by God at the very beginning of human existence. Over the course of time, these morals have produced customs, rules, traditions and taboos. 347 Morality is so central to African Religion that, according to Tanzanian scholar Laurenti Magesa, an understanding of this religious tradition requires an understanding of its moral traditions and of the behaviours to which they lead. Such an effort in understanding African Religion further requires a study of the symbols and rituals that give expression to religious belief: “understanding the morality of the African people – that is, their perception of the Holy that demands and enforces their emotional and behavioural commitment and so gives direction to their lives – requires us to examine the world-view and ethos contained in their religious symbols”. 348 A study of African Religion requires, therefore, an understanding of the world-view of African peoples, and understanding of their perception of the Holy, of the way this perception of the Holy is linked to attitudes and behaviour and of how such a relation between the Holy and what is requested of human beings is expressed in religious symbols and rituals.

2.1. African Religion or Religions?

Given the variety and complexity of the African continent, is it appropriate to refer to African Religion, or should we rather talk about African Religions in the plural? Is African Religion one or many? Kenyan theologian John Mbiti in his *African Religions & Philosophy* argues, as the title of the book indicates, that the phenomenon of religion in Africa has to be considered plural. Still, African philosophy, conceived as the “understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life”, including their religious thinking, is considered common:

we shall use the singular, ‘philosophy’, to refer to the philosophical understanding of African peoples concerning different issues of life. Philosophy of one kind or another is behind the thinking and acting of every people, and a study of traditional religions brings us into those areas of African life where, through word and action, we may be able to discern the philosophy behind.

Religious expressions are many, but the thinking behind them is common. According to Magesa, when Mbiti posits one philosophy underlying all African religious expressions, he indirectly refers to a common mental structure, what Magesa interprets as a unity of essence that allows us to speak of African Religion in the singular. Furthermore, later works of Mbiti move in this direction. The varieties, asserts Magesa, are more of expression than of fundamental belief, similarly to the varieties found in Christianity or Islam. While arguing for the concept of African Religion in the singular, Magesa also argues for its status as world religion.

2.2. The principle of abundant life

The core principle of African Religion and the substance of its morality and ethics is the preservation, transmission and enhancement of life, life in its fullness:

There is no other purpose to life but fostering life. Herein lies the mystique of life. All rites and rituals from birth to adulthood are meant to solidify this life. All of them connect human beings with other visible elements of creation and with the invisible world of God, the ancestors and the spirits. All of these forces working together in harmony result in harmony and balance in the world and assure humanity of its good conduct.

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352 Mbiti, John S., *Introduction to African Religion*
354 See Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion*, p. 23. For this reason, in the course of this work I capitalize ‘Traditional Religion’ or ‘Traditional’ as an adjective with specific religious connotations
The above quotation introduces us to a number of issues that I will address in the course of this chapter, among them God universally acknowledged as Creator and source of life; the close relation, interconnectedness and interdependence of the visible and invisible: God, spirits, ancestors, human beings and nature; the imperative of relationships; fullness of life as a sign of order in the universe; misfortune as a sign of disorder caused mainly by human misconduct; and the possibility of restoring the order of the universe and fullness of life through ritual action and moral conduct. For most African people, fullness of life is expressed in abundance of food and livestock, good health, security and numerous offspring. African Religion does not nurture hope for eternal, better life. The present is the time to celebrate life and enjoy it to the fullest.

As the promotion of life is the supreme goal of African Religion, human behaviour is guided by values and norms to achieve such a goal: “From the dialectic between the established goal and human responsibility to realize it existentially and experientially arise values and norms of behaviour, what Africans would generally call “customs,” in the most morally-laden sense of the world”. Magesa establishes therefore a triad of goals (the promotion of life), (ethical) behaviour and those values and norms (tradition) that guide human behaviour towards the supreme goal of the preservation of life.

2.3. The interconnectedness of life

God is the Creator, the Great Ancestor, the Giver of life. Every creature has been endowed by God with a certain amount of life-power. Since the source of life is common, namely God, all creatures are interconnected, and each one has the potential to influence the others both positively and negatively. In the frame of the interconnectedness and interdependence of life in the universe, the human being is seen as the centre and first beneficiary of it:

all life forces, that is, all creation, are intended to serve and enhance the life force of the human person and society. The belief of African Religion is that this is part of the Divine plan. Universal order can be maintained only if this plan of the interaction of vital forces for the sake of the enhancement of the vital force of humanity is adhered to and observed. African moral values and ethical behaviour are therefore vitalistic, existential (dynamic), holistic, relational, anthropocentric and mystical.

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357 Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion*, p. 50
358 Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion*, p. 54
One person can not determine the fullness of his or her life. One’s life force depends on the life forces of other persons and other beings, including the ancestors and God. Human relations and solidarity with God, the ancestors, other spirits, fellow human beings and other elements of creation are therefore necessary to the enhancement of life.359

2.4. The relationship imperative

In African Religion, an individual can exist as a moral person and become truly human only in community.360 African Religion is, in fact, pre-eminently communitarian.

The purpose of human beings is to live a long life and enjoy good relations with other people, ancestors, other spirits, and with God. The ethical agenda of life in African Religion includes the imperative of community and harmony. Relationships are seen as expressions of moral behaviour because they are perceived as that which allows the universe to continue to exist.361

Ancestors play a crucial role in maintaining relationships: they connect individuals in a clan and the visible to the invisible. Solidarity among the members of a society and unity between the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born are fundamental elements in the order and survival of the universe.362

3. Elements of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion

In providing an outline of Dinka and Nuer Religion, I will primarily refer to the fundamental studies of the British anthropologists Godfrey Lienhardt and Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard. Lienhardt published his Divinity and Experience,363 in 1961, after two years of research among the Rek Dinka of the Bahr el Ghazal Province of Southern Sudan. Evans-Pritchard published his Nuer Religion364 in 1956, as the last volume of a trilogy365 produced over a period of twenty-six years of research on the Nuer, particularly in territories west of the Nile.

The two books of Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard are to this day the most comprehensive studies on the Traditional Religion of the Dinka and the Nuer, and the most authoritative ones. Their work has been highly praised but has also been object of critique. I will refer to the arguments

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359 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 55
360 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 243
361 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 215
362 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 171
364 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, Oxford University Press, 1956
365 The other two volumes of the trilogy are The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People, Oxford University Press, 1940 and Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1951
acknowledging and questioning the authority of the two studies and illustrate the reasons why I nevertheless chose to primarily base my outline of Dinka and Nuer Religion on them. In elaborating the present chapter, I have also relied on the work of Charles Gabriel Seligman and Brenda Zara Seligman on Dinka and Nuer religion, as well as on the work of Francis Mading Deng on Dinka religion.

In his *African Religions & Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti refers to the two works of Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard as the two best examples of studies on African religions. Mbiti praises the two anthropologists for having lived among the people studied, in the case of Evans-Pritchard for a period stretching over twenty years, for having carefully studied respectively Dinka and Nuer languages and for having participated, as far was possible, in the life and activities of these peoples. The description of Dinka and Nuer religion is, in the words of Mbiti and referring specifically to Evans-Pritchard: “from within, using the scientific tools of an anthropologist but looking at it through the eyes of the Nuer themselves”. Lienhardt is referred to as following the same method: “The main contribution here is concentrating on the religion of individual peoples and treating it both in depth and in relation to the total situation of the people concerned. If such studies could be made for most African peoples, they would be of infinite value as a bank of information on African traditional religions”. The quality of the studies produced by Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard is considered by Mbiti as a suitable starting point for a comprehensive study of African Traditional Religions and philosophy.

Douglas Johnson and Sharon Hutchinson, both North American and a historian and an anthropologist, respectively, who have devoted decades of research to Sudan and particularly to the Nuer, draw attention to the limits of Evans-Pritchard’s work while at the same time acknowledging their debt to his research.

In his *Nuer Prophets*, Johnson criticises the paradigm of the prophet as a crisis leader proposed by Evans-Pritchard. According to Johnson, prophets rose and acted in processes of both continuity and change. Johnson also notes that there has been a tendency in ethnographic studies to apply to all Nuer prophets characteristics that were proper of west Nuerland, the area where

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366 Seligman, Charles G. and Brenda Z. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, Routledge, London, 1932. Charles G. Seligman was from 1913 to 1934 a professor of Ethnology at the University of London and one of the professors of Evans-Pritchard
368 Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*
Evans-Pritchard’s conducted his observations.\footnote{Johnson, Douglas H., \textit{Nuer Prophets}, p. 243} Johnson further criticises Evans-Pritchard’s generalised account of Nuer expansion towards east in the nineteenth century as an aggressive migration organised for warfare.\footnote{Johnson, Douglas H., \textit{Nuer Prophets}, p. 44} While Johnson disagrees with Evans-Pritchard on a number of issues, the historian also acknowledges that his study would have not been possible without the writings of the British anthropologist, “which not only interprets Nuer society brilliantly but now serves as a significant historical source in itself. I see my research as building on his work, and it is from him that I take many of my points of departure”.\footnote{Johnson, Douglas H., \textit{Nuer Prophets}, p. xi} In relation to the scope of the present research, it is significant to note that in his numerous references to features of Nuer religion, Johnson unquestionably relies on the study of Evans-Pritchard.

Sharon Hutchinson’s \textit{Nuer Dilemmas},\footnote{Hutchinson, Sharon E., \textit{Nuer Dilemmas}, \textit{Coping with Money, War and the State}, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1996} another important study on the Nuer, in the words of the author “builds directly on the path-breaking field studies carried out among the Nuer by Evans-Pritchard during the early 1930s”.\footnote{Hutchinson, Sharon E., \textit{Nuer Dilemmas}, p. 20} Hutchinson continues by saying that “On the basis of some eleven months of field research carried out during the early 1930s, Evans-Pritchard went on to produce what is, arguably, the most comprehensive and detailed ethnographic portrait of any people in the whole of the anthropological literature. His three principal studies … have been widely acclaimed by generations of anthropologists both as extraordinarily rich, well-crafted ethnographies in their own right and as exemplary models of inquiry and analysis for the entire field”.\footnote{Hutchinson, Sharon E., \textit{Nuer Dilemmas}, p. 21} Still, Hutchinson with her work aims at questioning the assumption created by decades of secondary reanalyses of Evans-Pritchard’s work that Nuer culture and social life are beyond change. Hutchinson considers Evans-Pritchard responsible for laying the bases for such assumptions: “the image of a balanced social harmony he projected was not simply the product of a keen eye and a brilliant mind but also an illusion fostered by the dominant theories guiding anthropological research at that time”.\footnote{Hutchinson, Sharon E., \textit{Nuer Dilemmas}, p. 30} Regional variations of culture and history were minimised in a favour of a generalised image of a timeless social order, an image that, as we will see, served the purposes and interests of the British colonial government, the same that sponsored the field research of, among others, Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard. By the time Hutchinson began her field studies in December 1980, “the Nuer were no longer the isolated, independent, cattle-minded warriors immortalized by Evans-Pritchard”.\footnote{Hutchinson, Sharon E., \textit{Nuer Dilemmas}, p. 25} In her book, Hutchinson aims at exploring how Nuer values, concepts and
practices have been shaken by the massive social and economic transformation caused by more than twenty-five years of British colonial rule and two major civil wars interrupted by eleven years of relative peace. While Evans-Pritchard, according to Hutchinson, viewed culture as something shared and with his work aimed at providing a homogenised image of what people held in common, Hutchinson questions the idea of ‘the Nuer’ as a unified ethnic identity and draws attention to regional variations of culture and history. During the nineteenth century, advancing from west to east across the White Nile, the predecessors of contemporary eastern Nuer assimilated a great number of Dinka and Anyuak people, and this assimilation had a profound effect, among others, on religious practices.381 After Sudan gained independence in 1956, the eastern Nuer were heavily affected by the political economy of the Country and were hit harder than the Nuer west of the Nile by the effects of the first civil war. Eastern Nuer, according to Hutchinson, also experienced a faster and wider process of conversion to Christianity than western Nuer. Historical events with a stronger impact on Eastern Nuer also determined greater cultural flexibility. On the other hand, western Nuer enjoyed greater social and political stability, and such stability had as a consequence greater cultural and religious conservatism: “the contemporary western Leek Nuer were, in my experience, far closer in culture and social outlook to the people described by Evans-Pritchard than were the contemporary eastern Jikany Nuer”.382 Western Nuer “prided themselves on being the “true” Nuer whose language and culture were not “all mixed up with Dinka ways””.383 Hutchinson’s argument about the religious stability of western Nuer is, as I will soon explain, one of the reasons I consider Evans-Pritchard’s study relevant for the purposes of the present work.

A similar critique has been moved to the work of Lienhardt. Jesse Zink384 notes that the portrayal Lienhardt provides of Dinka Religion gives little sense of diversity and change both in geographical and historical terms, presenting “a single Dinka worldview as if it was universally held, obscuring some of the diversity and debate within Dinka society”.385

In the introduction to the Zeligmans’ Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan, Harold M. Machmichael, Civil Secretary of the (British colonial) Sudan Government, refers to the difficulties and mistakes with which the British Government was faced in its task to govern the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile Provinces of Southern Sudan for lack of knowledge of language, culture, customs and religion of the populations inhabiting those areas. As the administrator grasps the connection between local social organisation and the religious ideas that support local structures, he requests

381 Hutchinson, Sharon E., Nuer Dilemmas, p. 37
382 Hutchinson, Sharon E., Nuer Dilemmas, p. 38
383 Hutchinson, Sharon E., Nuer Dilemmas, p. 37
384 Zink, Jesse A., Christianity and Catastrophe: Sudan’s Civil Wars and Religious Change among the Dinka, PhD Dissertation, Cambridge, 2015
385 Zink, Jesse A., Christianity and Catastrophe, p. 24
the help of the anthropologist and ethnologist “to understand more fully the politico-religious outlook of the tribes committed to his charge”. The pioneering anthropological and ethnological works of the period between the 1920s and the 1950s were commissioned by the administrators of colonial powers to better understand the culture and religion of submitted populations and in this way more efficiently control and govern them. Laurenti Magesa in his study of African Religion, refers to Okot p’Bitek’s perspective on the study of social anthropology in Africa by Western scholars seen as “not only the handmaiden of colonialism in that it analysed and provided important information about the social institution of colonized peoples to ensure efficient and effective control and exploitation, it also has furnished and elaborated the myth of the ‘primitive’ which justified the colonial enterprise”. Magesa agrees with p’Bitek about the fact that the first studies of African Religion aptly served the purpose of the coloniser to better know in order to more effectively subjugate. Still, Magesa in his study of African Religion heavily relies on the works of Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard, acknowledging the value of their research.

Taking into account the concerns raised by Johnson, Hutchinson and Zink, as well as the clear appreciation by African scholars of the calibre of Mbiti and Magesa, in providing an outline of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion, I chose to rely on the works of Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard for four main reasons. The first is that even those who find (good) reasons to criticise the work of the two anthropologists, such as Johnson and Hutchinson, substantially rely on such works to the extent that without a study of the works of Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard the implications of successive works could not be fully grasped. The second reason is that the works of the two anthropologists on Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion remain to this date the more comprehensive available. The third is that even those who criticise the partiality of the work of the two anthropologists on the grounds that they did not take sufficiently in consideration geographical variations among Dinka and among Nuer, acknowledge, as we have seen, that while especially Nuer on the East Bank of the Nile were more exposed to the cultural and religious influences of other ethnic groups and were more affected by turbulent historical events, Dinka and Nuer on the West Bank have preserved more ancient and stable forms of religiosity. Wunlit, the main conference of the People to People, was held on the West Bank of the Nile and for Dinka and Nuer peoples from the West Bank. The descriptions provided by Lienhardt and Evans-Pritchard, exactly

386 Introduction by Harold M. MacMichael to Seligman, Charles G. and Brenda Z. Seligman, Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan, p. xx
387 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, pp. 28-29
For a further exploration of the relation between power and knowledge production see Rosaldo, Renato, “From the door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor”, in Clifford, James and George E. Marcus (eds.), Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, University of California Press, Berkeley et alia, 1986, pp. 77-97
because they are primarily an account of the religious traditions preserved on the West Bank, retain their validity for the purpose of the present work. Fourthly, one of the aims of the People to People was to recover, remember and revive traditional methods of conflict resolution, acknowledging that traditional practices had been interrupted and disrupted by war and, before that, by foreign interference. What was kept in the memory of Dinka and Nuer chiefs that played such an important role in the People to People might well be in line with the description of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion provided by those ethnologists and anthropologists who had conducted research a few decades before. Magesa furthermore stresses that a discourse on Traditional Religion is at all possible because religious beliefs do not easily and quickly evolve.\(^{389}\) The accounts of the two anthropologists are in my opinion valid in grasping the significance of the religious traditions that contributed to the People to People Peacemaking Process.

In the following section I will therefore provide an outline of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion. The two religious traditions present a high number of similarities as Evans-Pritchard highlights in his introduction to \textit{Nuer Religion}: “It is certainly very unlike the religion of the Anuak, of the Luo of Kenya, of the Acholi, of the Alur, or of the Shilluk. Indeed, only the religion of the Dinka can be said to have strongly marked affinities with it”.\(^{390}\)

3.1. Understandings of God

Addressing the same point raised by Evans-Pritchard concerning close similarities between the religious traditions of the Dinka and the Nuer, Charles and Brenda Seligman further connote such similarities in terms of belief in one supreme God: “The Dinka, and the kindred Nuer, are intensely religious, in our experience by far the most religious peoples in the Sudan, their worship being directed to a high god dwelling in or associated with the firmament and to a host of ancestral spirits”.\(^{391}\)

Dinka refer to Divinity as \textit{Nhialic}, the locative of \textit{nhial}, ‘up’ or ‘above’. \textit{Nhialic}, therefore, means ‘the one who is in the above’. \textit{Nhialic} is further referred to as ‘creator’ (\textit{aciek}) and ‘my father’ (\textit{wa}).\(^{392}\) It has a masculine and personal connotation and to \textit{Nhialic} prayers and sacrifice are addressed.

\(^{389}\) See Magesa, Laurenti, \textit{African Religion}, p. 17
\(^{390}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. vii
\(^{391}\) Seligman, Charles G. and Brenda Z. Seligman, \textit{Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan}, p. 178
\(^{392}\) Of another opinion, Francis Mading Deng: “I do not recall instances of God’s being referred to as “God, my Father”; the relationship seems always to be qualified by “of my ...”, which implies the pivotal role of ancestry and the need for at least one ascendant above the father”. See Deng, Francis Mading, \textit{The Dinka of the Sudan}, p. 126. The difference of opinions may be attributed to geographical variations as Lienhardt researched among the Rec Dinka, while Deng is a Ngok Dinka
In Nuer religion, God\(^{393}\) does not have a proper name. God is simply *kwoth*, Spirit. Like the Hebrew *ruah*, *kwoth* is an onomatopoeic term that denotes intense breathing out of air in contrast to ordinary breathing.\(^{394}\) The most common way of expressing the idea of God is that God is like wind: “There is nothing Nuer can say of the nature of God other than that he is like wind or air. They can speak of their experience of Spirit but can tell us nothing of Spirit itself ... Spirit in itself is for Nuer a mystery which lies behind the names and the totemic and other appearances in which it is represented”.\(^{395}\)

The Nuer do not regard the sky or any celestial phenomenon as God. God might be particularly in the sky, but is in fact everywhere: “God is everywhere; he is permanent and changeless in his relation to the constant elements in the natural and moral orders; he is one, and he is all-powerful, just, and compassionate”.\(^{396}\) Still, all that is connected with the sky is associated with God. God reveals Godself “in the sky, falls in the rain, shines in the sun and moon, and blows in the wind”.\(^{397}\)

The most important attributes of Divinity, according to the Dinka, are creativity, fatherhood and justice.\(^{398}\) Divinity has a creative function in the formation of every human being and it is thought that human beings generate children in association with the creative intervention of Divinity. In this respect, *Nhialic* is considered the father of every person. Divinity is considered fundamentally just and its justice is closely related to Divinity’s feature as guardian of truth: “Divinity is held ultimately to reveal truth and falsehood, and in doing so provides a sanction for justice between men. Cruelty, lying, cheating, and other forms of injustice are hated by Divinity, and ... if concealed by men they will be revealed by him”.\(^{399}\) The association between Divinity, truth and justice points to the role of Dinka religion as an ordering factor in community relations.

Also for the Nuer people God is the creator and mover of all things. God made the world and is addressed as Spirit of the universe, creator of the universe and of human beings.\(^{400}\) “God, creative Spirit, is the final Nuer explanation of everything ... Everything in nature, in culture, in society, and in men is as it is because God made or willed it so”.\(^{401}\)

\(^{393}\) While God is referred to in the masculine by Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt, in my rewording of their texts, and generally in this dissertation, I avoid gender connotations of the term ‘God’

\(^{394}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 1


\(^{397}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 2

\(^{398}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 39

\(^{399}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 46

\(^{400}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 5

\(^{401}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, pp. 6-7
Kwoth is addressed as grandfather, ancestor and old father. “God is the father of men in two respects. He is their creator and he is their protector”.402 Kwoth is perceived as a personal God involved in the lives of human beings: “He is friend of men who helps them in their trouble”403 and “he sees and hears all that happens and he can be angry and can love”.404 Spirit constantly manifests itself to human beings and intervenes in their enterprises and affairs.

What happens in the world is determined by Spirit, and Spirit can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice. Human beings hope that God will hear prayers and accept sacrifices.405 Furthermore, it is possible to communicate with God through the social order instituted by God and of which God is the guardian.406

Nuer piety is dominated by a strong sense of dependence on and confidence in God, rather than in any human resources and enterprises. God is great and the human being is considered foolish and feeble, ‘a tiny ant’. This sense of dependence, Evans-Pritchard tells us, is remarkably individualistic. It is at the basis of an intimate and personal relationship between human being and God. This is apparent in the Nuer idea of sin, in their expression of guilt, in their confessions, in the prevalently expiatory character of their sacrifices and in their habit of making frequent short supplications. There is a considerable difference between the practice and function of prayer between Dinka and Nuer. While among the Dinka prayer is generally more formal and is performed almost exclusively by official religious leaders, prayer for the Nuer is personal, frequent and informal: “in what is said and in what is done, the emphasis is on complete surrender to God’s will. Man plays a passive role. He cannot get to God but God can get to him”.407 Suffering, in this frame of religious thought, must be accepted as God’s will.408

3.2. God as One and many

All Dinka assert that Divinity is one, nhialic ee tok. Divinity is considered to be the same for all people, “The different names by which different peoples know it are matters only of different languages”.409 The whole of humanity is understood as a single community with one original ancestor created by one Creator.

While Nhialic can be translated as ‘God’, Lienhardt warns us about the fact that a number of spirits are also said to be Nhialic. “Nhialic is figured sometimes as a Being, a personal Supreme

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402 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 7
403 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 8
404 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 7
405 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 316
406 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 10
407 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 318
408 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 12
409 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, pp. 156-157
Being even, and sometimes as a kind of being and activity which sums up the activities of a multiplicity of beings".  

God is at the same time one and many, an extended meaning, warns Lienhardt, that the word ‘God’ does not have “in our common speech”.  

Divinity, therefore, is also a comprehensive term for a number of divinities or powers. Both Divinity and divinities belong to a class of ultra-human agency collectively called jaak, sing. jok, power.  

While powers are collectively understood as being Divinity, Divinity as Nhialic is not identifiable with any of them: “the Dinka Divinity is spoken of as both single and manifold. All the sky-Powers are said to ‘be’ Divinity; yet Divinity is not any one of them, nor are all of them merely subnumerations of Divinity. ... The Dinka assert with a uniformity which makes the assertion almost a dogma that ‘Divinity is one’. They cannot conceive of Divinity as a plurality and, did they know what it meant, would deeply resent being described as ‘polytheistic’”.

How are we then to understand the relation between divinity and divinities, between the unity of Nhialic and the presence and action of a number of divinities? “Divinity as a unity, and Divinity as a multiplicity, are not the products of logical or mystical elaboration of a revealed truth... Divinity is manifold as human experience is manifold and of a manifold world. Divinity is one as the self’s manifold experience is united and brought into relationship in the experiencing self”.  

We could then say that Divinity in Dinka religion is first experienced and then understood. The individual experiencing Divinity is one, and this leads to a perception of Divinity as one. At the same time, the experiences a person makes of Divinity are manifold and for this reason are described in terms of the presence and intervention of several divinities.

Also for the Nuer God “is both the one and the many – one in his nature and many in his diverse social representations” or representations in relation to individuals and social groups. Evans-Pritchard helps us to grasp the relation between the unity and multiplicity of divinity, between Spirit and spirits, by introducing the concept of refractions: “it is always understood that what is being referred to is Spirit conceived of either as God or as some particular hypostasis or refraction of him”. The spirits are refractions of Spirit that correspond to different experiences a person can make of it. The concept of refraction helps us to understand “the numinous at different levels of experience”. The problem of unity in diversity is not confusing for the Nuer, says Evans-Pritchard, because difficulties do not arise on the level of experience. Since God is kwoth in

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410 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, pp. 29-30
411 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 30
412 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 31
413 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 156
414 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 156
415 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 113
the sense of all Spirit and of the oneness of Spirit, the other spirits, while distinct from one another, are all, being also *kwoth*, thought of as being of the same nature as God. Each of them is God regarded in a particular way. We are invited to think of the particular spirits as refractions of God in relation to particular activities, events, persons, and groups.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 107}

3.3. The ambivalence of God

In Dinka and Nuer religious thought Divinity is the only origin of all that exists and is experienced. The absence of dualism implies that evil has its origin in Divinity, even if, in most cases, conceived as prompted by some human fault.

As we have seen, according to Lienhardt, Dinka religion is not the logical elaboration of a revealed truth, but rather a reflection on experience. Still, the elaboration of such experience seems to require a considerable amount of rationalisation: “Without these Powers or images or an alternative to them there would be for the Dinka no differentiation between experience of the self and of the world which acts upon it. Suffering, for example, could be merely ‘lived’ or endured. With the imaging of the grounds of suffering in a particular Power, the Dinka can grasp its nature intellectually in a way which satisfies them, and thus to some extent transcend and dominate it in this act of knowledge. With this knowledge, this separation of a subject and an object in experience, there arises for them also the possibility of creating a form of experience they desire, and of freeing themselves symbolically from what they must otherwise passively endure”.\footnote{Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 170} Suffering, often experienced as sickness, barrenness and loss of people or property, is rationally elaborated to allow the affected person or community to cope with it.

Also in Nuer religion we find an ambivalent attitude toward Spirit: “Spirit is always, though it may aid him, dangerous to man”.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 197} Nuer religion is a religion of both fear and trust.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 312} God is far away in the sky and yet present with human beings on earth: “God is far removed from man in that man cannot ascend to him. He is very near in that he can descend to man”.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 177} Nuer want it both ways: “They want God to be near at hand, for his presence aids them, and they want him to be far away, for it is dangerous to them. It is particularly dangerous in such situations and relationships as are marked off by religious interdictions”.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 177} Sacrifices are made in time of trouble so that God may turn away. The sacrificed animal shields the person against God and it is God who runs down in the
earth with the blood of the sacrificed animal.\textsuperscript{424} Despite the understanding of God as father, creator and protector, “There is nothing an ordinary Nuer desires less than to be in contact with Spirit. He seeks by sacrifice to rid himself of it or to keep it at a distance, for it is dangerous to him”.\textsuperscript{425} The tension between closeness and separation in the relation between human beings and Divinity will be further explored in the chapter dealing with sacrifice (see 3.6).

3.4. The role of cattle

Given the conditions of the soil, the characteristics of the weather and the scarcity of metal that made agriculture and fishing difficult, Dinka and Nuer people have traditionally been pastoralists, and lived with their cattle in a relation that can be defined symbiotic, as for survival human beings and cattle have been mutually dependant.

For pastoralists, cattle have high economic value, but as we will see, the value of cattle for Dinka and Nuer people is only partially economic. Cattle have also great aesthetic, moral, social and religious value, and they are strictly connected to a sense of self-worth and ultimately to immortality. Evans-Pritchard tells us that “for all Nuer – men, women, and children – cattle are their great treasure, a constant source of pride and joy, the occasion also of much foresight, anxiety, and quarrelling; and they are their intimate companions from birth to death”.\textsuperscript{426} As Lienhardt expresses it, a man cannot be fully a Dinka without cattle.\textsuperscript{427}

Almost the whole extensive colour vocabulary of the Dinka is based on cattle colours.\textsuperscript{428} Names given to children at birth are derived from the colour range of cattle and specifically of the animal sacrificed to propitiate their birth.\textsuperscript{429} At initiation, boys receive an ox as a present from their father, and receive a new name, an ox-name, based on the colours of that ox.\textsuperscript{430} With that ox, the boy will closely identify\textsuperscript{431} and that animal will remain his favourite one for the rest of his life. A major activity of boys and young men is composing songs to their favourite ox. Moral closeness and interdependence of cattle and men is expressed through imitation,\textsuperscript{432} such as when men are imitating cattle horns with the position of their arms. To the unity of young men and oxen goes the attention of girls to the point that an ugly man with a fine ox is preferable to a handsome man with an ordinary ox.\textsuperscript{433}

\begin{itemize}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{424} Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, pp. 220-221}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{425} Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 307}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{426} Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 248}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{427} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 27}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{428} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 13}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{429} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 19}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{430} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 13}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{431} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 17}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{432} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 21}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{433} Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, pp. 17-18}
\end{itemize}
Evans-Pritchard describes the scene of a young man who composes poems about his ox, sings them to it, and gets a younger boy to lead the ox around the camp while the owner leaps behind chanting poems. This identification with the favourite ox has a spiritual meaning: “The youth now also enters through this ox into a new kind of relationship with God, the guardian spirits of his family and lineage, and the ghosts of his ancestors”.\(^{434}\) Evans-Pritchard underlines that identification is strictly speaking not with the ox of initiation itself but with the idea of oxen. The ox of initiation is the prototype in the ox-man relationship: “When the ox is long ago dead the relationship continues, because ultimately it is not one between a man and a particular beast but a general relationship of a human being to cattle, an essential feature of which, I am about to suggest, is the sacramental equation of man and beast in sacrifice”.\(^{435}\) To the issue of the identification of man and cattle in sacrifice I will soon return.

Ox names, names derived from cattle and their colour, are, as we have seen, given to young men who have passed through the rite of initiation, in addition to the names received at birth. Married women use cow-names among themselves, but this practice does not have the significance of the attribution of ox names to men and of the implications that, as we will see, this identification bears: “men, and not boys or women, are the sacrificial agents. The two sides of the standard equation are the human male and the bovine male, man and ox”.\(^{436}\)

Dinka words for social groupings, \textit{wut} and \textit{gol}, refer equally to groupings of people and of cattle\(^{437}\) as cattle bring and hold the community together. All important relationships and all important acquisitions are expressed in terms of cattle. Relationships between human beings and the divine are regulated by the transfer of cattle in dedication and sacrifice.\(^{438}\) Cattle are necessary for marriage as well as for compensation for homicide and adultery in the sense that cattle are handed over in place of a dead person or in place of a girl in marriage:\(^{439}\) “Only cattle can really restore to a person or a group what has been lost in the value of a human member … The cattle which are received for a daughter given in marriage are used for the provision of wives for her brother; the cattle handed over in compensation for homicide are used for the provision of a woman who will bear members into the lineage of the deceased, and thus restore to them what they have lost in him”.\(^{440}\) It is, in fact, only through cattle that social continuity and the continuity of the lineage can be assured: “A man’s wealth in cattle directly affects the likelihood of the remembrance of his name.

\(^{434}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 251
\(^{435}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 254
\(^{436}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 250
\(^{437}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 20
\(^{438}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 24
\(^{439}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 25
\(^{440}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, pp. 25-26
by a large posterity, and the fertility of his cattle is intimately bound up with the number of children he can expect. Dinka greatly fear to die without issue, in whom the survival of their names – the only kind of immortality they know – will be assured”.441 While the identification is between men and cattle, women and cattle are also closely interconnected.442 Through cattle, a man attracts the attention of a prospective wife and of her family. With cattle, dowry is paid. Through cattle, compensation can be made for sins such as adultery that can affect the prospects of a man to get progeny and, with cattle, rituals of expiation are performed for sins that can affect fertility. Around women and cattle evolve the ambitions and fears of Dinka people, says Lienhardt, connected with life and death, with prosperity, abundance, and fertility, as well as with barrenness, sterility and misfortune. I suggest the following depiction of the relation between men, women, cattle and Divinity: a vertical trajectory links men through cattle to Divinity, while a horizontal one links men through women and through cattle to progeny, and the immortality that progeny can procure.

3.5. Sin or human fault

Illness and other misfortunes are caused by spirits and powers, allowed by Divinity, but ultimately attributed to some fault or omission on the part of the person affected or some other person in the family or community. Sin understood as human fault or misconduct, is not an individual affair. The person who commits fault also places other members of the family and community in danger as he or she gets Spirit involved in the affairs of human beings. As we have seen, it is the proximity of God or spirits that is considered the greatest danger.

Most faults are related to the breach of rules concerning thek.443 The terms thek can be translated into ‘respect’, but also implies the ideas of deference, constraint, modesty, shyness, or a combination of these.444 The word has a similar meaning among the Nuer and the Dinka. Thek concerns, for example, the behaviour expected of a man towards his in-laws.445 He is not supposed to eat in front of them or to appear naked. A woman avoids her in-laws. Husband and wife don’t eat together until the birth of their first child. A man who kills another ‘respects’ water, in the sense that he may not drink until a priest has performed a sacrifice and made a cut in his right arm to let the pollution caused by the killing leave the body together with some blood.446

Another serious sin is thiang, or the breach of interdiction towards sexual intercourse between the parents of a child before the child has been fully weaned. The sin most frequently

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441 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 26
442 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 198
443 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 177
444 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 180
445 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 178
446 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 179
spoken of is rual, incest.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, pp. 183-184} It must be specified that the concept of incest covers a wide range of social relationships going from close kinship to membership in the same clan or age-group, meaning men who have gone through the ritual of initiation at the same time. For example, it is considered incestuous for a man to have intercourse with the daughter of an age-mate. The breach of interdiction can bring about nweer, translated as ‘sin’, the consequences of which can be severe illness and even death.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 182} The closer the relationship, the greater the danger of punishment, the more prompt the performance of expiatory sacrifice and the more valuable the thing or animal sacrificed.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 184}

Since suffering implies human guilt, the fault causing suffering needs to be identified so that people can make amends by undertaking the required expiatory action.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 21} To discover the cause of misfortune, the intervention of a religious figure is required, often a tiet or diviner. The diviner is expected to recognise the reason for the intervention of the power and recommend a suitable course of action for the person affected,\footnote{Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 152} so as to restore harmony in the relation between the person affected and the power, and ultimately the universe.

Once identified, the act of omission or commission needs to be made public. Acts of reparation and propitiation are possible only after the reasons of misfortune have been publicly announced.\footnote{Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 152} In this respect, expiation of fault or sin requires a previous act of confession: “Confession, by which the wrongful acts of the self are made present to it and to the community, is therefore often part of the Dinka way of dealing with sickness”.\footnote{Lienhardt, Godfrey, \textit{Divinity and Experience}, p. 153} Also among the Nuer for an expiatory sacrifice to be effective, it needs to be accompanied by genuine contrition and repentance: “though sin is regarded as bringing about a condition of the person which is contagious, the uncleanness is not simply a physical impurity which can be washed or purged away. It is also a spiritual state which can only be changed by sacrifice; and not even sacrifice is sufficient by itself to change it, only sacrifice which carries with it the will and desire of the sinner”.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 191} Sin and its consequences can be reduced by being confessed.\footnote{Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 187}
3.6. Sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is the central religious act, “the most complex, as it is the essential, symbolic act of the Dinka”. A approaching God in the rite of sacrifice is also the most typical act of Nuer religion and the one that mostly conveys the essence of Nuer beliefs. Sacrifices, even those for a sick individual, are made for the benefit of the whole sacrificing community and even for the benefit of cattle. Sacrifices are performed to achieve health, fertility and security of people and cattle.

Nuer sacrifice on a number of occasions, such as when sin has been committed, when a person is sick, when a woman is barren, on the birth of a first child, at the birth of twins, at initiations, at marriages, at mortuary ceremonies, after homicides and settlements of feuds, to honour spirits or a dead father, before war, when persons or properties are struck by lightning, in case of plague or famine, before fishing enterprises, and when a spirit is troublesome.

For Dinka and Nuer a central saying is: “Cattle are not just killed for nothing”. With the exception of extreme conditions such as severe famine, cattle are traditionally killed only in a sacrificial setting and the only meat to be eaten is the meat of a cow that has been sacrificed. An animal killed for any other reason, that for a Dinka is not an acceptable reason, may haunt its killers.

White, the colour of light, is considered an auspicious colour, and a white ox called mabior, or oxen boldly marked with white are especially appropriate for sacrifice to Divinity.

Also for the Nuer, the ox is the sacrificial animal par excellence. In important social ceremonies, such as weddings and those held for settlements of feuds, the victim must be an ox. A male victim must be a neuter, and if it is not, the animal is castrated before the rites begin: “In the Nuer representation a fat ox is a thing of grandeur and beauty ... Bulls evoke utilitarian interest rather than emotional and aesthetic attention”.

The identification on the spiritual level between man (human male) and cattle does not concern just the fact that only men can sacrifice, it primarily concerns the fact that, in sacrifice, cattle can take the place of men: “there is the idea of equivalence between men and cattle, and the only plane on which there is anything that can be called equivalence is that on which men and cattle are things of the same other, so that one can be substituted for the other, namely in sacrifice, or in

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456 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 282
457 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 197
458 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, pp. 21 and 292
459 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, pp. 197-198
460 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 21 and Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 264
461 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 21. On the dramatic change of practice among the Nuer during the civil war implying slaughtering for commercial purposes see Hutchinson, Sharon E., Nuer Dilemmas
462 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 46
464 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 254
other words in relation to God". The rubbing of ashes on the back of animals that are about to be sacrificed is both a sign of consecration to God and a sign of identification: "the rubbing of ashes in consecrating an animal for sacrifice is a substitution of life of man for life of beast and hence also an identification of man with beast, sacrifice with victim ... in the act of consecration the representations of man and ox, of sacrificer and victim, are fused". It is therefore possible to say that cattle play in relation to men a soteriological function: "Cattle are necessary to Nuer not only for food and marriage but also for salvation, for the sanctification of their social undertakings and for overcoming evil in its twofold character of sickness and sin ... This soteriological function pertains to cattle as much as their economic, bridewealth, and other functions".

Animals, as we have seen, are in principle not to be slaughtered except in sacrifice. Killing an animal is such an extreme act that in sacrificial invocations both Dinka and Nuer explain to God why the life of the ox is being taken, "and they may also address the ox and tell it why it is being killed - not that they think it understands. They are justifying themselves in taking its life". Since cattle as well as other animals are reserved for sacrifice, it is possible to speak of them as sacred in a metaphorical sense: "they are regarded as sacred only because they are reserved for sacrifice".

If the sacrifice is to be efficacious, every statement made in the presence of God must be true, and this justifies interruptions and emendations to what is being said. Sacrifices are occasions to express confession of grievances and resentments, and it is of the outmost importance that sacrificial invocations contain a true account of what has led up to the crisis. Ashes rubbed on the back of the sacrificial victim also represent the evils in the hearts of the participating people. Such evils are transferred to the beast and flow into the earth with blood or water. Contrition implies the intention to make reparation. Sacrifice without reparation is not sufficient.

Nuer sacrifices are performed for propitiation of divinity, for atonement or expiation of a sin committed, and for purification from the pollution caused by sin. Evans-Pritchard translates the Nuer word *kier* with ‘expiation’, and associates with it the idea of ‘purification’ as well as that of the ‘appeasement’ of God or spirits. He also refers to the concept of ‘atonement’ as the

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469 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 266
472 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 175
473 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 21
474 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 227. As Evans-Pritchard is an anthropologist and not a theologian, the meaning he attributes to terms such as ‘expiation’ and ‘atonement’ in relation to Nuer sacrifice are better understood in light of other sections of his work, rather than in light of definitions provided by other theological sources. Evans-Pritchard, who is nevertheless aware of classical theological interpretations of the term ‘expiation’, relates it to the Nuer verb *woc*, ‘to wipe out’, pp. 285-286. The Hebrew verb •• (kaphar) can be translated as ‘to cover’ or ‘to wipe away’.

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indemnification of God by sacrifice. “If God or a spirit is wronged by some act or neglect he or it must be indemnified by sacrifice. In the religious sense of the word it can perhaps best be translated ‘to atone’ and ‘atonement’”.475 In Nuer piacular or expiatory sacrifices are, according to Evans-Pritchard, implied the ideas of purchase, redemption, indemnification, ransom, exchange, bargain, and payment, in the sense that God takes the life of the animal sacrificed in the place of the life of its owner or of the community in the case of collective sacrifices.476

The ritual of sacrifice represents the conversion of a situation of death into a situation of life. In the sacrifice, the death of the victim is explicitly the source of life for the people: “Every sacrificial rite thus anticipates the death (with its Dinka associations of sterility and finality) which the Dinka expect and fear, and by doing so demonstrates their own power of survival. ... In the sacrificial rites death is deflected from men by the provision of animal victims, ideally cattle”.477

Although in principle any man can officiate at a sacrifice, usually only senior men who are heads of families do. Women do not sacrifice.478 Women may assist in the act of consecration with ashes and they may pray, but they do not make invocations or slay victims. In terms of who can officiate at sacrifices, there are clear restrictions of status, age and gender.

With the killing of the victim, God takes the yiegh (Nuer), life or breath of the animal, as well as the blood, which soaks into the ground, and the wau, chime.479 Human beings take the ring, flesh, what is considered to be left over after the sacrifice has been performed.480 The carcass is cut up and skinned as soon as the animal falls, to be eaten by the participants in the ritual. Evans-Pritchard specifies that the sacrifice proper ends with the killing of the animal,481 and therefore eating the meat is not strictly speaking part of it. This issue is relevant in relation to comparisons between eating the meat after Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist or Holy Communion, a point to which I will return in Chapter 13.

3.6.1. Sacrifice and the making of community

Collective sacrifices are made on behalf of whole communities.482 The primary purpose of collective sacrifices is to establish or confirm a change in social status. For example, at the end of a

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475 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 229
476 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, pp. 276-277
477 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, pp. 296-297
478 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 287
479 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 213
480 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 214
481 Slaughtering by cutting the throat is the usual practice among the Dinka. Nuer kill by spearing. See Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 218
482 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 199
blood feud, God and the spirits who are directly concerned with the change taking place, are made
witnesses of it. Sacrifice sacralises the social event (the ceremony to close a feud) and the new
(reconciled) relationships brought about by it.

Rituals of sacrifice create communion not only between human beings and Spirit, but also
among the participants. Still, the relation to God has the precedence over horizontal relations: “The
role of this religion in the regulation of the social life, its structural role, is subsidiary to its role in
the regulation of the individual’s relations with God, its personal role”. Evans-Pritchard is clear
about the centrality of the relation between human beings and Spirit in Nuer religion, despite the
ambiguities he underlines and that I have referred to. His sense of the importance of the content of
this relation is such that he considers it a matter of theology: “Though prayer and sacrifice are
exterior actions, Nuer religion is ultimately an interior state. This state is externalized in rites which
we can observe, but their meaning depends finally on an awareness of God and that men are
dependent on him and must be resigned to his will. At this point the theologian takes over from the
anthropologist”. Theological elements of Dinka and Nuer religion will come to the fore when
compared with elements of theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan.

For the Dinka, individual action in religious settings is ineffective. Dinka religion, as
African Religion in general, is strongly corporate. Individuals are weak, but social groups are
strong, both in the ordinary affairs of life and in dealing with the powers. For this reason, it is
necessary to join efforts when dealing with Divinity and powers. Sacrifice creates community even
before the animal is killed: “It is thus at the moment immediately preceding the physical death of
the beast, as the last invocation reaches its climax with more vigorous thrusts of the spear, that those
attending the ceremony are most palpably members of a single undifferentiated body, looking
towards a single common end”. The ceremony creates the conditions which are thought to be
necessary for its effective performance: “The community has been re-created in the form in which
its members ideally see it, united and single in intention”. In this respect, the ceremony
represents as already accomplished what the community collectively aims at: “the sacrifice is its
own end. It has already created a moral reality, to which physical facts are hoped eventually to
conform”.

484 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 322
485 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 246
486 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 247
487 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 233
488 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 250
489 Lienhardt, Godfrey, Divinity and Experience, p. 251
It is considered necessary that members of the community taking part in the ceremony cooperate and are united, as “Quarrelling and divisions weaken men’s effectiveness in sacramental speech and action”. Ritual sacrifices are for this reason occasions for reconciliation processes and for achieving a shared understanding of truth. The word *luk*, law case, has the meaning of ‘taking counsel together’ in order to see the objective truth of a situation. People are collectively permitted a measure of insight into the truth of the situation they are dealing with.

3.6.2. Sacrifice and communal meal

A sacrifice, or collective ceremony, in Dinka is called *yai*, a term that could be translated as ‘feast’. To perform and take part in such a ceremony is called ‘to eat’ (*cam*) a feast. Though the occasion of a sacrifice may be a sad one, the ceremony itself is regarded by the Dinka as essentially a happy event. Every sacrifice has a festive atmosphere. People’s ‘hearts are sweet’ and the hoped outcome of the sacrifice is that also the ‘hearts’ of Divinity and divinities may be sweet towards them. After almost every animal sacrifice, the meat of the animal is eaten by the participants. Still, as for the Nuer, the eating of the meat is not strictly speaking part of the Dinka ritual of sacrifice. While the communal meal is not part of the ritual and therefore, according to Evans-Pritchard, has no sacramental significance, “it forms part of the whole ceremony in the broader sense and has a social significance. We have always to remember that a sacrifice, even piacular sacrifice, furnishes a feast”. A sacrifice is by extension also and always a celebration that strengthens communion.

3.7. *Wei*, life

Abundance of life, the supreme ideal for African Religion in general, is also for the Nuer and the Dinka the greatest aspiration and the supreme gift they ask from Divinity and divinities. Life, *wei*, in Dinka language is the same word as ‘breath’. Life is something that can be increased or decreased, and a large and vigorous person or animal is considered to possess more life than a small and weak one. The bull as the emblem of vitality, fertility and strength has a great amount of *wei*. When it is killed, predominantly in sacrifice, its vitality leaves the body but does not disappear. It is believed that, at sacrifices, life is released from the body of the animal and its vitality is made available to the people present. Every person has *wei* in proportion to the power of his or her

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490 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 240
491 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 247
492 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 248
493 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 281
495 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 207
resistance against death and sickness. Key religious figures such as the *beny bith* (Dinka master of the fishing spear), are believed to possess more life than is necessary to them and for this reason are in the position to sustain the life of their people and cattle.

3.8. Peace and peacemaking

Since life is the supreme ideal for African Religion, peace as the condition that allows life to be preserved and to flourish is an equally high ideal. As I will illustrate in the next section, peacemaking is a task that connotes religious authority, and ceremonies are conducted to reinforce and celebrate the ideal of peace.

3.8.1. Traditional religious leaders and peacemaking

Lienhardt elaborates on the association between religious authority and peacemaking: “were a man to show ability to unite people and bring peace between them ... the Dinka would attribute contact with ‘divinity’ to him even though he were to make no claim to it”. Not only is an authoritative religious figure able to achieve peace, but peacemaking skills are seen as the trademarks of an authoritative religious figure: “Divinity, then, images here the lived experience of community and concord, and ... also represents truth, justice, honesty, uprightness, and such-like conditions of order and peace in human relations. Where these are considered absent, Divinity is also said to be absent from human affairs”.

Peacemaking skills are considered the characteristic of religious and political leaders who, beside making invocations for victory in war and raiding, mediate between enemies and facilitate the settlement of feuds. Neither prophets nor masters of the fishing spear are strictly speaking pacifist: “There is no contradiction between the function of the master of the fishing-spear as a guide in war and as a mediator and peace-maker. They are functions of different situations, which have in common the assurance of the welfare of the tribe and subtribe”. Religious figures can function as mediators and peacemakers within the borders of one community, and at the same time represent and give strength to their communities in opposition to others. Lienhardt notes that only a few authoritative masters of the fishing-spear or outstanding prophets could make peace between tribes.

496 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 158
497 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 158
498 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 211
499 Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 217
3.8.2. Ceremonies of peacemaking

Sacrifices for peacemaking prepare reconciliation processes: “This ‘mystical’ action is not a substitute for practical or technical action, but a complement to it and preparation for it”.\(^{500}\) In ceremonies for peacemaking, symbolic action such as the slaughtering of an ox or bull is intended to create the right mental and moral disposition to actual processes of reconciliation. The sacrifice for peace also constitutes an oath taken by all participants. In describing a ceremony to close a feud, Lienhardt tells us that “It was believed that, after the conclusion of this ceremony, anyone who reopened the feud would surely die”.\(^{501}\) The performance of the ritual must include a recognition of the hostility between the parties and their disposition towards peace.\(^{502}\)

3.8.3. The ideal of coolness-peace

Peace represented by coolness, is an ideal among the Dinka. A ‘cold tongue’ among the Dinka represents a ‘cooling’ tongue, a tongue that utters words that pacify those to whom they are addressed: “Dinka often ask in prayer that their bodies may be cool, that the comforting cool breezes may come to them, for coolness stands for peace and calm, health, contentment, and equanimity, and the absence of passion and conflict. In hymns also the divinities are sometimes said to have ‘brought coolness’ to the people and the earth”.\(^{503}\) In the same way as the tongue, a cool heart is associated with peacefulness, order, harmony, and truth. The possession of a cool tongue and heart and the ability to use peacemaking skills to reconcile people are seen by the Dinka as the desirable attributes of the most prominent religious leaders.

3.8.4. On the symbolism of right and left, right and wrong, and war and peace among the Nuer

At initiation, when a boy formally assumes the responsibilities of manhood, he is given by his father a mut, a metal fighting-spear, and an ox, the two objects around which the drama of sacrifice evolves.\(^{504}\) Initiation, as we have seen, “is not only into the social life of adults but also into a new relationship with the cattle which has an important religious side to it”.\(^{505}\) Through cattle, the boy enters into communion with the spirits of his lineage. The fighting spear is a projection of the self and stands for the self.

The right hand, in which the spear is held, stands for strength, vitality, and virtue. As the right hand is a projection of the self, “The spear, being an extension of the right hand, stands for all

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\(^{500}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 283

\(^{501}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 286

\(^{502}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 288

\(^{503}\) Lienhardt, Godfrey, *Divinity and Experience*, p. 139

\(^{504}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 238

\(^{505}\) Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 239
that the right hand stands for, for what is strong, virile, and vital, and consequently for masculinity and hence for the paternal kin and the lineage". 506 On the contrary, “The left side symbolizes evil as well as femininity; and there is here a double association, for the female principle is also associated with evil directly ... Thus we have two opposites, the one comprising the left side, weakness, femininity, and evil, and the other comprising the right side, strength, masculinity, and goodness”. 507 Accordingly, when Nuer deform the horns of their favourite oxen with which they identify, it should always be the left and never the right horn which is trained downwards. 508 Nuer speak of ‘right-handed peace’. 509

The spear stands for masculinity. Women and boys do not bear spears, and for this reason they do not go to war or sacrifice. 510 It is not just that a woman may not slaughter the sacrificial victim, as in fact, says Evans-Pritchard, is not important who slaughters it, but that, not being able to bear a spear, she cannot make the sacrificial invocation, which is made by the spear in the right hand as well as by one’s voice. A woman can address Spirit at sacrifices, but if she does so she prays (pal); she does not invoke (lam). “Sacrifice, like war, belongs to that side of life, what we ourselves call the spear-side”. 511 Still, there are exceptions. A woman may act as a master of ceremonies at a wedding in place of her husband, and shout out the spear-name of his clan. This is nevertheless not considered a sacrificial invocation. She can play this role if she is acting on behalf of the bridegroom’s family and holds in her hand not a spear but an instrument called dang, and also if she is an old woman, of whom Nuer say “she has become a man”. 512

3.8.5. The Nuer ideal of integral peace

The Nuer ideal peace is holistic and therefore also material: “Nuer do not think of the relation of man to God as one of soul, as a separate entity, to Spirit but as one of the whole man to Spirit ... peace of mind is very much bound up with welfare of body and estate”. 513 Peace does not only concern the whole of the person but also of the community: “a misfortune for any member of their community is a misfortune for all, ... when one suffers all suffer, ... if each is to be at peace all

506 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 233
507 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, pp. 233-234
508 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 234
509 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 235
510 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 236
511 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 236
512 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, pp. 236-237, note 1. On one occasion women can bear spears. As twins are considered one person, in the case of twins of the same sex, they have to go through a fictional wedding before they can go through a real one. During this ceremony, males dress up as females and the other way around. See also Seligman, Charles G. and Brenda Z. Seligman, Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan, p. 227
513 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 177
must be at peace”.514 This is exemplified by the fact that in prayers and invocations pronounced in public the plural “let us be at peace”515 is always used. Being at ease or at peace is related to being in friendship with God and with fellow members of the community.516

Also for the Nuer, peace and calm are associated with ‘coolness’. In blessings one can say ‘may you be cool’ with the meaning of ‘may you be at peace’.517 Peace, deliverance and protection are the key themes of prayers: “Nuer are asking for life, but not just life in the sense of living but of living abundantly, free from the troubles and sufferings which make life, as we say, not worth living”.518 Prayers for peace and deliverance from evil are, in most cases, not addressed to refractions but to kwoth, meaning “Spirit in the comprehensive conception of God the creator and the sustainer of life”.519 Peace, as mentioned, is the precondition for the flourishing of the supreme gift of life.

4. Elements of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion in the frame of the People to People

The purpose of this chapter has been to present key elements of Dinka and Nuer religion in order to facilitate an understanding of references to Traditional Religion in interview material.

In the next chapters, we will see how faith in One God, creator and sustainer of all that exists, was a key factor in early conversions from Traditional Religion to Christianity; in maintaining the practice of Traditional sacrifice by people who had converted to Christianity; and in facilitating inter-religious understanding and cooperation in the frame of the People to People.

Kwoth for the Nuer is Spirit, not bound to any place. Interview material will indicate that God is perceived in the same terms by Nuer Christians: active beyond the limits of church buildings, in common places and in the common activities of human beings. On such an understanding of God unbound to official religious places, an understanding of peacebuilding as religious activity can be built.

Animal sacrifice is the central religious act of African Traditional Religion and, accordingly, of Dinka and Nuer religion. Its key function is to seal relationships with God and fellow human beings; to create and recreate a moral community; to allow for storytelling, truth telling, confession and repentance; to facilitate processes of reconciliation; and to provide a communitarian meal and celebration. An understanding of the role of cattle, of the principle of substitution of cattle for

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517 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 25
519 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., *Nuer Religion*, p. 112
human beings, the expiatory character of sacrifice and the significance of sacrifice in sealing a peace agreement in Traditional Religion is of the outmost importance in understanding the role of sacrificial slaughter at People to People events and its relevance for Traditionalists and Christians alike.

While peace, understood as material and spiritual, is the sign that there is order in the universe, affliction, on the contrary, is the sign that there is no harmony or peace among human beings, between them and the spirits, ancestors or God. We find here the basis of the religious connotations of peacebuilding and peacemaking in the context of Southern Sudan and of the People to People.
9. Christianity in the context of Southern Sudan at war

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information about the theology that developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war and that contributed to the theoretical framework of the People to People.

I will describe such theology relying on literature on the History of Christianity in Sudan and Southern Sudan (Werner, Anderson and Wheeler), and on theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war (Wheeler, Nikkel and Dau). I argue that such a contextual theology has a marked inculturated character, in other words it is a theology that developed in relation to aspects of traditional culture and religion.

I will then elaborate on those elements of Traditional Religion that, in my opinion, were assimilated by Christian theological elaboration.

Finally, relying on the maximalist theory of religion proposed by Jan-Olav Henriksen, I will argue that the inculturation of theology, or integration of elements of Traditional Religion, provided resources for orientation and transformation vis-à-vis the experience of chaos – material and spiritual – caused by war.
2. Indigenous mission and grassroots Christianity

By the year 1964, when all foreign missionaries were expelled from Sudan, the missionary enterprise to Southern Sudan, initiated in the second half of the 1800s, had achieved remarkably few results. Among Dinka and Nuer, Christian converts amounted to no more than a few hundred.

Under the British-Egyptian condominium rule (1899-1956), migration from the South to the North of Sudan was restricted. From the year 1956, with independence and the almost contemporary beginning of the first civil war, large numbers of Southerners, mostly young men but also some women, moved to the North to escape the war and to search for work and education opportunities. People moving from the South found refuge in the so-called clubs of the North, where they finally felt welcomed by communities of fellow Southerners, received literacy education in vernacular language and English, and became familiar with the Bible and the Christian message. In the clubs, sermons and songs conveyed a message that was a mixture of Christian faith and traditional values, language and concepts, suitable to address new spiritual needs. Here, it was possible to express a subjective experience of the Christian faith in a familiar language and shared cultural categories.

With the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, bringing an end to the first civil war, many Southerners left the North and moved back to the South. The positive experience of the clubs had given them the impetus to embark in evangelisation and to give life, in this way, to a new phase of missionary work. This time the Christian message was brought to Southerners by fellow Southerners. It was brought to rural people by indigenous evangelists who had themselves been brought up in cattle camps. The message was conveyed in indigenous languages, through the familiar medium of songs, and in words, images and categories drawn from a shared culture.

The year 1983 marks the beginning of the second civil war. As towns were the primary targets of the Government, people moved from towns to villages and rural areas in search of safety. As a consequence of the displacement caused by war, and the displacement of new evangelists, a large number of people, even in the more remote parts of the Country, became exposed to the Christian message. Christianity spread geographically from the towns to the countryside, and developed thematically as a reflection on faith confronted with the experience of displacement, suffering and war. Displacement meant for Dinka and Nuer people the severing of the fundamental

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520 See Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*
521 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity. The Origins and Development of Christianity among the Dinka of Sudan with Special Reference to the Songs of Dinka Christians*, Paulines, Nairobi, 2001
522 Nikkel, Marc R., ““Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities” or “Children of Red Foreigners?”: Themes in Missionary History and the Rise of an Indigenous Church Among the Jieng Bor of Southern Sudan” in Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), *Land of Promise. Church Growth in a Sudan at War*, Paulines, Nairobi, 1997, pp. 61-78
523 Nikkel, Marc R., ““Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities””, p. 65
relation to the two most important cultural, religious and existential terms of reference, namely ancestral land and cattle.\textsuperscript{524} People felt betrayed by the ancestral divinities, the \textit{jaak}, who were proving unable to offer protection from enemy attacks. The large movement of conversion to Christianity can also be understood as a consequence of the need to compensate for what was lost in social, cultural and religious terms: “Displaced, stripped of cattle, and deserted even by \textit{jaak}, people have sought security in the church”.\textsuperscript{525}

Conversion to Christianity was also motivated by the need for protection against what was perceived as the threat of Islam in the North and the forced process of Arabisation and Islamisation pursued by the Government in the South.\textsuperscript{526} Christianity had the potential to strengthen the common identity of Southerners against the Muslim North.

3. Conversion in refugee camps

In their attempt to escape the areas where the conflict was most intense, many Southerners looked for refuge in neighbouring countries.

A great number of children who had lost their parents or had lost contact with their families, trekked for weeks and months as unaccompanied minors, to escape war and reach the refugee camps of Ethiopia first, and later Kenya. Many of these children died en route because of hunger, diseases or attacks by wild animals. Those who finally managed to reach refugee camps were at times taken care of by church people, often women, while being recruited for military training in the military camps the SPLM/A ran next to refugee camps. Military training and conversion to Christianity could therefore go hand in hand, with consequences in term of the spread of the Christian faith among SPLA soldiers, and the adoption, as we will see, of the language and ideals of liberation by church people.

In refugee camps, there would be time and relative safety to reflect upon the experience of war in light of the new faith: “By 1988 boys began drawing upon the biblical narratives to articulate their identity, explain their pilgrimage, and express their future hope”.\textsuperscript{527}

Refugee camps also became the place where the new religious identity could be reflected upon in light of traditional values: “Without the controlling presence either of missionaries or of

\textsuperscript{524} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 297
\textsuperscript{525} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 254
\textsuperscript{526} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 271
\textsuperscript{527} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 239
senior church leadership, a richer and largely unconscious engagement with traditional religious practice and experience took place”.

The proximity of refugee camps where the churches played a prominent role, and the military camps of the SPLA also lead to increasing cooperation between churches and the Liberation Movement.

Christianity as developed in Southern Sudan from the 1980s, had a very distinct ecumenical profile. Ecumenism was particularly strong in refugee camps. Nikkel writes that in the Ethiopian camp of Itang, Catholics, Presbyterians, and Anglicans would run common services, use each other’s languages, and exchange songs to the point that few of the newly-baptised were aware of confessional or denominational differences: “So close were ties that Bishop Nathaniel, unable to leave his Diocese of Bor, requested the evangelist Peter Bol Arok, be ordained an ECS [Episcopal Church of Sudan] minister by Nuer elders of the Presbyterian Church”. The situation of need, material and spiritual, in refugee camps pushed the various churches to increase cooperation both in worship and in the administration of material resources.

4. Christianity among the Nuer

By the end of the 1980s, the whole of the Upper Nile region of Southern Sudan had been heavily hit by war and had experienced widespread fighting, severe famine and huge displacement. Many thousands of Nuer fled to refugee camps in Ethiopia and to the North. Pastors and priests, both Presbyterian and Catholic, followed the people to the point that none were left in the SPLA controlled areas of Upper Nile.

After the fall of the Mengistu regime in 1991, Sudanese refugees were violently expelled from Ethiopia and the Ethiopian refugee camps. The largest group among the people sent back was Nuer. When pastors, priests and refugees returned to Southern Sudan, they found out that, in their absence, Christianity among the Nuer had grown extraordinarily under the guidance of local evangelists: “These evangelists, both men and women, were, characteristically, untrained and barely literate, even in Nuer or their vernacular language, and certainly in English and Arabic. They had not been appointed by any process known to the Presbyterian tradition, but had emerged and been recognised as evangelists, as pastors and leaders in their village communities in the very process in

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528 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 397
529 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, pp. 239-240
530 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, pp. 238-239
531 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), *Land of Promise*, p. 15
532 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 401
which those local Christian communities were coming into being”.\textsuperscript{533} Nuer Christians chased out of Ethiopia, joined the new rural churches.

The presence of ordained ministry in the Catholic Church from 1996 on implied the occasional provision of the mass to rural Catholics.\textsuperscript{534} Still, for the majority of them, mass remained a rare experience.

4.1. Reasons for Nuer conversion to Christianity

According to Sharon Hutchinson,\textsuperscript{535} the reasons for such a movement of mass conversion of Nuer people to Christianity are mainly three: the need of an identity of resistance against the process of forced Arabisation and Islamisation conducted by the Government of Khartoum; the fact that the church, in the same way as the precedent foreign mission, was seen as a provider of literacy and education that could take the Nuer out of their status of second-class citizens in the Country; and thirdly, the desire of Nuer people to get rid of evil medicines and troublesome divinities of the earth that were the cause of fear in daily life. In response to such arguments provided by Hutchinson, Andrew Wheeler asks whether theological reasons should not also be considered: “However there are sure to be, also, perceptions, understandings, and appeals integral to the Christian message, that have their place in the process of conversion”.\textsuperscript{536} While Wheeler acknowledges that “Much work remains to be done on the experience, sense of call, and message of the 1500 new evangelists”,\textsuperscript{537} he also adds: “It is very likely that local evangelists, often virtually illiterate, working with their communities and their daily problems in virtual isolation, would develop much more flexible, adaptive and indigenous theologies that effectively addressed the pressing pastoral needs of the people. Such a huge movement of church growth would hardly be possible unless some real point of engagement with people’s heart-felt needs was achieved”.\textsuperscript{538} Wheeler assumes that, although illiterate and with scarce theological training (probably for this reason, I would say), grassroots evangelists were able to grasp the spiritual needs of people faced with daily problems of survival in a context heavily affected by war. Because of the conditions of isolation and the freedom from external church influences that such conditions provided, evangelists were able to develop theologies that were “flexible, adaptive and indigenous”, theologies that resonated with the religious sensitivity of converts and responded to their religious quests. Wheeler’s final remark on the position of Hutchinson is that such a huge movement of church growth must have been possible.

\textsuperscript{533} Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), \textit{Land of Promise}, p. 16  
\textsuperscript{534} Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, \textit{Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment}, p. 407  
\textsuperscript{535} See Hutchinson, Sharon, \textit{Nuer Dilemmas}  
\textsuperscript{536} Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), \textit{Land of Promise}, p. 17  
\textsuperscript{537} Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), \textit{Land of Promise}, p. 20  
\textsuperscript{538} Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), \textit{Land of Promise}, p. 20
because the message proposed met and somehow satisfied the deepest spiritual needs of the people. Wheeler returns to the issue in a later work and confirms that “Christian conversion was a communal process driven by the need to survive and to find more adequate spiritual and social tools for confronting extreme challenges”.\(^{539}\) The author recognises the validity of Hutchinson’s first two arguments, namely the need to develop a common Southern identity against the process of forced Islamisation and Arabisation conducted by the Government of Khartoum, as well as the need to acquire literacy to increase chances to get a better position in the Sudanese society, but, according to Wheeler, Hutchinson’s argument does not answer two important questions: why did mass conversion happen at that specific point in time (1990-1991), and why on that scale? The answer that Wheeler suggests is that, in the same way as for the Dinka, the unprecedented violence and destruction caused by war undermined and determined the collapse of many aspects of traditional life.\(^{540}\) I suggest that the order of factors presented by Hutchinson be inverted or at least reconsidered: it is not that Christianity undermines and forcibly takes the place of Traditional Religion (even if, to a certain extent, this might also have happened), it is rather that Traditional Religion cannot be practiced (because of displacement, insufficient access to religious leaders and cattle) or is questioned as the traditional system of sacrifices seems to be insufficient to protect people in the new condition of extreme upheaval and suffering, leaving a spiritual void that is filled by Christianity. Wheeler continues: “There was, as a result, a powerful desire, spreading across the entire community, for a new and more comprehensive spiritual framework that would make sense of the threatening intrusion of the outside world, and provide resources to resist it. And it was the young people, and especially the young men in local communities, who had the courage to strike out in a new direction”.\(^{541}\) The Christian faith could provide a much needed shelter in the storm of war and destruction, says Wheeler, admitting at the same time that in the abandonment of Traditional sacrifice and prayer a significant resource for communal healing was lost.\(^{542}\) Wheeler asks: “does Christianity, as it is experienced by Nuer Christians today, meet their needs for contact with the divine, for healing, for reconciliation? The stark nature of Presbyterian public worship, and the absence of the sacraments for most Catholics, may suggest that there is some kind of spiritual vacuum for Nuer people today”.\(^{543}\) Wheeler seems to hint towards the conclusion that, while Christianity could offer some sense of protection that Traditional Religion could no longer provide \(\text{vis-à-vis the huge displacement and extended suffering cause by war, at the same time the new form of Christianity that spread among the Nuer was not articulated enough to address all the spiritual}\)
quests and needs of Nuer people. In my own words, it was not sufficiently organic to the cultural and religious context. In the transition from the old to the new, something was surely gained but much was also lost, leaving a vacuum that still needed to be properly addressed and filled: “With the widespread collapse of traditional sacrificial and ritual systems there is a need for an emotionally satisfying Christian alternative that addresses the wide spectrum of concerns and threats that confront the Nuer community today”.544 What theological ideas could fill the gap left by the abandonment of Traditional sacrifice? Wheeler suggests that “A Christian tradition with a demonstration of sacrifice as its central act may prove very attractive to Nuer people in search of a new framework for life. The Catholic understanding that the sacrifice of Christ is made present again in the Mass may be a means by which the power of sacrifice continues to be made real to the Nuer. The reality for many years yet, however, is going to be a non-sacramental and lay-led Church”.545 A Christian theology of sacrifice including sacrificial ritual would have, says Wheeler, the potential to meet the spiritual needs of the Nuer people. As we will see in the next chapters, empirical material indicates that Traditional sacrifice kept its validity and continued to be performed also by Christians during the years the People to People was conducted. I will return to this issue in the final section of this chapter.

Conversion to Christianity did not mean that people altogether abandoned their traditional world-view and system of values and customs. New, creative religious syntheses and solutions were formulated and provided by young, untrained evangelists, integral to the context and attuned to the spiritual needs of the people, often prompting the disapproval of the established leadership of the Presbyterian Church. An inculturated theology was being developed at the grassroots level.

5. The Dinka Bor and Christianity

The fact that John Garang was a Dinka Bor had as a consequence that the Bor area of Southern Sudan was particularly targeted during the second civil war, both by governmental forces and by Nuer raids following the split within the SPLM/A in 1991.546 The particular brutality of the attacks caused huge displacement and left the area depleted of cattle, which were all raided or slaughtered. As a consequence, cattle economy was completely destroyed, and traditional culture and ways of life severely compromised. People displaced from their land and stripped of their central symbol of wealth, worth, and spiritual well-being, felt betrayed by their ancestral divinities, and particularly

546 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), *Land of Promise*, p. 22. A fuller account of the split within the SPLM/A was provided in Chapter 7
among the Dinka Bor developed a profound aversion towards both the jaak and the Traditional shrines and religious artefacts associated with their cult.\(^547\) This aversion resulted in the widespread destruction of those religious artefacts that were evidence of Traditional religious practices. The sense of abandonment by Traditional divinities prepared the ground for the wide reception of Christianity by the Dinka Bor.

### 5.1. The role of Bishop Nathaniel Garang

A highly charismatic figure with the vocation to be an evangelist and a teacher, Anglican Nathaniel Garang was moved by the vision to take the Christian message to the rural Dinka people.\(^548\) He organised short pastoral courses, for both women and men, and by the year 1980 seven of his students were ordained.

Until the arrival of Bishop Garang, Christianity among the Dinka Bor was confined to towns. With financial support from Christian communities in Khartoum and other cities in the North, evangelistic campaigns were conducted in 1977 and 1978 to rural Dinka areas.\(^549\) Several new churches were established.

In 1984 Nathaniel Garang was consecrated Assistant Bishop for the area of Bor. While the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in Upper Nile during the worst years of the war were in exile in neighbouring countries or in refugee camps, Bishop Nathaniel stayed with the people in Southern Sudan, confined to the SPLA held territories, and for this reason he remained at the centre of the new movement of church growth as its inspirer and guide.\(^550\) Although an Anglican, Nathaniel Garang had been trained at the Nairobi Pentecostal Bible College, and Pentecostalism inspired his message and his actions, characterised by focus on the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit.

As a native of the Bor area, Bishop Nathaniel moved easily among rural people and was positively received by them.\(^551\) His authority was recognised by both Traditionalists and Christians because of his double lineage: he was a Christian Bishop, deriving his authority and that of his preaching from his association with the missionary station once placed at Malek, and on his mother’s side, he was a member of the prestigious priestly family that for a long time had maintained the cult of Lirpiu, the jok of the ‘cool heart’ at Gwalla.\(^552\) Perceived as a prophet amongst his people and uniting in his person the heritage of Traditional Dinka Religion and

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\(^{547}\) Nikkel, Marc R., “Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities”, p. 68

\(^{548}\) Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 243

\(^{549}\) Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God. A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan, Paulines, Nairobi, 2002, p. 57

\(^{550}\) Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), Land of Promise, p. 23

\(^{551}\) Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 243

\(^{552}\) Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 244
Christianity, Nathaniel Garang “articulates and inspires an indigenous and integrated spirituality that is profoundly fresh and entirely Dinka”.

In 1985, there were four churches in the diocese of Bor. Ten years later, there were 230. In the same time span, pastors ordained by Bishop Nathaniel increased from four to one hundred. The presence and ministry of these pastors had a profound impact on the accessibility of the Christian message by rural Dinka people and on the integration of the Christian message within the Dinka world-view.

5.2. Grassroots church and Christian prayer

In Dinka Traditional Religion, as we have seen, the lay person would consider himself or herself unworthy to address directly divinity, except in the most extreme, life-threatening circumstances. Even if in principle every man could sacrifice, the performance of the ritual was reserved to aged, wealthy men. Women could not sacrifice. Only in few cases, as mentioned in Chapter 8, could they express an invocation.

An important shift takes place in relation to prayer in the process of conversion to Christianity. Christians were encouraged to approach Nhialic directly in prayer, a possibility especially valued in the midst of war and displacement, at least for two reasons: first, because the destabilisation and suffering caused by war created a more frequent and intense need to address Divinity, and second, because access to cattle was limited as a result of displacement or of the lack of cattle. As the limited access to cattle severely limited the possibility of performing sacrifices, approaching God in prayer became for Dinka Christians an important ritual and spiritual substitute for sacrifice. The distinctions of status, age and gender, highlighted by Traditional sacrifice, were significantly reduced in Christian churches and eliminated in Christian prayer. The new church was lay, grassroots and inclusive, both in terms of age and gender.

5.3. Grassroots church and a contextual theology of inculturation

Beside Bishop Nathaniel Garang, among Dinka Bor there were no other top leaders. Church leaders would emerge from the grassroots level and remain active there. At the grassroots level was therefore to be found a popular church led by spontaneous leadership recognised by the same communities they had newly established: “At the “grassroots,” … Sudanese peoples have wrestled

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553 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), Land of Promise, p. 25
554 See Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 233 and Nikkel, Marc R., “Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities”, p. 65
555 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 253
556 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 256
557 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), Land of Promise, p. 37
with their experience, and with the Bible and the Christian faith, attempting to discern the presence and the purpose of God”.  

Bible interpretation and theological reflection are conducted in relation to the experience of people vis-à-vis the reality and consequences of war, and in search of answers about the role of God in it. In this context, theology is a reflection on the current situation experienced, and in the light of faith. Experience plays a central role. It is the experience of war that leads people to Christianity and it is the experience of Christians in the midst of war that moves theological reflection forward. In this ‘circle’ of war and faith, war that moves to faith and faith that reflects upon itself in the light of the current experience of war, culture becomes a resource: “The issue here seems to be one of contextualization ... as I feel is happening in the Dinka churches of both east and west banks, a full engagement between Gospel and culture is taking place, shaped by leaders who have been at the grassroots throughout the war”.  

The phenomenon of church growth among the Dinka is described by Wheeler as a phenomenon of contextualization, where Wheeler understands as contextualization a process of encounter, interaction or “full engagement” between Gospel and culture in the midst of the current situation of war. Wheeler here refers to what I would call ‘a contextual theology of inculturation’. Wheeler seems also to indicate that such a process of contextualization as inculturation was possible because it was facilitated by church leaders who had been at the grassroots level throughout the war. It is grassroots, indigenous church leaders who, among the Dinka, are in the position to guide and develop a process of contextualization of the Christian message, providing an example of inculturation that might also be of interest beyond the Southern Sudanese context: “An enormous and varied process of indigenisation and contextualization is going on that is of great significance for our understanding of the Gospel and how it speaks to our world”.  

Inculturation as articulation of traditional world-view and Christian faith, evolves around the issue of how to make the Gospel relevant in a particular religio-cultural and socio-political context.

5.4. The role of Dinka women in the church

In Dinka Traditional Religion, sacrificial rituals are performed by male elders. At times, single or widowed women beyond childbearing age may assume some roles of leadership, but are never allowed to perform sacrifice.

After the beginning of the second civil war, fundamental changes took place in Dinka Bor society, caused also by the spread of Christianity. While the cult of the jaak was traditionally

558 Preface by Andrew Wheeler in Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 9
559 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), Land of Promise, p. 38
560 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), Land of Promise, p. 37
maintained by authoritative male elders, the Christian movement saw young people and women in the front line, often questioning traditional social and religious roles. With men at war or dead, women assumed prominent roles, both in refugee camps and in the villages of Southern Sudan, such as heads of families and main providers, and in the new churches as evangelists, song composers, teachers, church planters and, not least, theologians. In reference to Kakuma refugee camp, Nikkel writes: “There, with ample time and a degree of security, Christians engage in a continual process of reinterpreting their painful experiences and seeking to construct a positive vision of the future through a rich blend of biblical symbols, prayer, worship, dance, music and drama. Here, too, women play a prominent role”.561 The new role assumed by women, writes Isaiah Dau, “is a significant sign of a social, cultural and religious change on a large scale that the war in Sudan has forced on the Dinka”.562

In refugee camps, women, many of them widowed, play a key-role in care-taking, praying, preaching and healing:

Known in Dinka as Nyiir ke Nhalic, the ‘Girls of God’, their compositions echoed across camps as they gathered to pray for the sick and bereaved. They established centres where orphans could be fed, taught and nurtured. In the ECS Mary Acol Deng was designated ‘Deacon of Women’. Among leading Christians was Major Debora Agergum, an Agar woman, renowned since the 1960s as a combatant and commander with the Anya-nya guerrilla forces. When she was not providing training with the SPLA she supported the church in a variety of ministries, often leading in public prayers.563

Composing songs among the Dinka is traditionally considered a male activity. In the church, on the other hand, women became the most renown composers of songs through which the Christian message was spread: “Contrary to Dinka traditional culture, women lead the way in composing and popularising new Dinka songs”.564 Of them, Marc Nikkel says: “A number have risen as influential ‘natural theologians’ through the worship and liberation songs they compose. Among a people whose traditional religious rites rarely gave overt leadership to women, they have risen as among the most articulate and influential Christian leaders”.565 While in the 1956 edition of the hymn book ‘Songs of the Dinka’, ten percent of the hymns had been composed by women, in the version of the hymnbook in use in the 1980s, after the beginning of the second civil war, over one third of the new compositions were by women, “their songs are among the finest of metaphor, most articulate, and

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562 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 77
563 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 240
564 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 77
565 Nikkel, Marc R., “Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities”, p. 66
Mary Alueel Garang emerged from great personal suffering as the most prolific contemporary Dinka song composer. Nikkel defines Mary Alueel Garang the finest composer, and probably the most gifted natural theologian.

5.5. Dinka Christian songs

Songs are a fundamental means of expression of Traditional Religion and culture among the Dinka and the Nuer. Songs continue to play an important role among new converts to Christianity, in the life of new communities and in the spread of the Christian message across Southern Sudan among all ethnic groups, confessions and denominations.

While in the missionary era baptism was performed after two or more years of catechism, in the 1980s it is performed with little preparation, on the assumption that the candidate has absorbed Christian teachings through the numerous vernacular songs in circulation.

The most significant study on the role of songs in spreading the Christian message in Southern Sudan, was carried by Marc Nikkel and concerns the songs produced by the Dinka.

What I will expose in the following section will therefore primarily reflect songs produced by the Dinka and for the Dinka. It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that these songs were spread across the borders of Dinka territories because of massive displacement and consequent contact of Dinka peoples with other groups, and because of the ecumenical character of the church in Southern Sudan and in refugee camps. Moreover, Dinka songs were spread and popularised by SPLA soldiers of various ethnic groups, who had converted to Christianity.

In the next section, I will illustrate the character and content of Dinka Christian songs, especially those produced during the second civil war. They provide us with considerable insight into the theology developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war, in relation to Traditional Religion, in the face of the reality of war and suffering and as expression of longing for historical as well as spiritual liberation.

5.5.1. Dinka songs and contextual theology

As a traditional medium of expression of Traditional Religion and culture, songs constitute an apt bridge between Traditional Religion and contemporary experience of the Christian faith: “Because the idioms and nuances contained in the songs reflect their tradition and culture, the Dinka

566 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 313
567 Dau, Isaiah Majok, *Suffering and God*, p. 75
568 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 313
569 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 92
570 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*
recognise a point of contact with the Christian message, which they can rightly now call their own. The fact that the Christian message is proclaimed in familiar language and images makes it easier to understand and be received by illiterate, rural people. Through itinerant evangelism and the movement of the displaced, as we have seen, new compositions could circulate widely. The 1980s and 1990s were also years when the war and its consequences were most strongly felt and the need to understand how faith related to the experience of suffering increased. The intensification of conflict in the 1980s and 1990s affected both the spread of Christianity and the outpouring of Christian songs.

The two principal and overarching themes of Dinka songs are the way the Christian faith and teachings relate to Traditional Religion, and the ways in which the experience of suffering and the presence and authority of Nhialic in the midst of war is interpreted and understood. Isaiah Dau expresses this point in the following way: “the Sudanese church is exploring, praying, trusting and wrestling with what faith in God means in the midst of upheaval and devastation. While not being able to find answers to the evils of war and suffering, the Sudanese church has, nevertheless, experienced God in suffering”. This is also the thesis of Dau’s Suffering and God. While an answer to the problem of evil and suffering is not to be found, the church in the context of Southern Sudan at war and the church of the Dinka chose to be a new community, “a community of love and mutual acceptance, capable of absorbing suffering”. The cross becomes a tangible sign of Christ’s presence in the midst of war and suffering and “provides the basis for a distinctively Christian response to suffering”.

Marc Nikkel divides Dinka songs into three thematic areas: songs expressing the enthusiasm of a growing church; songs of suffering; and so called ‘government songs’, or songs in which Christians explore the relationship between Christ’s messianic redemption and the hope for immediate, tangible liberation, if necessary by military means.

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571 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 79
572 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, pp. 261 and 303
573 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 79
574 Dau writes: “We maintain that, in the final analysis, there is actually no solution to the problem of evil and suffering in the sense that pain and suffering are totally and absolutely eliminated in this life. However, in the cross of Christ, we find a distinctively Christian answer to suffering, in the sense that God has done something about human suffering and has thus provided a framework in which we can respond to suffering and transform it into some higher good in this life. Ultimately, in the context of this response, suffering and evil are defeated and yet they are still paradoxically here with us, a perspective that introduces us to the element of mystery in evil and suffering”. Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 213
575 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 78
576 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 224
577 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 225
578 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 303
The theology developed and expressed through songs can be defined as contextual, grassroots, and inclusive. As we will see, it can also be defined as a theology of inculturation and liberation.

It is contextual because it aims to address, through the culturally contextual means of songs, issues that are related to and relevant to a particular time and place, namely Southern Sudan affected by war. It is produced in a specific context and for the benefit of people living in that context. In this specific form of contextualisation of the biblical message Old Testament texts in particular are interpreted in light of the experience of war: “Christian teaching has become more accessible through the continual reinterpretation of biblical narratives, especially from the Old Testament, in light of contemporary experience. An outpouring of new vernacular Christian songs reflect the contextualisation of theology, and serve as the texts for preaching and instruction”.579 It is a theology that takes seriously into consideration the experience of suffering and the questions that are raised about the nature and role of God in relation to that particular, contextual experience of suffering.

It is grassroots because it is produced by people who are and move at the grassroots level and address fellow Christians at the grassroots level, often with little if any supervision by official leaders.

It is inclusive as it disregards boundaries of gender, age and status. As we have seen, women and even young women are active evangelists, founders of churches and among the most appreciated song composers.

It is a contextual theology of inculturation because it is primarily expressed through the culturally established means of songs and in language and categories that are proper to the cultural context. It is also a theology of inculturation because it elaborates on the relationship between Christianity and Traditional Religion.

It is a contextual theology of liberation because, as we will see, it addresses issues of liberation, both material and spiritual, often closely linking the two dimensions, and because it focuses on the people, the poor, the displaced, the dispossessed and the oppressed, nurturing the hope of a change of human conditions towards justice, peace, relief from suffering, and promotion of the agency and empowerment of all people.

In the following section, I will illustrate some of the main theological themes expressed in Dinka songs.

579 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, pp. 341-342
5.5.2. Opposition to the jaak

In Dinka Traditional Religion, the *jaak*, both clan-divinities or free-divinities, be they benign or malign, powerful or marginal, have been believed to play an integral role in maintaining relations between the visible and invisible in the universe and in maintaining social equilibrium, continuity and security through the respect of traditional values and norms. While the divinities might have been perceived as greedy, capricious, and potentially dangerous, they have also provided prescriptions for healing and security.

With war and displacement, the same *jaak* who were once conceived as allies and protectors, are now perceived as enemies. The *jaak* are now portrayed as weak, insecure and dependent, greedy, vindictive and murderous: “In the human community they encourage division and hatred, adultery and falsehood. They are the greedy forces who demand sacrifice but bring few results. They are the ones who usurp the place of Nhialic”. Still, Christians generally do not question their existence.

The text of the song I will now refer to is considered by Nikkel revolutionary in cultural, religious and gender terms. A young woman, Mary Ameer Malek from Tonj Akok, the author of the song, declares that she has burnt the *jok* of her ancestral home. Ancestral divinities are traditionally addressed in terms such as the ‘*jok* of my father’ or ‘of our fathers’. While women could compose songs in honour of *jaak* and prepare food for their shrines, rites of sacrifice as well as veneration were normally performed by male elders. It is therefore a remarkable initiative on the part of a young woman to destroy the shrine of her father’s lineage, and at the same time exhort other women to do the same:

My heart is cool, so refreshingly cool,
My heart is wonderfully relaxed.
My sisters,
a girl who has not been called
to burn (a shrine)
is like one who has been refused by God.
Think upon this.
I have burnt the shrine
in the homestead of Tong A kok.

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580 See Chapter 8. See also Nikkel, Marc R., “‘Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities’”, pp. 68-69
581 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 100
582 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 288
583 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 313
584 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 313
Christian belief is expressed through action, in this case the destruction of the shrines and religious artefacts related to the veneration of the paternal Traditional divinities.

5.5.3. Apocalyptic Christianity

A shared belief is that Christians are caught between two wars: one military and one spiritual. The spiritual war is fought between the ‘evil powers’ on one side, and Christ and his followers on the other.

From dreams and visions, Christians gather that peace and prosperity will return only when the entire population will have destroyed Traditional shrines and embraced the Christian message. One answer to the question about the role of God vis-à-vis war and suffering is that “Nhialic is ushering in a new age of direct relationship to himself unmitigated by the old powers”.

Extreme suffering and the exposure to atrocities on an unprecedented scale increase the sense of living in a spiritually highly charged time. People feel that they are undergoing an ‘apocalypse’, that the world is coming to an end and that the advent of Nhialic is close. Dau refers to the fact that, particularly during the second civil war, there was considerable interest in the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, inspiring images of jaak thrown in the fire.

Apocalyptic expectations are developed and expressed in songs and partly realised in the action of burning shrines and artefacts related to Traditional rituals. Supernatural phenomena are reported with remarkable frequency. It is believed that the sick, both human and cattle, have been miraculously healed, the barren give birth, jaak cry as they are exorcised, and angels come near to comfort the oppressed.

5.5.4. The ambivalence of God

Why does God – Creator, Sustainer, Protector, a God of love – allow God’s people to experience such a degree of suffering? Many saw the war as a means of revealing the faith as well as punishment by God for the infidelity of the people of Southern Sudan who had for so long worshipped the jaak and resisted the Christian message. A contradiction can be perceived here between the belief in the closeness of God and the sense of abandonment by God, between the images of God as loving parent and that of God as punishing judge. The theme of the ambivalence

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585 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 88
586 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God, p. 74
587 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 317
of God and of the sense of struggling with God is expressed in the so-called ‘Songs of suffering’.\textsuperscript{588} Such songs thematise “a profound conflict regarding the nature of God”.\textsuperscript{589}

A song composed in 1987, “Who Created Us?”, became very famous among the unaccompanied minors who trekked from western Southern Sudan to Ethiopia and later Kenya, threatened by hunger, sickness and wild animals, and for whom starvation and death were daily experiences.\textsuperscript{590} The song wrestles with the two conflicting images of God as compassionate and sustaining Creator, source of life, and the God of judgement who, in his wrath, annihilates a people and their land. The second image is derived from Isaiah 18, a biblical text of great relevance in the context of Southern Sudan as it was (and still is) widely interpreted as a prophecy of judgement meant for Sudan.\textsuperscript{591} Human bones picked up by birds were a familiar image for those who would encounter a high number of corpses on the paths leading to Ethiopia. If Nhialic is Creator, why does God allow God’s creatures to be forced out of their land and die in the wilderness?

\begin{verbatim}
We ask you, O creator who created us,  
Who has created us?  
Isn’t it you who created us?  
...  
You have said that the land of Sudan  
will be devoured by birds,  
flapping their wings.  
Look upon us, O Creator who made us.  
God of all peoples, we are  
yearning for our land,  
that we may pray to you in freedom.  
Hear the prayers of our souls  
in the wilderness.  
Hear the prayers of our  
bones in the wilderness.\textsuperscript{592}
\end{verbatim}

Christian theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan maintains, as Dinka and Nuer religion, an ambivalent image of God. At the same time, misfortune is primarily considered the consequence of human fault, and to redress a situation of suffering this fault must be identified and

\textsuperscript{588} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 318  
\textsuperscript{589} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 322  
\textsuperscript{590} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 322  
\textsuperscript{591} The text of Isaiah 18 is to this day referred to in order to explain the war and the suffering inflicted on the Sudanese. For a theological explanation of the text and the centrality of Isaiah 18 for Sudanese Christians see Dau, Isaiah Majok, \textit{Suffering and God}, pp. 61-64  
\textsuperscript{592} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 323
corrected. Christian theology as Traditional acts of divination, elaborates on human responsibility in the face of the experience of war and in relation to God.

5.5.5. “Death has come to reveal the faith”

The first popular hymn of Mary Alueel Garang, “Death has come to reveal the faith”, was composed in 1985, one year after her conversion to Christianity. It acquired widespread popularity within months of its composition:

Death has come to reveal the faith:
It has begun with us,
And it will end with us,
O person who fears death,
Do not fear death,
It only means that one will disappear
From the earth.
Who is there who can save his life
And deny death?
...
Evil and good are competing;
The earth will stand still
And the blood of mankind will cry out.
“O, Lord, Lord!”
People are crying out all over the earth;
“God do not make us orphans
Of the earth.
Look back upon us,
O Creator of humankind.
Evil is in conflict with us,
Trying heavy burdens upon our necks,
Which no person can bear”.

Let us encourage our hearts
In the hope of God,
Who once breathed [life]
Into the human body.
His ears are open to prayers:
The Creator of humankind is watching;
He reigns from his place,
Seeing the souls of those who die.
Turn your ears to us:
Upon whom else can we call?
Is it not you alone, O God?
Let us be branches of your son.
Jesus will come
With the final word of judgement,
Bringing glory to the earth,
Peace and the truth of faith.  

The experience of displacement had a profound impact on Mary Alueel Garang as well as the many other people affected. In her words:

everyone is scattered. It is the first time to leave your home. It is the first time to hear your mother has died, the child is alone, the mother is alone, the father is alone. It is the first time to see the family scattered. So when you see like that, ... it is good to come to God because this is God’s planning ... Come back. And put your hope in God. ... So we can thank God if it is his own planning, we just thank him, because we are under his hand, under his control. When there is disaster, still pray to the Lord. When there is happy days, still pray to the Lord because it is God’s plan.

Mary Alueel Garang expressed similar ideas in another very famous and theologically articulated song she composed in 1992, “Let Us Give Thanks”:

Let us give thanks:
Let us give thanks to the Lord
in the day of devastation;
and in the day of contentment.
Jesus has bound the world round
With the pure light of the word of his father
When we beseech the Lord
and unite our hearts and have hope,
then the jok has no power.
God has not forgotten us.
Evil is departing and holiness is advancing,
these are the things that shake the earth.
...

593 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, pp. 364-366
594 I am thankful to Jesse Zink for having provided me with the full text of two interviews he conducted on 14 April 2013 in Bor with Mary Alueel Garang, and on 13 September 2013 in Rumbek with Mary Aruay Majak. These two are among the several interviews carried by Jesse Zink in preparation to his PhD dissertation: “Christianity and Catastrophe”
It is not that God 
does not have the power to deliver us, 
but we had to endure our punishment 
because of our foolishness 
of worshipping wood and animals. 
So God trashed out sin 
from within humankind 
and then he called us 
to come with purity into his presence. 
Salvation has come; 
jok is departing with its 
hands tight to its sides 
let us be strong, 
God wants to visit the earth. 
...
Everything that occurs every day, 
happens as it has been written. 
The Lord’s programme remains constant 
as he has determined it.595

The suffering of the people caused by the double conflict between Nhialic and the jaak, on the one hand, and the military, on the other, is not without purpose. Because of such conflicts, “evil is departing and holiness is advancing”.596 The jaak are being destroyed and the reign of Christ is dawning. As Mary Alueel Garang interprets it, a positive, spiritual revolution is underway, brought about by the will and purpose of Nhialic. In light of this, she calls her people to give thanks. God has not forgotten God’s people; still, God acts as judge against a stubborn people.597 The devotion of the jaak is the cause of the current conflict. Nevertheless, the punishment inflicted by God will result in the conversion of the people and the dawn of a new age. When God has won the spiritual conflict, the military one will also have come to an end, and people will live in peace in their land. Conversion is understood here as an indispensable step towards the end of the military conflict.

595 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, pp. 314-316
596 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 314
597 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 316
5.5.6. Songs of liberation

Mass conversion to Christianity by Southerners was, as we have seen, also a way to express resistance to discrimination and oppression in the North and the forced Islamisation of the South. By the mid-1990s, Christian faith had become an integral part of the Southern identity.598

While the widespread conversions to Christianity are also acts of defiance against the Arabic and Islamic North, it is interesting to note that in the 1,500 Dinka songs examined by Nikkel, there is no mention of ‘Islam’ or of ‘the Prophet’.599 The conflict between the North and the South of Sudan is not perceived in religious terms. It is perceived in political as well as spiritual terms: the political and military confrontation is conducted between the North and the South (as well as among conflicting groups within the South) while the spiritual confrontation, as we have seen, especially for Dinka people, sees Christ and Christians opposing the jaak. The two dimensions of historical and spiritual warfare are repeatedly addressed and articulated in various ways in Dinka songs: “In the vast majority of songs the conflict is explicitly spiritual in nature, but it cannot be denied that images of divine salvation, liberation, victory, and a future day of peace, often cut both ways. As with ancient Israel, the spiritual and eschatological hope can rarely be detached from the longing for tangible liberation and security”.600 A s war is understood as both spiritual and historical, so liberation is imagined and expected on different plans: people long both for spiritual deliverance from adverse divinities and historical deliverance from the oppression of the North and the reality of war. This interrelation of spiritual and material liberation is not new to people in Southern Sudan as it is already an integral element of Traditional Religion: “themes of protection, security, and well-being in practical, concrete terms, have proven as prominent in the thought of newly christianised Jieng [Dinka] as in traditional spirituality”.601

To warfare conducted both in the spiritual and the historical realms corresponds, as mentioned, liberation understood as historical and spiritual. A third dimension of liberation, beside the historical and the spiritual, is the eschatological one that envisions the imminent return of Christ, his judgement and deliverance. Such eschatological liberation comprises both material and spiritual elements, liberation both from the spiritual oppression by divinities perceived as evil, and from the oppression of war.

In several Dinka songs, the hope for liberation, be it spiritual, historical or eschatological, is expressed through reference to biblical texts.602 References to the book of Exodus establish a

598 Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), Land of Promise, p. 37
599 Nikkel, Marc R., “Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities”, p. 112
600 Nikkel, Marc R., “Children of Our Fathers’ Divinities”, p. 112
602 Nikkel, Marc R., Dinka Christianity, p. 317
parallelism between the people of Israel delivered from Egypt and the people of Southern Sudan to be delivered from its double slavery. The biblical theme of the promised land is echoed by the theme of the return of Dinka people to their ancestral land: “Christians draw upon Old Testament narratives, identifying themselves with the Hebrew slaves in Egypt or exiles in Babylon. They anticipate God’s deliverance and their return to the ancestral ‘promised land’”. 603 Such a return to the ancestral land is expected to happen in this world giving to the awaited liberation quite tangible connotations: “Increasingly, the songs and sermons of ECS Christians draw upon Old Testament imagery of liberation. As God led his ‘Chosen People’ in battle and liberated them from slavery, returning them to their homeland, so he will do for the Dinka”. 604

While in the group of songs termed ‘songs of suffering’, liberation concerns the life yet to come in a new world that will be realised through divine intervention, there are numerous songs in which liberation is understood as a possible historical reality, brought about by the liberation army. 605 In such songs, the vocabulary evolving around ‘liberation’ and ‘army’, is borrowed from military and political contexts. The two levels of conflict do not just run parallel to each other but are referred to as interrelated: “The military conflict which has devastated the south appears to be mirrored by renewed confrontation between Christians and the jak”. 606 Not only a parallelism, but also an interrelation is established between political, military fighting and the warfare that is carried at a cosmological level. It is my contention that such interrelation of the spiritual and historical level and of the conflicts conducted at both, is in line with a traditional world-view according to which it is not possible to separate the visible and the invisible. What happens on the visible, historical plane influences and is influenced by what happens on the invisible or spiritual realm. According to the same world-view, liberation is both spiritual and material, as the two dimensions cannot be separated.

5.6. The Dinka Cross as an example of inculturation
Long-shafted crosses appeared in the Bor area in the late 1970s, made and carried by those young men who had returned to Southern Sudan from northern towns. Dinka crosses proliferated from the early 1980s, as a consequence of the beginning of the second civil war and the repeated attacks on the town of Bor. Such crosses were to be seen in processions of thousands of people, and in the performance of exorcisms, 607 an issue to which I will return.

603 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 317
604 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, pp. 259-260
605 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 325
606 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 310
607 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 89
The Dinka Cross became the theme of a high number of Dinka songs composed mainly after the year 1985. Such songs were the expression of the theological value attributed by Dinka people to the crosses, their functions and meaning. Theological reflections around the cross were produced in the isolation to which the whole of the Bor area was constrained during the 1980s, and present, as we will see, a markedly inculturated character.

5.6.1. The Dinka Cross as an elaboration of traditional objects

Dinka crosses are a re-elaboration of two sets of traditional objects: sticks, spears and clubs, and wooden poles, tim ke jaak, related to the sacrifices to the jaak.  

These are long poles, often with arms to which the animal is tethered just before being sacrificed, and to which parts of the sacrificed animal – horns, bones or strips of hide – are hanged as memorial of the sacrifice. The pole, memorial of a sacrifice, marks a sacred space and from its function derives its sacred character. Being poles associated with blood sacrifice, they have a strong association with blood, the redemptive blood of the sacrificed animal that expiates individual and communal guilt.

In the elaboration of the Dinka cross – its shape, functions and meanings – there is, as we will soon see, a transformation, or what I would call a ‘translation’ from one religious universe to another. This translation involves an articulated process of continuity (the new is conditioned by the old meaning) as well as discontinuity, of rupture and differentiation, as well as of adaptation, integration and identification.

5.6.2. The Dinka cross invested with new meanings

As an elaboration, adaptation of traditional objects, the Dinka cross is invested with new meanings. Nikkel indicates the following: the Dinka cross is Christological in the sense that it represents both the sacrificial action of Christ and Christ himself; as it represents the sacrificial action of Christ, it also constitutes a memorial of his sacrifice and redemptive death; as a consequence of its association with the sacrifice of Christ, the Dinka cross is closely associated with the blood of Christ; it functions as a flag of Christian identity; it is a symbol of stability and security; it works as a weapon against the jaak as well as a device for protection; it is a tool for communication with God; a symbol of initiation; the sign of a new acquired status; a symbol of renewal and regeneration; a symbol of liberation; and finally an eschatological sign of salvation and judgement.

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608 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 90
609 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 93
610 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”
5.6.3. The Dinka cross as an expression of contextual theology

Dinka crosses in their form, functions and meanings, represent an indigenous, contextual transformation, in the words of Nikkel a ‘transmutation’ of tools and objects integral to traditional culture: “While these phenomena have occurred primarily within the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS), in what was once the sphere of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), they have emerged largely in isolation during wartime. As such they reveal a complex process of contextualisation through which indigenous implements and their meanings have been transmuted into a single, potent symbol of Christian identity”.611

This work of ‘transmutation’ that I term ‘translation’, while acquiring new meaning and functions, does not completely abandon the original ones: “indigenous symbolism has been adapted and merged with biblical imagery”,612 and at the same time, “conceptions of the cross have themselves been conditioned by old meanings”.613 In the work of translation, elements of the old ‘language’ are retained and give new meaning to newly acquired terms: “On the one hand we encounter a familiar, highly Christocentric theology, biblical and evangelical in nature, with Messianic and eschatological references. On the other, they integrate concepts and imagery deeply rooted in traditional religious and social values”.614 The “familiar, highly Christocentric theology” Nikkel refers to, might be familiar to the reader but was not necessarily familiar to new Dinka converts. What was familiar was the set of traditional religious and social values. In the work of contextualisation of the Christian message that develops around the symbol of the Dinka cross, new concepts and imagery are developed exactly in the encounter of traditional religious and social values and the new Christian message with its baggage of Christocentric theology and biblical images. This indigenous, grassroots enterprise gives life to a Christian message that is deeply inculturated: “Unlike the Christianity of the missionary era, the one which proliferates today is deeply rooted in the social and psychological impulses of entire communities, at home and in displacement”.615

In the work of translation from Traditional Religion to Christian theology, the focus remains on the same traditional themes of protection, security, and well-being in material terms, and the Dinka Cross “remains a valuable sign of continuity and solidarity with the past”.616

611 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, pp. 86-87
612 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 87
613 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 87
614 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 91
615 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 113
616 Nikkel, Marc R., “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society”, p. 114
6. Southern Sudanese contextual theology as inculturated theology

The study so far conducted of African Religion in the Dinka and Nuer traditions (see Chapter 8) and of Christian theology, as described in literature and as expressed through Dinka songs, indicates that such contextual theology was a deeply inculturated theology in the sense that in its effort to be relevant in a specific context, had retained and elaborated several elements of traditional culture and religion. In this section, I would like to summarise which elements of Traditional Religion have, according to the results of my analysis, been retained by Christian theology and in what way.

6.1. God is One

One of the most relevant elements of connection between Traditional Religion and Christianity is a compatible understanding of God as One, Creator and Sustainer of all that is. Such a compatible understanding of one supreme God is a key factor in conversions from Traditional Religion to Christianity.

The similarities of attributes of Nhialic, kwoth and the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition were not missed, neither by the earlier scholars of Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion,\textsuperscript{617} nor by the early Southern Sudanese converts to Christianity. As expressed in songs, Christianity, bypassing the jaak, brings the Dinka back to their ancient faith in Nhialic.\textsuperscript{618}

6.2. Christ mitigating the ambivalence of God

For both Dinka and Nuer, Divinity is the only origin of all that exists and is experienced in humanity and nature, and for this reason the ambivalence of life finds its equivalent in the ambivalence of Divinity.

Nevertheless, as the texts of songs indicate, Southern Sudanese Christians do not ask God to turn away from them. Christians express faith in a God who gets close in Christ, and through Christ they seek communion with God. Still, there remains in Southern Sudanese Christianity the same understanding of God as origin of all that affects human beings and creation, both in the positive and in the negative. Some of the songs analysed in the previous sections of this chapter, attribute to the jaak the origin of evil. Still, nothing is conceived as happening without the assent of God. As in Traditional Religion,\textsuperscript{619} misfortune happens always with the knowledge and permission of God, often, as we have seen in the songs of Mary Alueel Garang, with a pedagogical purpose. It is my opinion that Christian theology as developed in the context of Southern Sudan, retains in relation to

\textsuperscript{617} See Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., \textit{Nuer Religion}, p. 4

\textsuperscript{618} Nikkel, Marc R., \textit{Dinka Christianity}, p. 244

\textsuperscript{619} See Magesa, Laurenti, \textit{African Religion}, p. 164
God the same ambivalence that Dinka as well as Nuer Traditional Religion reserves to Nhialic or kwoth: being that God is in charge and in control of everything, both suffering and well-being ultimately come from God. Still, to a certain extent, Christ mitigates the ambivalence attributed to Nhialic.

6.3. Suffering as a consequence of human fault

In Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion, as well as in Christianity as developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war, suffering is mostly understood as a consequence of human fault or sin.

According to Nuer religion and moral view, misfortune can be avoided by keeping in the right in dealing with God and fellow human beings. Being in the right and deliverance from evil are therefore complementary concepts.620

Along the same line, Christians interpret the tragedy of war as the consequence of human fault, the fault of resisting the message brought by the missionaries, being slow in converting and keeping for too long the cult of Traditional divinities. War is interpreted as punishment and as an educational tool aiming at leading people to conversion.

6.4. Identifying the causes of suffering

Suffering is not just accepted or endured, neither by Traditionalists nor by Christians.

Since suffering implies human guilt, fault needs to be determined so that people can undertake the required expiatory measures.621

It is my understanding that to the Traditional process of divination aimed at identifying the causes of misfortune, there corresponds a theological effort to understand what causes war and consequent suffering. As war is understood as punishment for the sin of the people, their reluctance to convert and prolonged attachment to the jaak, redressing the current situation requires conversion to God in Christ, keeping strong in faith and renouncing the jaak. In Christianity as well as in Traditional Religion, “When God refuses to do these things [protecting people from danger], it is always temporary and indicates that it is time for humanity to examine itself to see what it has done wrong and then to correct its behaviour and repair the damage.”622 Resilience in the face of suffering is supported by trust in the ultimately good intentions of God for humanity.

The promotion of life in its fullness is a central trait of African Traditional Religion that easily resonates with the Christian ideal of fullness of life as the outcome of the redemptive action

620 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 112
621 Evans-Pritchard, Edward E., Nuer Religion, p. 21
622 See M agesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 49
of Christ (John 10:10). The life aspired to in its fullness by Dinka and Nuer is spiritual as much as it is material, as the two dimensions cannot be separated in African Traditional Religion.

6.5. Traditional sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ

Dinka Christian songs show that the imagery of the sacrificial death of Christ was easily received and understood by people used to animal sacrifice.  

A relation to Christ and the effect of his sacrifice partly replace the function of Traditional sacrifice in restoring both a sense of personal spiritual integrity and the integrity of communal relations.

As we have seen in the chapter on Dinka and Nuer Traditional Religion and specifically in relation to Traditional sacrifices, the identification of cattle and people, especially ox or bull and men (human males), makes the animal a suitable substitute for human beings. The animal suffers and dies in place of human beings in atonement for the wrongs of human beings. The same function can be attributed to the sacrifice of Christ when it is understood as an act of atonement for human sin. Cattle as well as Christ die in place of human beings and the concept of substitution creates a powerful link between Traditional Religion and Christianity.

Nikkel writes: “ECS clergy and evangelists claim that sacrificial theology is essential to their preaching and to church growth ... parallels are drawn between Dinka and Hebrew sacrificial traditions, both of which, it is affirmed, find their fulfilment in Christ. Among Christians Christ is exalted as the ‘Lamb who was slain,’ selected by Nhialic himself, and offered once for all to atone for human sin”. The atoning sacrifice of Christ could be understood “as a fulfilment of the aspirations of Dinka sacrificial rites”. The interpretation of the death of Christ as expiatory sacrifice and of the blood of Christ as having expiatory power can be seen as a translation of the expiatory significance of Traditional sacrifice.

6.6. Confession and forgiveness

In Traditional Religion the practice of confession is part, as we have seen, of an effective sacrificial ceremony. That Traditional practice is translated by converts into the Christian practice of confession. As an increasing number of SPLA soldiers converted to Christianity, Christian confession replaced purification rituals that were traditionally performed after a homicide.

623 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 299
624 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 255
625 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 341
626 Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity*, p. 259
6.7. New religion, same culture

Literature on the spread of Christianity in Southern Sudan indicates that the enterprise was successful when it managed to translate religious concepts using as tools shared cultural elements. Magesa seems to support the view that, when moving on the same cultural ground, those religious concepts that have been absorbed by culture will be carried on into the new religious dimension. On the contrary, when relations to culture are severed, also to avoid any mixtures of Traditional Religion and Christianity (as was the intention particularly of Anglican missionaries), new religious ideas don’t become sufficiently rooted or do not meet the deepest spiritual needs of potential new converts. The early and foreign as well as the recent and local missionary enterprises in Southern Sudan achieved limited results when they were not sufficiently inculturated.

7. Inculturation as a response to the need for orientation and transformation

The role of religion as orientation (Henriksen) in the attempt to turn the chaos of the world into order is of particular relevance in the case of Southern Sudan at war. Christians try to make sense of a situation of chaos (war, destruction, displacement, extreme suffering, death) and look for theological answers to questions such as why is this war taking place? Why us? What has God to do with war and extreme suffering? What is required to make this war stop? What is required of Christians? Religion could function as source of orientation and personal and social transformation in the depth of chaos. But which religion?

From the study of the spread of Christianity in Southern Sudan presented in this chapter emerges the fact that Traditional Religion was perceived as insufficient vis-a-vis extreme suffering and displacement that did not allow for the performance of Traditional ritual, and furthermore called into question the protective role of ancestral divinities. The old religion was seen by many Christians as no longer capable of providing appropriate answers to new religious questions. At the same time, the new religion, Christianity, was not rooted enough in the cultural context, was disconnected from a traditional African world-view and understanding of the interrelatedness of the universe, of the visible and the invisible, as regulated by Traditional sacrifice.

I suggest that inculturation as articulation of elements of Traditional Religion and Christianity be interpreted as an answer to the need for religious orientation in the situation of material and spiritual chaos created by war. Inculturation also responds to the need of personal transformation understood as conversion. In this chapter, I have used the term ‘translation’ to

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627 Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion*
indicate that the move from Traditional Religion to Christianity is one of both rupture and continuity: while some elements are abandoned (for example worship of Traditional divinities), others are retained, transformed and adapted (such as the redemptive effect of sacrifice and blood).

Theological elaboration on liberation responds equally to the needs of orientation, transformation and legitimation. A contextual theological elaboration around liberation provides Christians with theological orientation on issues of material and spiritual oppression. Material and spiritual liberation can be understood as individual and social transformation: personal transformation into a redeemed person, and social transformation from oppression to liberation. The elaboration of elements of liberation theology serves the important function of legitimising the involvement or support of Christians in the liberation struggle that is simultaneously perceived as spiritual, material and eschatological. I will return to these issues in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

10. John Paul Lederach on peacebuilding

1. Introduction

The NSCC publication *Building Hope* refers to “modern methods of conflict resolution” as the third element of the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People Peacemaking Process, together with Traditional values, beliefs and practices and Christian values and beliefs. In *Building Hope*, it is indicated that it is particularly in synthesis with modern methods that in the frame of the People to People traditional practices of conflict resolution are being “revived and reshaped”.

*Building Hope* defines modern approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking in terms of analysis and understanding of the causes of conflict; in terms of setting a time-frame for the duration of the peace talks; of encouraging the parties in conflict to generate own solutions; issuing formal peace agreements; and facilitation by experts with international experience. Above all, what is meant by the modern contribution to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, is the synthesis itself, the integration of traditional, Christian and modern approaches to peacebuilding and peacemaking. “Skilful facilitation” by external actors aims at achieving the desirable synthesis of “traditional, Christian and modern values, principles and concepts to suit the specific

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628 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 11
629 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 11
630 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 59
631 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 60
632 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 60
needs in each conflict”. Skilful facilitation is related to knowledge and understanding of the context.

Building Hope also refers to ‘strategic linkages’ to be established between the grassroots level and the top leadership by mid-level peace actors: “People-to-People Peacemaking has helped to establish and facilitate strategic mid-level peacemaking and reinforcement by promoting linkages and leverage between grassroots people and the top-level leadership that cannot be easily accessed or reached by communities themselves”, a method for sustainable peacebuilding that, as we will soon see, was developed and popularised by peace practitioner and theoretician John Paul Lederach. The fact that the important meeting held in Kisumu in 2001 was named ‘Strategic linkages’ is a clear and deliberate reference to the work of Lederach.

The external facilitator who played a key role in bringing forth a synthesis of traditional Christian and modern methods of conflict resolution, both at the Lokichoggio Chiefs meeting and in Wunlit (see Chapter 7), was the North American Presbyterian pastor and peace practitioner William Lowrey. William Lowrey had been engaged in conflict resolution in Sudan since 1991, and in 1996 had published his PhD dissertation on the role of religion in the Akobo conflict resolution process among Nuer tribes of Southern Sudan.

In his dissertation, William Lowrey declares his indebtedness to John Paul Lederach in relation to the concept and method of eliciting resources for peacebuilding and peacemaking from the people involved in conflict:

a model that is little understood and followed by few has been espoused by John Paul Lederach and called an elicitive approach. In his method there is an assumption that within a particular culture and setting there are resources of knowledge and skills present among the people that can be used to resolve conflict and transform relations.

Lowrey further refers to the role of the facilitator in eliciting such contextual peacebuilding resources:

The trainer becomes a facilitator rather than an expert and seeks to be a catalyst for a dynamic process of empowerment of the people to discover their own resources ... I have approached my case study research with a belief that Lederach’s assumptions are valid.

633 NSCC, Building Hope, p. 60
634 NSCC, Building Hope, p. 71
635 See Lederach, John P., Building Peace
636 Lowrey, William O., “Passing the Peace”
637 Lowrey, William O., “Passing the Peace”, p. 40
638 Lowrey, William O., “Passing the Peace”, p. 40
Finally, it is interesting to note how, in his dissertation, Lowrey links the role of the facilitator to the task of producing a creative synthesis of - in Lowrey’s words - traditional and modern resources for peacebuilding (a wording quite similar to that used in Building Hope), and how also such an enterprise is inspired by the work of Lederach:

In that sense, I have studied the Jikany-Lou Nuer conflict and peace process to see how the people could draw on their own resources, actually elicit from one another, and depend upon their traditional methods linked with their own people who have studied modern concepts to generate a creative solution to their conflict. In one sense the case study offered an opportunity to test the concepts of Lederach.\textsuperscript{639}

When asked about the ‘modern’ elements that contributed to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, several interviewees refer to Lederach, voicing, as we will see in the next chapter, diverse opinions about the extent of a possible influence of the ideas and methods popularised by the peace practitioner, on the theoretical profile of the People to People.

An introduction to the work of Lederach, the subject of the present chapter, will facilitate and understanding of the different opinions expressed in interview material.

\section*{2. In need of new paradigms}

The nature of warfare has changed in the past fifty years. While the conflicts of the past were fought mainly between and among states, the great majority of recent and on-going armed conflicts are intra-state or internationalised intra-state\textsuperscript{640} fought within the borders of the same state, region and even community. In this scenario, the line of demarcation between battlefield and community gets erased, conflicting groups live close to each other and will have to continue to live close to each other once the conflict is over.

Despite the above-mentioned shift in the nature of warfare from inter-state to intra-state, peacemaking, the complex of activities aimed at achieving a peace deal, continues to be modelled on processes to end inter-state conflicts of which political and military leaders are the main actors.


\textsuperscript{640} Data from 2015 shows that out of 50 armed conflicts, 1 was inter-state, 29 intra-state and 20 internationalized intra-state. Data from the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of Uppsala University available at http://www.pcr.uu.se/data/ (accessed 12.09.2017)
North American peace practitioner and theoretician John Paul Lederach, among others, points to the lack of international mechanisms, and therefore the limits of interstate diplomacy in effectively addressing and solving intra-state conflict.641

Lederach highlights the need for new paradigms, new concepts and approaches that can suitably address the specific nature of contemporary armed conflict. What conceptual framework is most useful for dealing with the structural and psychological nature of conflict? What practical approaches and activities have the greatest potential for moving these conflicts toward solution and for sustaining peaceful outcomes? The paradigmatic shift proposed by Lederach concerns the move from statist diplomacy to the focus on restoration of relationships in view of sustainable peace. At the core of the paradigmatic shift suggested by Lederach, there is the concept and experience of reconciliation: “I believe this paradigmatic shift is articulated in the movement away from a concern with the resolution of issues and toward a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships. This calls for an approach that goes beyond a mechanical strategy. The framework must address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding”.642 While the approaches that might have the most enduring positive impact are those oriented toward relationship building and reconciliation, the author points to how such approaches “seem to be the least understood, developed, and funded”.643

3. The role of middle-range leaders

The particular contribution of Lederach to a paradigmatic shift and the development of a new framework to address contemporary conflicts, concerns the role of middle-range leaders.

Lederach traces a pyramid to illustrate the role various actors moving at different levels of the social pyramid can play in both conflict and peacebuilding.644

At the top of the pyramid (Level 1), there is the top military, political and religious leadership. These are the leaders with high visibility who are in positions of power. The middle-range leadership (Level 2) is composed by ethnic, religious leaders, academics, intellectuals and

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643 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 93
644 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 39
humanitarian leaders such as leaders of NGOs. At Level 3, we find grassroots leadership. Among these are local leaders, leaders of indigenous NGOs and community developers.

Because of their high public profile and visibility, top leaders are often locked into positions of strength in relation to their adversaries and into what Lederach defines static viewpoints about possible solutions to conflict. The high degree of publicity limits freedom of manoeuvring. Furthermore, it is not often clear to what extent such leaders represent their constituencies and have the power to effectively mobilise in order to implement decisions made at the negotiating table.

Grassroots leaders, on the other hand, are in close contact with the masses. They have sufficient understanding of the conditions in which people live, but can also be affected by the same level of insecurity and lack of basic resources.

Lederach points to middle-range leaders as the ones with the greatest potential to establish an infrastructure that can sustain peacebuilding processes over a long period. Middle-range leaders are often well recognised, highly respected individuals. They are likely to know and be known by the top-level leadership, and still can act independently from authority. At the same time, they are connected to the broader context and the constituencies that the top leaders claim to represent: “They have contact with top-level leaders, but are not bound by the political calculations ... they vicariously know the context and experience of people living at the grassroots level, yet they are not encumbered by the survival demands facing many at this level”. Middle-range leaders are therefore connected to both the top and the grassroots level of the pyramid, and can connect the two levels: “peacebuilding must establish concrete linkages between levels of society, connecting the efforts of higher-level negotiations with midlevel participation and grassroots programs in the establishment of a social infrastructure to sustain long-term social change”. The greater flexibility of thought, movement and action middle-range leaders enjoy, allows them to play a key role in the framework for sustainable peace envisioned by Lederach.

The author also highlights how the lines of group identity within social pyramids in contemporary conflicts are more often vertical than horizontal: “in most armed conflicts today, identity forms around ethnicity, religion, or regional geography rather than class, creating group divisions that cut down through the pyramid rather than pitting one level against the other”. Leaders within each level therefore have connections to their people up and down the pyramid, while at the same time having counterparts at their own level. While conflict cuts the pyramid along a vertical line, middle-range leaders often have relationships with counterparts along horizontal

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645 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 40
646 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 60
647 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 42
648 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 125
649 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 43
lines of conflict. Middle-range leaders are therefore in the position to establish vertical and horizontal connections considered necessary to sustain peacebuilding processes.

Much of the attention of Lederach is directed to middle-range leaders. Still, they are by no means the sole actors needed to achieve durable peace. Lederach envisions a “peace-system characterized by just and interdependent relationships with the capacity to find nonviolent mechanisms for expressing and handling conflict ... Such an infrastructure is made up of a web of people, their relationships and activities, and the social mechanisms necessary to sustain the change sought. This takes place at all levels of the society”. Middle-range leaders are expected to play the role of catalysts in a web of relations that involves the whole society.

4. Principles supporting Lederach’s framework

The infrastructure for peace envisioned by Lederach contribute a number of ideas and principles. In the following section, I will address the issues of contextual approaches to peacebuilding; the circle of theory and praxis; the focus on culture as resource for peacebuilding; the spiritual dimensions of peacebuilding; focus on the people related to issues of participation; and the transformative function of training.

4.1. Contextual approaches to peacebuilding

An effective infrastructure for sustainable peace must be rooted in the conflict setting, it must make use of the resources, modalities, and mechanisms for building peace that exist within the context. Contextually grounded peacebuilding has a greater chance of being sustainable. Lederach further elaborates on the contextual aspects of peacebuilding in relation to three elements: culture; people’s participation; and the spiritual vision of peace that emerges in specific contexts: “Peacebuilding through the constructive transformation of conflicts is simultaneously a visionary and a context-responsive approach”.

4.1.1. Culture as resource for peacebuilding

Valuable resources for peacebuilding are both socioeconomic and sociocultural. Culture needs to be studied both in relation to conflict and conflict transformation. Conflict transformation “refers to the changes produced by conflict in the cultural patterns of a group, and to the ways that culture

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650 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 84
651 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 84
652 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 85
653 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 87
affects the development and handling of conflict. ... Prescriptively, transformation seeks to understand the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict, and to identify, promote, and build on the resources and mechanisms within a cultural setting for constructively responding to and handling conflict”. In relation to cultures, then, three tasks are recommended: to understand how conflict affects and changes culture; to understand how culture conditions violent responses to conflict; and, last, to identify such cultural resources that support conflict management and resolution. Cultural traditions are seen here as primary resources for building peace.

4.1.2. People’s full involvement

The focus on the key role of middle-range leaders does not minimise the importance of people’s engagement in peacebuilding. The peace system suggested by Lederach requires “a multiplicity of roles, for multiple levels of activity, and for diverse strategies and approaches, each with a distinctive contribution to make”. The full involvement of people in the conflict-affected context and participation in peacebuilding activities are a precondition for reconciliation processes and sustainable peace: “The greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture”.

4.1.3. The spiritual dimension of peacebuilding

As a Mennonite, Lederach brings in his practical and theoretical work on peacebuilding religious and theological perspectives. In Building Peace, he refers to the spiritual dimension of conflict transformation: “conflict ... transformation must be rooted in social-psychological and spiritual dimensions that traditionally have been seen as either irrelevant or outside the competency of international diplomacy”.

The author further refers to Elise Boulding’s work on ‘imaging’ the future. According to Boulding, people need to have an image of a desired future of peace, a vision of what they are trying to achieve in order to work towards that vision and realise it. Lederach further articulates such a vision of the future in terms of the well-being of coming generations.

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654 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 83
655 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 152
656 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 94
657 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 29
659 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, pp. 76-77
In a successive work, *From the Ground Up*, the author mentions “Mennonite theological discourse on pacifism” as one of the main tributary ideas to his earlier work and thinking, along with the social-change orientation of active nonviolence and practical perspectives from the conflict resolution fields.


In “The Long Journey Back to Humanity”, Lederach explores how Catholic leaders engage in peacebuilding activities with armed conflict actors. While searching for theological elements that support such peacebuilding activities, the author invites us to look for theology “in the dynamic nexus of word, context and action”, in other words invites to look for a theology that is contextual and that is the expression of reflection around praxis. In the book chapter in question, Lederach’s enquiry is conducted through interviews with Catholic religious leaders in the Philippines, in Colombia and Uganda. Theological answers are searched for empirically.

4.2. Training

Lederach sees training as an important tool to prepare people for peacebuilding and sustain infrastructures for peace. Training is primarily seen as a strategy to strengthen the capacities and role of middle-range leaders. Problem-solving workshops and conflict resolution training aim at raising awareness and promoting an understanding of how conflict operates, as well as teaching people specific techniques and approaches for dealing with conflict.

Lederach redefines training as a process (rather than single event) of strategic capacity and relationship building. Capacity building aims at the empowerment of peace actors and particularly at relationship building: “most capacity building skills and tools used in peacebuilding and conflict transformation are likely to have a greater strategic impact if they are applied in and by groups and communities. Relationship building responds to the longer-term and coordination requirements needed to sustain peacebuilding in a given setting”.

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661 Lederach, John Paul, “Journey from Resolution to Transformative Peacebuilding”, p. 45
According to Lederach’s ‘transformative approach’, training is not so much about the transfer of content as “about the creation of a dynamic process involving key people who together focus on the realities of the conflict in their context”. Such training, rather than aiming at transferring information, aims at transforming relations.

4.2.1. The circle of theory and praxis

The model of training suggested by Lederach envisions education as a process of action-reflection. In the course of training processes, lessons learned are shared and further elaborated. Learning is praxis oriented and praxis leads to further reflection on lessons learned. Training and learning, as well as peacebuilding, are meant to move in a circle of theory and praxis.

4.3. Internal and external actors

What role do external actors play in such a framework aimed at effectively addressing intra-state conflicts? External intervention, says Lederach, is most effective when it empowers indigenous actors. Still, in terms of sustainable peace, Lederach does not seem to place much trust in the contribution of external actors: “A final suggestion is to better coordinate the work of internal peacemakers, their resources and initiatives, with the efforts of external peacemakers ... even though there is no evidence that external initiatives have an inherent capacity for sustaining reconciliation”.

The peacebuilding paradigm that Lederach suggests is, as I have aimed at outlining, the combination of several components. The author points to the need of strategic points of contact, such as the role of middle-range leaders, to hold together various resources, efforts and levels of activities.

5. Lederach’s peace framework and the People to People

The People to People addresses a series of intra-state conflicts, both the conflict between the North and the South and conflicts among communities within Southern Sudan. The Wunlit conference particularly aimed at reconciling Dinka and Nuer neighbouring communities in conflict as a consequence of the split that occurred within the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in 1991. As we have seen in Chapter 7, the conflict among military leaders within the liberation

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668 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 109
669 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 126
670 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. xi
671 Lederach John Paul, Building Peace, p. 102
movement had as a consequence severe conflict at the community level. Such a conflict among neighbouring communities could not be addressed with those mechanisms employed by state diplomacy to solve inter-state conflicts.

Sustainable peace according to Lederach, as we have seen above, requires a contextual approach that can be further defined in terms of the involvement of people affected by conflict; use of contextual cultural resources; and references to a spirituality that supports a vision of holistic well-being for the future.

In the frame of the People to People, “peace of the people, by the people and for the people”, the full involvement of all people concerned is a key principle. As we will see in the next chapters, such a principle of full involvement of the people is supported by Christian principles, Traditional values and even by the rhetoric of the SPLM/A. Such a principle is also central in the theories for sustainable peacebuilding elaborated by Lederach, which, as we will see, will also be of direct inspiration for some actors in the People to People.

The People to People owes its positive outcome to the use of traditional methods of conflict resolution. In other words, it substantially builds on contextual cultural and religious resources. As Lederach advocates for an understanding of the changes produced by conflict in the cultural patterns of a group (see above), the People to People addresses the issue of the erosion of traditional practices of conflict resolution caused by war. The People to People particularly aims at recalling to memory and reviving traditional cultural and religious methods of achieving peace.

The People to People is supported by a spiritual and religious vision of peace as both a Christian ideal and a Traditional principle: we have seen how, in the frame of thought of African Traditional Religion, an ideal state of peace is the necessary condition to pursue the ideal of fullness of life. Traditional and Christian leaders articulate and convey a spiritual and religious ideal of peace that is contextually defined.

Sustainable peace as envisioned by Lederach is achieved through restoration of relationships in view of reconciliation. Peace in the frame of the People to People, and in line with principles of Traditional Religion, is strictly interrelated to restoration of relationships and reconciliation.

Lederach stresses the role of middle-range leaders. In the frame of the People to People, such a role is played by the ecumenical structures (SCC and the NSCC). Key religious leaders, such as Bishop Paride Taban and Bishop Nathaniel Garang, are of interest as they are both middle-range (leadership of the NSCC) and grassroots leaders: leaders who chose to be with the people at the grassroots level through the experience of war. In this respect, the People to People contributes to the definition of the profile of effective religious leadership for sustainable peace.

672 NSCC, Inside Sudan
Also within the People to People, peace is understood as the result of the coordination of efforts at different levels. The Kisumu conference held in 2001 (see Chapter 7), named ‘strategic linkages’ in explicit reference to the elaboration of Lederach, aimed at addressing exactly the issue of relating peacebuilding efforts at different levels of the pyramid. We have seen in Chapter 7 how such ambitions to move the peace process from the grassroots level to the top level led to the end of the People to People.

Lederach expressly refers to storytelling as a tool to restore relationships and achieve reconciliation. The author writes about how, in view of reconciliation, people need the opportunity and space to express the trauma of loss and the grief related to that loss, as well as the anger that accompanies the memory of injustice experienced: “Acknowledgement is decisive in the reconciliation dynamic. ... Acknowledgement through hearing one another’s stories validates experience and feelings and represents the first step toward restoration of the person and the relationship.” Lederach further relates the practice of storytelling to truth understood as the validation of painful experiences. We have seen in Chapter 8 how such public acknowledgement of wrongs both perpetrated and endured, is an important element of both Dinka and Nuer reconciliation processes. We will see in the next chapters how storytelling as a method of conflict resolution acquired from Traditional Religion, played a crucial role at People to People events.

The methodology of the People to People was recorded in the publication *Building Hope* as the result of action-reflection, and as the result of the elaboration of lessons learned through the People to People Peacemaking Process. The same circle of theory and praxis that Lederach advocates for, was part of the methodology of the People to People.

The model of peacebuilding outlined by Lederach with its elements of contextuality, full involvement and empowerment of the people, use of local cultural resources, among others storytelling and truth telling, understanding of peace as strictly related to reconciliation and peace supported by a spiritual, religious vision, finds in the People to People a remarkably well-fitting example. In the appendix to *Building Peace*, peace researcher John Prendergast aims at applying the framework elaborated by Lederach to concrete cases. One of the four cases presented is Sudan: “Sudan provides a window into a better understanding of Lederach’s pyramid model”. Prendergast does not refer to the People to People, as the process was launched in 1997, the same

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673 See Horjen, Stein Erik, *Reconciliation in the Sudans*, pp. 97-106
674 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 26
675 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 29
year in which *Building Peace* was published. Nevertheless, in his case study, Prendergast refers to four elements: 1. lessons learned from the Akobo peace conference (see Chapter 7), an important precedent for Wunlit, as William Lowrey played a crucial role in both events; 2. attempts by the New Sudan Council of Churches to facilitate dialogue between top political and military leaders as well as among church leaders; 3. the role of the All Africa Conference of Churches in supporting peace initiatives in Southern Sudan, particularly through the Sudan Working Group led by Kenyan Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat; and 4. significative grassroots peace initiatives within Southern Sudan facilitated by the New Sudan Council of Churches under the leadership of Catholic Bishop Taban and Anglican Bishop Marona. In other words, Prendergast in applying Lederach’s model to the Sudanese case study, refers to the preliminary phases of the People to People Peacemaking Process.

How are the close similarities between the model of sustainable peace described by Lederach and the methodology of the People to People to be interpreted? One answer is that actors in the People to People were influenced by the theories popularised by Lederach. This issue will be addressed in Chapter 11. In the next section, I argue that correspondences are also due to the influence of peace initiatives and practices in the context of Southern Sudan on Lederach’s elaboration.

6. Peacebuilding in Sudan and Southern Sudan and Lederach’s framework

In the acknowledgements section of *Building Peace*, Lederach expressly refers to the contribution of Dr. Hizkias Assefa and the Nairobi Peace Initiative, on his elaboration: “My thinking and the content of this book have benefited from my cooperation and work with a number of colleagues over the years ... Dr. Hizkias Assefa, ... In recent years the intensive efforts at training with colleagues from the Nairobi Peace Initiative ... have helped formulate the ideas and concepts presented in this book”. Assefa was particularly knowledgeable about the context of Sudan and Southern Sudan, and interview material indicates that the Ethiopian professor was particularly involved in training the staff of the SCC and NSCC on issues of peacebuilding and reconciliation (see Chapter 11). Cooperation with actors in Nairobi who had been involved with the Sudanese...
ecumenical structures is acknowledged by Lederach as contributing to the ideas and concepts presented in *Building Peace*.

In reference to the paradigmatic shift towards restoration and rebuilding of relationships, and the fact that the framework he suggests must “address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding”, Lederach in a note refers specifically to Assefa, and his text *Peace and Reconciliation as a Paradigm*. A gain, Assefa is referred to in relation to the “essential contribution brought by reconciliation as a paradigm”.

As an example of conflict resolution training to promote peacebuilding capacities among middle-range leaders, Lederach refers to the Nairobi-based All Africa Conference of Churches: “Yet another example is the efforts by the All Africa Conference of Churches, principally in collaboration with the Nairobi Peace Initiative, to combine the roles of convener and trainer”. In note references are again made to Assefa as well as to AACC staff Harold Miller and his text *Peace and Reconciliation in Africa*.

Finally, in reference to training events as processes aiming at sharing conflict resolution skills and strengthening reconciliation processes, Lederach asserts: “the insights gained from these activities have increasingly pushed my thinking in the direction of how to develop training programs that are more contextually relevant and strategically designed to maximise their constructive impact on the protracted conflict. In recent years, in collaboration with colleagues working with peacebuilding resource centers – Justapaz in Colombia and the Nairobi Peace Initiative in Kenya – I have experimented with a more comprehensive and strategic approach to training”. Perspectives on the role of training in peacebuilding are related by Lederach to the reflection conducted in Nairobi, also in cooperation with Sudanese church actors.

These references point to the fact that, to a large extent, Lederach owes his focus on the centrality of reconciliation in his peace framework and the importance of training as a means to strengthen middle-range leaders, to the elaboration of actors in Nairobi – Assefa, Miller, the Nairobi Peace Initiative – who were working closely with the Sudanese ecumenical structures (SCC and NSCC) as trainers or as partners. While it is possible to say that both the People to People and Lederach benefitted from ideas elaborated in Nairobi, it is also possible to assume that Lederach receives from Assefa, Miller and others lessons learned through peace initiatives conducted in

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684 Lederach John Paul, *Building Peace*, p. 49


Sudan and Southern Sudan and facilitated by the same actors who will later conduct the People to People Peacemaking Process.

While lessons learned in Southern Sudan contributed to the elaboration of Lederach, the lessons he elaborated and recorded in *Building Peace* further inspired, as we will see in the next chapter, reflection and action in the frame of the People to People.
PART FOUR: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW MATERIAL

The next six chapters are devoted to the analysis of interview material. The first, Chapter 11, concerns the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People as perceived by interviewees. Chapters 12 and 13 address the inculturation aspects of the theology articulated in the frame of the People to People. Chapter 12 will describe five different approaches and theological responses to the articulation of African Traditional Religion, Christian values and beliefs and peacebuilding. Chapter 13 will deepen issues of inculturation while addressing the perceived relation between Traditional sacrifice, Old Testament sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Chapter 14 and 15 address the liberation aspects of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People. Chapter 14 explores the attitudes of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army and particularly its leader, John Garang, towards religion, Christianity and the task of the churches as promoters of a theology of liberation that could support the liberation struggle. Chapter 15 looks at the issue of a contextual theology of liberation and peace developed both in relation to the tasks of building peace inside Sudan and the need to communicate, also theologically, with partners abroad. Finally, Chapter 16 explores more in depth the issue of the role international partners might have played in promoting theological reflection in the frame of the People to People.
11. The theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People and its contributing elements

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss perceptions among interviewees who were key actors in the People to People, of the theoretical ‘framework’ of the process and of the elements, Traditional, Christian and inspired by contemporary peacebuilding practices, that contributed to such a ‘framework’.

I will start by addressing the issue of the ‘framework’ in general, its articulation in publications by the NSCC and the process by which it was defined. I will then explore in more detail perceptions of the elements that contributed to it, such as Traditional ritual; storytelling; songs; a traditional concept of time; focus on community building; restorative justice; the Christian understanding of peace also as hermeneutical principle in the interpretation of the Bible; forgiveness and reconciliation; and modern methods of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, particularly as inspired by peace practitioner and theoretician John Paul Lederach.

With this chapter, I aim at substantiating those schematic references in NSCC’s publications to the theoretical profile of the process; I aim at providing a picture of the number of cultural and religious elements, practices and ideas, that contributed to the process; and finally, I aim at exploring how such a variety of ideas and practices were intertwined in the perception of actors and in the development of the People to People.

1. Introduction

In 2003 and 2004, the NSCC conducted what was defined action-research on the People to People Peacemaking Process to gather lessons and share them with a larger, international audience. The
results of that work of action-research were published under the title *Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan*,687 a core text on the principles and methodology that supported the process.

*Building Hope* explicitly refers to a “framework of People-to-People Peacemaking for innovation and application at community levels”.688 Such a ‘framework’ supporting the People to People is defined in the same publication as a creative and effective synthesis of traditional, Christian and modern values, beliefs and practices:

It has been seen People-to-People Peacemaking can contribute to reconciliation and peace. ... It is believed that this can be promoted by adopting positive aspects of social change that are rooted in a synthesis of traditional, modern and Christian values, beliefs, customs that are relevant for application in the Sudanese setting and the broader African context.689

The intersection of traditional and Christian elements in the ‘framework’ of the People to People rests on the perceived “compatibility of basic approaches, concepts and values that are central to Christianity and traditional culture and belief systems”.690 In such a synthesis of Christian and Traditional values is seen the potential to achieve peace and reconciliation in Southern Sudan and beyond.

The authors of *Building Hope* also highlight the relationship between peace engagement and the religious beliefs that sustain such engagement:

It is clear that peacemaking must be based on traditional and religious values grounded in the communities and must encompass historic as well as recent experiences and practices that are meaningful to the people involved in peacemaking ... Peacemaking is fundamentally driven and motivated by the underlying values and philosophies of the involved groups and people. Peacemaking is motivated by a genuine desire of the groups to end conflict and search for a lasting peace. We must make this note here before the discussion of process and methods because there can be no process without adequate clarity and consent on fundamental elements and underlying values and philosophies that motivate groups to work for peace.691

In the experience the authors of *Building Hope* intend to record and transmit, peacebuilding is effective when it is supported by indigenous cultural resources, when it relies on the agency of people, when it is contextually relevant and when it is supported by religious values and beliefs. The methodology of the People to People is built on these principles. Concerning the aim of the

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687 The New Sudan Council of Churches, *Building Hope*
688 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 16
689 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 11. For further references to the synthesis see pp. 11, 12, 25, 42, 50, 59-60 and 71
690 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 57
691 NSCC, *Building Hope*, p. 24
present research, what is particularly relevant is that peacebuilding practices experienced in the frame of the People to People were explicitly related to religious beliefs, both Traditional and Christian.

2. The theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People

Understanding the ‘framework’ as the sum of ideas that inspired and supported the People to People, Kenyan ecumenical leader Dr Agnes A buom describes it as the outcome of the training to which people who managed the process were exposed. At the same time, Dr A buom highlights that to define a ‘framework’ that could be exported and employed in other places and at other times, both within Southern Sudan and abroad, the combination of ideas and methods that contributed to it would have needed to be tested. In the context of Sudan at war there was no time for such testing. Still, the intersection of principles and practices employed in the People to People proved successful:

*The Sudanese went through a lot of training on these issues, so the framework developed on that ... they did not have time because it was a hands-on immediate crisis, because you need to also interrogate the theoretical framework, whether it will work, whether you need to turn it around, so they didn’t have time. They used what they got and that was it. And I think it was adequate for them.*

In the course of the interview, Dr A buom refers to Emmanuel LoWilla, at that time staff of the NSCC in Nairobi, as a peace practitioner and thinker, and therefore as the person to be asked about the process leading to the definition of the ‘framework’.

Emmanuel LoWilla confirms that the publication *Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan* was the expression of the desire of staff in the NSCC to document what had happened and record lessons learned to be applied elsewhere:

*The publication of Hope was our own initiative as NSCC trying to document what we have done ... we thought we could start documenting the theories and if anything, so that it can be learned, practiced by other peacemakers.*

Was the idea of a synthesis of traditional, Christian and modern values, beliefs and methods of conflict resolution in the mind of people who envisioned and conducted the process? LoWilla replies:
This is going to be my personal feeling. My personal feeling is that the theoretical framework was a reflection after the conferences or the processes. Again, as I said, I am not sure that we were consciously aware of any of the theories as we were doing the process. I think each individual used their own experiences, their own ideas and went forth to try. But as it was developed in Hope, in the book Hope, I think it was a reflection because after that we had to sit and say: okay, what really happened?

LoWilla is clear about the fact that an understanding of a ‘framework’ as a combination of the ideas and methods that contributed to the People to People was the result of reflection conducted after the process had come to an end. LoWilla also indicates that at the time of Wunlit and other People to People conferences, key actors were not necessarily aware of theories and methods of conflict management and resolution. A wareness of established theories (such as those proposed by Lederach), might have been reached at a later point. Nevertheless, each actor contributed with his or her own insights, resources and experiences. The People to People urged and provided the space and opportunity to make use of such personal insights and resources.

The publication of Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan was, on the other hand, the result of the need felt at a later stage, to take time to reflect on what had taken place, what resources had been employed and with which results. Still, LoWilla acknowledges that not all reflection was postponed until the process had come to an end. As he asserts, in preparation to the Liliir conference held in 2000, staff of the NSCC went through a process of evaluation of Wunlit:

we had to learn from what happened, like for example for us I think to go to Liliir, I am not very sure, but I think we also had a reflection as to what happened in Wunlit which worked well and which didn’t work well.

The elaboration of the ‘framework’ can therefore be defined ‘work in progress’, partially conducted while the People to People was conducted, still more comprehensively carried once the process had come to an end.

LoWilla further refers to the role partners played in defining the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, among them Rev. Dr. William Lowrey from the US and Paul Murphey from Ireland. Paul Murphey played a major role in the publication of the document Leading from Behind, an evaluation of the People to People:

and remember during that time we had consultants who were also helping us. Dr Kettering is one of them, Bill Lowrey and many others that I might have forgotten, Paul Murphey particularly when we had the grant, when

692 I will return to the role of partners, particularly William Lowrey, in the theoretical elaboration around the People to People in the next chapters
693 New Sudan Council of Churches, “Leading from Behind”
we had the USAID grant, Paul Murphy was also hired, and particularly he worked on the issue “Leading From Behind”, and so I don’t want to repeat myself, sure that we were consciously thinking about that, but this was a reflection about the processes that the theoretical framework was developed.

The concept of a theoretical ‘framework’ was therefore defined in the closing phase of the People to People, with the aim of producing a publication to both record and disseminate ‘good lessons’, in other words the ideas and practices that had proved successful.

As the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People was defined as a synthesis of three elements, namely traditional values and practices, Christian values and beliefs and modern methods of conflict resolution, in the next sections I will present an analysis of interview material dealing with these three elements.

2.1. Traditional elements in the ‘framework’

The use of traditional methods of conflict resolution by Christians was not a novelty by the People to People Peacemaking Process, says Bishop Paul Yugusuk of the Episcopal Church. What was new in the People to People was the scale at which traditional and Christian elements intersected:

Loki [the preparatory meeting held at Lokichoggio in 1998] was the first experience of that encounter, of the fellowship of Traditional and Christian. Before that, such rituals were performed only on a small scale. Loki was a larger event of traditional leaders and church leaders. It was a positive experience.

Lokichoggio provided a unique opportunity to test and experience on a large scale the positive impact of the use of traditional methods of conflict resolution also by Christians, a practice that became a trademark of the People to People. On a smaller scale, the practice was in use even before Lokichoggio, restates Bishop Paul:

Even before Loki, traditional methods of conflict resolution were used to reconcile Christians. Traditional committees were involved also when Christians were involved [in conflict and peacemaking], and animals were slaughtered. Eastern Equatoria is predominantly Catholic and they do not have much problem with slaughtering.

The use of traditional methods of conflict resolution to reconcile Christians, including ritual slaughtering, precedes the People to People. Bishop Paul relates the openness of Christians to
Traditional religious practices in the Eastern Equatoria region of Southern Sudan, to the fact that most Christians in that area were Catholic.694

Among the Traditional elements contributing to the ‘framework’ of the People to People, interviewees mention rituals; storytelling and truth telling; songs; a traditional understanding of time; focus on community relations; a holistic understanding of peace; and compensation as an element of restorative justice. To these elements I will now turn.

2.1.1. Rituals

When asked about the Traditional elements contributing to the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, interviewees refer primarily to ritual.

According to Rev. James Ninrew, a Nuer Presbyterian pastor, the only ritual performed in Wunlit was the Traditional slaughtering of the white bull for peace and reconciliation. Did the fact that a Traditional ritual, such as the slaughtering of the white bull, was performed in the frame of an event facilitated by churches imply any variations in the way the ritual was conducted? The answer seems to be negative. Interview material indicates that in Wunlit rituals were performed according to tradition.

Rev. George Riak, also Presbyterian and Nuer, provides details about the specific bull that was sacrificed at the opening of the Wunlit conference:

The bull was given by the most elder in the community and it was very wild. And it was given with a comment. It was brought in the early morning. The person who brought it said: “take this bull, I have taken it among many bulls I have, but I know that it is very wild. Who would refuse peace, would die like that wild bull. And this is the reason why I give you a wild bull”. And this was said before the invocation and the slaughtering.

The fact that the bull was “very wild” is a significant detail and, as the quotation indicates, a deliberate choice by the person who offered it. The wildness of the animal is meant to reflect the virulence of the conflict raging in Sudan and among communities in Southern Sudan. It reflects the seriousness of the situation that the ritual slaughtering is aiming to redress. A wild animal requires a greater use of violence to be killed. Who refuses peace or dishonours the oath taken with the ritual slaughtering, will call upon him or herself the same amount of violence.

694 I will address in the next chapter the role confessional and denomination differences play in the more or less positive attitude towards the intersection of Traditional and Christian elements in the People to People
Monica Ayen, who attended Wunlit as a women’s leader and chaired several official sessions, refers to the role of women in the ritual killing of the mabior. As we have seen in Chapter 8, Dinka and Nuer traditionally would kill animals, especially cattle, exclusively for ritual purposes. A clear explanation of the reasons why the ritual is performed and the animal is slaughtered is the third and unmissable part of every ritual killing. Women are traditionally and generally not allowed to pronounce the ritual invocation. Exceptions can be made in the case of widows or of women otherwise related to men of great spiritual authority. According to Monica Ayen, in Wunlit, with their singing, women were in fact actively participating in the ritual, addressing the animal to be killed, explaining that the reason it was going to be killed was to achieve peace:

Q: What can you tell me about the participation of women in the ritual killing of the mabior?
A: Ja, they were singing songs of peace. They are talking to the ghost spirit, they are telling the ghost spirit that you, mabior, if you die like this, we kill you because of peace. This is why we are killing you. We are not killing you just liking of killing you. Ja. Because we want peace. Because we kill you to stop this war.

The extreme act of ritually killing the white bull is carried out because people are tired of war and want peace. I also asked Monica Ayen whether there was a difference between the traditional way the slaughtering of the mabior would be carried and the way the ritual was performed in Wunlit. Monica Ayen tells that there was a difference, and it consisted in the unusually large participation of women:

They came there. There is difference. They came there to watch the killing of the mabior because there is a war for her to be concerned. But in any killing of any bull in any occasion they don’t need to be there.

The particularly large participation of women in the ritual slaughtering of the mabior in Wunlit, clarifies Monica Ayen, was due to the gravity of the situation, the urgency to achieve peace and the fact that women felt particularly involved in the task to achieve peace. Participation in the ritual slaughtering of the mabior signified for women their intention to be full participants in the peace process.

The interview with Monica Ayen is the only one in which I have been assisted by a translator. The work of English-Dinka translation was carried by June Malet. Still, Monica Ayen understood my English as she often started replying before the question was translated.
2.1.2. Storytelling and truth telling

Storytelling is an important element of traditional methods of conflict resolution both in the Dinka and Nuer traditions. Traditionally, reconciliation and peace can be achieved only after all the wrongs experienced are openly told and acknowledged by the community, in other words, after the community has agreed on a shared account of the events that caused the conflict. In this respect, in Dinka and Nuer culture, storytelling is related to truth telling as in the process of achieving a common understanding of the events that led to the conflict, a shared understanding of ‘truth’ is negotiated by the community.

Given the importance of storytelling as part of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, this practice was performed in the Akobo conference in 1994 and in Lokichoggio in 1998. Because of its positive outcome, it was employed in W unlit and successively at other People to People events, becoming part of the process’ methodology.

William Lowrey, who had studied the Akobo conference and was the organiser of the Lokichoggio event, played an important role in applying in Lokichoggio lessons learned in Akobo. In relation to storytelling, Lowrey reports:

at Loki ... the first three days were geared toward basically telling their stories of pain, what they had done to each other, and the second three days were reflecting on conflicts in their ancestors’ experiences and what the key principles were that were used to resolve those conflicts.

Time for storytelling in Lokichoggio provided the opportunity to remember and revive traditional methods of conflict resolution. The positive outcome of the process encouraged the organisers to allocate sufficient time for storytelling at W unlit.

References to storytelling in interview material point significantly to the role women played at People to People events. Devoting a consistent amount of time to storytelling created space for women’s participation. Furthermore, the fact that women were participating in storytelling, made public storytelling personal:

Anonymous 1: Storytelling in traditional terms is not personal. But in the People to People it became a personal storytelling for women who would otherwise be allowed [to discuss personal issues] only among themselves as women.

By engaging in storytelling, women would encourage men to open up and talk. Anonymous 1 describes it as a cathartic experience:

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696 In Chapter 10 I have referred to Lowrey’s PhD Dissertation. See Lowrey, William O., “Passing the Peace”
Some men would not open up to other men and only through women they started talking. Women approached military leaders after the split. At that time, men began to talk. It was a relieving experience, an inner cleaning process for men who were keeping all inside themselves.

After the 1991 split within the SPLM/A (see Chapter 7), women approached military leaders of both sides to promote reconciliation. In this respect, Anonymous 1 informs that women played the role of horizontal connectors that Lederach envisions for mid-range leaders.

Storytelling would also be used by women as a tool to keep the reconciliation process going at People to People events:

Anonymous 1: Every time there was a blockage in the process, women would break through by telling their stories. They would continue telling until a solution is achieved. In the People to People more chances were given to women and youth to talk and cry. Enough time to cry. This has given women the momentum.

The point of women intervening in those instances in which the peacemaking process had come to a stalemate, is addressed, as we will soon see, by other interviewees. I will also return to the issue of time, of allowing sufficient time to the peace and reconciliation process, as a traditional contribution to the ‘framework’ of the People to People.

According to Rev. George Riak, through storytelling women contributed to reconciling men:

Women participated in meetings in Wunlit. There they are allowed to talk, to reconcile the men. Women are peacemakers, especially in this time of Christianity. Women participated in storytelling.

In the words of Rev. James Ninrew, women employed storytelling also to convince the men to sign the Wunlit peace agreement:

But on the day of the signing in Wunlit, all the women united and compelled all present to sign. That was felt by everybody. Women were telling their painful stories that convinced the hearts of people.

Interview material also shows that as women in both Nuer and Dinka culture are perceived as guardians of truth, storytelling by women was particularly perceived as truth telling. Anonymous 1 even indicates that it is exactly the perception of women as truth-tellers that encouraged the organisers of the People to People to actively involve women:
Dr Harun and Telar [Deng] thought of women mobilisers. Women are respected and people listen to them. Women go for the truth. Therefore the church wanted women mobilisers.

According to Anonymous 2, the contribution women gave in terms of truth telling was decisive for the positive outcome of the People to People:

They [the women] knew that truth telling is a crucial part of peacebuilding.

Q: Would the People to People have been different if women had not participated?

A: Yes, it would have not been complete. You would have not had truth telling but denial. That is why the People to People had to involve women.

Also Bishop Paride Taban links women to truth telling and further to the goal of reconciliation:

and that is why women are very much needed in reconciliation, and even though they say strong words they can tell the truth and nobody can even do any harm to them, but the men, because they are not much respected, it is very difficult for them to tell the truth. They are afraid, but women are not.

Finally, on the relation between women’s participation and truth telling, I would like to report a quote from Rev. William Lowrey who illustrates how women’s role as truth-tellers was decisive for the outcome of Akobo:

One of the stories that came out of Akobo, and that was really quite powerful and important for me as I did research in the next couple of years after that about how they did this, was that there were men who stood up in that Akobo conference and basically where lying about who killed whom and what they had done, and the women never confronted them in the conference, would wait until the day was over, and then either a wife or a woman who knew would confront the man and say: are you going to go back in and tell them the truth or do I need to do that? And so basically putting up a threat on them that they would tell the truth, because the women actually knew almost all the incidents of who killed who, and the man as a result would go back in and change the story.

In the course of the interview, William Lowrey indicates that the role played by women in Akobo was so important that, in launching the People to People, women’s participation was seen as a condition for the positive outcome of the process.

Truth telling is a main attribute of Divinity, both in Dinka and Nuer religion.\(^{697}\) It is worth noting that when women are perceived as guardians of truth, as in the frame of the People to People, they are ascribed an attribute that pertains to God.

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2.1.3. Songs

Another traditional contribution to the profile of the People to People, according to several interviewees, is singing and songs. As in the case of storytelling, several interviewees relate songs to the participation of women. Anonymous 2 links the fact that women were singing at People to People events to the fact that singing is a common activity for women:

*Women more than men sing. Singing is part of grieving, is a way to express feelings and sentiment. Women accompany every activity with singing. Both positive and negative.*

Rev. James specifies that women were contributing to People to People events with songs of peace:

*Women were singing for peace ... Women would not sing war songs.*

The same point is made by Rev. George who also refers to the fact that women’s singing at People to People events contributed to tension release and therefore to the positive outcome of the process:

*If the women had not participated the People to People would have missed a big help, it would have not been effective. And when we brought this choir, most of them were girls, when men are caught up in the meeting, we have to think of a religious song.*

Awut Deng, who at the time of Wunlit was a peace mobiliser for Bahr el Ghazal, gives a powerful account about how women in Wunlit made a statement for peace through their singing, and by doing so influenced the tone and, accordingly, the outcome of a key session:

*the women came and made a statement but merely setting the tone of discussion, and this was, the statement we made there is a song which is very popular among the Nilotics, the Dinka and the Nuer, it is a peace song, is called Door. Door is reconciliation. That song, I started singing it and everybody sang, and even the men who sang it better stood up and sang it and the whole crowd just joined in, and made a big laughter and everybody was relaxed.*

The singing, tells Awut Deng, created momentum at Wunlit. It was followed by a statement by a woman delegate and then by all participants holding hands in a gesture of commitment to the peace that was going to be agreed upon:

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698 The full text of the statement can be found in the minutes of Wunlit. See Wunlit-Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference
and this woman from the other delegation from Upper Nile called Yar [Deborah] Nyandien, I invited her to talk ... and she said: “this war, as women we decease senselessly. You people have to stop it” ... it was a very powerful statement, everybody was like moved, and from there we held hands, this is the sign of the peace we want to send to everybody, and we invited different traditional leaders and our Movement [SPLM] and the church and the partners, we joined hands together and hold them so that we said: “we are solid as this symbol that we will hold our hands to make a breakthrough everywhere for peace”, and that was applauded and everybody was relaxed and the tone was clear.

In Chapter 7 we saw how, from the mid-1980s, Dinka women were among the most prolific and creative composers of Christian songs, songs that played a significant role in the widespread growth of an inculturated Christianity in Southern Sudan. Were any of these Christian songs composed by Dinka people, both women and men, sung at People to People events? Both Emmanuel LoWilla and Bishop Isaiah Dau reply positively. Bishop Dau further elaborates on the function and content of these songs:

Q: At People to People events would they use some of the Dinka songs produced in those years of the second round of war?
A: Yes, yes. At least from the Bor side I can say that ... On the Bor side they were tremendously used. ... At People to People, of course when people gathered it was always opened with prayers, and even if it was opened with prayers, they would need to sing a song, so the mix of peace methods, if you like the theology of peace, the theology of conflict resolution, just as the conflict between God and people was being resolved, that could translate into resolving the conflict between people and people.

When Dinka Christian songs were sung at People to People events, a traditional tool (a Dinka song) was turned into an instrument of transmission of the Christian message (Dinka Christian songs) and further into a tool for peacebuilding, as Dinka Christian songs would convey a theology of peace and of conflict resolution. In this, Bishop Dau sees an interesting articulation of peace methods.

Bishop Dau further elaborates on the theology of conflict resolution and peace these songs would convey: the resolution of the conflict between God and humanity and subsequent reconciliation would serve as an example for a process of conflict resolution and reconciliation among people.

Songs for peace sung by Dinka Christians as well as other participants at People to People events are an example, as we have seen, of a traditional cultural form of expression filled with Christian content and used for peacebuilding. They are, in other words, an example of the intersection of the dimensions of traditional culture and religion, Christian theology and peacebuilding efforts in the frame of the People to People. They also exemplify how peace
engagement in the frame of the People to People both highlights and enhances the inculturation of theology.

2.1.4. The concept of time

The issue of time as available and unrestricted, is mentioned by several interviewees as an important aspect of the People to People methodology. "Time to talk as much as you want" (Anonymous 2); "the time people needed" (Anonymous 1) to discuss, argue, reconcile and reach an agreement; “enough time to cry” (Anonymous 1), meaning enough time to express all their sorrow, resentment and anger for the pain received, as well as remorse for the pain inflicted, enough time to elaborate both emotionally and rationally around the condition in which conflicting communities found themselves, and about the willingness to commit to peace. “The issue is not the time, is the solution”, says Ambassador Kiplagat, meaning that it was the goal of achieving a solution to the conflict that would determine how much time would need to be allocated to each session and the process.

In his *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti describes the Traditional African understanding of time and the implications it has for African philosophy and religion.

Actual time involves the two dimensions of present (sasa in Swahili), or what Mbiti terms micro-time, and past (zamani), or macro-time. Only the immediate future is of interest, as it is still considered part of the present. The linear concept of time moving towards the future is foreign to African thinking: after events are experienced, they move back from the sasa to the zamani. History, in African philosophy and religion, moves backward rather than forward.

For the individual and the community, the most important moment is the present as it is the dimension of time in which people are conscious of their existence. Time becomes meaningful to the individual and the community only through participating in it or experiencing it.

Time, says Mbiti, is a composition of events. Time must be experienced in order to make sense or become real. What is in the future has not been experienced and therefore does not make sense: “The day, the month, the year, one’s life time or human history, are all divided up or reckoned according to their specific events, for it is these that make them meaningful”. Time gains meaning from the events that occur and, in this sense in traditional African life, “time has to be created or produced”. People produce time through their activities. Content defines the time-frame.

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A functional understanding of time as connoted by the use and the experience of it, is perceived as another important Traditional contribution to the methodology of the People to People.

2.1.5. Focus on community relations

Anonymous 1 considers the value attributed to being-in-community, “valuing togetherness at the grassroots”, as a traditional contribution to the ‘framework’ of the People to People.

William Lowrey more specifically refers to the traditional practice of achieving peace not only at the community level but with the active participation of the whole community. Lowrey tells how such a traditional principle of communitarian participation in peacemaking was applied to the People to People by the initiative of traditional leaders convened in Lokichoggio:

_In Loki … they could not make peace as representatives. That’s really a western methodology, it had to engage the people … don’t really believe that you send representatives to do that, it is much more engagement of larger numbers of people that engages enough people that the communities feel like they are fully present there._

We will see in the following chapters how the focus on community relations is not only traditional, but also Christian, and for this reason represents one of the interconnecting elements that facilitate the synthesis of various traditions in the ‘framework’ of the People to People.

2.1.6. A holistic understanding of peace

William Lowrey refers to the traditional holistic understanding of peace in Dinka and Nuer culture and religion as an important contribution to the principles as well as methodology of the People to People:

_There is a belief in Traditional Religion among Nuer and Dinka, and I think it is true in most of the Southern tribes, that there is a God and there is a responsibility to God and that when people kill each other, have violence, do conflict it not only, it is a holistic perspective, so it not only affects the relationship to people, but it also affects the relationship to the land, with the grass, with the water, with the rain and with the Divine, and that until they reconcile with each other, they will continue to bear negative consequences in all of those arenas, and so there is a strong belief system that eventually we must reconcile, eventually, now eventually can go a long time in conflict, but nevertheless it is a very important belief system in the traditional system._

In Dinka and Nuer religion, peacebuilding and peacemaking are considered deeply religious enterprises, as reconciliation among human beings is interconnected with restoration of relations and peace with Divinity and creation (see Chapter 8).
The interconnectedness of relations among human beings and between human beings and God, resembles closely the biblical concept of *shalom*, also understood as integrity of relations with self, the other and God.\(^{702}\) In African Religion as well as in the Hebrew Bible peace/*shalom* is further understood as both spiritual and material wellbeing.

### 2.1.7. Compensation and restorative justice

One last principle interviewees refer to as drawn from Traditional Religion and traditional methods of conflict resolution that became part of the methodology of the People to People is that of compensation as an expression of restorative justice. Bishop Paul refers to it in the following terms:

> compensation, as much as possible. Returning animals, children and women. Compensating the previous husband if the wife [who has been kidnapped] wants to stay [with the new husband].

The mechanism put in place at Wunlit and other People to People events to assess the entity of loss on each side of the conflict and ensure that suitable compensation was granted, was a decisive contribution to the success of People to People events.

Ambassador Kiplagat refers to the model of restorative justice applied at People to People events as an example for other places and reconciliation processes in Africa, not the least in Kenya.\(^{703}\)

Interview material indicates that compensation and restorative justice are perceived as both traditional and Christian, as the principle of restoration of relationships, also in material terms, in view of reconciliation and peace is also perceived as fundamentally Christian.

### 2.2. Christian elements in the ‘framework’

Among the Christian contributions to the ‘framework’ of the People to People, interviewees mention, as we will soon see, Bible reading and prayer; peace as the key biblical message; focus on the people; forgiveness and reconciliation.

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\(^{703}\) Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat was Chairperson of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission in Kenya from 2009 to 2010 and again from 2012. The Commission was established to deal with the violent aftermath of the 2007 elections
2.2.1. Bible reading and prayer

During the years the People to People was conducted, namely the end of the 1990s and early 2000, given the shortage of ordained ministry, the Eucharist or Holy Communion was very rarely celebrated in Southern Sudan.\textsuperscript{704} For this reason, the Eucharist was not performed at W unlit. Accordingly, there was no Christian equivalent of the ritual slaughtering of the mabior, and Traditional sacrifice remained the only and central ritual. Still, Christian worship was conducted in W unlit, consisting mainly of Bible readings, meditation, prayer, and songs. In the words of Rev. Matthew Mathiang Deng:

\begin{quote}
the meeting [W unlit] lasted for about two weeks so every day when the meeting starts, we start with the reading of the Bible. That is the only side of the Christian religion. We start with a Bible reading always.
\end{quote}

Given the fact that theology in the context of Southern Sudan at war was (and still is) fundamentally biblical, namely the outcome of a contextual reflection on the Bible, it is understandable that Bible reading is referred to here as the most important Christian contribution to the religious asset of the People to People.

When asked about Christian rituals at People to People events, Rev. James refers to offering prayers, while Emmanuel LoWilla mentions prayer and preaching.

2.2.2. Peace as key biblical message

Out of thirty interviewees, eleven expressly refer to the concept of peace as the central message of the Bible. It is my understanding that, for the people I have interviewed, peace as the central theme in the Bible, functions also as a hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of the scriptures and as a guiding principle for Christian praxis. I deliberately employ the term ‘praxis’ here, as I refer to practice that is inspired by biblical and theological reflection, action that is in a circular relation to biblical interpretation. In order to convey the high relevance attributed to the biblical concept of peace by interviewees, I will first report all the quotes and then comment on the issues raised:

\begin{quote}
The central message of Christ is peace … The spirit of the church embodies forgiveness, harmony and peace (Rev. James)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The Bible is talking of forgiveness, peace, love and unity of the people (Rev. George)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{704} See Chapter 9. The issue of the Eucharist in relation to Traditional sacrifice is the topic of Chapter 13
the church is for peace ... because religiously it is our duty to make people to have peace because it is a demand from Jesus Christ that I gave you peace (Rev. Matthew)

because the Bible is talking about peace (Monica Ayen)

Christians saw their role as peacemakers as we know that Jesus is the Prince of peace (Awut Deng)

and then the biblical notion of peace and reconciliation. ... but we really as Council of Churches depended very much on the biblical notion of peacebuilding, peace with yourself, peace with your neighbour, and peace with society and all that .... they [Sudan Ecumenical Forum] would ask about the biblical perspective of the peace (Joy K waje)

So we were then playing our right role as peacemakers in both sides of the conflict ... Blessed are the peacemakers, Matthew five verse nine, this has always been the song for the work ... So we wanted to be peacemakers in our context (Bishop Enoch Tombe)

I begin to look at Jesus Christ who came from heaven into this earth for what? To make peace, to make reconciliation between God and man... (Archbishop Paulino Lukudu Loro)

The Christian, particularly the Christian pastors and evangelists, church leaders have a very strong bend towards peacemaking and so they have that as part of their beliefs and they include that in their preaching and trying to influence people that they should work toward peace. So that was supportive (Rev. William Lowrey)

I think we, those of us who were involved in it, we didn't really see peacemaking as some separate activity, I think we thought it was just part of the pastoral activity of the church (John Ashworth)

Isaiah, Prince of Peace. Blessed are the peacemakers. Everybody knows that peace is life, blessing. Feeling that you have a role brings you peace (Hanna Kima)

Two interviewees (Rev. James and Monica Ayen) refers explicitly to the fact that peace is the central message of the Bible, while Rev. James, Rev. George and Joy K waje mention peace in conjunction with other concepts such as forgiveness, harmony (Rev. James) love, unity (Rev. George) and reconciliation (Joy K waje).

In some instances (Rev. James, Rev. George and Archbishop Paulino), peace might be understood as a spiritual category, such as peace of the spirit, while in several cases (Rev. Matthew, Awut Deng, Joy K waje, Bishop Enoch Tombe, Rev. William Lowrey, John Ashworth and Hanna Kima), the reference is clearly to active peacemaking. Still, even in those cases in which references to peace might be interpreted in spiritual terms, either in the same quote or in the context of the interview, it emerges that peace as a spiritual entity, gift of God or attribute of Christ, motivates

Joy Kwaje refers to the fact that staff in the Sudanese ecumenical structures would be asked by partners in the Sudan Ecumenical Forum to elaborate theologically around their biblical understanding of peace.

In Chapter 8, we have seen how peacemaking has strong religious connotations in the Dinka and Nuer traditions. We now also see how Christian identity and faith in the context of Southern Sudan are strictly interrelated to peacebuilding understood as the main call for Christians. The religious connotations of peacebuilding are yet another dimension of the intersection of religion, both Traditional and Christian, and peace in the frame of the People to People.

2.2.3. Focus on the people

The People to People Peacemaking Process was also referred to as “A Peace of the People, by the People, for the People”. As the process’s name indicates, the NSCC had as one of their primary concerns the situation the peoples of Southern Sudan and other marginalised areas found themselves in, people’s agency and inclusive participation in peace work.

In Chapter 15, we will see how the theology of Bishop Taban focuses on justice, the rights of the people and respect for the people. The earthly ministry of Jesus and the values he witnessed to are, for Bishop Taban, both of theological inspiration and the basis of the theology that supports People to People peace and reconciliation work.

John Ashworth further connotes this focus on the people in terms of listening to their voices and trusting their judgement. Empowerment was, according to Ashworth, a by-effect of the focus on people’s participation:

> These are grassroots people who were empowered, whether women or men, this process empowered people I think, and listened to people and allowed them to drive the processes more than virtually any other processes in Sudan, and you know, sometimes I am reluctant to separate men and women, at times it is important to do that, at others times it is just important to say these are the citizens and these are the grassroots people and a way was found for them to drive the process ... in a sense we created empowerment without realising we were doing it, we just naturally thought that the way to do it is listen to the grassroots and let them drive it.

Focus on the people is therefore not only traditional but also Christian as it draws its inspiration from the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is also a principle of grassroots peacebuilding. Focus on the

705 See New Sudan Council of Churches, *Inside Sudan*
people is therefore another transversal theme that links together traditional, Christian and modern elements in the ‘framework’ of the People to People.

2.2.4. Forgiveness

Rev. James, a Nuer himself, tells about how retaliation and revenge are a strong component of Nuer culture. Such cultural elements are seen in contrast to the biblical command to forgive:

“You don’t have to count offences”, says the Bible, but the Nuer count. And when I retaliate, I believe I am on the right side and God is on my side. When the Nuer retaliate, they do more than what has been done to them ... Among the Nuer revenge can happen after a very long time ... God stands by the person who does not aggress but retaliates. “God knows our rights” ... Christian people who have not fully understood the message of Jesus, would also think in this way.

Nuer people, says the interviewee, don’t forget easily and accordingly don’t forgive easily either. When wronged, Nuer people consider retaliation and revenge as a right granted by God. Such a perception of retaliation as legitimate contributes to the escalation of violent conflict. Rev. James further tells that such a perception is also common among Nuer Christians, in his opinion people who have not fully understood that the prescription by Jesus to forgive stands in contrast to habits sanctioned by culture. We find here an example of how Christianity is expected to function as a counter-cultural factor.

Hanna Kima, also a Nuer, likewise refers to the importance of forgiveness in putting an end to circles of revenge. At the same time, Hanna Kima highlights the role forgiveness has in Traditional Religion and describes how the practice of forgiveness is an important part of Traditional sacrifice:

Forgiveness is biblical but is also a Traditional concept. The Nuer word is ‘Pali ha ika’, ‘Forgive me’, ‘Have mercy on me’. Dinka and Nuer don’t say these words lightly. ... Dinka and Nuer use it when they ask for forgiveness from each other and then together ask for forgiveness from God. This is Traditional, not Christian. The elders will speak to God. They will bring new spears and the animal has to die painfully. They will talk to the animal first, and the animal will take the message to God: “forgive us”. The animal is killed to say “we are sorry” and to ask for forgiveness.

While referring to the culture of revenge that is deeply rooted in South Sudan, Hanna Kima underlines that not only forgiveness but also repentance and reconciliation at People to People events had a Traditional more than a Christian inspiration.
Rev. George offers a perspective that mediates between the position of Rev. James expressed above and that of Hanna Kima. While Rev. George also refers to forgiveness as an important aspect of traditional conflict resolution processes, he underlines that the Christian understanding of forgiveness has a larger radius, reaching beyond the traditional borders of family, clan or tribe:

*The Bible says: “love your neighbour”, not only the immediate one, also the person beyond.*

Emmanuel Lowilla refers to “the strong Christian connotations of forgiveness” as an unmissable part of processes of restorative justice:

*talking of restorative justice, you can bring in also the whole idea of forgiveness and forgiveness is a very powerful tool which I believe the churches, Christians and even Traditional Religion need to develop and bring it forward, and, to say, it is one of our instruments, it is one of our resources which we have. We can use it to resolve our problems.*

The Christian understanding of forgiveness also contributes to and connotes in Christian terms the traditional practice of restorative justice.

In the interview material I am examining, forgiveness is therefore referred to as both Traditional and Christian. In this sense, forgiveness functions as another transversal concept that links Traditional Religion, Christianity and peacemaking practices in the frame of the People to People.

2.2.5. Reconciliation

While, as we have seen above, peace is indicated by a high number of interviewees as the key theme of the Bible at the basis of the call to Christians to be active peacemakers, reconciliation is described in several interviews as the mandate of the church. To the question about what motivated the People to People, Awut Deng replies:

*The church as an institution had a mandate to reconcile communities which were in conflict ... The church by definition carries religious values, then what you need to do in that situation [of conflict] is to assist, to facilitate, to see that the people are reconciled, so the main thing for the church was to reconcile.*

Along the same line, Janet A yaa A lex sees reconciliation as the centre of Christian life and for this reason believes that churches are charged to take the lead in the reconciliation scope of the People to People.
From interview material emerges the close association of peace also understood as peacemaking, to reconciliation. In the words of Archbishop Paulino:

*the People to People is a programme of peace, is a programme of reconciliation.*

Kenyan researcher Gachora Ngunjiri confirms this point when he says:

*The People to People Peacemaking Programme was launched because of the strong desire to reconcile the people.*

Hanna Kima links the dimensions of reconciliation and peace in the Traditional ritual slaughtering of the white bull:

*The animal has to die with a lot of pain and who breaks the peace will experience the same pain. Then people jump over the animal to mark the passage from death to life. The next step will be to reconcile.*

The ritual slaughtering of the white bull is a ritual of peace and reconciliation. While taking an oath of peace, people also commit to reconcile with each other. The traditional understanding of peace closely related to reconciliation, either because reconciliation is seen as a precondition or component of peace, becomes a trademark of peace in the frame of the People to People.

Reconciliation in the frame of a holistic understanding of peace and in the frame of the People to People is considered an unmissable condition to peace. The intersection of Traditional and Christian in the frame of the People to People contributes to enlarging the concept of peace and, accordingly, the practice of peacemaking.

2.3. Modern elements in the ‘framework’

In the previous paragraph, we have seen how religious approaches to peace, be they African Traditional, or Judeo-Christian (*shalom*), linking peace to sound relationships and therefore to reconciliation, contribute, in the ‘framework’ of the People to People, to a modern synthesis and modern perspective on peacebuilding and peacemaking that links reconciliation and peace, they contribute to an understanding of peacebuilding that cannot envision peace without reconciliation. Such a point is supported by the following assertion of Anonymous 2:

*the modern is a blend, a convergence of Traditional and Christian. Because the modern tries to see what works. Modern are the skills. Facilitation, documentation, to keep up the memory. Bill Lowrey played an*
Anonymous 2 is here indicating that the modern component in the frame of the People to People is exactly the synthesis of Traditional and Christian elements and the affirmation that comes from outsiders of the value of traditional methods of conflict resolution. I have referred to restorative justice and the ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation leading to peace as elements that are perceived as both Traditional and Christian and that in relation to the task of peacemaking and peacebuilding in the ‘framework’ of the People to People, give way to new approaches to peacebuilding. To such a synthesis contribute contemporary perspectives and approaches to peacebuilding brought in by foreign partners such as William Lowrey.

William Lowrey shares the opinion that the modern, in terms of methodology, consisted of a synthesis of traditional methods, such as storytelling, and current methods of conflict analysis, or techniques aiming at eliciting an analysis of the on-going conflict from participants:

then in the next three days, the final three days, that is when I introduced the few sort of modern analysis, peacemaking analysis, so I had developed a few diagrams that I used in a way that they used pictures from their own experience like tukuls [mud huts] and AK47 and things like that, to show cycles of conflict that continue on, unending cycles of conflict, and then how to intervene with those to break out of the cycles of conflict, and then have them tell their own stories of how they had experienced that. So it was modern only in the sense of tools of analysis rather than separating from traditional.

Modern is the synthesis of traditional methods, Christian values and beliefs and modern methods of conflict analysis, but, William Lowrey underlines, in the ‘framework’ of the People to People the modern is meant to highlight the potential and strengthen the effectiveness of traditional methods of conflict resolution.

Still, other modern methods of conflict resolution and peacemaking are mentioned in interview material. Rev. James refers to the signing of a peace agreement (after the slaughtering of the second bull, a peace agreement was signed or thumb-printed by all official delegates at W unlit) as a modern method contributing to the ‘framework’ of the People to People.

Emmauel LoWilla refers to two other elements. The first one is timing, understood as an assessment of the most suitable time to make attempts at peacemaking:

One is the theory first of all that there must be a time where, how did they call it? Whereby the parties are so tired that they are willing to have peace.
The second element to which LoWilla refers and that he considers modern, is awareness-raising on the conflict through programmes of education:

*education was used in the sense of creating awareness among the population about the conflict itself, ok, and NSCC used that through its peace mobilisers. The peace mobilisers were used to create awareness among the population about the conflict itself.*

We have seen above how, according to Dr Agnes Abuom, the ‘framework’ of the People to People was the result of extensive training to which the staff of the NSCC were exposed. Through such training, people like Emmanuel LoWilla came across concepts of timing and conflict awareness. Through training, several actors were also exposed to the theories and practices of peacebuilding elaborated in networks in which John Paul Lederach was an important player. The extent and impact of Lederach’s influence will be the subject of the next chapter.

2.3.1. The contribution of John Paul Lederach to the theoretical profile of the People to People

Out of thirty interviewees, eight refer to the influence of Lederach on the ‘framework’ of the People to People.

Opinions about this influence, as we will soon see, vary greatly. A nalysis of interview material allows me to outline six perspectives: 1. key actors were aware of the work of Lederach and were influenced by his ideas; 2. there was no influence of the ideas of Lederach; 3. actors were not aware of the work of Lederach, but a resonance between the ideas elaborated by him and the ideas that inspired and supported the process were discovered once the process was coming to an end or had already ended; 4. actors were not aware of the work of Lederach but were influenced by trainers who were working closely to Lederach (unaware of the influence); 5. actors were aware of the work of Lederach but did not consider their elaboration influenced by his ideas; point 5 is related to point 6. Lederach elaborated and popularised ideas that were circulating among peace practitioners. The interview material I am now going to present will help illustrate each of the points mentioned.

2.3.1.1. Option one: key actors were aware of the work of Lederach and were influenced by his ideas

Some actors were aware of the work of Lederach and considered themselves and other Southern Sudanese actors influenced by his work. In the words of Anonymous 2: *“All are influenced by him”.*
Agnes Abuom elaborates on the close cooperation between the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), NSCC and Lederach:

*but NSCC of course was informed by the thinking of people like Paul Lederach, all these peace practitioners. 
... There were links [with Lederach before the People to People was launched]. Ja, there were. Because you see already we had had conflicts here [in Kenya] and Paul Lederach was working very strongly with the Nairobi Peace Initiative and Hizkias Assefa professor who ... had written on Sudan on the first agreement, and so he was also advising, he was like an adviser to the Sudanese.*

Paul Lederach would travel to Nairobi (where the NSCC was based) and cooperate with organisations such as the Nairobi Peace Initiative and professor Hizkias Assefa working in close cooperation with the NSCC (see Chapter 10). Agnes Abuom is clear about the fact that actors in the NSCC and People to People were consciously building on the ideas of Lederach:

*So by the time People to People Peace Processes are being launched, Paul Lederach’s thinking was already available and they were able to tap into it.*

Dr Agnes Abuom further refers to the fact that not only the Sudanese were influenced by the work of Lederach, even Lederach himself had to review and elaborate his work, taking in lessons from the People to People:

*And don’t forget, Daniela, that peace practice was very much new at that time. In fact I remember I and Schrock [Executive Secretary of the NSCC] after we had evaluated the NCCK Dutch peace programme, forced, pushed Lederach to actually develop a Monitoring and Evaluation tool for peace programmes because our argument, and that was around 1997, our argument was you cannot have the same M&E for peace work like you have for development ... So he actually did it, Lederach actually did it, so that is why I am saying the theoretical thinking around peace even on Sudan has also evolved with the peace thinkers and practitioners, particularly EMU [Eastern Mennonite University], Paul Lederach, the EMU people, Eastern Mennonite University in Pennsylvania, and the thinking has been evolving.*

Dr Agnes Abuom and George Schrock challenged Lederach to develop a Monitoring and Evaluation tool more suitable to peace programmes than the one originally defined to evaluate development efforts. Lederach, says Agnes Abuom, developed such a tool, indicating that as the reasoning around the People to People developed, developed also theoretical tools and evaluating tools provided by external peace theoreticians and practitioners.
Emmanuel LoWilla, who we have already heard on the issue of the gradual elaboration of the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People, refers to the contribution of Lederach to such a ‘framework’:

*But also you could think about Lederach’s triangle whereby you think, whereby he talks about the bigger part of people, about the majority is the grassroots, and you can have part of the people who are also in the middle who have connection to the top and connection to the grassroots that you could prevent it as spoilers, engage them into peace process. So I think it was a mixture of all those theories fused together.*

The elaboration of Lederach and the pyramid he draws help actors in the NSCC to define and better understand the role of the grassroots level in the People to People as well as the role of middle-range actors, namely religious leaders who connect the top leadership to the base and are in the position, says LoWilla, to involve in the peace process potential spoilers. LoWilla confirms that the ideas of Lederach contributed to the ‘framework’. At the same time, he states once again that the development of the ‘framework’ was in itself a process:

*I am not sure whether it was necessarily structured, I don’t know whether it was necessarily structured, but it was sort of spontaneous but that we used different peace theories and different methods and eventually when it worked with Wunlit it was applied in subsequent meetings.*

What was found as giving positive results would be applied at subsequent meetings and would become part of the ‘framework’. The ‘framework’ in this respect, is also a *memorandum* of good practice and lessons learned.

2.3.1.2. Option two: there was no influence of the ideas of Lederach

Anonymous 3 excludes that in designing the process, actors were influenced by the ideas of Lederach:

*There was no influence of John Paul Lederach. Lederach has become a big name in the peace fraternity, and so you seem to be smart if you invoke his name.*

According to Anonymous 3, given the popularity of Lederach among peace practitioners, referring to his work is more an attempt at showing competence and knowledge of the related literature than proof of the impact of his ideas on the People to People.

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706 See Chapter 10
2.3.1.3. Option three: a resonance between the work of Lederach and the ideas that inspired and supported the People to People was discovered at a later stage

Anonymous 4 indicates that once he got an understanding of the ideas proposed by Lederach, he interpreted them in terms of People to People or grassroots peace approaches:

I know Lederach, I thought this is, and I think that translates into People to People Peace Process, yes, peace at the grassroots and that was the approach.

John Ashworth is explicit about the fact that he was not aware of the ideas proposed by Lederach at the time the People to People was conducted. John Ashworth is in fact convinced that none of the key actors and staff in the NSCC would consciously apply the ideas of Lederach to the process:

it [the work of Lederach] was not known at all. I had never heard of them, none of us had. I mean he wrote his major book in 1995, now we were already beginning the process in 1997 was when it really started, I mean we were already beginning that process, we had never heard of him, we had never heard of his ideas. His name first came in South Sudan at least in Catholic circles, in the Caritas peace manual which was published in 2002.

Only at a later stage, says John Ashworth, resemblances were noted between the ideas supporting the People to People and the main ideas proposed by Lederach:

You see, if you go back to the Lederach thing, I wasn’t even looking for it, I am very clear we knew nothing about it at that time, I wasn’t looking for it, but years later when I became aware of Lederach and I read his books I mean it just kept ringing bells, this is perfect, this is exactly what we did. Now if you had asked me five years ago: “Is it this what you were doing?” I would have said “No”, but now when I read it in hindsight I can say “This is what we did”.

In hindsight, John Ashworth discovers significant resonances between the principles that lead the People to People and the ideas elaborated and shared by Lederach. But is this resonance fortuitous? As we have seen in Chapter 10, and as confirmed by interviewees, actors in the People to People and staff in the SCC and NSCC were exposed to extensive training on peacebuilding by practitioners who were working closely with Lederach.
2.3.1.4. Option four: an indirect influence of Lederach

John Ashworth, as we have seen, is clear about the fact that he was not aware of the work of Lederach at the time the People to People was conducted. Still, he refers to the role of Hizkias Assefa, whom Ashworth links to the Sudan Working Group, Harold Miller and the staff of the NSCC:

I won’t say we were aware of no peace literature, because Assefa had tried, he was not right at the centre, he was on the margins of it through the Sudan Working Group in Nairobi, with Harold Miller, and of course Harold was aware of some of this.

By the end of the 1990s, several workshops on peacebuilding had been conducted in Nairobi. Prof. Hizkias Assefa who was in close contact with the Central Committee of the Mennonites, was one of the facilitators of those workshops to which NSCC staff would participate. In other words, by the end of the 1990s, NSCC was being exposed to the ideas of Lederach through training. This information is confirmed both by John Ashworth and by Anonymous 4, staff of the SCC, who tells about training events in Nairobi organised by the Mennonite Central Committee:

because when we used to go to Nairobi, I used to go to Nairobi to these peacebuilding workshops and the Mennonite Central Committee had a program in Nairobi... Before Wunlit, by far before Wunlit
Q: So the staff of NSCC, at least you, were receiving training in Nairobi by the Mennonites.
A: Yes, the Mennonite Committee, Central Committee, and I got these theories of peace building there.

While an indirect influence of the work of Lederach on the actors of the People to People through theoreticians and trainers who were close to the Mennonite Central Committee, the Eastern Mennonite University and Lederach cannot be excluded, it is also possible to assume that Lederach was one among several people in Mennonite circles who was developing such ideas, and that it was possible to be aware of and even apply ideas and methods of grassroots peacebuilding without necessarily relating them to Lederach. This opinion is expressed by William Lowrey:

I know John Paul, ... I don’t have in my mind when some of his things were written, but in my own PhD work I was studying, you know, various peacemaking processes, and John Paul would have been one of those that I read and I had some interaction with Eastern Mennonite so those ideas were all just circulating in the peacemaking community, but I am not sure on the dates of his books, you know as to whether there was a, what

707 Harold Miller, a Mennonite from North America who has worked for decades in East Africa as an ecumenical partner and staff in the SCC and AACC, was another important connector between the Mennonite Central Committee, the AACC, the Sudan Working Group and the NSCC
he had published, by that time, you might have that ... But I was quite familiar with his, as well as with other just the peacemaking community and the thinking about peacemaking, because that was my field of study.

Lederach’s elaboration was known among peace practitioners related to the Eastern Mennonite University. William Lowrey specifically refers to Lederach’s ‘elicitive approach’ and the influence it played on Lowrey’s work as it resonated with the people to people grassroots approach observed in Akobo:

Q: In any case, you were aware of, you knew core concepts of Lederach’s thought
A: Ja, and I would think that one of the probably key influences ... he created this language, ... ‘elicitive approach’ to peacemaking. So you elicit from the people the starting point, rather than having a top down approach to peacemaking, and so he gave that label to it and for a number of years that was a primary language that was being discussed in particularly communal peacemaking, and so I know that that was influential for me because I loved that language and it fit perfectly with what I believed, that you needed to start with the people rather than start with the top antagonists, and find out from the people what is the way that they resolve conflicts.

William Lowrey relates the focus on the people and on peace resources developed and employed by the people, to ideas that either were elaborated by Lederach or were circulating in those environments in which Lederach was active. Lowrey agrees with the idea of resonances between ideas popularised by Lederach and what was being implemented in Southern Sudan:

Q: So could we say that there was a kind of resonance between what you were anyway experiencing because you were engaged in Akobo and grassroots peacebuilding, and the ideas of Lederach, in a way the two were resonating with each other without having to say that Lederach directly influenced the way the People to People was designed?
A: I think that is probably the most accurate way of saying it, yes.

In the opinion of Anonymous 2, such a resonance is created by the very essence of traditional methods of conflict resolution, which are grassroots and based on community relations:

The principles of Lederach are basic, they were already there in African Traditions. ... From the Ground Up is People to People. ... Lederach sees peace as relational.
Anonymous 2 confirms that there is a clear correspondence between traditional methods of conflict resolution focusing on the broad involvement of people, and Lederach’s elaboration on grassroots peacebuilding as recorded in his *From the Ground Up*.708

The way Lederach refers to his cooperation with actors in Nairobi, as we have seen in Chapter 10, helps to understand the multiplicity of perspectives about his influence on the People to People as well as resonances between Lederach’s theory and the practice of the People to People.

3. Conclusions

The publication of *Building Hope for Peace in South Sudan* aims at sharing insights on religious, grassroots peacebuilding, on the potential of indigenous cultural and religious resources and on inclusive participation. The aim of the publication is to make it possible to apply lessons learned through the People to People to other contexts. In this respect, elaboration around the ‘framework’ of the People to People aims at both theorisation and generalisation.

The perceived compatibility of traditional culture and religion on the one hand, and Christianity on the other, is at the basis of the synthesis produced in the ‘framework’ of the People to People. In the course of this work, I claim that this compatibility is also due to the fact that Christian theology in the context of Southern Sudan at war was already inculturated, in other words, had already developed in relation to key elements of Traditional religion and culture. Dinka songs sung at People to People events – a traditional tool conveying a Christian content in order to achieve peace – convey also an inculturated theology of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding in the frame of the People to People highlights the inculturated character of contextual theology in Southern Sudan.

In the theology that develops in the context of Southern Sudan at war, ‘peace’ is considered a key biblical concept, a hermeneutical key to interpret the scriptures and a foremost prescription for Christians. Contextual theology in Southern Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s is to a large extent a contextual theology of peace.

One premise of the reflection behind the ‘framework’ and recorded in *Building Peace* is that peace engagement in the frame of the People to People was supported by religious beliefs, and it was effective exactly because it was supported by religious beliefs. This is in my opinion one lesson to be applied in the context of South Sudan still at war: religious peacebuilding capitalising on both traditional and Christian resources, has the potential to mobilise for effective peace work.

708 Sampson, Cynthia and John Paul Lederach (eds.), *From the Ground Up*
Another important lesson gathered from the practice of the People to People and recorded in the ‘framework’ is that, in order to be effective, peacebuilding has to capitalise on the experiences and meaningful practices of people involved, in other words it has to be contextual. In the frame of the People to People, a contextual theology contributes to contextual peacebuilding.

Another core principle of the People to People is its focus on the people, on the agency of the people, and full involvement of the people. People to People is inclusive peacebuilding at the community level. Also in this respect, peacebuilding theory is supported by religious perspectives, both Traditional and Christian, both thematising focus on the people and inclusive participation. Women’s contribution was crucial to the success of the People to People.

While local, indigenous resources, both religious and cultural, are of great importance, the People to People also owes its success to the contribution of external actors who saw that the potential of traditional resources for peace could be increased in combination with ‘modern’ insights, such as conflict analysis and contributions from theories and practices developed abroad. At the same time, while the People to People was conducted, it contributed to the theoretical reflection around grassroots peacebuilding carried abroad (Lederach). The success of the People to People is due to a fortunate synthesis of traditional, Christian and modern theories and practices, as well as to the interaction among internal and external actors and factors.

The holistic concept of peace, both Traditional and Judeo-Christian, in which peace is understood as integrity of relations with self, community, God and the universe, is also an important religious contribution to secular peacebuilding efforts. Religious peacebuilding in the context of Southern Sudan, linking reconciliation and peace, contributes to extending the definition of peace. The example of the People to People furthermore indicates that religious resources can also significantly contribute to models of restorative justice.
12. Perspectives on inculturation I: different attitudes towards the coexistence of Traditional rituals and Christian beliefs at People to People events

1. Introduction

How did participants react to the fact that Traditional rituals were performed at conferences organised and facilitated by ecumenical networks and their member churches, attended by Christians as well as Traditionalists? What kind of theological reflections were prompted by the coexistence of Traditional rituals and Christian beliefs at Wunlit and other People to People events?

Interview material indicates that participants reacted in different ways to the performance of Traditional rituals at People to People events, and that different reactions were to a certain degree related to confessional and denominational identities. While Catholics were generally more open both to Traditional rituals and to attempts at the inculturation of the Christian message, namely the elaboration and communication of the Christian message in categories and images organic to traditional culture and religion, Protestants, in general, resisted and in some instances opposed the performance of ritual expressions of Traditional religion.
As performing Traditional rituals was considered an unmissable step in the process towards achieving and maintaining peace, even by those who in principle would oppose their performance, theological elaboration around the articulation of Traditional Religion and Christian theology was deemed necessary and was, as we will see, conducted.

In the course of this chapter, I will present five positions and related elements of theological elaboration prompted by the intersection of Traditional ritual and Christian faith at People to People events. I will also look at the issues of syncretism, dual faith systems and inter-religious cooperation to see which interpretative categories are most suited to understand and define the religious practices of different groups of Christians attending or maintaining Traditional practices.

2. The five groups

On the basis of interview material and the reactions of participants to the performance of Traditional rituals, primarily the slaughtering of the white bull at Wunlit and other People to People events, I have identified five main groups of participants that I have categorised in the following way: the Traditionalists; the conservative Christians; the ‘in-betweens’; Christians respectful of other traditions; and finally those ready to review theology in light of tradition.

2.1. The Traditionalists

Literature indicates that Christianity had spread widely in Southern Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s.\(^709\) Still, from interview material it emerges that many of the participants in Wunlit, mainly from Upper Nile and Western Bahr al Ghazal, had remained adherents of Traditional Religion.\(^710\)

Rev. Peter Gai, Nuer and Presbyterian, among other interviewees, confirms that there was a consistent number of Traditionalists at Wunlit as well as at other People to People events. Rev. Gai further elaborates on the fact that in order to involve local communities in a durable peace and reconciliation process, it was necessary to perform Traditional reconciliation rituals, rituals that had the power to hold participants accountable to the peace agreement achieved:

> The convenient thing is that people were not in one category ... these animists are the people who have other religion which cannot be ignored because for example the traditional way of solving problems they thought that it is the only way we can help them, that’s why they were even given chance so that they can also not only feel as part of the process, part of the solution of the problem, but also they feel that they are involved because

\(^709\) See Chapter 9

\(^710\) See Hutchinson, Sharon, _Nuer Dilemma_, p. 38, on the greater religious conservatism and cultural stability of Nuer on the West Bank of the Nile
they are also stakeholders and they are part and parcel of this conflict ... That is why in Wunlit the traditional leaders were involved, because they feel that they are part of that resolution.

Rev. Peter Gai sees positively the variety of religious stands at Wunlit and other People to People events. Rev. Gai further refers to the far-sightedness of the organisers and facilitators of Wunlit (staff in the NSCC), who saw the importance of letting people at the community level and Traditionalists perform Traditional rituals, not only for them to consider the peace agreement binding, but also to empower people at the grassroots level to feel part of the solution as much as they had been responsible for the conflict in the first place.

Rev. Gai considers and defines the plurality of religious stands at Wunlit “convenient”. Does he imply that the presence of Traditionalists created space for the performance of Traditional rituals to which Christians, otherwise reticent, could conveniently openly participate? Whether this is what Rev. Gai implied, this point is raised by other interviewees. We will see in the course of this chapter how several Christians would consider the performance of Traditional reconciliation rituals as holding a binding force – binding both people to the peace oath and people to each other – unmatched by any other Christian practice.

Traditionalists obviously would not object to the performance of Traditional rituals at People to People events. Would they also welcome the celebration of Christian worship? In other words, what was the attitude of Traditionalists towards the coexistence of Traditional and Christian element at People to People events? According to Anglican Bishop Enoch Tombe, the coexistence of different religious traditions did not pose a problem to Traditionalists:

\[
\text{in African Traditional Religion they believe that you can reach God through the ancestors, so in terms of the divine it is just the same [God], the same person, some of them think that you can use another route than the only one which is the official one which is Jesus Christ, so for the late [the Traditionalists] I think they would have not minded about, whether you go through this route or you use another one because it is God we are worshipping, but then, of course, for the theologians, you know, Hebrew 10,10, there is only one sacrifice, once for all, so you cannot come again with your own sacrifice.}
\]

Traditionalists, says Bishop Tombe, are open to the possibility of approaching God in different ways: God can be approached by Christians through Jesus Christ in the same way as God is approached through the ancestors by Traditionalists. For Traditionalists, the coexistence of different religious traditions and rituals at Wunlit would have not posed any problem. The problem, says

\[\text{See Chapter 8}\]
Bishop Tombe, was felt by Christians who had an exclusive understanding of the means through which God can be approached, namely Christ sacrificed once for all (Hebrews 10,10). For the Christians Bishop Tombe refers to, performing Traditional sacrifice would be equal to questioning the ‘once for all’ validity of the sacrifice of Christ.

2.2. The conservative Christians

Interview material indicates that several among the Christian participants would resist the articulation of Traditional ritual and Christian worship at People to People events, and more generally an articulation of Traditional Religion and Christian faith. Interview material also indicates that differences of positions often followed confessional and denomination lines. While Catholics are considered to be the most open towards the inculturation of the Christian message, Protestants emerge as generally more conservative. Among the Protestants, evangelicals seem to be the most resistant to the coexistence of Traditional and Christian elements.

Rev. Mathiang Deng confirms what has been expressed by Bishop Paul in the previous chapter, namely that Traditional rituals of conflict resolution and peacemaking at meetings attended by Christians were not a novelty at Wunlit nor at the preparatory meetings leading to W unlit (Lokichoggio and the exchange visits in Thiet and Leer). Already at the Lou-Jikany conference held in Akobo in 1994 (see Chapter 7), Christians had been involved in Traditional peace rituals:

*In Akobo, which I told you, in 1994 it was done also the traditional way. Although sometime the church people, the pastors were hesitating to attend when they were making those sacrifices. But I witnessed it, seeing what they are doing, since people have a conviction and belief in that, we are not just opposing it.*

Already in Akobo some pastors and church people had expressed their resistance towards the performance of Traditional rituals. Being a participant in Akobo, Rev. Mathiang Deng could witness that even the most resistant pastors eventually agreed to participate, recognising that the performance of those rituals was an important expression of the religious beliefs of most participants and a necessary step to achieve peace.

2.2.1. Compromise

According to Bishop Enoch Tombe, those Christians who would have in principle opposed the performance of Traditional rituals eventually compromised on the basis of contextual considerations:
I have mentioned that you have the context which you cannot do anything about, you have to work within the context, with the people in that context, we are talking about traditional chiefs, maybe they have even been given Christian names, but they are basically influenced by their beliefs and experiences, their worldview is basically African Traditional Religion, there is no question about it.

In order to understand how Traditional Religion and Christian faith intersect in the frame of the People to People, and in order to understand conditions and implications of such intersections, one has to take into consideration the context, historical, cultural, religious, social and political, of such intersections. Church leaders, albeit reluctantly, had to acknowledge the contextual conditions, in other words the demands posed by the context on the encounter of Traditional Religion and Christian faith, says Bishop Tombe, and had to make choices that would consider people living and moving in that context in order to be effective in that specific context. Among such people, Bishop Tombe mentions Traditional chiefs. The fact that such chiefs might have received Christian names indicates that they had been exposed to Christianity, or that they were nominal Christians. They nevertheless retained Traditional beliefs and an African traditional worldview intertwined with religious beliefs, and such a worldview and beliefs conditioned their experiences. Here, Bishop Tombe provides ground to my assumption that, in the frame of the People to People, not only theological reflection was contextual, but also approaches to peacebuilding and the way religion supported peacebuilding activities.

Bishop Tombe further elaborates on the causes of the superficial adherence to Christianity among communities in Southern Sudan:

the gospel is still a message which is coming to this context, it is about hundred years, Christianity is about hundred years old, maybe hundred and over now, but at that time it was less then hundred years, so you would not say Christianity had made much impact, even right now are people, including those who are Christian, when they are visiting an area they slaughter a bull and they jump over it, they have no problem with it, although we pastors begin to question if this is really biblical.

It should not surprise that Christian beliefs have only superficially taken root in Southern Sudan, says Bishop Tombe, since Christianity is relatively new to the region. Christianity is not sufficiently rooted, and for this reason, to this day, people who profess Christianity still practice Traditional rituals such as slaughtering bulls and jumping over them in a sign of welcome. While such practices seem to pose little problem to most people, Bishop Tombe refers to pastors for whom this is a problematic coexistence. Some pastors, among them Bishop Tombe, question if such practices - especially animal sacrifice - are compatible with the teachings of the Bible.
How did the pastors Bishop Tombe refers to react to Traditional rituals performed at People to People events? Taking into consideration contextual issues and being unwilling to jeopardise the peace process with their orthodox standpoints, the more conservative pastors had to compromise:

Well, I actually asked John Okumu about this, and I said: “John Okumu, how did you do it? How did they reconcile the slaughtering of that white bull and their own Christian belief?” And he said: “Well, in that context, right? Where the goal is reconciliation, you can say they just simply closed their eyes, they swallowed it, tolerated the practice”, because we are talking about diversity here, so you allow each party to express themselves in the way they think is best, then the church comes next to it, but it is very difficult.

Rev. John Okumu was staff of the NSCC at the time of Wunlit. The answer Rev. John Okumu provides and that Bishop Tombe seems to accept, is that in the context of Southern Sudan marked by war, the goal of peace determines and conditions stands and choices, including theological choices. In a context of war and with the urgent goal of peace in mind, even reluctant pastors compromised, swallowed the intersection of Traditional and Christian practices, postponed discussions about the compatibility or not of such practices with the teachings of the Bible, because questioning such mixed practices at peace events might have sounded like not respecting the culture and tradition of the people involved, would have undermined their participation and compromised the outcome of the peace process. In the context of war, with the goal of peace and reconciliation in mind, pastors such as Bishop Tombe, had to compromise.

2.2.2. Confessional differences

John Ashworth provides information about the different reactions of Catholics and Protestants to the coexistence of Traditional and Christian elements at People to People events:

Q: How do you see that being side-by-side of African Traditional Religion and Christianity at People to People events?

A: It was controversial. It was more controversial for the Protestant churches than it was for the Catholic Church. Bishop Cesar Mazzolari was the Catholic who was most involved in the Wunlit Conference although Paride Taban was also very much involved in the broader process. And they had no problem with it, no problem at all, they didn’t see any contradiction or any clash really. Some of the Protestant churches really did see a contradiction and for some of them it was very hard to accept this, I am not sure actually how they finally justified it in their minds. Some I think just refused to participate in that part of it [the sacrifice of the white bull].

Highly profiled Catholics church leaders such as Bishops Mazzalari and Bishop Paride Taban therefore had a positive attitude to the performance of Traditional rituals at Wunlit and other events.
Protestants, on the other hand, did see a contradiction and, according to John Ashworth, even refused to participate in the sacrifice of the white bull. As to how, in the words of John Ashworth, some pastors eventually theologically justified their participation in the ritual slaughtering, the answer is provided by William Lowrey, as we will see in the course of this chapter and the next.

Also, Dr Agnes Abuom refers to the differences between Catholics and Protestants, not only among the Southern Sudanese but also among partners from the neighbouring countries:

\[\textit{Of course Kenya and Uganda protesters, mainly Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, found it a bit difficult to understand, but after the African Synod, the Catholic African Synod had emphasised inculturation, and knowing that NSCC hosted both Catholics and Protestants, it was, people did not pay too much attention, but it was a bit of a surprise, and to tell you the truth, it continued to be much more a surprise how in the SudanTraditional rituals coexist with Christianity compared to Uganda and Kenya.}\]

Protestant partners from neighbouring countries found it difficult to understand the level of coexistence of Traditional and Christian practices both in Southern Sudan and at People to People events. The coexistence of different religious practices is defined by Dr Abuom as an issue of inculturation, and Catholics are seen as better prepared and more open to the inculturation of the Christian message, especially after the Catholic African Synod.\footnote{The first Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was held in 1994. The final document, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, was issued by Pope John Paul II in 1995} Given the fact that the NSCC was ecumenical and that Catholics were full members and played a major role in it (Bishop Paride Taban was one of the founders of the NSCC), and knowing that Catholics were open to inculturation, the coexistence of different practices was eventually also accepted by Protestants in the name of ecumenical cooperation.

The extent to which Traditional Religion and Christianity coexist in Southern Sudan is not comparable, says Dr Abuom, to the situation in Kenya:

\[\textit{Not really, you cannot compare because protestant Christians here [Kenya] have been very strong in separating because of the strong mission traditions, so I know that when we had the Sudan visits with some church leaders from here, they were shocked to learn that in an Anglican church you can have a lay reader and that is a parish council leader, having been polygamous, I mean official, so things like those were a bit of a surprise to us.}\]

The fact that men occupying official positions in the church could be openly polygamous was highly surprising for Kenyan church leaders. Dr Abuom traces a link between the stricter stand against such mixtures and a stronger foreign missionary presence in Kenya. This quote, in line with
literature on the spread of Christianity in Southern Sudan,\textsuperscript{713} supports the following conclusion, namely that the more widely accepted coexistence of Traditional and Christian practices in Southern Sudan was due to a less dominant presence of foreign missionaries, and, accordingly, the lower the level of (Protestant) missionary influence, the higher the chances of inculturation of the Christian message. Still, according to Agnes Abuom, because of the reality of war and the urgent need to achieve peace, issues of inculturation that might have been considered problematic by Protestants both in Southern Sudan and in neighbouring countries, were set aside:

\textit{but I think because of the nature of the war and the suffering, the churches didn’t pay so much attention to the inculturation issue. I think they were more focusing on the peace, the peaceful coexistence or the reconciliation of these communities. But it is something that I think is much stronger in Sudan than in the other countries.}

Another way of looking at the fact that the issue of inculturation was subordinated to the goal of achieving peace is to say that inculturation, tolerated or accepted as it was, became a tool used to achieve peace, and became a precondition in the process to achieve peace. Achieving reconciliation and peace among conflicting communities among which many were Traditionalists, required an inculturated Christian message.

Bishop Paul, an Anglican, further articulates confessional and denominational differences. The fact that Anglicans generally are more reluctant than Catholics toward Traditional Religion and sacrifices is due to the influence of Pentecostalism on the Anglican Church in those years in which a new Revival got a foothold in Southern Sudan.\textsuperscript{714} With Pentecostals, Anglicans share a wary attitude toward Traditional Religion and, accordingly, toward the encounter between Traditional Religion and Christian faith. Still, the reference to Pentecostal influences does not minimise the role foreign Anglican missionaries played in the early 1900s:

\textit{I don’t do it, but I don’t mind attending it. I would eat the meat after it. … There are different attitudes. For the Catholics it is less problematic to be part of Traditional sacrifices. It is more difficult for the Anglicans. It is a consequence of the spread of Christianity during the war. The new Revival groups were also Pentecostal. The Anglicans are more similar to Pentecostals and it is not good for them [to participate in Traditional rituals]. The Pentecostal influence made it difficult to accept this encounter of Traditional and Christian. But also the old Episcopal missionaries were not open to the encounter.}

Bishop Paul, nevertheless, is open to participation in Traditional rituals.

\textsuperscript{713} See Chapter 9

\textsuperscript{714} See Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, \textit{Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment}
2.2.3. Coexistence or mixture?

Bishop Dau, a Pentecostal, confirms that, among the Protestants, the evangelicals were the ones who resisted most the coexistence of elements:

Q: How do you see the articulation of African Traditional Religion in the Dinka and Nuer tradition and Christianity at People to People events?
A: Well quite mixed, and I think that in evangelical circles that would cause what is called syncretism which is rejected by others because you don’t mix the gospel with it.

Evangelicals would interpret such an articulation of Traditional and Christian elements as a mixture of different religious practices and meanings, would understand it as syncretism and as such they did reject it.

The same point is expressed by Rev. Samuel Kobia:

Yes, there was actually a mixture, especially among the church leaders ... there were those who considered that approach of slaughtering the bull, offering Traditional prayers and then Christian as syncretism and they were not very much comfortable with that.

The fact that Traditional rituals, as well as Traditional and Christian prayers were performed at the same event, was uncomfortably perceived as syncretism by some of the church leaders. I will return to the issue of the presumed syncretistic character of rituals performed at Wunlit and other People to People events in the course of this chapter.

2.2.4. A theological solution to the dilemma

Articulating and elaborating around the intersection of Traditional Religion and Christian theologies at People to People events was a considerable theological challenge, in fact, in the words of William Lowrey, the biggest theological challenge:

Now the biggest theological challenge that we had was that many of the Christians had become Christians from a Traditional Religion standpoint, and many of them had had a dramatic conversion experience and some had even had ceremonies where they would burn fetishes or some might call them idols and putting away the Traditional Religion as they embraced Christianity. And as a result of that, many of the rituals of Traditional Religion and traditional culture were also put away in becoming Christians.
Such articulation of Traditional and Christian rituals was most difficult for those who had moved from Traditional Religion to Christian faith through an intense process of conversion.\textsuperscript{715} In Chapter 9, I have referred to the emotional disavowing of the \textit{jaak} that accompanied the feeling of being abandoned by Traditional divinities, and the ensuing dramatic destruction of religious artefacts and shrines by Christian converts. Those who had been through such dramatic experiences of conversion and radical rejection of Traditional divinities, were understandably against any trespassing into Traditional Religion and celebration of Traditional rituals.

The Christians William Lowrey is referring to, would respect traditional leaders but would resist participating in Traditional rituals:

\textit{And so, while they would respect and interact with chiefs, they had a disdain for all those Traditional rituals, and so that became a real key-point of contention because part of the traditional peacemaking process is the use of rituals in both initiating peace processes as well as sealing them at the end.}

While the reasons some Christian converts would reject and refuse to participate in Traditional rituals were understandable, their refusal to take part in rituals aiming at achieving and sealing the peace agreement would have been detrimental to the outcome of the peace process. Therefore, the issue of an understanding of Traditional rituals from a Christian perspective became what William Lowrey calls a key-point of contention.

Would Christian peace sealing rituals have been an acceptable alternative to Traditional rituals? Already at the Lokichoggio chief meeting in 1998, the meeting where traditional leaders agreed to take part in a People to People Peacemaking Process, the idea was launched to perform a Christian ritual to celebrate the agreement there achieved. William Lowrey recalls:

\textit{At Loki when we came to a resolution of their reconciling with each other these key leaders, and wanted to have at the end a brief ceremony of that, one of the ideas that came up was to use a passage from Psalms which talks about breaking the bow and shattering the spear, and the idea was to actually have someone read that psalm and have someone break a bow or a spear, and one of the church leaders that happened to be Catholic but it could have been any of them, said that he was very nervous about that because he was not sure whether his bishop over him would agree to have any kind of ritual like that ... that was a little bit of a surprise to me that it seemed like a simple little ritual, I mean it was nothing as profound as sacrificing a bull, but that is when I discovered that even the smallest kind of ritual might bring up issues with the churches.}

\textsuperscript{715} On the psychology of religious conversion see James, William, \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature}, Longmans, New York, 1902
Even a biblically-inspired ritual raised concerns, in that case by a Catholic church leader, despite the generally open attitude of Catholics towards exercises at inculturation.

Lowrey is clear about the fact that such discomfort with Traditional ritual was a consequence of the impact of the foreign missionary enterprise:

now I am also, you know, theologically trained as a Christian, so I understood their theology, but also what had happened is they had created, the missionizing effect had created a vacuum where all rituals were given up but new ones were not brought in place.

Foreign missionaries with a negative and diminishing attitude towards local culture and religion had instilled aversion in new converts towards Traditional rituals, but had failed to replace Traditional rituals with new Christian ones, leaving in this way a vacuum in the spiritual and moral perceptions and needs of new converts. An alternative theological perspective was required in order to see and understand Traditional rituals, generally for the benefit of Christians and particularly, in the context we are here examining, for participants at People to People events:

and there was not a theology of how to view old rituals, and so there is just a real anxiety on that, and as a result, that became a key role that I needed to play, was to work with church leaders to help them respect the traditional leaders that they didn’t have to embrace their theology, but they needed to recognize, they would need to make use of their rituals and symbols in order for them to seal the peace and the church leaders could use their own rituals and symbols for their sealing of the peace. ... So it was a way of preparing the Christians to deal with the closing process which would include the sacrifice of mabior.

Given the anxiety, in the words of Lowrey, experienced by some participants, or the discomfort caused by participating in rituals that were considered incompatible with the new Christian faith, William Lowrey felt he had a key role to play in helping pastors to fully respect traditional leaders, their theology and to accept that it was necessary for Traditionalists to perform their rituals in order to achieve peace. We will see in the next chapter what type of theological perspectives and keys for interpreting and relating to Traditional rituals William Lowrey offered at Wunlit in order to help Christians to deal with their religious dilemmas and participate in the closing ritual slaughtering of the white bull.

Attitudes, as mentioned, varied among participants. William Lowrey continues:

Now it did not mean that all the church leaders had this as an issue, but there was a nervousness among church leaders about going in that direction, and if others had problems with it, the others would be leery of getting into it, and I think it varied a great deal.
Still, even if only a minority was reticent about participating in rituals (both Traditional and Christian), they might have influenced a larger group of church people and consequently jeopardised the peace process. For this reason, it was urgent to address the issue theologically.

Between Lokichoggio and Wunlit, two chief exchange visits took place, as mentioned, in Thiet and Leer (see Chapter 7). Most of the participants were traditional leaders, says William Lowrey, but the meetings were attended and even hosted, as in the case of the Leer meeting, by church people and their leaders. A number of Traditional rituals were celebrated, and this did not cause negative reactions:

> when we did the chiefs exchange visits prior to the Wunlit conference, and that was mostly chiefs being exchanged, but there were also a few church leaders present, and there were a number of rituals that were used in that, and that caused not stirring whatsoever, and in fact when we went back to Leer for the second part of that exchange visit, ... that began with traditional leaders killing a bull that we all stepped over, you know, cutting the throat of the bull and we all stepped over it and then it went to celebration time and then there was the washing of feet which was done by the church leaders. So clearly they were linking Traditional rituals and their own church rituals together in that process and I never heard any indication of that being a theological problem.

In Leer, the Traditional slaughtering of the white bull was followed by the Christian washing of feet. As William Lowrey reports, Traditional and Christian rituals were linked in Leer, and that initiative was well received by participants.

Foot washing in the Leer chief exchange visit is presented by William Lowrey as a Christian correspondent to Traditional ritual. It might be worth noting that ritual foot washing symbolising welcoming and wishing peace, is also Traditional in the South Sudanese context. As a ritual with both Traditional and Christian connotations, it could to some extent have satisfied the need felt by Southern Sudanese, both Traditionalists and Christians, for ritual, it could have also functioned as an element of connection between the two religious traditions. Still, with its symbolism of hospitality, humility and service, it would not have been sufficient to motivate and sustain a peace deal. Even for Christians, as we will see in the course of this chapter, the Traditional ritual slaughtering of the white bull maintained the exclusive power of holding a peace oath binding.

2.3. The ‘in-betweens’

While the group we have just examined, those I categorised as the conservative Christians, were uncomfortable with the coexistence of Traditional rituals and Christian worship at People to People events, interview material indicates that there were people who would not perceive such
coexistence as problematic, as they were used in their religious practice to move in and out of Traditional Religion and Christian faith. I have categorised this group of people as the ‘in-betweens’.

Anonymous 4 voices his perceptions about the religious allegiance of people attending Wunlit. According to Anonymous 4, the phenomenon of practicing both Traditional Religion and Christianity was (and is) spread in Southern Sudan. Few people would practice Christianity exclusively. Such a phenomenon, says Anonymous 4, is most evident among pastoralist communities, and therefore among the Dinka and the Nuer. Several of the participants in Wunlit, mainly Dinka and Nuer, would fall in the category of people practicing both Traditional Religion and Christianity:

*Generally speaking in some of our communities or in many of our communities the Christian faith has not replaced the traditions completely and therefore Christianity as religion runs parallel in some communities with traditions. There are very few communities and very few members in the communities who would want to stick to the Christian faith without again going back to the traditions. And I have felt that most of the people and most of the pastors who attended Wunlit, most of the pastors attending Wunlit were mostly from the pastoralist communities and in our own context the pastoralists are those communities that actually run [Christian] religion together with traditions.*

Anonymous 4 therefore provides interesting perspectives about the identity of participants at Wunlit: among Christians, the majority would be ‘in-betweens’, people with a double religious identity.

The same opinion is expressed by William Lowrey:

*most of the Christian people actually kind of flow in and out of Traditional and Christian, and they would have participated in eating the meat and just as they would participate in the celebration around mabior.*

In the following quotation, Bishop Enoch Tombe describes his reaction in an instance in which Traditional sacrifice was going to be performed in his honour by church people. It is not strictly related to participants in Wunlit, but was provided in the course of the interview as an example of Christians, such as those attending Wunlit and other People to People events, who would practice both Christianity and Traditional rituals:

*Immediately I took my Bible out and I started reading, and this happened to be a lay reader from the Catholic church ... you can only do one sacrifice, that is the one that should be done, not this one and even your little sacrifice is not a match to the one of Jesus. So there is that problem of our tradition because it has become a*
tradition, they don’t see any problem, they do it and go to the church and they take the Holy Communion no problem with it, it is another tradition. So we talk about diversity here, but I am saying as theologians we shouldn’t do it, we should challenge it.

Traditions coexist, are followed side by side without big dilemmas, according to Bishop Tombe. This coexistence of different religious practices is considered by the Bishop a problem that should be suitably addressed and challenged by theologians:

So, as I said, in contexts where you are in a transition, you see Christianity and African Tradition side-by-side, probably in the long run we might see more of Christianity as we teach, if you do the discipling, because another thing we just baptise people and we assume when they read the Bible they will understand. No, we have to do discipling so that people know what do they believe and how do they live as African Christians ... we have still to do it in Africa, how to live as African Christians, it is a challenge.

The context of Southern Sudan is considered by Bishop Tombe as a context in transition from Traditional Religion to Christianity, and in such a phase of transition can be observed the coexistence of different religious practices by recent converts. For Bishop Tombe this seems to be an issue of time. More time is required for Christianity to become rooted in the context of South Sudan, a time that should be employed doing what Bishop Tombe calls ‘discipling’, witnessing and teaching Christian theology. In the process of mass conversion to Christianity in Southern Sudan, people were often baptised shortly after they had been exposed to the Christian message with little if any biblical and theological training.

Bishop Tombe raises the important issue about what to believe, what is the content of Christian faith, as well as how to live out such faith as people who are fully African and Christian. This is to my understanding the core of the issue of inculturation of the Christian message in Africa: how to maintain an African identity, acquire a Christian identity and remain able to articulate the two in a way that does not compromise the integrity of either of them. For Bishop Tombe this is a challenge, in my opinion a challenge that became further evident in the context of the People to People Peacemaking Process where the urgency to achieve peace forced a reflection on the intersection of Christian theology and Traditional Religion and culture.

Also Bishop Dau addresses the issue of people moving between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. A connecting element between the two religious allegiances is belief in God who is One and over all:

but here, so that you can penetrate if you like the deep thoughts of the people to reach their emotional level and their heart level, if you like, it had to be like that, and of course when people came and they prayed they
In the context of Southern Sudan and in the case of recent converts to Christianity, a common Traditional and Christian understanding of God facilitates double allegiance and moving between the two religious traditions. Traditional rituals were performed in W unlit, says Bishop Dau, to reach both the deep thoughts of people and their hearts, to engage them both intellectually and emotionally, and in this way involve them in the peace and reconciliation process.

Dr Dau moves forward in his theological analysis of double allegiance. He takes into consideration both the positive and negative sides:

_They moved quite freely, and that is both good and also bad. It is good in the sense that it provides a connection between your Christian faith and where you come from, your background, it is bad also in the sense that sometimes you cannot tell the difference and that can be a quite serious theological problem, the clash between the culture, particularly at crucial times._

The positive side of double allegiance is that people find connecting points, elements of continuity between Traditional Religion and Christianity. One does not need to break completely with his or her religious and cultural past, as well as present cultural and social identity in order to become a Christian. Here, Bishop Dau is outlining an understanding of inculturation where elements of Traditional Religion are either imported into Christianity or translated into Christian elements. In other words, the moving back and forth creates an interface that is an element of contact and continuity between the religious past and present. The integrity of religious experience leads to a sense of integrity of religious and cultural identity.\(^{716}\)

Double religious allegiance can also constitute a problem, says Bishop Dau, when the person who lives in between two religious traditions does not sufficiently grasp the differences between two sets of beliefs and practices. As I will explore at more length when discussing issues of syncretism and double religious allegiance in the course of this chapter, the risk of syncretism is that of mixing different elements and producing a new religious entity that does not preserve the meaning and function of the original ones.\(^ {717}\)

Bishop Dau further refers to a reinterpretation of the meaning and function of Traditional ritual that allows Christians to participate in it for celebration purposes:

\(^{716}\) See the struggle against ‘anthropological pauperization’ leading to elaboration of African theology according to Martey. Martey, Emmanuel, *African Theology*, p. 38

\(^{717}\) See Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 144
the differences that I have made are very important. Traditionally it [the slaughtering of the white bull] was redemptive in the sense that you have to sacrifice for your sins and all of that, but in this sense now people who have become Christian were celebrating, it was celebrating the faith, it was celebrating the peace that is going to come and it was also going to provide food for the people who are attending the conference.

Some of the Christians participating in Traditional ritual, clarifies Bishop Dau, would not interpret it in terms of propitiation or redemption, as in his prime, Traditional significance, but in terms of celebration of their faith, of the intention to achieve peace as well as to seal the peace, and to provide meat for a communal, celebratory meal. In other words, according to Bishop Dau, Christians participating in the slaughtering of the mabior would distinguish between the original religious significance of the ritual for redemption and a new, Christian interpretation of the ritual for celebration. In this frame of understanding, we are no longer talking of ‘in-betweens’ but of a re-elaboration and re-appropriation of a Traditional ritual in a Christian frame of understanding.718

2.4. Respect for other traditions

Rev. James introduces the element of respect to be shown towards people of other faiths than the Christian:

Pastors at the beginning were not in favour of the synthesis. But then they realised that not all are Christian and that they had to respect other traditions before all become Christians.

One way of approaching the issue of the coexistence of different religious practices in the frame of the People to People was that Christians, although awaiting a future where all would be converted, were able to respect Traditionalists. I would define this a respectful inter-religious approach.

Along the same lines, Rev. George Riak, while reaffirming the essence of his faith in the once for all sacrifice of Christ, refers to the need to respect Traditionalists, who are part of the same community:

In Christianity the place of sacrifice has been taken by Jesus Christ. The community is composed by African Traditional Religion believers and we cannot over-right them, we cannot say: “you cannot perform your Traditional rituals”. That would be ridiculous and not be accepted by the community. We don’t want to impose because these are the sources of power traditionally, and we value the community, and we said: “whatever they want to do, sacrificial things, we allow them to do”.

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718 What I have referred to in Chapter 9 as ‘translation’
Christians, says Rev. George, have no rights over Traditionalists, no right to prevent them from performing their own rituals. There is in this approach a sense of respect towards the traditional sources of power, be they traditional leaders or the beliefs and practises that are safeguarded and perpetuated by them. In this approach, there is also a clear sense of respect for the community and for the communitarian life of which Christians are also a part and benefit from.\(^{719}\)

Rev. Peter Gai relates the issue of respect for Traditional Religion by Christians to a specific understanding of inculturation:

> After the expulsion of the missionaries the church was owned by the indigenous Sudanese, the church became their own church. When they become Christians, they become Christians with an African Traditional background, that’s why allowing people to come and slaughter the bull it is the part of respecting even our own way of, our ancestral way of being together, of solving their problem and so on.

The process of indigenisation of the Sudanese churches and inculturation of the Christian message was made possible precisely by the departure of foreign missionaries forcibly expelled from the Country by the Government of Sudan in the early 1960s. Southern Sudanese, finally leaders and in charge of their church, could articulate and express the Christian faith through their own cultural and religious categories.

To slaughter the bull, even by Christians, is according to Rev. Gai a way of acknowledging and respecting an ancestral way of managing conflicts and reinforcing community ties. Respecting African Traditional Religion as Christians means respecting one’s own religious past as well as present identity.

Furthermore, an enterprise of cultural and religious hermeneutics is invoked:

> Even if Christianity is there, if there is something in the community that brings peace we cannot take it as something evil because it is something connected with peace.

If something is related to peace it is good, and if it is good it should be valued by Christians. I draw the conclusion that according to Rev. Gai peace or the potential to create peace can function as a hermeneutical principle to assess the value of Traditional Religion and culture.\(^{720}\)

\(^{719}\) About the communitarian character of Traditional Religion to which I have referred in Chapter 8, see Magesa, *African Religion*, p. 243

\(^{720}\) The issue of the concept of peace as biblical hermeneutical principle has been addressed in Chapter 11
Respect for one’s own religious and cultural past and identity does not mean that one compromises on the content of Christian faith or adherence to the teachings of the Bible, points out Rev. Gai:

Exactly on that you cannot perform as if you are not a Christian, that is why allowing others to perform their sacraments or sacrifices does not include that you compromise the teachings of the Bible. You have the teaching of the Bible, yet you give others to exercise their way of sacrifice to God.

The attitude here envisioned is that of a firm stand in one’s own tradition while respecting others’ tradition which, at the same time, is partly shared.

Rev. Samuel Kobia provides what I would define as a utilitarian explanation of why some church leaders eventually accepted the performance of Traditional rituals. In order to achieve peace, it was important to reach and mobilise people at the grassroots level and resort to traditional methods of conflict resolution. To access both people and traditional methods it was necessary to first involve chiefs and Traditional spiritual leaders:

but I would say, by and large the mainline churches accepted this because they saw the need for bringing on board the Traditional leaders, not only just the chiefs but actually Traditional spiritual leaders, and once it became clear you know in Kejiko, in Wanlit, that this really was not syncretism as such because it did not challenge Christianity, it did not question the role of the faith in Jesus Christ when it came to offering Christian prayers, so I think the differences that existed were not too big and in the end this was acceptable, but theologically there were still some very conservative theologians who did not accept this combination of those approaches.

Participation in Traditional rituals by Christians should not be considered syncretism, says Rev. Kobia, because such participation did not question or affect the content of Christian faith expressed in prayers and worship. Still, as we have seen, the combination of approaches, among which, says Rev. Kobia, the gap was not particularly big, was opposed by those Kobia calls conservative theologians. My assumption is that definitions of syncretism, and therefore the perception of the risk of becoming entangled in it, also varied according to more or less conservative theological standpoints.

The positive effect of Traditional ritual in terms of achieving peace, should be, according to Bishop Paul, a sufficient reason to explore further its meaning and appreciate its impact:

One has to consider the other side of the coin. The potential of traditional practices to bring peace was evident. And if it could work in that way, why not appreciating and understanding this more, getting to
understand it more. If you just come and pray and that slaughtering is not done, for them it is not peace. You want to reconcile the communities. But these communities are also made of Christian people, not only Traditionalists. When we talk about communities that were in conflict, among these communities there were both Traditionalists and Christians. Traditional rituals were also working for Christians.

Christian prayer is not considered powerful enough, not even by Christians, to achieve and maintain peace, says Bishop Paul. Traditional ritual should therefore be better understood and appreciated because of its unmatched potential to realise peace, also among Christians.

2.5. Those open to reviewing theology in light of Traditional practices

The intersection of Christian theology with Traditional Religion and peacebuilding in the frame of the People to People prompted in some actors, as interview material indicates, a process of reflection about the character of Christian faith and theology in the context of Southern Sudan at war (contextualisation), about the character of theology vis-à-vis Traditional Religion and culture (inculturation) and about theology vis-à-vis peacebuilding (a theology of liberation and peace).

Archbishop Paulino of the Catholic Church is in favour of the participation of Christians in Traditional rituals aimed at achieving peace:

Q: What do you think about that combination of peacemaking and Traditional religious elements?
A: That it is in place. I mean myself, now I’m talking to you as an African, a South Sudanese, those are religious elements which ... are of our cultural background, and it is true, there is the issue of these animals, white bulls, black goat or whatever kind of thing it is, it is for us our cultural background.

The Archbishop is well aware of the religious dimension of Traditional rituals. He is in favour of Christians participating in those rituals, as Traditional Religion is strictly related to the cultural background of Christians in South Sudan.

Archbishop Paulino is among those who point to the responsibility of early foreign missionaries in forcing converts to disavow and sever links with their own culture:

I will have to be telling you that even at the beginning of our religious missionary work they did not do very well because they did not understand our cultural background, our cultural religious background and so our good values of our culture which are very important to put that background of Christianity into our lives I think were not well taken because the missionaries are foreign missionaries and they did not understand the cultural religious background, so you see it was good that they were now our Bishops, our South Sudanese, African religious leaders, and allowing this white bull from the cultural background is in place and I think that was really to cement this religious Christian background today. So I think all these things are to me, provided
The idea of inculturation the Archbishop is expressing here is that Christianity in the context of South Sudan should be supported by its traditional cultural and religious heritage. It is this leaning of South Sudanese Christianity on its cultural and religious tradition that can make Christianity solid, that has the potential to “cement” it. One way of implementing such an inculturated Christian faith is to allow for the participation of Christians in Traditional rituals, especially with the preeminent goal to achieve and seal peace. In such a process of inculturation of Christian theology in Southern Sudan, African and South Sudanese church leaders play an important role.

Traditional religious practices are acceptable to Archbishop Paulino, and acceptable is an articulation of Traditional practices and Christian faith, provided, adds the Archbishop, that a reflection is carried about the content of Christian faith, and about how to relate Christian faith and Christian values to Traditional Religion. The work of inculturation calls for the serious work of reflection on Christian faith and theology.

A sound work of inculturation of the Christian message, according to Bishop Dau, as we have already seen, relies on identifying or creating points of connection between Traditional Religion and Christianity. According to Bishop Dau, a reflection on such a process of inculturation animated the theological work of people in Nairobi (NSCC staff, church actors and partners) at the time the People to People was conducted:

Q: Do you think there were any theological ideas that influenced the NSCC at that time in Nairobi, were there any theological trends that influenced NSCC, and might that influence also have had, let’s say, an impact on the People to People?
A: Yah, it was a big time, very big ideas. One of them is what we have just been talking about the connection between the Traditional Religion and Christianity or the transiting point from one and another, that is one, the other is what Marc Nikkel talks about and I talk about it, you know the first failure of the Christian missionaries because there was no link, there was no point of contact between what you used to believe in and what you believe in now. There was a disconnection, like for example the first Dinka who became Christians they were Christians as long as they were on the mission field, but when they left the mission field and came out they no longer, they conformed to the popular culture because there were no hooks, ideological hooks for them to be there and also be in the near place, so that connection was very, very important in peacemaking.

The crisis caused by the lack of connection between Traditional Religion and Christian beliefs calls, also for Bishop Dau, to a critical examination of the work of foreign missionaries and the responsibility they bear in forcing new converts to disavow their religious and cultural past, in this way contributing to the disconnection of religious needs and cultural identity. Early converts kept a
Christian identity as long as they were in the mission field. Back to the cattle field they would also go back to Traditional religious practices. This, according to Dr Dau, is due to the lack of “ideological hooks”, in other words elements of continuity between Traditional Religion and Christianity that could facilitate the transition from the religious and cultural old to the new, and that would not force new converts to be cultural aliens within their communities.

Such connections or points of transition, indicates Dr Dau, become quite relevant in relation to peacebuilding and peacemaking:

*The peacemakers, “the peace of God which passes all understanding may be with you”, or as they would say “peace on earth and pleasure with people with whom he is pleased”, but where are the hooks that you actually hook it to somebody, who is reading, who is tending his cattle or somebody who is looking for pastures, how do you make that connection, and some people quite wisely, people like Marc Nikkel and others, here there is something that needs to be learned here, not just in theology but even in the theology of peace and connection with the Traditional thought, the thought of peacemaking.*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the context of Southern Sudan at war, peace was generally understood as a key concept in the Bible, and, by some, as the hermeneutical principle to interpret the scriptures. Bishop Dau poses an important question here: if peace is understood as a key biblical message, and therefore understanding the implications of that concept equates to having a good grasp of what the Bible is asking of Christians, how can the centrality of the biblical concept and command of peace be conveyed to the person with a Traditionalist background attending his cattle? How does one convey biblical concepts and the centrality of the biblical concept of peace to people for whom cattle are the central symbol of material and spiritual well-being and of harmony of relations with Divinity and the universe? Such a challenge of conveying the biblical message of peace requires a theological effort in terms of a theology of peace that is able to absorb and elaborate important insights in Traditional Religion and in those elements of Traditional Religion that are related to Traditional peace practices. Dau refers to Marc Nikkel\(^\text{721}\) as one of those theologians who saw the problem of the lack of connections and the need to elaborate theologically both on the relation between Traditional Religion and Christianity as well as on the relation between cultural and religious identity. Bishop Dau continues:

*And then also the whole issue of are you first a Dinka or are you first a Christian ... you could not answer those questions if you cannot connect with your cultural background but also be authentically Christian in your context.*

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\(^{721}\) See Nikkel, Marc R., *Dinka Christianity* and his contribution “The Cross as a Symbol of Regeneration in Jieng Bor Society” in Wheeler, Andrew (ed.), *Land of Promise*, pp. 86-114
Are you first a Dinka or a Christian? What comes first, your cultural or your religious identity? In other words, is the cultural identity, and with it the inherent (Traditional) religious identity, the base on which to build Christian identity or is Christian identity meant to question and redefine what it means to be, for example, Dinka? Whatever answer one might choose to give to such questions, according to Bishop Dau, besides having a proper understanding of the content of the Christian faith, one needs to have sufficient appreciation of his or her own cultural background. One also needs to have a proper understanding of the context one moves in (be the context religio-cultural or socio-political), to be “authentically Christian” in one’s context. Such awareness might imply a critical approach to both culture and context.

The mix of peace methods in the frame of the People to People, suggests Bishop Dau, can provide an opportunity to elaborate a theology of peace that reflects on the intersection of Traditional Religion and Christianity:

*the mix of peace methods, if you like the theology of peace, the theology of conflict resolution, just as the conflict between God and people was being resolved, that could translate into resolving the conflict between people and people.*

A theology of peace and of conflict resolution can be built on the biblical understanding of God’s ways of solving conflicts between God and people and among people. Such a theology can also be built on traditional practices of conflict resolution and peacemaking and on the religious world-view and beliefs that support such practices. What Dau calls the “mix of peace methods”, namely the intersection between a theological reflection around peace and traditional methods of conflict resolution, leads to what Dau calls a “theology of peace”. A theology of peace is, in this sense, also a theological reflection on the intersection of Christian theology and Traditional Religion contextually prompted by the goal to achieve peace.

John Ashworth refers to further reflections on inculturation and inter-religious dialogue expressed in the official documents of the Catholic Church produced on the wave of the Second Vatican Council:722

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722 See *Nostra Etate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions. 28 October 1965: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”
our own Vatican II documents they say clearly there is something of God’s grace operating in other faith
traditions, and if slaughtering the bull brings peace then I think there is something of God’s grace operating in
the slaughtering of the bull, for me it is as simple as that.

God’s grace is perceived as also operating in faith traditions other than the Christian, and is
recognised in the effects of other religious traditions. If the slaughtering of the *mabior* brings peace,
then there is grace operating through that ritual. Peace is, in this respect, seen as an indicator of the
presence of the grace of God in a Traditional Dinka-Nuer ritual.

In the course of the interview, Bishop Paul moves from positions that I called respectful of
other traditions, to a more active approach to reflecting on Christian theology in light of Traditional
ritual, religion and culture:

*Christianity can be explained out of people’s culture and that works very well with these rituals. Take for
example dance in my community, thanksgiving dance. It is an example of inculturation. It is coming from our
culture. And it is not bad, is good. Some people don’t appreciate their culture. Dinka evangelism with Daniel
Deng is a positive example. The Dinka now dance the same cultural dancing, traditional dancing in church
with new songs and music. You feel at home.*

Performing Traditional ritual, says Bishop Paul, exemplifies how Christian beliefs can be explained
by means of local cultural expressions. Traditional ritual is a concrete example of how to make use
of culturally organic categories to convey a Christian message.

Another example provided by Bishop Paul is that of traditional dance for thanksgiving. The
Episcopal Church under the guidance of Archbishop Daniel Deng allows for the performance of
traditional Dinka dances during Christian worship. Evangelisation is done in Dinka cultural terms.
As well as ritual, traditional dance provides a positive example of inculturation of the Christian
message, of the transmission of the Christian faith through local means of expression and
indigenous cultural patterns. The positive effect is that Christianity is perceived as something not
alien, but familiar, a reality that is at home in the culture and that makes people feel at home in the
church.

Even if there is no reconciliation at the national level among politicians, meaning that the
fracture within the SPLM/A has not been recomposed yet, reconciliation is achieved at the
community level when indigenous methods of conflict resolution are applied. Bishop Paul says:

*Reconciliation is working down there if not at the national level. All these conflicts are not community, it is the
element of militarism, it is the SPLA who brings all these conflicts. With the little experience on traditional*
The current situation of conflict in South Sudan is primarily caused by the military leadership. Solutions are found at the grassroots level. People coming together and using traditional methods of conflict resolution can play an effective role for peace. But in order to achieve the goal of peace at the grassroots level – with the hope that such initiatives might contribute to peace at the national level – it is necessary that church people put aside their theological prejudices against Traditional Religion and rather approach religious dilemmas with humanity, says Bishop Paul, with a genuine concern for the well-being of people.

Traditional methods of conflict resolution (and related rituals) not only retain their validity until the present day, they are also the only effective resources for peacemaking South Sudanese can resort to, reiterates Bishop Paul:

*About the traditional peacemakers, it is still valid, and this is the only thing that has replaced everything. People fight, up until now, still people at the village reconcile. In their own way. They don’t need workshops. This is working. This is in people, is a culture, a way of life, and people are continuing with it, whether we support it or not. So, why don’t we support these traditional structures and see what they are lacking.*

Traditional methods of conflict resolution are expressions of the culture and religion of the people, and for this reason are engraved in people’s consciousness and in their practice. This applies to both Traditionalists and Christians. People will continue to resort to traditional methods of conflict resolution, says Bishop Paul, with or without the help of external resources, with or without the approval of religious leaders. Once church leaders and their partners have acknowledged that this is the case, rather than trying to implement other, imported methods, they should try to build on such indigenous methods, trying to strengthen and better implement them. Church actors also have the possibility of complementing Traditional rituals of conflict resolution. We have seen in the previous chapter how a Christian understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation as well as a focus on the biblical concept of peace might be understood as Christian beliefs and approaches to peacebuilding that complement Traditional ones.

In order to make the best possible use of traditional resources for peacemaking, it is necessary to avoid any haughty attitude, it is necessary to speak the language of common people and be able to appreciate the roles and figures of chiefs, as simple as they might be. Bishop Paul describes a situation in which he assisted in arranging and conducting a Traditional reconciliation ritual:
When you talk about tradition, you have to go down, in terms of language, in terms of appreciation of chiefs, they are simple people. I did one. If you want to slaughter we don’t mind, we bring, there are goats at the market. They appreciated, they felt part of that. … Then you are also part of it in the same way. Since you have appreciated. And you know that this is a tradition thing. It is just like the blood of Jesus, I mean in that way. Unless you are not part of that. But if we, the Christians we allow that, it means that our understanding of that tradition ... as well as understanding of Christianity, we are able to put these things together.

Bishop Paul further establishes a theological link between the blood of the animal sacrificed and the blood of Jesus. More will be said about this link in the next chapter.

In the case to which the above quoted interview excerpt refers, Bishop Paul not only had nothing against the performance of a Traditional ritual, he even provided the animal to be sacrificed. Allowing for the ritual to take place is a sign of understanding and appreciation of culture, and vice-versa, one who appreciates culture should not have anything against the performance of a Traditional ritual. A satisfactory grasp of both Traditional Religion and Christianity allows for identification of connecting elements between the two, those elements of connection to which also Bishop Dau refers.

For too long Christians have been required to repudiate their culture and religious past. Now African Christians are faced with the challenge of going down to the grassroots level to gain a new understanding of their culture and, in that process, elaborate a new understanding of their Christian faith:

Now this is the challenge, I feel that we need to go down to the grassroots, understand our culture, and come up from there. I have been reading a lot of African theology. And you know it is difficult because no African is reading African theology. We can have it explained to us in a very simple way.

Quite literally, inculturation has to do with getting to the ground, planting a new seed and working for something new - a new, contextual understanding of theology - to grow. Bishop Paul relates such reflections to his readings of African theology. He wishes more Africans would read African Theology. He wishes there were more opportunities to train people in African theology. Being that inculturation is the main focus of African theology, the issue at stake in the reflection of Bishop Paul is an issue of inculturation. This quote also leads me to the conclusion that African theology did have an impact on the theoretical and theological elaboration around the People to People. Still, such reflections do not aim at a mixture of Traditional Religion and Christianity:

723 See Chapter 5
So I think that is my experience in all the Eastern [Equatorian] reconciliation, that the traditions work very well and they are happy. I don’t call it Christian. We put more emphasis on prayer. I am not saying God is not answering our prayer but in most cases this prayer, Christian, to people who are conflicting is not meaningful. I call them and say: “let’s pray and forgive one another”. It is nothing to them! But the ritual is powerful. To me prayer could be powerful, but we are not all on the same page.

A Christian ritual contributing to conflict management and resolution in the context of South Sudan would be prayer. Still, as we have seen, people who are involved in fighting, both Traditionalist and Christian, don’t consider Christian prayer effective enough to achieve and maintain peace and reconciliation. Ritual, on the other hand, says Bishop Paul, is considered powerful.

Showing respect towards Traditional religious practices and consequently towards traditional chiefs, traditional culture and the people, helps in establishing strong relationships with people at the grassroots level, and such relationships of mutual respect become an important tool to share the Christian faith:

*Also it [not opposing but participating in Traditional ritual] builds relationships. Whenever I visit these places they give me that respect because I also respect them. I am able now to bring in my evangelistic belief, I get accepted. I have been given a room to enter and to explain those things and they listen.*

On the ground of that mutual acceptance, respect and trust, it is possible for the church leader to present the Christian message, and feel that both the messenger and the message are well received.

3. Considerations on syncretism and dual religious systems

In this section, I will reflect on the positions that have been expressed and reported above on the relation between Traditional Religion and Christian theology at People to People events, using as analytical categories the two concepts of syncretism and dual belief system. I will move from the definitions and elaboration of such concepts by Robert Schreiter.724

Syncretism, says Schreiter, “has to do with the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses basic structure and identity”.725

Schreiter illustrates three types of syncretism. In the first type, Christianity and another tradition come together to form a new reality, with the other tradition providing the basic

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724 Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*
725 Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 144
framework. In the second type, Christianity provides the framework of the syncretistic system, but is reinterpreted and reshaped substantially, independent of any dialogue with established Christianity. In the third type of syncretism described by Schreiter, selected elements of Christianity are incorporated into another system.\textsuperscript{726} In order to talk of syncretism, we should assume that elements of different religious systems are combined in a new system, and in this new system they become altered to the point of losing their original identity.

From the seventeenth century onward, the concept of ‘syncretism’ was widely referred to by missionaries encountering new cultural settings, with the aim of combating “Anything that would dilute or substantially alter the basic structures of Christianity”.\textsuperscript{727} To respond to what was perceived as a syncretistic threat, continues Schreiter, a rigid line was taken on the question of cultural accommodation, one consequence of which has been the development of dual religious systems: “In dual systems a people follows the religious practices of two distinct systems. The two systems are kept discrete; they can operate side by side. Sometimes one system is followed more faithfully than the other (as in Africa, where people will follow the Christian system, but retain certain elements of a traditional system)”.\textsuperscript{728} Schreiter delineates, therefore, a clear distinction between syncretism and dual religious systems: while in syncretism the elements of two religious systems are mixed and form a new religious entity, in dual systems the two original religious systems are kept separate while people move in and out of each, or, as in the example of African Christians provided by Schreiter, adhere mainly to one system while practicing elements of a second.

Schreiter also refers to three kinds of dual systems. In the first, Christianity and another tradition operate side by side. “People follow both sets of rituals and see no contradiction in doing so”.\textsuperscript{729} The two systems can be seen as functioning independently of each other.

In the second type of dual system Christianity is practiced in its integrity, and selected elements from another system are also practiced. Often those elements are perceived by Christian leaders as incompatible and even contradictory to Christianity. Thus Christians in rural West Africa often will maintain sacrifices at a shrine to a local spirit or deity. In times of distress, this dual practice becomes especially evident. There are not only prayers to the Christian deity, but recourse to local priests and healers for their intercession with local deities as well. It is as though the people wish to exhaust all possible channels of mediation. While the dual practices appear clearly contradictory to the Christian leadership, local members do not see the contradiction.\textsuperscript{730}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{726} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, pp. 146-148
\bibitem{727} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, p. 144
\bibitem{728} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, p. 145
\bibitem{729} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, p. 148
\bibitem{730} Schreiter, Robert J., \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, p. 148
\end{thebibliography}
In this second model, Christianity is the main tradition followed. I will soon come back to this
second type of dual system, as I see it as most suitable to describe the religious praxis of the group
of people I have above defined the ‘in-betweens’.

The third type of dual system is what Schreiter also calls the “double belonging”. As can be
observed in several Asian countries, “a particular religious tradition and citizenship in a nation are
seen as inextricably bound up”.731

As anticipated, I see the practice of those I have defined the ‘in-betweens’ most suitably
described by the second type of dual system suggested by Schreiter. Analysis of the interview
material leads me to the conclusion that the majority of the ‘in-betweens’ are people who formally
adhere to Christianity, possibly in its integrity (in its contextual version), and at the same time
practice selected elements of Traditional Religion. I would not exclude that some of the people
referred to in the interview material would fall in the first type of dual system described by
Schreiter, namely those who follow both sets of rituals, and possibly also other elements of
Traditional Religion, and see no contradiction in doing so.

In my understanding of the interview material and following the classification provided by
Schreiter, I argue that the practices of those I categorise as the ‘in-betweens’ are not to be defined
syncretistic because no new religious system is being produced. It might be that, in the perception
of some church leaders, the habit of practicing Traditional ritual alongside Christian rituals is seen
as syncretistic, as it might imply the altering of key-elements of the Christian faith, among them the
‘once for all’ validity of the death of Christ understood as sacrificial.

The issue of syncretism has been addressed by Laurenti Magesa who, in conflating the two
ideas of dual system and syncretism, suggests a positive understanding of syncretism, which he
seems to consider unavoidable in the African context:

Christianity in Africa today may be said to have two different forms of thought-systems and faith expressions -
one official and one popular. ... The vast majority of the Christian faithful, however, appropriate the teaching
of the official church according to their own circumstances and needs using the dominant symbol system of
African Religion. Indeed, these people struggle to respond to their Christian calling, but they are compelled
from within to do so without denying their culture, the conception and understanding of life that defines them
as Africans. This latter faith expression may be referred to as popular Christianity. In reality it is a form of
syncretism between official Christianity and African Religion.732

731 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 148
732 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 20
The duality of Traditional Religion (and culture) and Christianity produces a second duality of thought systems and faith expressions, namely the official and the popular. The majority of Christians, says Magesa, insert elements of teachings of what he calls the official church in a worldview or what Magesa calls the dominant symbol system of African Religion, and in this way produce a popular form of Christianity. This, according to Magesa, is a syncretistic mixture of official Christianity and African Religion, a mixture that the author does not condemn and actually sees as unavoidable, as he states: “the main principles constituting African Religion remain the force behind African religiosity and identity, the source and basis of religious meaning”. An African person is a profoundly religious person who, even when adopting new religious identities (such as the Christian or Muslim), carries with him or herself the conception and understanding of life that is shaped by African Religion.

How official was Christian theology in the 1980s and 1990s in Southern Sudan at a time when the spread of Christianity was mainly the task of lay, largely uneducated local preachers and missionaries? To what extent can the contextual theology that was expressed in Dinka songs often composed by illiterate women be considered official? In the context of Southern Sudan at war, the theology that was spreading and being developed was a grassroots, contextual theology that tried to convey the Christian message in images and categories organic to culture. I argue that such contextual theology was already popular theology with a remote relation to the official positions that had been proposed by foreign missionaries and probably maintained by some educated church leaders (often living abroad). The distance between such popular theology and what might be called, following Magesa, syncretistic practices of retaining and practicing Traditional ritual, is shorter than between the official position and syncretistic practices that might have been observed in neighbouring countries.

Following the classification of Schreiter, I chose to define the ‘in-betweens’ to whom I have referred above, as people moving within a dual religious system, mainly of the second type, but possibly also of the first type described above. As for the religious leaders who problematized participation in Traditional ritual, but who still participated in order not to compromise the peace process, I consider appropriate to speak of inter-religious participation. As Christians, they chose to take part in an African Traditional ritual.

Syncretism and dual systems as unavoidable as Magesa considers them, are the symptom of a problematic process of transmission of the Christian message in a new religious and cultural context.

733 Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion*, p. 10
When syncretistic or dual systems appear, says Schreiter, the responsibility is often attributed to incomplete or inadequate work of evangelisation. Bishop Tombe in the interview reported above, refers to the fact that Christianity is new to the context of Southern/South Sudan and that knowledge of the Bible is superficial. We have seen how Bishop Tombe attributes the responsibility of dual religious practices to insufficient work of evangelisation. Several interviewees on the other hand, see syncretism and dual systems as a consequence of the way evangelisation was conducted by foreign missionaries. The condemnation of traditional culture and religion respectively as backward and pagan, forced new converts to live religiously and culturally ‘schizophrenic’ lives. I also interpret syncretism and dual faith systems as attempts at recomposing fragments of cultural and religious identities in order to live a spiritually satisfying, integrated life.

Schreiter asks the following question: “If religious traditions are forces within a culture for the development of world-view and group boundary, can these traditions be easily forsaken?” Traditional Dinka and Nuer Religion have provided the parameters for world-view, the framework to read and understand the universe and relations between the visible and the invisible within it, and have provided resources for group boundary, for keeping and restoring relationships, albeit within the limits of a defined group (clan or tribe). Was the new Christian faith able to provide a satisfactory alternative, both in terms of life orientation and holding and restoring community ties? The answer seems to me to be both yes and no. In the spiritual crisis created by the war in which people felt abandoned by Traditional divinities (jaak), Christ was seen as the intermediary to an all-powerful God. The relations established within the church, the body of Christ, would cross and extend beyond the limits of clan and tribe. Still, I argue that the world-view remained a Traditional one, and that of the Southern Sudanese context can also be said what Magesa expresses in more general terms: “African Religion forms the African people’s ethical consciousness as a whole united system wherein each factor influences the other. In this system, “being” is the same thing as “doing,” and vice versa.” In the transition from the religious old to the religious new in Southern Sudan, something was gained (the new sense of protection and safety offered by Christ and the church), something was lost (the power of Traditional ritual, at least in principle) while something might have just remained the same, namely a world-view and a basic understanding of religion as a way of life.

About dual systems, Schreiter writes:

734 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 149
735 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 150
736 Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion, p. 60
From a third perspective the local culture accepts the sign system of the invading culture, but believes that there are still problems that the invading culture’s sign system does not adequately handle. For those problems and issues, segments of the old system are maintained. Thus some forms of Christianity have been perceived as not dealing adequately with intercession for immediate and concrete needs in the culture.737

Schreiter describes culture as a system of signs and, in the above mentioned quote and in the classification he is suggesting, he refers to Christianity as “the invading culture”. What is expressed in this quote applies to the context I am examining where the local Southern Sudanese culture accepts the sign system of the invading culture mixed with the message brought by Christian missionaries, still recognises (more or less consciously) that problems remain that Christianity as it is received and elaborated, does not sufficiently address. It is particularly in regards to such problems that segments of the old religious system, in the context of Southern Sudan particularly Traditional ritual, are maintained or resorted to in situations of intense crisis. Schreiter continues by saying that

In the questions of syncretism and dual systems, one touches some of the most significant dimensions of the theory of contextualization. If contextualization is about getting to the very heart of the culture, and Christianity is taking its place there, will not the Christianity that emerges look very much like a product of that culture? ... Syncretism and dual religious systems raise the question for Christians of how serious we really are about contextualization.738

Schreiter uses contextualisation in reference to the process I have chosen to refer to as inculturation.739 The issues of syncretism and dual system reveal a problem in the way the inculturation of the Christian message has (or has not) been conducted. In my opinion, if the transmission of the Christian message had been conducted in a way that sufficiently took into consideration the receiving culture, in continuity and not necessarily dramatic discontinuity with the cultural context in which it was inserted, in other words, if the Christian message had been sufficiently inculturated, issues of syncretism and dual religious systems might have not been so acute.

Schreiter suggests a way of approaching and maybe solving the problem addressed here, moving from the level of theological debates to that of a religious interpretative lens:

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737 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 156
738 Schreiter, Robert J., Constructing Local Theologies, p. 150
739 As described in Chapter 4, the two terms can also be considered synonyms
Syncretism and dual systems are ultimately not about theology, even though that may seem to be the case on the surface. They are about the entirety of the religious sign system. Thus, resolving the fact that Saint George is equated with the Quechuan lightning deity will not be done by theological argument, but by looking at the entirety of the sign system – which social relations it maintains, what problems it solves, what benefits accrue from keeping things as they are. To conflate syncretism and theology is to reduce religion solely to a view of life, forgetting that it is also a way of life.\footnote{Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, p. 157}

While reminding the reader that the very concept of ‘religion’ is contextual and its meaning varies from culture to culture, Schreiter suggests approaching the issues of syncretism and dual systems from an angle wider than theological discourse, that takes into account the function of religious practices in maintaining relations and finding viable solutions to concrete problems.

In Chapter 6, I have introduced the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation suggested by Jan-Olav Henriksen.\footnote{See Henriksen, Jan-Olav, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation*} I have made mention of how, according to Henriksen, religions offer resources for orientation and transformation primarily through religious practices, which in turn mediate specific values. Changes in circumstances, concerns and interests as well as in the life-situation of the individual – as well as communities as is the case in relation to the People to People – require a constant process of orientation and reorientation.

I argue that the articulation of Traditional Religion and Christianity primarily in relation to ritual practices (Traditional ritual) in the frame of the People to People, responds to the need for orientation and reorientation in a situation of individual and collective, spiritual and material chaos determined by war; it aims at processes of personal and collective transformation (conversion and peacebuilding) and leads to practices of legitimation to be understood as theological reflection on inculturation, perceived syncretism and dual religious practices.

Henriksen states: “it is the understanding of how other traditions orient their participants and provide a means of transformation that can help us understand what is really at stake in our own traditions. Such an understanding will be elusive unless there is an engagement with religion as practices, rather than simply with doctrines and beliefs”.\footnote{Henriksen, Jan-Olav, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation*, p. 17} In the frame of the People to People, the practices of the in-between and a confrontation with what orients them in a religious landscape that holds together elements of Traditional Religion and Christian faith, leads Christians to a process of examination of their own faith, beliefs and practices, in other words, to a process of theological examination and justification.
4. Conclusions

The intersection of Traditional Religion and Christian beliefs in the frame of the People to People is motivated by the urgent need to achieve peace. The intersection of Traditional Religion and Christianity urges a reflection on the process of inculturation of the Christian message in the context of Southern Sudan at war. As the goal of peace motivates the articulation of the intersection, it is possible to conclude that the goal of peace prompts a new round of reflection of inculturation.

The main idea of inculturation expressed in interview material as developed in the frame of the People to People, is that of a positive, constructive encounter between African Traditional Religion, and particularly the practice of Traditional ritual, and Christianity. Inculturation is also understood as the expression of key Christian concepts in idioms and categories organic to Traditional Religion and culture. In order to achieve a positive, constructive encounter of Traditional Religion and Christianity, elements of connection are needed, being these beliefs or practices, between the two religious traditions. The issue of elements of connection, and specifically the interface created by Traditional ritual and the Eucharist or Holy Communion, will be the subject of the next chapter. People in a dual religious system are perceived as being in the position to identify and highlight such points of connection.

Interviewees express the idea that an inculturated theology of peace should be able to positively relate peace affirming elements in both Traditional Religion and Christianity.

Several interviewees see the disconnection between traditional culture and religion on the one end, and Christianity on the other, as a problem created by the foreign missionary enterprise, and foreign missionaries who, due to their generally insufficient knowledge of the context they were approaching (often combined with cultural arrogance), devalued local culture and forced new converts to disavow their cultural roots. Accordingly, a more substantial process of inculturation of the Christian message is related to a weaker influence and control by missionaries. The relative freedom from foreign missionary control created space for a local church leadership and consequently for attempts at inculturation as coexistence of African world-view and Christian faith.

Differences in the degree of openness to a process of inculturation are related to confessional differences. Catholics are generally seen as more open to inculturation. In the frame of the People to People, even Christians with more conservative views on the issue of the relation between Christianity and Traditional Religion accepted taking part in Traditional ritual, in their words to ‘compromise’, in order not to jeopardise the peace process. Compromise was also accepted in the name of ecumenism and of inter-religious cooperation. Peace as a paramount goal conditioned theological standpoints and choices.
Given the close inter-relation of religion and culture in the context of Southern Sudan (and generally in Africa), respecting the beliefs and practices of Traditionalists by Christians is related to respecting one’s own cultural and religious background. Respect for others’ religious and cultural identity implies self-respect. Among the positive outcomes of a sound work of inculturation, interviewees refer to the integrity of the person, or borrowing from Martey’s terminology, anthropological integrity.

In the frame of the People to People, the intersection of Traditional and Christian values, approaches to and methods of peacebuilding, translates into contextual peacebuilding, contextual approaches to faith-based peacebuilding, and a contextual, inculturated, theological reflection.

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13. Perspectives on inculturation II: connections between Traditional sacrifice, Old Testament sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ, and the Eucharist in the frame of the People to People

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the issue of inculturation is understood by interviewees and actors in the People to People primarily as an issue of relation between Christianity and Traditional Religion. We have also seen how the element of Traditional Religion to which interviewees mostly refer is that of Traditional sacrifice. And last, we have seen that interviewees in the process of transmission of the Christian message by foreign missionaries indicate as problematic the lack of clear elements of connection between Traditional Religion and Christianity.

Traditional sacrifice for peace and reconciliation, as we have seen, played a central role at People to People events and was attended by Traditionalists and Christians alike. Since an understanding of the death of Christ as atoning sacrifice was established and shared in Southern Sudan during the years the People to People was conducted, I have attempted to find answers to the following questions: would those people who attended the ritual slaughtering of the mabior make a connection between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ? Would they further relate Traditional sacrifice, particularly as an expiatory sacrifice followed by a communal meal, to the Eucharist? If so, how did they articulate this relation?

All the nine interviewees I will refer to in this chapter attended Wunlit or other People to People events. The question posed to them Do you think that people attending the sacrifice of the mabior made a connection to the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist? aims at gathering information on general perceptions about the relation addressed here and finding out whether theological reflections were conducted around such issues.

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744 To indicate the ritual also called Communion, Holy Communion and Lord’s Supper, I use the term ‘Eucharist’ as the term is used by Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians, the main confessions in Southern Sudan, and to which belonged most of the Christians attending Wunlit
745 See Chapter 9
Interview material shows, as we will see, that theological elaborations were in fact conducted both individually and collectively, by and for participants in W unlit and other People to People events.\textsuperscript{746}

2. Five responses to the relation between Traditional sacrifice, Old Testament sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ, and the Eucharist

On the basis of the information provided by interviewees, I have identified five main approaches to the (assumed or excluded) relation between Traditional sacrifice, Old Testament sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist: 1. the relation is simply not acknowledged even if the interviewee otherwise expresses a positive attitude towards Traditional Religion; 2. the relation is excluded on the theological ground that the sacrifice of Christ has a once for all validity. For this reason, Traditional sacrifice is perceived only as a traditional conflict resolution mechanism; 3. while a relation between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ is not contemplated, an explicit relation is traced between Traditional sacrifice and Old Testament sacrifice; 4. a relation is traced to Old Testament sacrifice and New Testament sacrifice, but not to the Eucharist; 5. a relation is traced to Old Testament sacrifice, New Testament sacrifice and the Eucharist.

2.1. The relation is not acknowledged

John Ashworth, British and trained in theology, was extensively involved in the People to People over a long time. Ashworth denies that participants in the ritual slaughtering of the \textit{mabior} would make a connection to the sacrifice of Christ or the Eucharist:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Whether it was Eucharistic or not, I hear what you are saying, I doubt very much that it was in the minds of people who were doing it.}
\end{quote}

John Ashworth is one of those who hold a positive attitude towards Traditional Religion and, in the previous chapter, is mentioned among those open to review theology in light of Traditional practices. Despite his positive attitude towards Traditional Religion, John Ashworth would argue against the connection.

\textsuperscript{746} Literature on the People to People clearly indicates that, beside W unlit, ritual slaughtering was performed at Akobo in 1994, Lokichoggio in 1998, Thiet, Leer and Waat in 1999, and Liliir in 2000. See Bradbury, Mark, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge, \textit{Local Peace Processes in Sudan}
2.2. The relation between Traditional sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist is excluded due to theological reasons

To give further ground to his opinion that, in Wunlit, no relation was established between Traditional sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist, Rev. Matthew Mathiang Deng, a Presbyterian Nuer church leader and at the time of Wunlit a peace mobiliser in Upper Nile, further adds:

*The sacrifice of the mabior was only a Traditional ritual.*

In the Reverend’s opinion, as a Traditional ritual for peace and reconciliation, and without further religious connotations the slaughtering of the white bull was understood and attended by Christians.

Rev. George Riak, another profiled Nuer Presbyterian church leader, provides theological ground to the exclusively Traditional connotation of the sacrifice of the *mabior*:

*In Christianity the place of sacrifice has been taken by Jesus Christ.*

While Traditional sacrifice is to be respected,\(^747\) the only sacrifice considered expiatory is the sacrifice of Christ and, for this reason, Traditional sacrifice should not be associated with Christian sacrifice.

Along the same lines, Rev. Peter Gai, again Nuer and Presbyterian, says:

*Jesus is the whole sacrifice once and for all. Therefore, there is no need for Christians to slaughter to take away the sins.*

The death of Christ on the cross was widely understood by Southern Sudanese Christians as expiatory and redemptive sacrifice.\(^748\) The functions once performed by Traditional sacrifice such as atonement for human fault and restoration of the relationship with Divinity as well as of order in the universe, are now considered fully accomplished in the sacrifice of Christ, to which is attributed a ‘once for all’ validity. The quoted interviewees express the opinion that in this new frame of understanding, to attribute expiatory value to Traditional sacrifice equals disregarding the absolute validity of the sacrifice of Christ.

Several of the participants in Wunlit, as we have seen, tolerated the performance of Traditional rituals at People to People events as an unavoidable step towards the achievement of

\(^{747}\) Rev. George Riak in the previous chapter is mentioned among those respectful of other traditions

\(^{748}\) See Chapter 9
durable peace. For some of them, the process was nevertheless difficult, and required, as Rev. William Lowrey explains, a process of theological elaboration. The question posed to William Lowrey was expressed in the following terms:

*Do you think that people in Wunlit ... who were there when the mabior was slaughtered, made the connection with the sacrifice of Christ? Was there any connection between sacrificing the bull and then eating the meat, and the Eucharist?*

The first question concerns the relation between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, while the second one the relation between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist.

William Lowrey categorically replies:

*No, no, I am not aware of anyone making that, in terms of, now we are talking about the public event, killing the mabior, very, very public, and so it is dominated by the traditional spiritual leaders. The Christians basically saw their worship service as a way of covenant sealing for them, and that is the way I tried to preach it and teach it as well, so they could then have a theological framework for their sealing the covenant of peace, of Wunlit, and they were then more, I would say, participants than observers of the larger communal sacrifice of mabior.*

The answer is negative, and apparently, until this point, concerns both questions. We will see in the course of this chapter that, in fact, at Wunlit William Lowrey proposed a theological elaboration on the relation between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ. My interpretation of this excerpt is that here the interviewee rules out the possibility that a relation was established between the sacrifice of the *mabior* and the Eucharist. The reason he provides is that the ritual was led by Traditional spiritual leaders in a Traditional way and such clear Traditional connotations would have prevented any associations with the Eucharist.

In this quote, William Lowrey also indicates that there was no need to give Christian connotations to the Traditional ritual, as Christians saw their worship service as a means to seal the peace covenant. This opinion stands in contradiction to the one expressed several times by Bishop Paul, namely that even for Christians, Traditional ritual held a binding power that was unmatched by Christian prayer or worship. A problem remained to be addressed, says William Lowrey, and it was that of equipping Christians with a theological framework that would allow them to attend as full participants rather than observers, and with good theological conscience, the Traditional ritual slaughtering that was going to take place. We will soon see what kind of theological framework was suggested.
Still, William Lowrey refers to some pastors, few people, who refused to eat the meat of the animal traditionally sacrificed, in this way withdrawing from a central part of the peace sealing ceremony:

*My guess is that some of them, and I don’t have any doubt, I have been asked about this recently, and I don’t have any hard data to say, name people, but my guess is that there were probably a few pastors who might have individually chosen not to participate in the eating of the meat. But they would be such an exception that it was not noticed. Most of the Christian people actually kind of flow in and out of Traditional and Christian, and they would have participated in eating the meat and just as they would participate in the celebration around mabior.*

It is my opinion that the pastors William Lowrey is here referring to might have refused to eat the meat exactly because they perceived a problematic relation between Traditional ritual and the Eucharist. Another possible explanation is that they abstained in accordance with the biblical injunction not to eat “food sacrificed to idols” (I Cor 8,4).

Such pastors, says William Lowrey, were an exception that did not affect the outcome of the peace ritual. While such pastors were a minority, the majority, says William Lowrey, were people who would move in and out of Traditional Religion and Christianity, those I have categorised as the ‘in-betweens’, for whom it would have not been a problem to attend Traditional ritual and eat the meat afterward.

William Lowrey here refers to three groups of people and three related different attitudes. The first is the group of Christians who are not comfortable with Traditional sacrifice, are not ready to compromise in order to achieve peace, and see their worship as a covenant sealing “for them”, as a Christian equivalent of the Traditional peacemaking and peace-sealing ritual. For and together with this group of people, say Rev. Lowrey, it was necessary to develop a theological framework that would allow them to accept Traditional ritual and participate in it.

The second group of people to which Rev. Lowrey refers are a group of pastors who, despite the process of theological reflection in which they were involved, decided neither to participate in the Traditional sacrifice nor to eat the meat of the slaughtered bull.

The third group of people referred to are the ‘in-betweens’, as we have seen, those who move in and out of Traditional Religion and Christianity and who, accordingly, don’t have problems in consuming meat traditionally sacrificed or, had they had the opportunity, the

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749 As mentioned in Chapter 9, during the decades of widespread growth of Christianity in Southern Sudan, namely 1980s and 1990s, most of the evangelists and church leaders were lay people. Due to the lack of ordained ministry, the Eucharist or Holy Communion was a rare event among Protestants and Catholics alike. It was therefore not part of the liturgical experience of Christians, and most probably not expected at People to People events. In Wunlit, Christian worship included preaching, singing and praying. The Eucharist was not celebrated.
Eucharist. It is quite interesting that in the quote just referred to, Rev. Lowrey defines them “most of the Christian people”.

What are the elements of the preaching and teaching offered by William Lowrey, and aimed at providing some of the Christian participants with a theological frame that would allow them to accept Traditional ritual and take part in Traditional peace sealing? Such theological elaboration was offered in a sermon delivered by William Lowrey in Wunlit. The text of the sermon is recorded in the minutes of the Wunlit conference. I will report the full text of Rev. Lowrey’s sermon here, dividing it in subsequent sections.

William Lowrey starts with a reflection on the biblical concept of covenant:

Now, finally, I want to talk with you just a moment about the meaning of covenant, and the sealing of covenant we are doing here at Wunlit today. All through the Bible it speaks of how we live in covenant with each other and with God. To be in covenant means to make commitments to one another and commitments to God, ... This kind of Covenant did not begin with Jesus, but was happening for many, many years before Jesus came. God made Covenants with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and lived in covenant with Moses, and the people of Israel. And the prophets knew what it meant to live in covenant as the People of God. Each time that a covenant was established an animal would be sacrificed, and the blood would flow. It takes the shedding of blood to reveal the cost of confirming the covenant. But the power of the sacrifice was not found in the animal that was sacrificed, by itself. Each time the animal was sacrificed it was pointing to the day when the perfect sacrifice would come. The perfect sacrifice was Jesus Christ, so that every animal sacrifice pointed toward the sacrifice of Christ who would come to fulfil the purpose of God.

Covenant is a key biblical concept. In the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, covenants are sealed by God with the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. Each biblical covenant required animal sacrifice, as only blood shedding could seal such a covenant. After having illustrated that animal sacrifice is a central element of Judaism, William Lowrey moves to a Christian interpretation of Old Testament sacrifice: each sacrifice in the Old Testament is somehow waiting for its fulfilment, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus to seal the ultimate covenant between God and humanity.

The Jewish people who raised sheep in their culture referred to him as “the Lamb of God”. In this culture we might want to refer to Christ as the Bull of God.

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750 Wunlit-Dinka-Nuer West Bank Peace and Reconciliation Conference. The quotation is from the chapter “Sunday Morning Christian Worship Service followed by the sacrificial ceremonies to conclude the Conference the 7th of March, 1999”, pp. 104-108
751 Considerations of different interpretations of Old Testament sacrifices also in relation to the sacrifice of Christ are beyond the scope of this section
As sheep were a precious asset for Jewish people, and were accordingly used in animal sacrifice, Jesus came to be referred to as ‘the Lamb of God’. Being cattle central to the spiritual and material welfare and world-view of people in Southern Sudan, a similarly contextual adaptation would allow for calling Jesus ‘the Bull of God’, being the bull both valuable and used in sacrifice. William Lowrey here encourages Christians to read Traditional Religion with the same lenses they would read Judaism as described in the Old Testament. Accordingly, Lowrey pleads for the same level of acceptance.

In my culture we did not have these sacrifices, and so it was difficult for us to understand the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice, as that which made possible our relationship with God.

For people brought up in Western cultures and therefore unused to animal sacrifice, it is difficult to fully grasp the theological significance of the bloody sacrifice of Christ, and the fact that this type of sacrifice was deemed necessary to seal the covenant between God and humanity. Dinka and Nuer elaborations of Traditional Religion are valuable as they prepare and facilitate an understanding of the need to sacrifice in order to seal a covenant, and therefore of the need for the supreme sacrifice of Christ to atone for human sin.

In your culture you have seen these sacrifices since you were a small child, but you might ask as a Christian, “what does this mean for me?” I encourage you to learn from the people of the Old Testament so that you know how to interpret these things you see in your culture. The people of the Old Testament looked forward to the day when the Messiah, the Christ, would come as the perfect sacrifice.

Addressing people who had converted to Christianity from Traditional Religion, William Lowrey wants to provide keys to reinterpret rituals that until recently had been (and for some still are) part of their religious experience: Traditional rituals should be seen by Christians in the same way as Jewish rituals were seen by Jewish and later Christian people: as something imperfect, hinting towards its perfect realisation.

Now we today as Christians are able to look back to the day when Jesus was the perfect sacrifice and we are able to understand how we are in Covenant with God and with one another through his sacrifice. So when you see a bull sacrificed by the people here, let this point in your own mind and your own heart toward Jesus Christ who is the sacrifice which has brought you into covenant with God. From your culture you are able to see pictures of the sacrifice, pictures of the covenant, in the sacrifice of bulls. But as Christians you are able to say,

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752 ‘Ox’ might have been an even more suitable adaptation given the fact that in Dinka and Nuer culture oxen are considered more valuable than bulls. Lowrey probably refers to the bull since that was the animal sacrificed in Wunlit
those sacrifices are not the power for you, but it points toward the sacrifice that is offered once and always for you.

People who have converted to Christianity from Traditional Religion, says Rev. Lowrey, need to reinterpret the meaning and value of Traditional sacrifice in Christian terms. The Old Testament provides a key to understand such value: as the people of the Old Testament, while performing their sacrifices, looked onward towards the perfect sacrifice, in the same way Christians, through Traditional sacrifices, can look backward at the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ with its ‘once for all’ validity, seals the ultimate covenant among human beings and with God. Old Testament and Traditional sacrifices prepare an understanding of that perfect sacrifice. In this respect, Traditional sacrifice is attributed two important functions: to point to the sacrifice of Christ, and to provide a graphic example of that sacrifice. Cultural and religious Traditional identity and experience together with the Christian faith facilitate, therefore, a fuller understanding of Christ’s sacrifice. Traditional Religion and culture are, in this key, seen as a resource.

So when you have signed the Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Covenant, you are crying to God, “let us be peacemakers, give us your power as peacemakers, the power of Christ that we might do your work”. My sisters and brothers, Dinka and Nuer, go from this place in the power of God as peacemakers in your land (applause). Alleluia and Amen.

By sealing the Wunlit covenant, explains William Lowrey in his concluding remarks, people are making a covenant of peace with each other and with God. People commit in front of fellow human beings and God to actively engage in peace work. In this framework of understanding, to be peacemakers requires power from God. Peace, in a Traditional as well as Christian frame of understanding, is a deeply religious and spiritual experience that requires divine sustenance.

Despite the fact that the first answer of William Lowrey to the question about a possible relation between Traditional sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist sounded negative (see above), on the basis of material from the same interview and the text of his preaching at Wunlit, I conclude that a connection was in fact made, a connection that was perceived as so problematic that it required a theological elaboration precisely on the relation between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ.
2.3. A relation is established between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifices of the Old Testament

In the previous section, we have seen how the preaching of William Lowrey articulated a relation between Old Testament and New Testament sacrifices as well as between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ.

An association that was expressly made in several interviews, and that seems to be little problematic in the context we are examining, is the one between Traditional ritual and the rituals of the Old Testament, both attributed a preparatory function in relation to the sacrifice of Christ.

Anglican Bishop Enoch Tombe says:

_In the African tradition they always choose the best for the rituals, even in the Bible, in the Old Testament, for sacrifices the animals must be really good looking and without any scars, that is why Jesus was sent as the lamb without spots or wrinkles. I mean, that is biblical and so I think that the African Tradition is more or less close to the one in the Bible, they would choose the best always for the sacrifices._

There are specific aesthetic requirements concerning the animal to be sacrificed, both in the Old Testament and in Traditional Religion.753 Such requirements bear on the identification and description of Jesus as the Lamb without spots.754 If the requirements of Old Testament sacrifice are recognised as valid, as indicated by the fact that they are applied to Jesus, it might be deduced that the same validity is to be ascribed to Traditional rituals, ruled by similar requirements. The relation explicitly traced by Bishop Tombe between Traditional sacrifice and Old Testament sacrifice on the one hand, and between Old Testament sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ on the other, would, in my opinion, allow for a comparison between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, a relation that is nevertheless not contemplated by the interviewee.

The relation between Old Testament sacrifice and Traditional sacrifice is also articulated by Catholic Bishop Paride Taban:

_Well I think the African belief is more or less very close to the Old Testament. In the African way using white bulls is always a blessing. If there is something evil they take something black, which is connected to the devil. White is connected really with God and sacrificing something to God and not to the devil, and that is why they usually sacrificed this white bull. It is like in the Old Testament, that is what they believe._

753 See Lev 4,3 as well as Exod 12,5; 29,1; Lev 22,17-25; Ezech 43,22f; Heb 9,14

754 See I Pt 1,18-19: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (NIV)
Also for Bishop Taban, since requirements about colour and lack of blemish are biblical, Traditional sacrifice acquires value by following prescriptions that are similar to the biblical ones.

2.4. A relation between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist is established

Bishop Taban further refers to the relation between Traditional ritual and the Eucharist as acknowledged by early converts:

*The beliefs of our African Traditional believers are closer to the Old Testament. Also the reason why they accepted easily the sacrifice of the Eucharist is because they connected it, because even in the past they were offering food to God, and when there are problems in the family they make some food and offer it to God.*

Traditional rituals and Old Testament rituals are similar, says Bishop Taban, and for this reason also Traditional and Jewish beliefs are similar. The Traditional ritual here referred to is that of food offering to God. Bishop Taban addresses with this example the issue of the connection between Traditional religious past and present Christian experience. In his opinion, a connection between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist was made by early Christian converts, and it is exactly such a connection that made it possible for these converts to accept the ritual of the Eucharist.

Bishop Paride Taban refers to the Eucharist both as sacrifice and as food offering. It might be worth remembering that according to the Catholic doctrine, the Eucharist includes the offertory: bread and wine are offered by the priest in the name of Christ to God. Catholic Eucharist is also an offering of the real body and blood of Christ and for this reason it is considered a sacrifice, a making present of the once for all sacrifice of Christ. The meaning of the Eucharist as sacrifice and as the gift of the body of Christ could be grasped by people in Southern Sudan, says Bishop Taban, because it could be related to Traditional sacrifices and Traditional rituals of offering food to God. Bishop Taban continues:

*I’m telling that because when the missionaries came they destroyed all the places where people put secret food to be offered to God. In the language of the people it was called ‘tabernacle’. The missionaries came and destroyed all those places where people were making sacrifices, but later, when they translated [the Bible] in the [local] language, they used the same word which in our language is called ‘kidori’. That is the place where they offered food to God.*

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755 The real body and real blood of Christ are offered by Christ himself, the eternal high priest of the New Covenant, through the ministry of the priest. The same Christ, truly present, is the offering and the one who offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. See “Catechism of the Catholic Church – The Sacrament of the Eucharist”, paragraphs 1366 and 1410 www.vatican.va (accessed 12.09.2017)
Bishop Taban is clear in his critique of the first missionary enterprise, so adverse to Traditional Religion that places with religious significance, such as the traditional tabernacle, *kidori*, were destroyed either directly by missionaries or by new converts. But in the work of translation of the Bible in local languages conducted by the same missionaries, linguistic correspondences are sought and built upon religious resonances: in making use of the term *kidori* to translate ‘tabernacle’, missionaries implicitly acknowledge the religious value of the traditional place for food offerings. Back to the converts who made the connection between Traditional food offering and the Eucharist, the Bishop clarifies:

> When Jesus’ body becomes our food, they left out the traditional food and they use now the true food of God, the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. The food which they prepared was eaten only by special people or people who were sick to get healed. When the Eucharist came, that is the body of the Son of God, they left out the other offerings.

The body of Christ as food offering with healing power and accessible in the Eucharist, both relates to the Traditional ritual of offering food and surpasses it. Who believes that that food is the body of Christ, does not continue to perform traditional food offerings.

In the course of the interview with Bishop Taban, I asked the question one more time, specifically in relation to participants in Wunlit. The answer was again positive:

> Q: So, do you think that this connection was also made by people at Wunlit? I mean, people who were participating in the ritual slaughtering of the white bull, would they make a connection to the Eucharist?

> A: I am sure ... I am sure, I am talking about the African tradition, African belief. I can quote you when Museveni visited the Holy Father I think this year, he was asked about the African tradition. He [Museveni] said [that] the African [people] believed in God even before the missionaries came but there is only one thing which was not there in the African belief that is the Eucharist, the body of Christ.

In Bishop Taban’s view, there is a relation between Traditional slaughtering and the Eucharist, and in his opinion such a relation was in the mind of people attending the slaughtering of the *mabior* in Wunlit. According to Bishop Taban, African Traditional Religion is valuable in itself as it is an expression of faith in God, and also because such faith is expressed through rituals that closely resemble Christian ones. The one element that was missing in Traditional ritual - otherwise valuable - was the Eucharist, the offering of the very body of Christ, now available in the Eucharist.

The issue of the relation between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ is also addressed by Dr Dau. As in the case of the interview with Bishop Paride Taban, the ideas Dr Dau expresses are valuable not so much to assess what people attending Wunlit thought, as to gain
insights about the kind of theological elaboration that was carried in Southern Sudan at the time of the People to People.

Q: Do you think that the people participating, attending [the slaughtering of the mabior], would make the connection with the sacrifice of Christ?
A: Actually the sacrifice of the mabior is very sensible in the context of the sacrifice of Christ.
Q: You think that people who were participating, attending, would made the connection
A: Oh ya.
Q: No doubt?
A: Specially if there are Christians, no doubts in my mind, you can take me on that, because mabior would actually be senseless, the killing of the mabior would be senseless if it is not connected with Christ, in fact you will understand both clearly in the context of each other, you understand the context of Christ clearly when you see this mabior taking the place of the people who are suffering and the people who are dying. You can understand what Christ did for us on the cross, I think you must be aware that among the Nilotics the theology of substitution and the cross was not a problem, that Christ took our place is quite natural.

The relation between the slaughtering of the mabior and the sacrifice of Christ, established without hesitation, is further connoted by Dr Dau as a relation in which one sacrifice is better understood in light of the other. Not only do we understand better the sacrifice of Christ in the context of the sacrifice of the mabior that takes the place of people who are suffering and dying – also because of war –, we also understand the sacrifice of the mabior in light of a Christian understanding of atoning sacrifice.

For Nilotics, among them Dinka and Nuer, it is not difficult, says Isaiah Dau, to understand the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ for the expiation of human sin because that kind of understanding is prepared and supported by the function of Traditional sacrifice. In the same way that an animal must brutally die to take away the sins of human beings and reconcile human beings with Divinity, so Christ had to die to atone for human sin and reconcile human beings with God. The theological underlying structure is the same: on the basis of identification, one sacrificial victim takes the place of sinful humanity in order to restore the relationship with Divinity.

Beyond any rational understanding of the theological concept of atonement, seeing an animal dying in much blood and with great suffering brings to a new level the grasping of the sacrifice, furthermore voluntary, of Christ. Assisting to the slaughtering of the mabior is for Christians a painful and soul-stirring theological lesson.

At the same time, the sacrifice of the mabior acquires a particular connotation when it is interpreted in light of the sacrifice of Christ. Dinka and Nuer religions had sacrifices of expiation
even before the missionaries arrived. There is an intrinsic value in Traditional Religion and the similarities between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ highlight such value.

3. A much needed theological debate

The following interview with Rev. Samuel Kobia provides glimpses of the theological debates that were initiated around the issue of the relation between Traditional and Christian ritual, and in general on the relation between African Traditional Religion and Christian theology among church leaders, both Southern Sudanese and from neighbouring countries:

Q: When the white bull was slaughtered do you think that people who were Christian and who were assisting to the ritual would make a connection between the slaughtering of the white bull for peace and reconciliation, the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist, do you think that people would have made that connection?
A: Yes, there are theologians who would make that connection and there was actually a debate about it because we had even some theologians from Kenya who were not comfortable with that because we don’t do it [Traditional sacrifice] in Kenya any more, but once they realised that the churches in South Sudan and some really respected bishops and moderators of churches did not take an issue with the slaughtering of the bull and jumping over the white bull then they accepted it.

There were participants at People to People events, and among them theologians, who explicitly related the Traditional sacrifice of the white bull to the sacrifice of Christ. Theological discussions - a debate, says Rev. Samuel Kobia - around such issues were started, and various perspectives were contributed by guests from outside Southern Sudan. The fact that profiled Southern Sudanese church leaders did not oppose the running of Traditional rituals at events facilitated by churches convinced church leaders from other countries to hold an accommodating approach. Rev. Kobia continues:

and the question as to whether it was seen as resonating with the blood of Christ or with salvation it remained a big question because there are those who wanted to separate the two completely and said this is symbolic, culturally it is a ritual, but let’s not compare it with the blood of Christ, and I would say that one of the key church leaders in Kenya who participated in these conferences, moderator Rev. John Gatu, who is very progressive socially, politically speaking, but when it comes to theology is on the conservative side, and Gatu would not feel very comfortable with that. His view is: leave the traditional approach as it is but let’s not compare and try to see how it resonates with the blood of Christ.

The elements of the debate were on the metaphorical table: for some, the sacrifice of the white bull would resonate with the sacrifice of Christ, and for others it would not, or rather, others deliberately
wanted to keep the two rituals and relative theological interpretations separate. Rev. John Gatu, a profiled Presbyterian church leader from Kenya, represented, according to Samuel Kobia, the position of those who were respectful of Traditional practices, but would have not appreciated comparing them to Christian beliefs and rituals. I asked a clarifying question to elicit more information:

Q: So, can we say that it was more on a personal basis. Some people would have liked to keep the two things very much separated, but for other people maybe one experience could strengthen the understanding of the sacrifice of Christ?
A: Yes, you are very right, it was really at a personal level and I think this is something that could have been done perhaps but it was not done, there was no serious theological debate as to what meaning we should attach to the Traditional approach and the Christian theology so the doctrinal issues were not actually discussed.

Given the fact that different actors would hold different stands, there would have been need for a theological exchange about the meaning and value to be attributed to Traditional sacrifice both in itself and in relation to Christian interpretations of sacrifice. Such a ‘serious theological debate’ was not conducted for reasons that Rev. Kobia further provides:

and I think that perhaps with hindsight it is one of the things that we could have tried to do so that people would come on board, but if we spent a lot of time on doctrinal debate we would not have gone far enough and that was a time that people needed to facilitate the processes of liberation and people’s participation in it, and therefore the time for theological debate was not there and then we did not have academicians really or scholars of theology or comparative religions who took time to study it and advise, so that was not done. I would say that to a very large extent even those who tried to accommodate the Traditional and all that, were influenced by scholars like John Pritchard, did not read the more modern theologians, so to speak.

A serious theological debate would have provided the opportunity to bring people on board, says Rev. Kobia. An interpretation of this quote is that a clarification on the articulation of Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ would have both helped in making Christianity more attractive to Traditionalists and would have facilitated a fuller participation of the more conservative Christians in those aspects of the People to People that implied Traditional ritual, but for such a debate there was no time. Time had to be prioritised for more urgent tasks, such as involving people in the peace process and related to it, says Rev. Kobia, the process of liberation of the South from the North.

756 Apparently, a Western understanding and use of time clashed with the traditional one to which I have referred in Chapter 11
The problem caused by the lack of time for what would have been a highly needed theological debate, was aggravated by the lack of adequately trained theologians and academics who, says Rev. Kobia, could have facilitated a theological understanding of the issues at stake. Even those who were in the position to help such a process of theological reflection on the relation between Traditional and Christian sacrifice, and more generally on the relation between Traditional Religion and Christianity, had not been exposed to more recent and articulated reflections on inculturation.

4. Conclusions

The urgent goal to achieve peace forced even the more reticent Christians to take part in Traditional peace sealing rituals at People to People events. Such a situation, in turn, created the need for a theological reflection on the relation (assumed or denied) between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, and more generally between Traditional Religion and the Christian faith, in other words on the inculturation of the Christian message in the context of Southern Sudan. The People to People became in this way the arena for a theological reflection (although not fully carried out) on inculturation.

Different theological standpoints determined different attitudes toward such a relation between Traditional sacrifice and biblical understandings of redemptive sacrifice, and at the same time called for different processes of theological elaboration.

In the course of this chapter, I have presented five different approaches. In the first case, the relation between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Jesus is not acknowledged, even by actors with a generally positive attitude towards Traditional Religion, possibly because theological elaboration was not perceived as a priority.

In the second case, the relation is excluded on a biblical-theological ground, namely the principle of the ‘once for all’ validity of the sacrifice of Christ. Within this category can be included those pastors who at Wunlit refused to eat the meat of the sacrificed bull (see paragraph 2.2). It is my understanding that such an exclusion of possible associations between Traditional sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, is motivated also by a fear of syncretism, in other words fear of the mixture of elements (beliefs and practices) of different religious traditions that might result in the denaturation of the original traditions (mostly the Christian).

In the third case, a relation is traced between Traditional and Old Testament sacrifices on two bases. The first one concerns the similarity in prescriptions in Traditional Religion and Judaism about the colour and aesthetic value of the animal to be sacrificed. Similarities of requirements and
regulations lead to equating the two kinds of sacrifice. The second, more specifically theological base for the connection of Old Testament and Traditional sacrifice is that both point towards and prepare for an understanding of the sacrifice of Christ. I will return soon to this point.

In the fourth case, a relation is traced between Traditional sacrifice and sacrifice of Christ. Bishop Dau explains how Traditional sacrifice prepares an understanding of the elements of substitution and expiation included in the understanding of the sacrifice of Christ as redemptive.

Finally, a relation is clearly established between Traditional ritual and the Eucharist. In this case, Traditional rituals such as the offering of food to God, are understood as preparing the reception of the significance of the Eucharist. Given the role confessional and denominational differences played in determining different stands on issues of inculturation in Southern Sudan, it is not surprising that such a fourth approach is held by Catholic bishop Paride Taban. I argue that those pastors who refused to eat the meat might also be included in this category, in the sense that they refused to take in the meat of the sacrificed animal exactly because they perceived - and rejected - an association between Traditional sacrifice and the Eucharist.

The theological dilemmas caused by the participation of Christians in Traditional rituals and the associations such participation might have evoked between Traditional and Christian beliefs and ritual practices, called for theological elaboration. Two paths are envisioned by interviewees. The first is the one referred to and followed by William Lowrey who, at Wunlit and mainly through his sermon, offers as a theological solution a hermeneutical key to read and accept Traditional ritual as pointing, in the same way as Old Testament rituals, towards the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The second path is the one to which Samuel Kobia refers, and concerns a theological debate among those who felt the need for an articulation of Traditional and Christian ritual, on the one hand, and those who preferred to avoid any associations, on the other. For such a full-fledged theological debate there was no time.

It is my impression that, beside the issue of participation by Christians in Traditional rituals, another factor that created the need for a theological debate was the practice of the so-called in-betweens. Their apparent easiness towards a double religious practice that envisaged participation in Traditional ritual and Christian practices (when available, even the Eucharist) contributed to the need for theological debate. It is the attitude of the in-betweens that, while prompting negative reactions among the more conservative Christians, contributes to the need for further reflection on the issue of inculturation of the Christian message.

It is interesting to note that despite the differences of positions towards a possible relation between Traditional sacrifice and Christian sacrifice, a generally positive evaluation of Traditional sacrifice emerges from interview material on the basis of similarities with Jewish sacrifice; seen as
pointing towards the sacrifice of Christ; as preparing the reception of the message of the sacrifice of Christ; and helping to fully grasp the implications of that sacrifice. For Christians in Southern Sudan, the sacrifice of Christ supersedes Traditional sacrifice. At the same time, the atoning sacrifice of Christ is embraced, intellectually and emotionally, as a powerful theological principle, because it resonates with Traditional religious beliefs expressed in Traditional ritual that are organic to the culture, and therefore are familiar and shared.

Time and space for theological debate would have provided a more articulated understanding of the issues addressed here, and would have been a great opportunity for theological elaboration, in Southern Sudan and beyond, on the relation between Christian theology and Traditional Religion. More specifically, as indicated by Rev. Kobia, such a theological debate might have created a qualitatively different type of participation in Traditional rituals at People to People events and in the peace process. To be more specific, such a theological debate could have helped in the process of transmission of the Christian message in Southern Sudan; it might have contributed to the articulation of the issue of dual religious allegiance; it would have eased some of the theological dilemmas of the more conservative Christians; and, as a result, would have allowed for a fuller and possibly more effective participation in People to People events and peace work in Southern Sudan.

Still, the reality of war and the urgent need to achieve peace did not leave space for such theological elaborations. Furthermore, such a debate was limited by the lack of trained theologians. Paradoxically, the same situation of war and the urgency to achieve peace that created the conditions for the coexistence of Traditional and Christian practices at the People to People events and created the need for a theological reflection on inculturation, was the reason why the debate could not be conducted further. Still, a sufficiently elaborated theological debate would have contributed to the peace process. In this respect, theology and inculturated theology are perceived as tools to support peacebuilding.
14. Perspectives on liberation I: The SPLM/A between Marxism and Christianity

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the position of the SPLM/A and specifically its leader John Garang, on religion, both Traditional Religion and Christianity, in relation to his vision for the ‘New Sudan’, and the role of churches in the liberation struggle. With this chapter, I also aim at seeing to what extent the ideological stands of the SPLM/A and its leader might have influenced theological elaboration in the frame of the People to People.

The interview material I have collected on these topics and present in the third paragraph of this chapter, needs, more than interview material analysed in the other five chapters of this section, to be introduced and complemented by information gathered from literature. A considerable portion of the present chapter will therefore be devoted to the Dialogue Meeting between the SPLM/A and the NSCC held in Kejiko, Yei, Central Equatoria, in July 1997757. I will look at the positions there expressed both by John Garang and church representatives on the role of the churches in the liberation struggle and the mandate the churches received from Garang to elaborate a contextual theology of liberation and peace.

2. The “historical Dialogue” between the SPLM/A and the NSCC

The Kejiko, Yei meeting (21-24 July 1997) between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) is of relevance for the present research, since at that meeting the NSCC as the organisation connecting churches in Southern Sudan, received from the SPLM/A the formal mandate to reconcile conflicting political and military factions and conflicting communities. In other words, at the Yei meeting, the NSCC received formal endorsement to launch the People to People.

The Yei meeting was not the expression of an isolated effort on the part of the SPLM/A. Since April 1994, the SPLM/A had held four major meetings758 to improve dialogue and

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757 See NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*
758 See Rolandsen, Øystein H., *Guerrilla Government*
cooperation between the Movement/Army and civil society and institutions, both towards an alleged process of democratisation of the Movement and to gain popular support for the liberation struggle.

Given the importance of the churches and ecumenical networks as the only institutions still in place after decades of war, and in the spirit of the previous four major meetings, the Yei Dialogue was conveyed to identify problems between the SPLM/A and the NSCC, air grievances and explore avenues for cooperation.\footnote{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}, p. 13}

The SPLM/A felt that the churches had isolated themselves from the liberation struggle and were not clearly expressing their stand toward and support for it. The churches were accused of blocking recruitment, not sufficiently motivating fighters and even offering protection to defectors. Churches were further accused of undermining traditional norms and culture. For its part, the NSCC felt that the churches’ contribution to the liberation struggle had not been sufficiently recognised, while its neutral role in reconciliation had not been understood.\footnote{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}, pp. 13-14} The NSCC further accused the SPLM/A of grave abuses against church representatives and civilians.

In the final statement of the Yei Dialogue, the SPLM/A and NSCC reaffirmed their commitment to freedom, equality, justice and dignity as legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the ‘New Sudan’, committed to the eradication of all forms of oppression, and to strive for the realisation of such visions through the mobilisation of the people, reconciliation of persons and groups and the development of civil authorities. SPLM/A and NSCC further committed to collaborate and respect each other’s roles to carry

complementary functions and activities, whereby SPLM seeks to achieve liberation and the establishment of good governance for the people of the Sudan, and NSCC seeks to achieve its spiritual mandate and as part of civil society assist in peacemaking and reconciliation among the different peoples of New Sudan.\footnote{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}, pp. 1-2}

In this frame, ‘liberation’ was to be understood as the responsibility of both the SPLA and the churches, albeit with specific focuses and tasks:

with the Church taking up the theological and spiritual challenge and the Army the practical armed struggle.\footnote{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}, p. 5}

While both the SPLM/A and the churches committed to the liberation of the people, such goals were to be achieved by the churches theologically and spiritually. What would such a spiritual and

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textit{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}}, p. 13
\item \textit{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}}, pp. 13-14
\item \textit{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}}, pp. 1-2
\item \textit{NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}}, p. 5
\end{thebibliography}
theological support to the liberation struggle imply? From the perspective of the SPLM/A, it would involve inspiring and motivating people to support the armed struggle, working for peace and reconciliation and elaborating a theology that would support the armed struggle. We will soon see in which ways in Yei such a theological task was interpreted by church representatives. What is important to notice is that a link was at that point established between theological elaboration further connoted in liberationist terms, and the work of peacebuilding and reconciliation. The theological work envisioned aimed at the elaboration of a contextual theology that would address both issues of liberation and peace.

Still, the SPLM/A was not satisfied with just a spiritual and theological elaboration on the liberation struggle, it also expected and asked for cooperation from churches in instilling among people a sentiment of support for the armed liberation struggle, and help in the work of recruitment of new forces in the SPLA:

SPLM/SPLA should execute the war of liberation with the support and co-operation of the Church in resource mobilization and recruitment of fighters.\(^{763}\)

In Yei, it was decided that all mobilisation and recruitment committees that were going to be formed should include Church representation. While the presence of church representatives in such recruitment committees would make visible the support of the churches to the armed liberation struggle, it would also give churches and the NSCC the chance, at least in principle, to monitor whether the SPLM/A abided by the principles agreed upon in Yei: no person under the age of eighteen years should be recruited into the army; no woman under eighteen years should be encouraged to volunteer; no trained teachers should be conscripted; and enrolment should be voluntary.\(^{764}\) Churches, for their part, expected compliance from the SPLM/A with the rule of law.\(^{765}\)

Among the activities requiring continuing collaboration between the SPLM/A and NSCC, the minutes of the Yei Dialogue mention military chaplaincy. At the Yei meeting, it was recommended that the churches should establish chaplaincies within the SPLA with the goals of educating the military “in humanitarian principles, human rights, democracy and good governance”.\(^{766}\) Such a task was defined as “an immediate priority”.\(^{767}\) Through military

\(^{763}\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 20
\(^{764}\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, pp. 22-23
\(^{765}\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 20
\(^{766}\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 6
\(^{767}\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 6
chaplaincy, the churches would have expressed their mandate to be responsible for the “spiritual and moral education and guidance of the Army”.

2.1. The Marxist rhetoric of the SPLM/A and their standpoint toward religion

The SPLM/A, supported since its formation by the Marxist regime of Mengistu in Ethiopia, had accordingly adopted a Marxist, socialist rhetoric. In the *Manifesto* of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement issued in 1983, the SPLM/A expresses its positions against capitalism, neo-colonialism, and the ‘bourgeoisified bureaucratic elites’ of the North as well as the South, and in favour of a socialist revolution by the masses that would lead to a socialist transformation and, eventually, to a united socialist Sudan.

Concerning the SPLM/A’s position on issues of religion, under the chapter “Religious Fundamentalism” the *Manifesto* reads:

> Religious fundamentalism, like the nationality question, will continue to be used by the Sudanese ruling clique in both North and South as a tool to deceive and divide the people in order to perpetuate their rule and exploitation. The SPLM provides a correct and consistent policy on religion. Under SPLM Government there shall be separation of state and mosque and church. All religious faiths in the country shall have complete freedom to practice without hindrance or intimidation, provided that this freedom is not abused and used for political purposes.

The SPLM/A opposes religious fundamentalism, especially as promoted by the Government of Khartoum and its representatives in the South, and used as a divide-and-rule device. The SPLM/A does not deny the importance of religion, on the contrary, it promotes what it sees as a correct and consistent policy based on the separation of State and religious institutions that would allow equal status and freedom to all religious faiths in the envisioned New Sudan. The freedom of religion that the SPLM/A wishes to grant to the whole of Sudan should not be abused for political purposes, says the text of the *Manifesto*. Since John Garang himself, as we will soon see, promoted the use of religion to support his liberation struggle, I suggest that what is meant by such an admonishment is that religious freedom should have not been used for political purposes that did not conform with the goals of the SPLM/A.

At the Yei meeting, John Garang reinstates some of the principles expressed in the *Manifesto*:

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768 NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 17
770 “Religious Fundamentalism”, in Sudan People’s Liberation Movement, *Manifesto*, Chapter nine, paragraph (c), p. 23
771 Sudan People’s Liberation Movement, *Manifesto*, p. 23
The New Sudan is based on a unity for the country with justice for all nationalities, for all religious groups, for all ethnic groups and for both women and men.\(^772\)

In his opening speech at Yei, John Garang also expresses his vision of religious justice for the whole of Sudan, and refers to the Islamic regime of Khartoum as fascist and fundamentalist, worse than South Africa’s apartheid because of its double exclusion, both racial and religious. Even worse as it excludes while it absorbs with the aim of eventual extinction of indigenous cultures and peoples. It is this superstructure of injustice and cultural genocide that the SPLM/SPLA has fought for the last 14 years.\(^773\)

The result of the enforced Arabisation and Islamisation of Southerners perpetrated by Khartoum, has the double function of absorbing and excluding: Southerners are forcibly absorbed in a political, religious and cultural system in which they are simultaneously relegated to a second-class status. In the just-reported quote, John Garang identifies as the final goal of the policy of forced Arabisation and Islamisation of Khartoum, cultural genocide as the destruction of indigenous cultures and people through assimilation. Accordingly, the programme of rediscovery and re-evaluation of traditional culture and religion promoted by John Garang, acquires the features of an act of defiance against the regime of Khartoum and an important component of the liberation struggle. To achieve such a goal of protection and revitalisation of traditional culture, Garang needs the help of the churches. I will soon return to this point.

2.2. John Garang, the churches, and the liberation struggle

At the Yei meeting, the position of the NSCC toward the New Sudan was debated. As mentioned, the Movement resented the fact that the NSCC had not expressed a clear position towards the vision of the New Sudan and the liberation struggle aiming at realising such a vision. The NSCC, for its part, responded to such accusations by expressing its own idea of participation in the liberation struggle:

\[\text{[the NSCC] views itself as the Church of the oppressed, and in that light has been struggling for liberation together with the people of the New Sudan. The only difference is that the Church regards its natural role as one of pursuing an end to the conflict by peaceful means.}\] \(^774\)

\(^772\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 33
\(^773\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 51
\(^774\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 26
In Yei, churches express their commitment to the liberation of the oppressed people of Southern Sudan, and by actively participating in the liberation of the oppressed, they see their contribution to the vision of the New Sudan. The church in Yei expresses its wish to participate in the liberation of the people by peaceful means.

Bishop Joseph Marona, Chairperson of the NSCC, defines the support of the NSCC to the liberation struggle in terms of a theology that is contextually relevant in the face of injustice and that holds together liberation, justice and peace:

As Christian leaders of NSCC and the churches in Southern Sudan, we bring a deep faith and commitment to the struggle for liberation and lasting justice and peace ... We believe that the Christian faith is relevant and effective in the situations of injustice and conflict which we experience in Sudan. We believe that the principles of our Christian faith are as critical for the Movement as they are to the Church of God.\textsuperscript{775}

Such commitment to liberation, justice and peace should concern not only the church but also the liberation movement. To the request of commitment by the church to the liberation struggle, Bishop Marona replies with a call to the Movement to commit to the liberation of the people and justice for the people inspired by Christian principles.

2.3. John Garang, the churches, and Traditional Religion and culture

In line with the vision of his leader John Garang, and as affirmed in Yei, cultural and religious affiliations would be transcended in the New Sudan, in the sense that all cultural and religious traditions would be valued and respected, especially when supporting the vision of the New Sudan:

New Sudan society transcends cultural and religious affiliations, thus a programme may be drawn up ... to affirm cultural and religious values as well as traditions which promote and strengthen the New Sudan and its many people.\textsuperscript{776}

As mentioned, John Garang recognises the important role that traditional culture and religion can play in strengthening the identity of Southern people and communities and, as an outcome, in supporting the liberation struggle in view of the realisation of the New Sudan. Garang probably sees traditional culture and religion as both leading to the realisation of the New Sudan and supporting it once it has been established.

\textsuperscript{775} NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}, pp. 57-58
\textsuperscript{776} NSCC, \textit{Come, Let Us Reason Together}, p. 19
In Yei, it is noted that not only the policy of assimilation of Khartoum but also the war has had a negative impact on traditional culture and values:

Traditional cultural and moral values have been eroded and broken down under the impact of war. Both parties were called upon to take responsibility for promoting good cultural and moral values.\(^777\)

For this reason, both parties, the SPLM/A and the churches, are called to promote traditional cultural values. In fact, the churches are accused by the SPLM/A of undermining local traditions.\(^778\) As an example, the practice of Christians demolishing Traditional shrines is mentioned.\(^779\) The NSCC was explicitly asked to be more sensitive to cultural values in its teachings and behaviour.\(^780\)

Bishop Marona, on his part and on behalf of the churches, states his appreciation of a multi-religious and multi-cultural Sudan:

We believe in the strength of Sudanese working together, the richness of many cultural traditions reinforcing and learning from each other.\(^781\)

In the words of Bishop Marona, the churches welcome the request of John Garang to embrace traditional culture and religion, seeing respect for traditional values as a means of strengthening unity among Southern Sudanese.

2.4. John Garang, the churches, and liberation theology

John Garang does not want to define his liberation struggle as the conflict of a Christian South against the Muslim North. In 1997, at the time of the Yei meeting, he seems to still be nurturing the vision of a united liberated Sudan where there is room for multiple religious identities. For this reason, Garang avoids religious factionalism in order to not antagonise actual and possible supporters in the North. But while his conflict is not religious, he sees the potential of the churches as supporters in the liberation struggle, and for this reason he asks for the formulation of a contextual liberation theology on the model of those developed in South Africa in support of the

\(^777\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 7
\(^778\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 25
\(^779\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 26
\(^780\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 11
\(^781\) NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 59
anti-apartheid struggle, and on the model of liberation theologies developed in other contexts. In Yei, John Garang affirms:

I cannot ask, and I am not asking, the Church to declare a Christian Crusade. This would make me indistinguishable from and as despicable as Dr Turabi. But the Church is certainly expected to play a significant role in our present struggle for freedom, a role similar to that played by Bishop Tutu and the Southern African Church against apartheid, a role similar to that played by the liberation theologians of Latin America in advocacy for the poor. I certainly expect our situation to produce its Bishop Tutu's. The Church must have a clear vision of how freedom and justice can be brought about, for it is freedom and justice that will bring about peace. This challenge is part of this Dialogue, so that the Church takes its rightful place in the struggle for freedom, justice and peace.782

John Garang demonstrates that he is aware of the existence of different contextual and liberation theologies, as well as of the social and political role they can play, and for this reason he exhorts the churches to charge theologians with the task of voicing a Southern Sudanese contextual liberation theology. Such theology envisioned and commissioned by John Garang should relate the Christian message to issues of freedom and justice as preconditions to peace. One of the main goals of the Yei Dialogue, according to John Garang, is that the churches take their part in the liberation struggle by producing such a contextual, liberation theology. Bishop Marona replies in the following terms:

We are called to hear the Word of God in the face of our situations. We are called to act according to Christian principles in seeking liberation and lasting justice and peace, otherwise it is not true liberation and it will not be truly lasting justice and peace ... Jesus, our Liberator, came so that we may have life and have it abundantly ... we, the churches, commit ourselves, whatever the cost, to unity, liberation, and lasting justice and peace.783

The theology Bishop Marona envisions is a contextual theology that relates the Word of God to the situation people are facing. Liberation, justice and peace are indeed to be pursued, according to Christian principles and in an inter-related way. Only in this way it is possible for the churches Bishop Marona represents to speak about true liberation and to achieve lasting justice and peace. Jesus is referred to as the Liberator, in line with liberation theologies in Africa and other continents, as the one who is believed to bring fullness of life, another key principle of liberation theologies. Marona responds to Garang referring to key concepts of liberation theology, and defines the terms of the contextual, liberation theology to which the churches are ready to commit.

782 NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 55
783 NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, pp. 59-60
As part of the task of the church to support the liberation struggle, Bishop Marona refers to the responsibility of the church to carry out a ministry of reconciliation among political and military factions and to keep the Army accountable to the rights of people. Such a task of keeping the Army accountable to the people is, for the Bishop, the expression of a contextual reading of the Bible:

This Dialogue has mandated the NSCC to pursue reconciliation efforts, and towards that end the NSCC will take steps ... We have been using the Bible to liberate the mind, soul and body of our people ... As a result of this Dialogue the Church now pleads with our soldiers to: Respect the civilians they are liberating and sacrificing their lives for; Protect civilians; Be God-fearing men behind the guns.784

The churches are ready to accept the challenge given by the Movement, to support the liberation struggle also by means of a contextual theology of liberation and peace, but Churches also feel that they are in a position to come with a request: for the Movement and the Army to defend the rights of the people and preserve their conscience while engaging in the liberation struggle.

2.5. The NSCC-SPLM/A Yei Declaration

In the final document produced at the Yei dialogue, representatives of the NSCC and the SPLM/A reaffirm their common commitment to the struggle for the liberation of the people of Southern Sudan and towards the realisation of the New Sudan:

The meeting recommitted the NSCC and the SPLM/SPLA to recognizing and respecting their respective roles and contributions towards building a new society. They noted that the Church in Sudan has an essential part to play in nurturing the vision of a New Sudan. The Church is commissioned to care for the spiritual welfare of the people, to contribute to the social and political formation of Sudan and to be a prophetic voice on behalf of the poor and dispossessed.785

In such a task of contributing to the liberation struggle, the churches reaffirm their primary commitment to be the voice of the poor and dispossessed, socially and politically engaged in the future of their Country. In these terms are expressed the priorities of the contextual, liberation theology envisioned by church actors in Yei.

784 NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 74
785 NSCC, *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, p. 78
3. Analysis of interview material

In the following section, I will present and analyse interview material on the ideological shift in Garang and the SPLM/A from their Marxist allegiance to a more profiled Christian identity, and on how the theology of liberation developed in the frame of the People to People came to be seen as a suitable alternative to Marxism in addressing the issue of liberation.

3.1. Garang, Traditional Religion, Christianity, and the role of the churches in the liberation struggle

We have seen in the previous section how in Yei John Garang introduced the SPLM/A’s programme of openness to a plurality of religions and religious freedom in the New Sudan. Did he define in any way his personal religious preferences? According to Rev. John Gatu who participated in the Yei Dialogue as key-note speaker and Moderator,

In Yei Garang said he was not Christian, but then he travelled to Nairobi with a new-born child and wanted the child to be baptized. In Yei Garang wanted to say that people should be free to do what they like, profess Christianity or Traditional Religion. He was for the plurality of religion in the New Sudan.

In 1997, Garang would not define himself a Christian, says Rev. Gatu, but his personal and public stand toward Christianity changed few years later when his family moved to Kenya. Gatu highlights how the politically relevant point Garang wanted to express in Yei was that religion should have not been a discriminating factor in the New Sudan. Garang also aimed at presenting himself equally open to Traditional Religion and Christianity.

According to Samuel Kobia:

John Garang had a very good grasp both of what constitutes the Traditional approach but also its significance in the liberation struggle, and that is why he was very supportive of what was called the House of Nationalities. The House of Nationalities was a concept of both recognising the positive role that different ethnic communities of Sudan, especially Southern Sudan, could make to the liberation struggle, so that, in itself, is a recognition by John Garang of the importance of Traditional approaches.

Kobia is clear about the fact that the interest of John Garang in tradition is at least twofold: Garang is interested in culture per se as well as in its potential as a resource for the liberation struggle. As we have seen in the previous section, Garang wants to oppose the process of assimilation and cultural annihilation conducted by Khartoum, at the same time as he needs to cement Southern identity. Beside the churches, Garang needs to have the traditional leaders on his side, both to have access to the people for military recruitment and to foster popular support for the liberation
struggle. Traditional leaders as well as church leaders are therefore the key to several goals: support for the struggle, access to the people, and cementing Southern identity, either Christian or Traditionalist. John Garang needs a united South in order to stand stronger in the conflict with the North. He also needs to reconcile and unite the South after the ferocious conflicts internal to the SPLM/A caused widespread conflict among communities. With the lack of administrative structures in the so-called ‘liberated areas’, the territories that were under SPLM/A control, while in the process of creating a civil administration, Garang needs the support of both Traditional and Christian leaders. Samuel Kobia continues:

Secondly, John Garang was very clear about the enormous power the churches had, particularly as organised under the Southern Sudan Council of Churches and the New Sudan Council of Churches, so he knew that if the churches embraced the traditional approaches with respect and recognition than this again would be a big contribution.

The churches were the only institution standing in a situation of protracted war in the period we are examining, and furthermore the churches could count on an international network, which meant both international visibility and financial support. The churches were a precious resource for the liberation struggle and the creation of a New Sudan. What could provide more support to the liberation struggle than the support of traditional leaders and the support of the churches? A conjuncture of both forces. Toward this goal, Garang wishes that churches would cooperate with traditional leaders and show respect and support for traditional culture, embracing traditional methods of conflict resolution. Samuel Kobia indicates that Garang addresses the issue of Traditional Religion and culture in Yei because he is aware of the resistance by the more theologically conservative church people towards Traditional religiosity and, consequently, towards resorting to traditional methods of conflict resolution:

Apparently John Garang because he was really both a historian and an economist, he knew that there were among church leaders [some] who were very conservative in their theology and did not embrace or respect the traditional approaches, so that is why he was encouraging the churches to actually come on board in accepting and respecting the traditional approaches.

Especially for such conservative church people are meant, according to Kobia, the positive remarks of Garang on Traditional Religion.

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786 See Rolandsen, Øystein H., *Guerrilla Government*
Anonymous 3 informs that, in his intent to rediscover the cultural and religious roots of Southern Sudan, Garang resorts not only to traditional culture and religion but also to ancient Christianity:

Garang conscientized Southern Christians to understand that there was an ancient Sudanese Church. Many didn’t know that. In the 1940s Father Vantini of the Comboni had researched on the ancient Church in Sudan. Vantini was in charge of the Christian content of the Khartoum Museum … Garang was rooted in history and tradition and knew what he was doing.

During the interview, Anonymous 3 provides important information about the fact that John Garang contributed to spread awareness and knowledge of the history of the ancient Sudanese Church. At the same time as Garang shows a genuine interest in the history and religious history of Sudan, he also demonstrates that he is aware, indicates Anonymous 3 in line with Samuel Kobia, of the potential of such history for his political vision of liberation and instauration of a multi-religious New Sudan. Cultural interests and political opportunism are inter-related here. From similar forms of opportunism, says Anonymous 3, church people are not immune:

even the theologians were opportunistic and not theologians for its own sake. A pastor in Malakal would say: “every baptism that takes place is a vote against the North”.

Anonymous 3 highlights how religious and political interests also become intertwined among Christians, as in the case of the pastor in the town of Malakal the interviewee refers to, who considers conversion to Christianity and membership in the church as the equivalent of a political declaration against the Muslim North. The inter-relation of religion, culture and politics becomes further evident in situations of conflict that call for the identification and demarcation of identities.

3.2. Garang and Marxism

Anonymous 3 further refers to the political opportunism of Garang:

Garang was a Marxist opportunist in the same way as church people were opportunistic with theology.

Samuel Kobia, on the other hand, seems to give more credit to the Marxist allegiance of the SPLM/A:

There is no question about it, really, that SPLM/A embraced Marxism as an ideology and this is what informed any speeches of John Garang, if you read his speeches certainly before the fall of Mengistu, the rhetoric is...
Up until the fall of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia, Marxism was the official ideology of the SPLM/A, and as Kobia indicates, such a deliberate ideological and political choice is reflected in the rhetoric of the speeches of Garang and confirmed by the fact that other relevant figures in the SPLM/A, such as Peter Adwok Nyaba, continued to rely on a Marxist frame of thought even after ideological shifts had taken place in the SPLM/A.

The fall of the Mengistu regime in 1991, until that time the main supporter of the SPLM/A, marks a shift in ideological allegiance on the part of the Southern Sudanese liberation movement. Samuel Kobia continues:

After the fall of Mengistu and when John Garang established his base in Kenya, then you can begin to see less and less of the Marxist rhetoric until finally it became an African understanding of the need to liberate themselves from the oppression of the North, and by the time of the peace talks that led to the signing of the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] the Marxist rhetoric was completely gone.

Samuel Kobia as well as John Gatu relate the move of Garang to Kenya to a shift in his ideological (and religious) stands. The interview with Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat, indicates that Garang was in close contact with Kiplagat, an important political actor who helped Garang to establish a network of support among African countries. Kiplagat was also the person in charge of the Sudan Working Group established by Samuel Kobia within the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK). It might be that the long conversations with Garang to which Ambassador Kiplagat refers, and the proximity to figures prominent in church settings played a role in Garang’s new and friendlier position towards Christianity.

Concerning the political ideology of the SPLM/A, according to Kobia, as Marxism faded away and completely disappeared in the official pronouncements of the SPLM/A by the year 2005 (the year of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement), it was replaced by an African understanding of the need for liberation, by a contextual, African reflection around the need for liberation and political options for the future of Africa.

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3.3. The move of the SPLM/A toward Christianity

As we have seen in Chapter 7, while Christianity spreads in the context of Southern Sudan at war, increasingly soldiers convert to Christianity. Garang used the strategy to establish military training camps and refugee camps next to each other, to recruit child soldiers from the refugee camps and to make use of the goods that were there distributed by aid organisations to supply his soldiers. Children in refugee camps and recruited by the SPLM/A, were often, as we have seen, so-called unaccompanied minors, children who had escaped areas of war and who, together with other children, had reached the refugee camps of Ethiopia and Kenya. As these children had lost their parents or had lost contact with them, they were taken care of by other people in refugee camps, often women, widowed and Christian. Being taken care by church people, these children were also exposed to the Christian message. Many of them became Christians and Christian SPLA soldiers.

Soldiers would be in charge of protecting bishops and other church leaders in their movements in the ‘liberated areas’. Travelling with church people, soldiers would become familiarised with the message of the Bible and learn Christian songs composed in great numbers in those years, often by women, which had become the most powerful means of transmission of the Christian message and of conversion. As an increasing number of soldiers convert to Christianity, the approach of the SPLM/A towards Christianity changes.

The main conferences of the People to People would have not taken place without the protection of SPLM/A commanders and soldiers. Wunlit could take place because of the personal commitment and protection offered by Salva Kiir, at that time commander for Bahr el Ghazal, who also attended the meeting, and the approval of Riek Machel, at that time SPLM/A Commander in Upper Nile. The perimeter of the peace village where Wunlit took place, was protected by SPLA soldiers. Soldiers were also allowed inside the peace village, disarmed and in civilian clothing. Being present at People to People events, soldiers were exposed to the ideas shared there and the peace rituals that were performed.

In the opinion of Rev. George Riak:

Churches influenced the SPLA and their beliefs convincing them that they were not communists.

It might be that the ideological shift prompted by the fall of the Mengistu regime, as well as the increasing proximity to church people and exposure to the Christian message, disclosed the

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789 See Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 394
790 Rolandsen, Øystein H., *Guerrilla Government*, p. 35
791 See Haumann, Matthew, *Travelling with Soldiers and Bishops. Stories of Struggling People in Sudan*, Paulines, Nairobi, 2004
792 Salva Kiir was also deputy Commander in Chief after John Garang
shallowness of the Marxist allegiance of the SPLM/A. Bishop Paul, on the other hand, seems to offer another interpretation of the shift from Marxism to Christianity among the SPLM/A, not quite rapid at all levels, as the Marxist ideology was more established than the comment of Rev. Riak might indicate. In the words of Bishop Paul:

*There was a shift of ideology in the SPLA. Garang was able to shift very quickly from Marxism. The leadership understood the shift but not the base, the soldiers. Garang was a nominal Christian. He had seen something in Christianity that could contribute in expanding the cause. The political leader in him saw the potential of Christianity, but it took a long time for the people to realise that shift. There were conflicts and misunderstandings among people within the SPLM/A, because people were not on one page.*

Bishop Paul points to how the shift from a Marxist ideology wasn’t a homogenous process within the SPLM/A. While Garang could move quickly, swiftly abandoning positions (Marxism) that were no longer useful to his political goals and move towards Christianity as more befitting, others, at the basis of the Movement and the Army, remained longer attached to Marxist ideas. Conflicts and misunderstandings were the consequence of opportunistic changes in ideological allegiances.

### 3.4. The elaboration of liberation theology as an alternative to Marxism

The three quotes that I will present in this section are all from the interview with Rev. Samuel Kobia. As we will see, Samuel Kobia sees the elaboration of a contextual form of liberation theology by Southern Sudanese church actors and theologians as the chosen alternative to Marxism in addressing the issue of liberation and the position of the churches towards it:

*Now when it came to Christians, many Christian theologians did not subscribe to the Marxist ideology and I would say that is why many found it necessary to articulate the liberation ideology or black theology of liberation because the theology of liberation was seen by some people as a Christian apology to Marxism, but certainly it is not because it is very deeply biblical.*

Samuel Kobia informs that several Christian theologians did not approve of the Marxist ideology of the SPLM/A. Still, they needed to find a theoretical frame to articulate, from a Christian and biblical perspective, their participation in or support for the liberation struggle, or more simply they needed to articulate their experience of the ongoing liberation struggle theologically. Such Christians, says Rev. Kobia, resort to a liberation ideology or theology, to a black theology of liberation on the model of the theology developed in South Africa (see Chapter 5).

To consider the liberation theology elaborated in that context as a Christian apology of Marxist ideas is erroneous, says Kobia, as that theology was deeply biblical. Samuel Kobia here
seems to posit Marxist ideology and the Bible as two mutually exclusive entities. According to him, a deeply biblical theology of liberation cannot be Marxist and cannot even be considered an apology of Marxism. Samuel Kobia at the same time provides important information about the fact that church actors were engaged in articulating a theological response to the reality of the liberation struggle.

Kobia continues:

_The black theology of liberation I would say the same thing, and that is why you find many theologians who do not subscribe to Marxism but they are comfortable with liberation theology and I think that is the balance that was put and I think this was pretty well accepted by people like John Garang and others, they didn’t try to force it on Christian theologians._

What Sam Kobia says about a South Sudanese contextual theology of liberation he would say of the black theology of liberation developed in South Africa: neither theology subscribed to Marxism, but still responded to the need to articulate a theological discourse on how to relate to the need for liberation and how to relate to the liberation struggle. Christian theologians, says Kobia, found in this way an acceptable balance between their beliefs and their political concerns.

This second quote adds a further element to what was expressed in the previous one, namely that this Christian and theological response to the liberation struggle in the form of a contextual theology of liberation was accepted by John Garang, who was not interested in imposing a Marxist ideology on the churches.

Liberation theology, or what Kobia calls a theology of liberation produced in Southern Sudan by Southern Sudanese actors, is a way of dealing with issues of liberation without having to subscribe to Marxist ideas:

_**Q:** So you see liberation theology as a way of dealing with the issue of liberation without subscribing to Marxist ideas?_  
_**A:** Yes, yes, I think that is really how I would see it because even in Latin America those who started liberation theology are those who are struggling with how do we subscribe to Marxism but we have the Bible and the Bible is very clear on what we are called to do and to be in situations of oppression and exploitation._

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793 Not all see the Bible and Marxism as two irreconcilable entities. For a study of biblical resonances in Marxism see Miranda, José Porfirio, _Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression_, Orbis, New York, 1974, and by the same author _Communism in the Bible_, Orbis, New York, 1982.

Q: Are you saying that we have liberation theology and then we have Marxism and then we have the Bible so we can have a Marxist approach to liberation or even have a biblical approach to liberation and that would produce a liberation theology?
A: Yes, yes, I would really say so.

The Bible is referred to here as providing sufficient principles and directions in situations of oppression and exploitation. Samuel Kobia presents two possible and alternative theoretical approaches to the issue of liberation: Marxism and the Bible. Between the two routes from Marxism to liberation and from the Bible to liberation, Kobia points to a contextual theology of liberation as a biblical approach to the reality and experience of liberation that can bypass Marxism.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore whether and to what extent the position of John Garang and the liberation movement on the issue of religion, the relation of religion (both Traditional and Christian) to the liberation struggle and the vision of the New Sudan influenced theological elaboration in Southern Sudan and in the frame of the People to People.

As was made clear at the Yei Dialogue, the leadership of the SPLM/A expected support from the churches and the NSCC for the liberation struggle. Such support was to be expressed through help in recruitment, instilling in the people sympathy towards the liberation struggle and the SPLM/A, engaging in work for peace and reconciliation, supporting Garang’s vision for the revitalisation of Traditional Religion and culture and finally developing a theology of liberation that would also address issues of justice, peace and reconciliation.

In response to the invitation of Garang, church leaders attending the Yei Dialogue voice their commitment for the liberation struggle by peaceful means. They also provide an outline of their spiritual and theological contribution to the liberation struggle. The theology outlined in Yei has the following traits: it is contextual, prophetic, liberationist and concerned with justice and peace. More specifically, the theology that church leaders propose is contextual, as it aims at conveying the word of God in the face of the current situation and as it aims at being relevant theology in the specific context of Sudan at war. That theology aims at expressing the prophetic voice of the church. It is already a liberation theology as it articulates faith in Jesus the Liberator who came to provide abundant life. It is also a liberation theology because it is the expression of a church that choses to be on the side of the people – against the SPLM/A – of the poor and of the oppressed. It is a theology that aims at linking liberation with justice and peace, as it is clearly expressed that only where there is justice there can be true liberation. In this respect, churches
redefine and expand the concept of liberation. While Garang is asking for a liberation theology that might support his armed liberation struggle, the churches reply with the articulation of a theology of liberation for the people as a peaceful contribution to the liberation struggle.

In Yei, Garang also urges the churches to promote a positive attitude towards Traditional Religion and culture and to embrace traditional methods of conflict resolution.

As Khartoum aims at annihilating the South by suppressing traditional, indigenous culture, cultural resistance becomes part of the liberation struggle. Here, liberation is related to cultural preservation. The two elements of liberation and cultural preservation are related in the strategy of the SPLM/A and John Garang.

It is interesting to note that Garang articulates in Yei, at the very starting point of the People to People, the two dimensions of cultural revival and liberation and asks the churches to respond theologically to such an inter-relation. In other words, and in terms that are at the core of the present research, Garang is asking the churches to articulate a theology of liberation and inculturation. The churches respond positively to the request to re-evaluate traditional values and practices. As traditional values, beliefs and practices had been eroded by the ongoing war, Garang wishes for peace in order to reinstate them. Interestingly, in the frame of the People to People, it is the re-evaluation of traditional practices that will contribute to achieving peace.
15. Perspectives on liberation II: liberation theology in the frame of the People to People

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have referred to the ways in which the Sudanese churches received the SPLM/A mandate in Yei to elaborate a contextually relevant form of liberation theology that would also address issues of peace, reconciliation and justice. We have also seen how, in the words of Bishop Marona, the Sudanese churches were already engaged in articulating a theology that was contextual, prophetic, liberationist and concerned with issues of justice and peace, a theology of liberation for the people as peaceful contribution to the liberation struggle.

Before introducing my analysis of interview material on the articulation of a theology of liberation in the context of Sudan at war and in the frame of the People to People, I will address the issue of what I identify as liberation theology in core documents and publications by the SCC and NSCC. Identifying references to key-concepts of liberation theologies in the main documents of the SCC and NSCC justifies the question I pose to interviewees about the elaboration of a theology of liberation in the frame of the People to People.

2. Liberation theology in Sudanese ecumenical documents and publications

Following the 1991 split within the SPLM/A, the level of conflict among Southern armed groups increased, and so did the extent of violence inflicted on civilians. In the early 1990s, Church leaders began to issue pastoral letters to condemn human rights abuses committed against civilians by the various factions of the liberation movement. In Chapter 7 I have referred to the letter “To Our Flocks” published in February 1993 and personally delivered by church leaders to factional military leaders deep in the bush.795 As mentioned, the letter did not achieve the desired effect of curbing the behaviour of military leaders, but it conveyed a significant statement to international partners, “marking out internationally where the Sudanese churches stood on the inter-factional fighting in Southern Sudan”.796

The letter refers to liberation, liberators, oppressors and the oppressed. It conveys the intention of the churches to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and be actors of change. The

795 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 489
796 Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment*, p. 489
terms and principles conveyed with this text resonate with key themes of liberation theologies, among them liberation versus oppression, oppressors and the oppressed, the commitment of the church to bring about change, the choice of the church to stand in solidarity with the poor, and the commitment of the church to be a prophetic voice for justice.

At the Dialogue meeting held in Yei in 1997 to which I have referred in the previous chapter, the programmatic document “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace”, issued jointly by the SCC and NSCC in 1996, was presented as a basis for discussion in seeking a common vision for the Movement and the Church. The Church makes its stand based on the need for unity, strength, diversity and self-reliance for the Sudanese people. To this end, the Church sought endorsement of its active role as mediator in attempts to reconcile differences between the factions and groups in Southern Sudan.  

As the Yei meeting officially marks the beginning of the People to People Peacemaking Process, the document “Here We Stand”, used in Yei as the basis for dialogue between the Movement and the churches on a future plan of action, can be considered to be the ideological basis of the People to People. 

“Here We Stand” is further referred to as the ideological basis of the People to People in a lecture delivered in Juba on 2 April 2008 by Samuel Kobia, at that time Secretary General of the WCC. In his key-note speech Samuel Kobia states:

1996 was the year when the NSCC and the SCC through the SEF [Sudan Ecumenical Forum] came up with the celebrated document “Here we stand united in action for peace”. It is to be remembered that this was the document that spelt out in very clear terms what the churches saw as the vision for a new Sudan after the civil war. It also laid down a clear programme and indeed a project which had all the main ingredients of what it would take for the churches to contribute meaningfully to the peace process in Sudan. 

“Here We Stand” is presented by Kobia as the document that clarifies and communicates both the intention of the churches to actively engage in peace work, and the vision of the churches for a liberated and peaceful new Sudan. 

Samuel Kobia continues by saying:

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797 SPLM – NSCC, *Come Let Us Reason Together*, p. 4
798 Speech of Samuel Kobia, Juba, 2 April 2008, Section I
In the second part of my reflections, I would now like to look at the insight gained and lessons learned from our engagement in solidarity with the churches and people of Sudan in their liberation struggle. One of the very first insights that I say we have gained is that clarity of vision is critical to the process for transformation. When the document “Here we stand united in action for peace” was formulated, it became not just a manifesto, but it was the equivalent of the Kairos document of the churches of South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle. The document henceforth became the master piece for the churches and the main reference point for the people of Southern Sudan in general.\footnote{Speech of Samuel Kobia, Juba, 2 April 2008, Section II. For the Kairos Document see note 154 in this work. In 1999, the SCC and NSCC issued an elaboration of “Here We Stand” named “Together We Remain United in Action for Peace”}

Comparing “Here We Stand” to the South African Kairos document, Samuel Kobia confirms the programmatic as well as theological relevance of the Sudanese document. What principles and ideas are then conveyed in “Here We Stand”? In the text of the document, churches and Sudanese ecumenical structures express themselves in the following terms:

> We then felt it is our responsibility to speak for all the people of Sudan and to suggest ways forward out of the present deadlock.

> The Church in Sudan exists for all the people.

> Believing that all human beings are made in God’s image, we are concerned for the well being and for justice for all the marginalised and oppressed people of Sudan. We will stand with all the suffering people in the Sudan and speak on their behalf.

> Whatever political solution is chosen by the people, we believe that peace and harmony will depend on the following principles being followed ... A recognition that a lasting and a true peace must be based on justice and full and equal rights for all citizens.

> As leaders of the Sudanese Church we commit ourselves to defend and promote these principles and to work for reconciliation at all levels. We commit ourselves to pray for peace, reconciliation, for those who suffer, for the oppressed and for the oppressor. In the search for a just and lasting peace we offer ourselves without reserve in the service of God and for our people.\footnote{SCC – NSCC, “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace”}

In a similar way as “To Our Flock”, the text of “Here We Stand” refers to key themes of liberation theologies: churches taking a stand in solidarity with the poor and taking on a prophetic role; references to the categories of liberation, oppression, oppressors and the oppressed; the connection...
between peace and justice; equality and the focus on human rights; references to the political connotations of liberation; and commitment to bring about change.

So far in this chapter I have referred to the pastoral letter “To Our Flocks” and to the programmatic document “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace”. In Chapter 11 I have introduced the publication Building Hope for Peace Inside Sudan as the document with which the NSCC aims at recording and sharing the ideas and methods that inspired and supported the People to People. A fourth document to which I have referred is Inside Sudan. The Story of People-to-People Peacemaking in Southern Sudan. A Peace of the People, by the People, for the People, a publication that, as the title indicates, aims at making known the history of the People to People and of people’s involvement in it, in order to raise awareness of the civil war in Sudan and conduct advocacy work to bring the war to an end.

I argue that these four core texts related to the Sudanese churches’ involvement in work for reconciliation, peace and justice, use a high number of terms, expressions and themes that characterise liberation theologies. Accordingly, the question at the basis of the present chapter is whether it is possible to talk of a liberation theology produced in the context of Southern Sudan at war and in the frame of the People to People, and if so, in what terms.

2.1. A comparison between key concepts of liberation theology and the content of core publications in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process

Liberation theology, as defined in the pioneering work of Gustavo Gutiérrez Teología de la liberación. Perspectivas, is “a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God”, “a theological reflection born of the experience of shared effort to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, free and more human”. Contemplation and theological reflection go hand in hand with active engagement towards the transformation of society.

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801 See Chapter 3 and 11
802 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan
803 New Sudan Council of Churches, Inside Sudan, p. 2
804 See Gutiérrez, Gustavo, A Theology of Liberation
805 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, A Theology of Liberation, p. xxix
806 Gutiérrez, Gustavo, A Theology of Liberation, p. xiii
The pioneering work of Gutiérrez, as well as the text of Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*\(^{808}\) elaborate on the following key themes of liberation theology, particularly in its Latin American expressions: liberation; oppression, oppressors, the oppressed; political connotations of liberation; connection of peace and justice; focus on human rights; equality; commitment to bring about change; an understanding of *shalom* /peace as integral peace; the importance of perspectives elaborated by the people; churches in solidarity with the poor, and the prophetic role of churches; the agency of the people and empowerment of the people; the link between theory and praxis; and inclusivity with a focus on women.

In the comparison table annexed (Annex I), I propose a comparison between the key terms identified by Gutiérrez and Leonardo and Clodovis Boff and key concepts of the four main publications by the SCC and NSCC I referred to in the previous paragraph. As can be seen in the comparison table, similarities between the terminology of the four chosen texts and key-concepts of liberation theology are considerable, both in number and in content.

### 2.1.1. Results of the comparison

The first text, “To Our Flocks” refers to oppression and liberation, articulating the relation between the two terms. Later it refers to civilians as the oppressed. The text also refers to spiritual liberation in the context of political and military liberation. The text further points to change brought about by the churches. To achieve the goal of change, church leaders are ready even to risk their own lives. The churches are in solidarity with the suffering people and share in their pain.

“Here We Stand” being a longer document, also presents a higher number of references to key themes of liberation theology. It refers to the oppressed people of Sudan, relating the terms oppressor and oppressed. This text is more explicit on the focus on human rights and on the association of justice and peace. Again, church representatives are ready to offer themselves completely to God and the people. “Here We Stand” refers to the equal value of every human being created in God’s image, and goes on at greater length on the role of the churches as voice of the voiceless, as the task of the churches is to stand in solidarity with the suffering and make their concerns heard. “Here We Stand” also refers to the necessity to open political participation to all people as a precondition to the solution of the political problems of the Country.

In *Inside Sudan*, we do not find the associated terms liberation, oppressors, oppressed, but we find a clear reference to the role of the churches in promoting political involvement among the people. The link between justice and peace is clearly and repeatedly expressed, as well as the commitment of the churches to be a prophetic voice, a voice for the voiceless. The church refuses

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any claim of neutrality and takes a clear stand in solidarity with poor, suffering people. Several
references, furthermore, can be noticed regarding the promotion of the agency of the people and
their empowerment. Finally, inclusivity, with numerous references to the involvement of women, is
referred.

Building Hope, as mentioned, is the text among the four that aims at providing an account of
the methodology and key concepts of the People to People. More than the other texts, it underlines
the association of human rights, peace and justice. Building Hope also articulates the concept of
shalom as integral peace, including spiritual and material dimensions, as well as the integrity of
relations with self, with God and the others. Here, more than in any of the other texts, the centrality
and agency of the people in the peacemaking process is stressed.

A fifth document to which interviewees and I will refer in this chapter and the next, is “Let
my People Choose. The Statement of the Sudanese Churches on the Right of Self Determination for
Southern Sudan and the Marginalised Areas”, issued on 6 March 2002 at the London General
Assembly of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum.809 The text is highly political and has limited
theological content. Worthy of note is the reference to the role of the churches as advocates of the
“Right of all people to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and
cultural development. It is the right of people to govern themselves in a manner freely chosen by
them”.810 In relation to the theme of the present chapter, namely liberation theology in the frame of
the People to People, the relevant element in this document, beside the very fact of the involvement
of churches in political issues, is the title “Let my People Choose”, a clear reference to the text of
Exodus, relating the right of the Southern Sudanese to self-determination to the God-sanctioned
right of the Israelites to be freed from slavery in Egypt.

The number of similarities in terminology and concepts between founding texts of liberation
theology and core Sudanese ecumenical documents justifies the formulation of questions about
liberation theology in the context of Southern Sudan at war and of the People to People.

3. A Sudanese liberation theology

To what extent is it possible to talk of a liberation theology produced in the context of Southern
Sudan at war and in the frame of the People to People? Were Sudanese church people aware of
liberation theologies produced in other contexts? Were there any influences of liberation theologies

809 The text of “Let my People Choose” was signed by Archbishop Paulino Lukudu of the Catholic Church, Archbishop
Joseph Maruna of the Ecumenical Church, Rev. Peter Makuac Nyak of the Presbyterian Church, Rev. Taban Elonai
Andarago, Chairperson of the SCC and Rev Mark Kumbonyaki, Chairman of the NSCC
810 SCC-NSCC, “Let my People Choose”, p. 1
produced abroad on the theological elaboration that was conducted within Southern Sudan? If so, were Southern Sudanese church actors aware of such influences? These questions were asked to interviewees and answered in considerably different ways, as the analysis of interview material that I will now present shows.

According to a first group of interviewees, a contextual theology of liberation was developed independently from external influences. A second group indicates that similarities were due to the fact that Sudanese ecumenical actors acquired the theological language of international ecumenical partners. Finally, a third group indicates that Sudanese church actors and theologians were aware of liberation theologies produced abroad and were influenced by them.

3.1. Option one: a contextual theology of liberation is developed independently from external influences

The five interviews to which I will refer in this section indicate that, in the perception of interviewees, a form of contextual theology addressing issues of liberation and oppression, focus on the people, and the relation between peace and justice, was developed in Southern Sudan, independently from external influences. Such contextual theology of liberation arose as a biblical response to and theological reflection around the ongoing war, the liberation struggle and their effects on the people.

On the complaints of ecumenical partners to the Sudanese ecumenical networks prompted by the highly political character of the document “Here We Stand”, Bishop Tombe, at that time General Secretary of the SCC, comments:

Some people think that we were behaving like politicians, why don’t we talk straight, even so, as religious leaders you have to be cautious, you don’t say your personal opinions, but you say the role of the Church, even if you don’t like it, I mean, the prophets were playing that role, so we accepted that, okay, we are really speaking on behalf of others not for ourselves, and then when it comes to the referendum now it was each one to decide whether to vote for unity or nothing, and when I look back it was very good that we stood on that ground and we played that role.

By advocating for the right to self-determination,811 the churches felt they were playing a prophetic role. The fact that the churches stood firm in their advocacy for the right of self-determination is judged positively by Bishop Tombe.

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811 Addressed primarily in the document “Let my People Choose”. See above
Was the advocacy work and engagement of the churches around political issues related to liberation theology? Did liberation theology inspire this work or did this work find expression in liberation theology? Bishop Tombe continues:

"Whether they have come across, in fact I would hear a lot about this liberation theology, I think that is more interpretation, but we were already looking at our context, what needed to be done. For example, we said the war must be stopped and there should be dialogue and negotiations, a peaceful approach instead of violence. I think that if liberation theology is understood as a biblical reflection in a particular context then of course the Bible is our common reference, yes that can be true because we use, as Christians we follow the Bible, we want justice, so I know that many people said: well, you have heard about this, but we heard about liberation theology much later on, I mean I was in my second year in the office of General Secretary, I became aware of this liberation theology.

Staff in the SCC did hear about liberation theology, says Bishop Tombe. Whether they were influenced by it is a matter of interpretation, a matter of interpreting and naming the ideas that influenced the ecumenical structures. What is most important, says Bishop Tombe, is that the churches were already engaged in their context, and in the task of finding a theological expression to their commitment to bring positive change. The task they saw before them was to find ways to stop the war, initiate peace negotiations and practice non-violent methods of conflict resolution. If liberation theology is the result of a biblical reflection on a particular context and in response to the requirements of that context, then church people in Southern Sudan were elaborating their own form of liberation theology, a theology that could address contextual issues of justice and peace. Those involved in the task of producing a biblically-inspired response to the pressing needs of that particular context were producing their own form of liberation theology before they heard about liberation theologies produced elsewhere, or were by them influenced, says Bishop Tombe.

A similar opinion is expressed by Archbishop Paulino:

"No, to be honest I think yes we heard this liberation theology as if it was something that was taught in America in general as such, but I think that liberation theology did not reach really to us and even today, yes, liberation theology which we really, well if it is understood in this way, yes, it is here liberation theology, but I mean it was as if it was not something very straight with the Church or whatever it is, so just on this point of People to People peace talk in Wunlit, no, no, I don’t think there was anything to do with liberation theology.

Church leaders and people trained in theology had heard about liberation theology as something happening abroad, says Archbishop Paulino. Liberation theology had not reached Southern Sudan, and it was not part of the elaboration around Wunlit. On the other hand, Archbishop Paulino does
not exclude that there is a local, contextual form of liberation theology in South Sudan, “today”, and possibly in the 1990s, that was nevertheless not defined in terms of liberation theology.

Like Bishop Tombe and Archbishop Paulino, Anonymous 4 does not see the influence of liberation theology on the key actors in the People to People. Nevertheless, Anonymous 4 raises an interesting feature of the theological reflection that was elaborated in those years, namely that it was centred on biblical texts dealing with issues of liberation:

Q: Do you think that liberation theology was influencing the NSCC at that time? And what about the SCC?
Was it influenced at all by liberation theology?
A: Not exactly, you know, among our pastors there were those who were affected by the liberation theology, very few. I know few of them, ... I know very few pastors who followed liberation theology but they were junior pastors, I know the current apostolic administrator of Malakal is one of them who was in charge of the displaced in Umdurman, and he is one of them I know. There were the old pastors who did not have this thing. ... I think that most of the pastors did not really have that understanding and in particular among other churches, the Anglican churches, I have not seen any with that theology
...
Q: So you are saying that the text of Exodus, of liberation from Egypt was a meaningful text for the people of South Sudan?
A: In some, in many locations it was a meaningful text, it was, that people have to suffer but in the end God will always intervene.

Anonymous 4 provides here a sort of profile of those church leaders who were influenced by and in turn produced liberation theology: they were a minority, Catholic and young. Most of the senior and Anglican pastors did not have that understanding, says the interviewee, and would not define their theology in such terms. At the same time, Anonymous 4 says that the book of Exodus and references to the liberation of Israel from Egypt were texts considered as particularly meaningful in the context of Southern Sudan. The text of Exodus talked to people who were suffering but were expecting and hoping for deliverance from God. While most of the pastors were not perceived as liberation theologians, biblical texts that are central in the elaboration of liberation theology, such as the book of Exodus, were perceived as particularly relevant. That people suffer but fully trust that in the end God will intervene is a basic assumption of African Traditional Religion and theology. Interestingly here, Anonymous 4 is linking an overlapping of Traditional Religion and Christian theology – inculturation – to issues of liberation.

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Bishop Paride Taban is considered by several interviewees, as we will see, to be one of those who were aware of liberation theologies produced elsewhere. The interview section to which I will now refer, indicates that Bishop Taban, more than subscribing to forms of liberation theology produced abroad, had elaborated his own theology of liberation. It does not emerge from the interview to what extent already existing liberation theologies influenced his own thought.

Q: Do you think that liberation theology influenced you or other church leaders who were conducting the People to People?
A: Well I don’t know because one, the liberation theology was always in order for justice, for the right of the people, for the respect of the people and looking always at justice and it looks always like that. That is what I look into, and for myself I have always this life I take from Jesus: love, joy, peace, patience, compassion, sympathy, kindness, truthfulness, gentleness, self-control, humility, and then you have got trust, unity, and faith and hope. And these are the things leading the People to People peace and reconciliation because you have to look at the people, love them, then you meet them and you have them always in your heart and the people within the middle of your heart. And this has been the life of Jesus Christ.

In his words, Bishop Taban’s theology focuses on justice, the rights of the people and respect for the people. In liberation theology, this focus on the people would be called ‘a preferential option for the poor’, but Bishop Taban does not use this wording. The inspiration of his theology, centred on justice and concern for the people, is the example of the life lived by Jesus, and the values he preached and practiced. The example of Jesus and the values he witnessed to are also, according to Bishop Taban, the basis of the theology that supports People to People peace and reconciliation.

I would define the theology of Bishop Taban as a contextual theology that has at its core a preferential option for the (poor) people and a deep commitment to justice, as well as a theology that anchors such preferential options to the earthly ministry of Jesus witnessed in the Bible.

Bishop Taban was in contact with the WCC and delivered a key-note at the 1998 WCC General Assembly held in Harare. While he does not elaborate on the influence of liberation theology on his thought, he was aware of theological discourses elaborated in international ecumenical settings. Without trying to assess direct influences, there are evident resonances between key themes of liberation theology and the core of Bishop Taban’s theology.

John Ashworth, as mentioned, theologically trained and engaged over a long period of time in the People to People, provides an analysis of the relation between liberation theologies and the contextual theologies of liberation produced in Southern Sudan:

813 See Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*
Q: do you think there were any specific theologies that influenced the NSCC at the time, 1998 -1999, were there any theologies that influenced the NSCC?
A: I’m not sure so much about it. First of all, I don’t think we used the word theology because we were dealing with a lot of Protestant churches, for them the idea of theology is not a very big one, but we talked about Bible values, so I think we felt very much that it was based on gospel values and that is the term we used in fact, gospel values. In retrospect, there were liberation theology values, I think in my book [815] Sam Kobia has spoken quite eloquently about that, but at the time we were not really using that language, probably not really looking at the, we were not looking at the literature of liberation theology, and yet we were choosing some of the same texts, for example ‘Let My People Choose’, the Exodus stories are a very important part of liberation theology. Also our advocacy work, I mentioned in my book, I was once challenged about why do we had to do advocacy? So we found in the Bible, we found the Old Testament prophets, for example justice and everything, we found in the gospels peace and reconciliation, so I don’t know how explicit it was, some of it we probably didn’t even discuss, but that is the background we were coming from.

A difference between Protestants and Catholics referred to here is that Protestants, in the context of Southern Sudan, would not generally make use of the term ‘theology’. They would rather refer to Bible values or gospel values to indicate a theological elaboration around the biblical message. Beside the way such a reflection was termed or what language was used, John Ashworth adds that in looking back at the type of reflection that was conducted, there were similarities with the ideas (or values) set forth by liberation theologies. Although liberation theologies were not a conscious reference, biblical texts meaningful and often referred to in the context of Southern Sudan, were the same texts that are at the centre of the reflection and elaboration of liberation theologies. One of the most political documents issued by the SCC-NSCC, “Let my People Choose”, on the issue of self-determination, with its title aims at creating associations with the book of Exodus, a key text for liberation theologies, says Ashworth. Furthermore, to justify the advocacy work conducted by the Sudanese ecumenical structures, biblical references were sought and found among texts that are central to the reflection of liberation theologies, namely prophetic books. Justice is a key concept in the books of the prophets, while peace and reconciliation are quite prominent in the New Testament. While references to liberation theologies were not explicit, says John Ashworth, they are, in retrospect, quite evident. The language and priorities of liberation theology were later found to resonate with that of the theology contextually produced.

John Ashworth continues:

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You have to remember South Sudan was really cut off in those days and had been for thirty, forty years, even before the expulsion of the missionaries in 1964, so on liberation theology I would say: first of all yes, we had the language because we talked about the liberation struggle and from the SPLA obviously, so we had that language, we also had the biblical language because especially our Protestant churches are very biblical churches, they did a lot of, a lot of their work was and a lot of the thinking was biblically based, and Nehemiah was a very important document in a different context, but they really identified with the book Nehemiah, they really identified with a lot of the gospel values, they identified with Isaiah, you know, the race of a black long legged people who live south of the swamp or in the reeds or something. I mean we have hints actually that Sudan was mentioned the land of the Bible, Sudan the land of the Bible based on that Isaiah text, so they really are very fluent in the Old Testament especially because of the New Testament, but as I said, the Protestant churches, for them the very concept of theology is quite alien to some of the Protestant churches.

Attempts at understanding what theology was produced in the context of Southern Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s will have to take into account the social and political situation of the region. The language of liberation was part of the theological elaboration of church people because they were involved in and affected by a liberation war. Liberation was for obvious reasons a key concept in the language of the liberation movement. A nother source of reflection around liberation was, as mentioned, the Bible. Especially the Anglicans, says John Ashworth, were firmly grounded in the Bible in their theological reflection. The book of Nehemiah, as an example, was considered particularly important and referred to. Another important text as we have seen in Chapter 9, is the prophecy referred to in Isaiah 18, and interpreted as a reference to the people of Southern Sudan. Theology, particularly for the Protestants, was reflection on the Bible and what the Bible had to say vis-à-vis their experience of war and of the liberation struggle. Concerning the Catholics, John Ashworth continues:

Our Catholic Church, liberation theology by the ‘90s had not found its way into South Sudan. Our Church is one of the very conservative theologically, but very progressive on pastoral and social issues, but also very, very cut off, and Vatican II was unknown in South Sudan for many years because it happened in the ’60s just as the missionaries were expelled, and our Church in many ways is still a pre-Vatican II church.

The outcome of the II Vatican Council did not have much impact in Southern Sudan as it happened at the time when all foreign missionaries were expelled from the Country. As we have seen in Chapters 7 and 9, the South Sudanese Catholic church lost all its clergy around the mid-1960s as they were all expelled. In the 1990s, adds John Ashworth, liberation theology had not yet reached the Catholic communities of Southern Sudan. This very fact can be interpreted positively:

So I think it is perhaps a strength of liberation theology that it was developed in Latin America in one context and it sprung also in a completely different context in South Sudan with no cross fertilisation and yet actually something very similar. It also sprang up in South Africa, although they probably had more cross fertilisation with South America. I mean, one way of saying it is: we invented it. Now we were not the only people who invented it, whether you are talking about liberation theology or whether you are talking about let’s say John Paul Lederach’s theories of reconciliation, we invented them, but he also invented them, but the two were completely separate and later when we found out that they were saying the same thing, we found that very affirming. Talking the same language having come from different directions, perhaps.

A contextual theology of liberation sprung up in Southern Sudan, says John Ashworth, independently of what was produced in Latina America, still with very similar features. “We invented it”, says John Ashworth, to stress that the theology produced in Southern Sudan was the expression of a contextual, local theological reflection. The same can be said of peace theories developed in the context of Southern Sudan, still with remarkable similarities to the peace theories developed and popularised by John Paul Lederach, a topic I have addressed in Chapters 10 and 11. Only at a later stage, peace practitioners became aware of the strong resonances between their peace theories and those of Lederach, says Ashworth. While a contextual form of theology of liberation was developed in the context of Southern Sudan, independently, accordingly to John Ashworth, of what had been produced in other contexts, it later became evident that it presented features similar to those of better known liberation theologies. In the words of John Ashworth, similar languages were produced in different contexts, and this was experienced as affirming.

Was the theology of liberation produced in Southern Sudan really free from influences from other contexts? In the course of the interview, John Ashworth reviews the direction of his argument:

Some of them just as you say Sam Kobia brought certain ideas in with him, although Sam was not at the heart of the People to People process. So it is not to say that none of these, I mean I had heard of liberation theology, and I was at the heart of things, I certainly had heard of liberation theology so there were those of us around who could feed in certain things, but it was not where this was rooted, it was rooted very much from within.

Sudanese Church leaders were indeed in contact with ecumenical partners and theologians who were familiar with liberation theologies. One of them was Rev. Samuel Kobia who carried in his work of support to the Sudanese churches his theological inclination towards liberation theology.

John Ashworth admits that he had heard of liberation theology, still he sees the source of inspiration for a Southern Sudanese theology of liberation as internal and organic to the context.
Anna Kima was staff of the NSCC in Nairobi. As peace mobiliser for the Upper Nile region, she was frequently in Southern Sudan. In her work of mobilisation of women as well as other community members, she often used the Bible as a resource to elicit the potential of women for peacebuilding and peacemaking.

Q: Had you ever heard of liberation theology?
A: I used to hear about it from conversations with Dr Haruun [Executive Secretary of NSCC]. I wanted to become a pastor and wanted to travel to Egypt, but my ex-husband refused. Help liberate the oppressed who are lost, mentally, spiritually. I wanted to be a pastor because the way they preach is not enough. Haruun told me that what I was saying was in line with liberation theology. Dr Haruun told me that there were certain colleges in the USA that were doing it.

Anna Kima felt in the first place moved by an urge to help with the physical and spiritual liberation of the people she encountered. She felt that the experience of suffering because of war also needed to be addressed theologically. She also felt that the type of reflection on the Bible that was shared by the pastors she encountered was not sufficient, and did not properly address the spiritual needs of the people. She had in mind another way of doing theology and asked Dr Haruun, the Executive Director of the NSCC, for advice. Dr Haruun gives a name to the theological reflection that Anna Kima was sharing, namely liberation theology.

The excerpt from the interview with Anna Kima illustrates how the situation of war and the experience of the people called for a specific form of theological elaboration that could meet the people in their suffering and could provide spiritual and theological answers to their conditions. Elements of such a form of theological elaboration took shape in the minds of people, such as Anna Kima, without any specific labels. In the encounter with trained theologians, such aspirations were found as resonating with elements of liberation theologies developed elsewhere.

3.2. Option two: talking the language of partners
Is it possible to assume that the terminology of liberation theology found in the official documents of the SCC and NSCC I have examined above, more than the outcome of an internal reflection was developed to communicate with ecumenical international partners? Rev. John Gatu tells:

At that time Africa was burning with liberation. ... Liberation theology was developing everywhere in the world and the NSCC was influenced by what was happening in other African countries.

As much as Southern Sudan might have been isolated, affected as it was by prolonged civil war, several church leaders and theologians were aware of what was happening in other countries and
what theological elaborations were conducted abroad. From the 1960s, several African countries were involved in liberation wars and, in various contexts, theologians had been engaged in the process of developing a theological response to liberation struggles and processes. The New Sudan Council of Churches, says Rev. John Gat, was influenced by what was happening in other African countries, both politically and theologically. The theological language that can be heard in the official documents of the NSCC was also the result of attempts by the NSCC to talk the same language of other theological and ecumenical actors in the African continent.

Anonymous 3 considers the language of liberation theology in NSCC documents “learned language”. At the same time, Anonymous 3 confirms that the language of liberation theology was used in the official documents of the SCC and NSCC. More than being a language developed in Southern Sudan as the expression of a reflection contextually carried, Anonymous 3 considers such language as adopted from ecumenical partners and employed to cement cooperation.

Asked about possible similarities between the language of liberation theology and that of the official documents of the NSCC and SCC, William Lowrey points to a distinction between the programme of the People to People and the broader range of activities of the NSCC:

*I would distinguish some between the People to People and the broader effort of NSCC to be engaged in peacemaking and conflict resolution ... so I wouldn’t be surprised if there were some influence with that, but I never heard anyone talking about it, using that precise language.*

Q: But then if I understand you right, it was more a language meant for the partners than a language that would be used at People to People events.

A: That’s right. Those documents where not widely distributed on the ground in South Sudan because you actually don’t have at that time a widely literate audience as well, and so they were written primarily for the partners who were the ones who were going to fund the various events ... it was a communication within the diaspora as well.

William Lowrey distinguishes between what was happening on the ground in Southern Sudan also in the frame of the People to People, and the level of the ecumenical structures engaged in advocacy work, both towards international partners and the Sudanese diaspora. Communication with external actors would have followed other channels and would have been expressed in a different language than the one used within Southern Sudan. The fact the most of the population in Southern Sudan was (and to a large extent still is) illiterate, implies that written, official documents were not primarily meant for them. The language of liberation theology used in official documents, says William Lowrey, was meant for an international audience and donors.

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817 See Chapter 5
The issue of the influence of partners on the theological elaboration of Sudanese church actors will be the theme of the next chapter. Still, as the theme of the present paragraph is liberation theology in the Sudanese documents and in relation to the influence of ecumenical partners, it might be relevant to mention that the WCC was consistently influenced by liberation theologians and theologies. José Míguez Bonino, one of the protestant fathers of Latin American liberation theology, Uruguayan Julio de Santa Ana, Emilio Castro and Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a text much referred to by liberation theologians, had all been staff of the WCC. In the words of Walter Altmann, another Latin American exponent of liberation theology and active member of the WCC, in the 1970s and 1980s, liberation theology had a strong influence on the ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches.

3.3. Option three: aware of other liberation theologies and influenced by them

The question whether staff in the Sudanese ecumenical structures were aware of liberation theologies, and if liberation theologies affected the People to People was posed to Joy Kwaje, in those years staff of the SCC office in Khartoum. Joy Kwaje replies:

> Definitely yes, because the liberation theology itself was being already used for the whole notion of the liberation of the people of the South from the North and therefore it was not very difficult to bring that into it, and that also pushed us, if we wanted to be liberated from Khartoum, from oppression in the North, from all the evils that we thought that they were, then there was a need to liberate ourselves from all the other things that had divided us, and I think that was also a very strong perspective that pushed the people to say yes, we need to get over all these other things to liberate ourselves, to be able to liberate ourselves from the bigger enemy, so to say.

The language of liberation, says Joy K waje, was a language people were familiar with as the issue of the liberation of the South from the North was part of everyone’s experience. It is understandable that when church people tried to express themselves theologically on the issue of liberation of the South from the North, they expressed themselves in terms of a theology of liberation. In the process of developing a theological elaboration on the issue of liberation in the context of Southern Sudan, ideas developed elsewhere were imported and applied to that specific context. The theological terminology of liberation was employed not only in relation to the oppression of the South by the North, but also in relation of conflicts and situations of oppression within the South. Southerners understood that, in order to achieve the bigger goal of liberating themselves from the oppression of

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818 Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

the North, they needed to liberate themselves first from the ailments that Southerners were inflicting upon other Southerners. Only a liberated South, liberated in more than military and political terms, could stand the fight of liberation from the North.

About key terms of liberation theology employed in the document “Here We Stand”, Joy Kwaje continues:

Yes, because in “Here We Stand” we worked for it to tell the people, to tell the world that, there was something in the beginning that other circles thought that the church should not be involved in some of those things, that it was political, that it was beyond the church, but as an ecumenical movement people wanted to say: we are all together as the different denominations of churches in Sudan and South Sudan then, of course there was no South Sudan, it was called the liberated areas, what was important then was as churches we are here together, to work for peace, here we stand together for peace and that was a very strong message.

Joy Kwaje confirms that in the document “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace” there were references to terms and ideas of liberation theology. The reason why such terminology was used, says Ms Kwaje, is that the churches in Sudan, gathered in the two ecumenical networks of the Sudan Council of Churches and New Sudan Council of Churches, wanted to send a clear message to their ecumenical partners and beyond, namely that they were determined to continue their work for peace even if such a task implied getting involved in politics, and even if such involvement was considered beyond the competence of churches. Liberation theology is considered by Joy Kwaje as suitable to convey the commitment of churches and ecumenical networks to stand firm in their task, inevitably political, to work for peace.

Gachora Ngunjiri clearly refers to the strong influence of liberation theology on the NSCC:

Q: What theologies were mainly influencing the Nairobi based ecumenical network?
A: If you look at the thinking of the key people who were involved, I think that the liberation theology was a very key influence on some of them. People like Paride Taban and obviously John Gatu and Samuel Kobia and even Nathaniel Garang, you realise that they were not just simple church people who would just talk the Bible. It is the Bible with the question of what does it have for us who are suffering without an opportunity to express ourselves, without the opportunity to address the issues of our destiny, and I think that comes through as you talk to them. They were very aware that the Bible is not just a book to be followed from the podium. If it does not address our issues, then it is not relevant to us. Liberation theology played a key role in that.

While the question asked and that prompted this answer concerns the issue of theological influences on the Nairobi based New Sudan Council of Churches, the interviewee relates the ecumenical structures in Nairobi to the communities within the South through the figures of prominent church leaders who played a key role in the People to People, namely Southern Sudanese Bishops Paride
Taban and Nathaniel Garang, and influential partners such as Kenyan John Gatu and Samuel Kobia. Here, the focus is on the thinking of people who were recognised as theological guides. These church leaders would not be content with a simple reading of the Bible, rather they would want to articulate the message of the Bible in ways that would address the situation of people suffering because of war, in ways that would give voice to the concerns of the marginalised, to empower those who otherwise would not have any control over their future. Contextual concerns, solidarity with those suffering, solidarity with the voiceless and the disempowered, and the urgency of reflecting on the Bible in ways that were relevant to the specific context, were all concerns of the named church leaders and their theology was an expression of such concerns. In the words of Gachora Ngunjiri, what they articulated was liberation theology. Such prominent church leaders would also connect people at the grassroots level in Southern Sudan to ecumenical and theological realities abroad. The interviewee continues:

There was a heavy influence from the traditional perspective on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The religious influence of liberation theology, whether they were conscious of it or not. Those two were the key-thoughts behind the entire process. Of course it evolves as people become more and more aware. And the fact that they interacted at various levels. People looking back to the good times when there was not conflict. African experience of the communal life. Desire to perpetuate the communal values and desire to reach out to other people. Local traditional methods of peace building and the influence of the thinkers of the day who had interacted with theological reflection from others.

Here Ngunjiri names what he sees as the two major contributions to the theories that supported the People to People: on the one hand, traditional methods of conflict resolution and peacebuilding with their religious and cultural underpinnings, and on the other liberation theology, whether theological actors would define it in these terms, or not. The opinion expressed here by the interviewee and that I support, is that a contextual form of liberation theology was elaborated during the years we are examining, consciously by some. Others were elaborating and voicing a contextual theology of liberation that was not necessary labelled as ‘liberation theology’ or associated with theological discourses produced in other contexts. Ideas and theories around the People to People evolved as the process was conducted, and while key, local actors interacted with partners from abroad.

Bishop Isaiah Dau was well informed about various expressions of liberation theology and the answers he provides in the course of the interview reflect his own level of awareness:

Q: Do you think that liberation theology played any role in all of this?
A: Yes. Even to come out of that cocoon if you like to say, there is something to learn from the Traditional Religion as the Christian is a very liberal idea, it is an idea of liberation theology and the truth is available, in
Liberation theology enters the picture of the People to People both as a contributing stream of ideas and as an outcome of the Process. Church people and leaders were challenged to move from an understanding of truth as exclusively Christian to look with new eyes at Traditional Religion as a religion other than Christianity still capable of conveying elements of God’s truth. This openness to truth in other religions is for Dr Isaiah Dau an element of liberation theology, a theology that liberates from exclusivist constrains. Inculturation and liberation are related here as a theology of liberation liberates Traditional Religion and culture from prejudices and makes it possible to grasp God’s truth in them. A theology of liberation liberates Traditional Religion and culture. The interview continues:

Q: In those years of the People to People, do you think that these ideas of liberation theology had any impact on the...
A: Yes, because most of the people [theologians] were reading and were somehow influenced by liberation theology.
Q: Do you think it was more the Latin American or the South African liberation theology that would impact NSCC or the churches?
A: A bit of both, but more of Latin because of the oppression aspect of it.
Q: So you are confirming that in those years, let’s say from ’97, ’98, ’99, liberation theology was known to you theologians in South Sudan?
A: Yes! Actually we have liberation theologians here.

As a trained theologian, Dr Isaiah Dau was conversant in various strands of liberation theology and in his Suffering and God examines the ways in which Latin American liberation theology through his main exponents, addresses the issue of suffering.820

According to Dr Dau, trained Southern Sudanese theologians were aware of liberation theology, would read it and would be mainly influenced by the Latin American expressions of it, because of its focus on patterns of oppression more than on issues of race. Trained Southern Sudanese theologians would even define themselves as liberation theologians, underlines Dr Dau.

Samuel Kobia was mentioned in several interviews in relation to the influence of liberation theology on Southern Sudanese church leaders and the profile of the People to People. Samuel Kobia seems clear about the fact that there were theological influences on the actors of the People

820 Dau, Isaiah Majok, Suffering and God. More specifically, see the chapter entitled “Liberation Theology: Praxis and Suffering”, pp. 144-154
to People. He specifically mentions three theological streams: the first is the black theology of liberation developed in South Africa, the second is the reflection conducted within the All Africa Conference of Churches, particularly under the leadership of Canon Burgess Carr, and the third is liberation theology as developed in Latin America:

Q: What theologies influenced the People to People or supported or inspired the People to People?
A: Yes. There are three very important Christian thoughts or interpretations of the Bible and theological understanding that inspired this approach, one is what I would call generally black theology of liberation which was very much developed by South Africa, and the Contextual Theological Centre in South Africa had made studies on this, and particularly when they came out with the Kairos document, the Kairos document I think in Africa is the best articulated theological explanation of why we should participate in liberation struggles, and it concentrated on a justification for participation because it is a way of overcoming injustices like colonialism, oppression, etc., so that had a big inspiration, and people like Archbishop Desmond Tutu who was already quite well known by the 1990s, so that was an inspiration.

The Black theology of liberation developed in South Africa found distinctive expression in the Kairos document, Challenge to the Church. A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa, issued in 1985. According to Samuel Kobia, the Kairos document is one of the best articulated theological explanations of the participation of Christians in liberation struggles. Such participation is justified as a legitimate means to oppose colonialism and its effects. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was President of the AACC for two mandates, from 1987 to 1997, and brought the theological voice of the South Africans to the AACC.

The second one, and related to that, was the work of the AACC and particularly the influence and the thinking of Canon Burgess Carr who was General Secretary of the AACC towards the 1980s, so these two from Africa inspired the approach for Christians.

The second strand that, according to Samuel Kobia, influenced the Southern Sudanese actors in the People to People, is the theology elaborated within the AACC, specifically the perspectives of Canon Burgess Carr on the legitimacy of armed liberation struggles. Desmond Tutu and Burgess Carr are presented as the two African liberation theologians who influenced the theological work of the AACC and of its members, among them the NSCC.

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821 In his address to the Third AACC Assembly held in Lusaka in 1974, Secretary General Canon Burgess Carr utters the following words: “In accepting the violence of the Cross, God, in Jesus Christ, sanctified violence into a redemptive instrument for bringing into being fuller human life”. Quoted in Walshe, Peter, Church Versus State in South Africa: the Case of the Christian Institute, Orbis, New York, 1983, p. 119. I thank Anonymous 3 for references to this statement.
The third one was the liberation theology from Latin America and particularly when it came to Catholics because of course it was controversial among the Catholics. There were those who accepted the theology of liberation and there were those who didn’t, including the Vatican didn’t really embrace the theology of liberation as such, but that also inspired some of the Christian leaders from Sudan as well as from the rest of Africa, those of us who supported the liberation process of Southern Sudan.

The third strand Samuel Kobia refers to is Latin American liberation theology. The position of Southern Sudanese Catholics towards it would vary, says Kobia, as a consequence of the fact that the Catholic hierarchies were involved in conflicts with key exponents of Latin American liberation theology. Nevertheless, Latin American liberation theology was a source of inspiration, according to Samuel Kobia, for Catholics as well as Protestants, on the issue of participation in the liberation struggle.

In the course of the interview, I reported to Samuel Kobia what other interviewees had told me, namely that they were not aware of liberation theologies at the time the People to People was conducted. Samuel Kobia comments in the following terms:

you will find that many of the Sudanese did not have much understanding of that, but people like myself, and I was very much involved in this, people like Isaiah Dau who was also, people like Bishop Arkanjelo, those had been exposed to liberation theology, to black theology of liberation and these are the opinion-formers if you will, and I think, and that is why you will find many of them going that way. I would say that a key leader like Bishop Taban who was the first chair of the New Sudan Council of Churches, he was very much aware of liberation theology.

Southern Sudanese church leaders and theologians who had been exposed to different versions of liberation theology were aware of the implications of their theological options and were in a position to influence the theological reflection of others. About Bishop Nathaniel Garang, Samuel Kobia says:

Nathaniel Garang did not have a formal scholarly understanding of contextual theology the way we are talking about it, but his support of the liberation process was total, I would say. I worked very closely with him so he was very supportive of this, but not in terms of articulating why we are doing it, he didn’t have time to ask those questions, but he simply participated and was very supportive of the struggle.

This and other quotes indicate that, for Samuel Kobia, liberation theology in the context of Sudan at war is primarily an articulation in theological terms of the support by churches of the armed
liberation struggle.\textsuperscript{822} Samuel Kobia is also clear about the fact that the leadership of the NSCC professed a non-violent understanding of the process of liberation in Southern Sudan.\textsuperscript{823} Still, referring to Bishop Nathaniel Garang, another highly influential church leader both among communities in Southern Sudan and in the NSCC, Samuel Kobia distinguishes between a formal understanding and adherence to contextual theologies that Bishop Garang did not have, and the practical support, as a church leader and widely acknowledged spiritual guide, and approval of the liberation struggle.

In the course of the interview, I summarised for Rev. Kobia my understanding of the relation between theologies produced in the context of Southern Sudan and theological influences from abroad. There were differences among Southern Sudanese leaders. Some like Isaiah Dau, were aware, informed and willing to take positions towards theologies produced abroad. Still, most of the church leaders at the grassroots level, given the situation of war and the isolation of large areas of the South, had not been exposed to such ideas. These grassroots church leaders were developing their own forms of contextual theologies of liberation, faced, as they were, with the issue of liberation as a political issue that required a theological response. In his reply, Samuel Kobia supports my conclusion:

\begin{quote}
Yes, yes, I think it is possible and it is right to say that in fact, because without the support of those who remained inside we would have not gone very far and particularly those who were in the liberated areas in the southern part of Sudan who were able to participate in some of these consultations and seminars and workshops that we had, whether here in Kenya, in Kisumu, Entebbe and then inside their country, those clearly had begun themselves to embrace the ideas of the liberation struggle being justified by the Bible because the more they participated in some of these meetings, the more they became, they came into contact with ideas like Moses or concepts of liberating the people and that this is, was directed by God, so it is considered as a divinely sanctioned activity, you know, “Let my people go”, and that is as you have seen in the most important documents that were developed at that time, they were all biblically based and they were all accepted by the people, so contextually I saw Southern Sudanese Christians becoming more and more aware of the fact that even as Christians we need to participate in this struggle for liberation because this can be defended biblically and theologically and historically.
\end{quote}

In his response, Samuel Kobia relates the two realities of theologies either contextually produced or imported from abroad to the issue of support, biblically and theologically grounded, of the armed liberation struggle. Grassroots church leaders with their biblical and theological reflection, were

\textsuperscript{822} On the conflation of ideas of spiritual liberation and liberation as the outcome of the armed struggle by soldiers who converted to Christianity, see Werner, Roland, William Anderson and Andrew Wheeler, \textit{Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment}, p. 424

\textsuperscript{823} See the interview with Samuel Kobia in A shworth, John, \textit{The Voice of the Voiceless}, pp. 84-86, also for a further elaboration by Kobia on the issue of the influence of liberation theologies on the Sudanese ecumenical structures
instrumental in developing ideas around and advocating for support to the liberation struggle. Those church leaders who were in the areas controlled by the SPLM/A – the ‘liberated areas’ – were able to participate in consultations, seminars and workshops organised by the NSCC and their international partners held in neighbouring countries. A contextual theological reflection about the legitimacy of the liberation struggle found resonance in this way in ideas developed abroad and shared at such international seminars. Local church leaders became familiar with the use of biblical texts such as Exodus in liberation theologies, and with the concept of the liberation of the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt as part of the salvific plan of God. A transition is implied here by Samuel Kobia, a transition that in my opinion not all interviewees would subscribe to: from the fact that the liberation of the people is sanctioned by God to the assumption that the means to achieve such liberation, including violent means, are also sanctioned by God.

The fact that important programmatic documents issued by the NSCC such as “Let my People Choose” on the issue of self-determination, explicitly refer to biblical passages shows, according to Kobia, how the South Sudanese looked for and found in the Bible justifications for their political stands. The fact that such documents were well accepted by the people within the South would indicate that the idea of a biblically and theologically justified struggle for liberation was generally well accepted. A contextual understanding of the necessity for Christians to support and become involved in the liberation struggle was, according to Sam Kobia, supported and strengthened by exposure to theologies and Bible readings developed abroad.

4. Conclusions

Interview material indicates that there were and are different perceptions about the relation between the contextual theology produced in Southern Sudan and liberation theologies produced abroad. For some, a contextual theology of liberation developed independently of theologies produced elsewhere. For others, the terminology of liberation theology used by Southern Sudanese church actors and employed in official documents was mainly meant for partners and the diaspora. A third group of interviewees indicate that they were aware of liberation theologies developed abroad and were consciously articulating their own version of liberation theology. The three options are not mutually exclusive and all contribute to an understanding of the process of theological articulation in Southern Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s.

Beside the way such forms of theological reflection were branded, the theology developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war was a theology that tried to articulate the reality and the experience of war and of the liberation struggle. The reality of war and the experience of it called
for a specific form of theological elaboration that could meet people in their suffering and could provide spiritual and theological answers to their questions. In the encounter with trained theologians, such aspirations were seen as resonating with elements of liberation theologies developed elsewhere.

Whether the theology elaborated in Southern Sudan during the years of the People to People was defined as a liberation theology or not, the tone of official documents was markedly political. Churches did engage in political issues such as self-determination, and the very issue of engaging in peace work. As engagement for peace has political connotations, theologically supported engagement for peace acquires, in turn, political connotations. Such political engagement of the churches is the expression of the will to speak on behalf of the people, to be the voice of the voiceless. Political engagement is perceived as the other side of the coin of a theological choice to be on the side of the people. The political stands of the churches are justified on the basis of the biblical example of the prophets. By expressing the voice of the people and taking political stands, the churches see themselves as playing a prophetic role.

Dr Isaiah Dau refers to the potential of liberation theology to liberate Traditional Religion from exclusivist constraints. Not only do Traditional Religion and culture contribute to peace and liberation, they are in turn liberated by some work of theological elaboration on the relation between Christian faith and Traditional Religion and culture. We have here a new perspective on the relation between liberation and inculturation: inculturation is a form of liberation, also of traditional culture and of people’s cultural identity.
16. The Influence of partners on the theological elaboration of the NSCC

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we have seen how, according to William Lowrey, terms and concepts of liberation theology in SCC/NSCC official documents, were meant for an international audience, primarily international ecumenical partners, donors and the diaspora. Interview material indicates, as we will see, that the NSCC was entirely donor funded, in other words, without the financial support of external actors to the NSCC, the People to People could have not been conducted. Did the consistent financial support received from abroad imply influence on the level of activities to be carried out, or on the level of the ideas that supported such activities? If so, what kind of influence can be assumed?

The issue of the influence of partners on the theological elaboration of the NSCC is the subject of the present chapter. On the basis of data gathered through interviews, this chapter is divided in five sections, addressing the issue of the possible influence on the NSCC by (1) international ecumenical structures such as the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF); (2) Kenyan and (3) South African ecumenical partners; (4) international staff in the NSCC; and (5) the role that South Sudanese staff in the NSCC might have played in channelling ideas from the ecumenical structures to actors on the ground in Southern Sudan.

2. International ecumenical organisations

Several interviewees refer to the influence that the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) might have played on the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC):

Anonymous 2: *Yes, AACC, Kobia, surely there was an influence of African theology on NSCC.*

Anonymous 3: *The NSCC was profoundly influenced by AACC... The AACC was involved in the formation of the NSCC.*
Both the AACC and NCCK led by Rev. Samuel Kobia, were involved in the formation of the NSCC. The two quotes above indicate that there were theological influences by partners on the NSCC. I will return soon to this issue.

Anonymous 3 provides information about relations among international ecumenical organisations:

Sam Kobia was at that time General Secretary of NCCK and had established the Sudan Working Group in the NCCK. From there he related to AACC. AACC together with NGOs such as NCA helped to formulate the Sudan Working Group with Elisabeth Otieno. The Sudan Working Group was a bridging group between AACC, NCCK, a little discussion group.

The Sudan Working Group, which functioned under the leadership of Kenyan Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat, had been established by Samuel Kobia while he was General Secretary of the NCCK. The Sudan Working Group functioned as a discussion group connecting NCCK, AACC and organisations such as Norwegian Church Aid on issues relating to the conflict in Sudan.

As organisations were related, actors would also move from one organisation to the other or be active in several organisations at the same time, a fact that also explains why ideas would circulate and were shared by members in different organisations. Anonymous 3 continues:

About WCC, we were all together. Sam Kobia after the NCCK experience became General Secretary of WCC. From there he had established the SEF. We fed in there from these elements and found an ecumenical home in WCC... WCC was influenced by Latin American liberation theology. ... Konrad Raiser, in his Ecumenism In Transition suggested to include African Religion in a broad concept of ecumenism.

Samuel Kobia had moved from the NCCK where he had established the Sudan Working Group, to the WCC, where he established the Sudan Ecumenical Forum. Those actors who had been engaged with Sudan for several years, found an ecumenical home, says Anonymous 3, in the WCC, found in the WCC the place that would connect people, ideas and efforts. Liberation theologies were at home in the WCC as well as theological efforts aimed at relating Christianity to African Religion. Anonymous 3 refers to the publication Ecumenism in Transition,\textsuperscript{824} with which Konrad Raiser advocates for the inclusion of African Religion among world religions.

\textsuperscript{824} Raiser, Konrad, Ecumenism in Transition, WCC, Geneva, 1991
2.1. Financial support, advocacy, credibility, and authority

Partners were often also donors or would channel funds from donors. Dr Agnes Abuom provides information about the extent to which the NSCC was dependent on donor funding:

NSCC was hundred per cent donor funded. Peace was their agenda, yes, their priority agenda, but without the funding of the donors, they could have not realised it. You see, the realisation of the objectives was only made possible by the input of the donors. ... So I think even if the agenda was Sudanese, the realisation of the agenda would not have taken place, including the Wunlit process, it would not have succeeded without the facilitation of the donors.

Peace work was the priority area of engagement of the NSCC, still their peace programme and therefore the People to People, could not have been carried out without the support of donors. Agnes Abuom continues:

the peace messages for reconciliation that came out of these processes brought by people like Bishop Taban to Norway, were also facilitated by, so that the globe now started to talk about the peace agreement. Peace came out of the donor support. Particularly for NSCC the ecumenical donors support, getting people like Bishop Taban to Norway to speak, getting Bishop Taban in 1998 to speak at the WCC Assembly in Harare, so even profiling the peace issues in the Sudan was actually very much propelled by the donors.

Not only peace work inside Sudan, but also the work of advocacy conducted abroad to gain international attention and support for NSCC’s engagement for peace, could be conducted only with the support of donors. Agnes Abuom does not refer to theological influences. Along the same line, Emmanuel LoWilla tells that donors would support advocacy work without indicating any theological line:

I think that the international church whether it is NCCK in Kenya which participated or AACC or the WCC or even the ecumenical movement, I think what they did was really to push much more on the advocacy side. I wouldn’t say that they pushed theologically but I would say what they really did push and which helped and which strengthened the NSCC was advocacy work, because by virtue of just seeing WCC being there then you know that the world church is there, so we were listened to, so that gave us, I mean, credibility if you like, much more than really any theological pushing into the process.

Emmanuel LoWilla provides a list of the international partners who were close to the NSCC and therefore in the position to influence them, a list that includes the NCCK, the AACC, and the WCC. The influence is defined here in terms of pushing for, encouraging and supporting the advocacy work of the SCC and NSCC, meaning bringing the case of the war in Sudan to international
attention and gathering support for the peace work conducted by churches and Sudanese ecumenical structures. The donors encouraged this work of advocacy. Emmanuel LoWilla tells that international partners and donors did not push theologically, did not suggest any theological positions, but that they did push the Sudanese into conducting advocacy work. This push from the NCCK, AACC and WCC was important, says LoWilla, it helped and strengthened the work of the NSCC. It was encouraging for the NSCC to see that the WCC was on their side, as the support of the WCC was interpreted as a sign of global resonance of the case of Sudan. The WCC provided the stage and the microphone for the Sudanese churches to be heard globally. The support of the WCC and other international ecumenical organisations gave the NSCC credibility internationally.

The credibility that came with international support, continues LoWilla, was decisive in giving the NSCC leverage to approach the opposed military factions:

The New Sudan Council of Churches at that time had very good relationship and support from the ecumenical partners and so that gave it credibility, and once the New Sudan Council of Churches was seen as a credible institution within South Sudan, it was respected. Now if we did not have friends and that high profile with the international community I doubt if we had succeeded to this level in order to realise whether it is international or the local [peace], but once we had this credibility it was easier for us to mobilise either side.

Together with the good working relations and support from international ecumenical actors comes the issue of credibility vis-à-vis secular instances, being those international actors or national ones, specifically the leadership of the various Southern military factions. Ecumenical international relations increased the status of the NSCC as an institution in Southern Sudan and in the eyes of the SPLM/A. With the recognition and respect acquired internally thanks to international partners, comes the power of leverage towards the SPLM/A and other military and political entities. The newly acquired status and credibility of the NSCC gives the organisation the strength to approach and mobilise, as LoWilla phrases it, the factions of the SPLM/A to reconcile and create the conditions for peace at the community level. But such status acquired with the help of partners and donors also becomes the reason of conflict with John Garang:

I mean our problem with Dr John [Garang] was the fact that we had the ability to mobilise the international against what we thought was not the right processes within South Sudan, and that in itself gave us more and more, and once Dr John was threatening and we stood our ground it gave us more and more support from the international community.

The power that the NSCC got as an institution thanks to the support of international partners, was, says LoWilla, the cause of the conflict between the organisation and the leadership of the SPLM/A
in the person of John Garang. The more the power and influence of the NSCC increases, the more it is seen by John Garang as a threat to his authority in Sudan and Southern Sudan. LoWilla refers to threats by John Garang to the NSCC. In the course of the interview, LoWilla does not specify in which circumstances. As we have seen in Chapter 7, the organisation and running of the Liliir conference, held in May 2000, and of the Kisumu Strategic Linkages conference held in June 2001, were made particularly difficult and even overtly opposed by John Garang, as well as Riek Machar. By this time, both leaders suspected the People to People Peacemaking Process and the NSCC behind it of undermining their political authority and control. The NSCC, in the words of LoWilla, had the ability to mobilise international partners against what the NSCC saw as a poor option for the South, most probably referring to unity with the North as opposed to the programme of self-determination. The NSCC kept its position in favour of self-determination and such a firm stand, LoWilla indicates, won them further support from international partners.

According to LoWilla, contextual and international dimensions are strictly interrelated in the People to People:

> So in terms of theory I think that what I am saying is that it is a process that deals with a local context but this local context would need an international or an outside support that gives credibility to the institution or to the process itself, maybe.

The NSCC is dealing with a contextual problem (war, the split within the SPLM/A, impact on the local population, and conflict among communities) that requires a contextual solution, a solution that is designed by local actors making use of local resources (social, political, cultural and religious). But such an initiative by the NSCC to approach a contextual problem could only be conducted with external support, implying both material resources and the authority and credibility that came with resources to the NSCC and the People to People.

LoWilla further relates relation to and support from international donors to power:

> First of all that relation helped us to get funding, and because we got funding we got the resources to spend on the process. And now because inside we were seen as having resources and having friends we had the power that people were afraid of us, so basically you cannot start it and if you don’t have the support people, you are not going anywhere.

Funding to the NSCC implied funding for the People to People and the work of reconciliation and peacebuilding. Resources and connections are seen as power, to the point that people (most probably LoWilla is referring to the political and military leadership in Southern Sudan), were fearing the implications of the power the NSCC had been able to gather. The power gathered by the
NSCC around the People to People thanks to the support of donors led, as we have seen in Chapter 7, to the end of the People to People Peacemaking Process. For the purpose of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that according to LoWillia, a central figure in the People to People and among the staff of the NSCC, the support of international partners translated into effective advocacy, resources, visibility, credibility and authority. It did not imply theological influence. Still, as we will see in the next section, the support received from donors could also be perceived as related to theological options.

2.2. Theological influences

Joy Kwaje, staff of the SCC at the time of the People to People, clearly refers to the influence of partners on the elaboration of ideas and theological reflection:

>I think there was an impact, there was a lot of impact of ideas. Every time, for instance, I remember in many meetings of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum where we worked for peace, in every issue they would ask for the theological perspective, when we wanted to talk about peace they would ask about the biblical perspective of the peace, what was the foundation, what was it that made us want to do that, did we have a grounding in our theological teachings.

Joy Kwaje indicates that ideas were circulating and would reach and impact the Sudanese ecumenical structures. Joy Kwaje refers specifically to the Sudan Ecumenical Forum (SEF), conveyed by the World Council of Churches. The main tasks of SEF were to coordinate the support of ecumenical partners and donors and assist both in the work for peace as well as in international advocacy. From what Joy Kwaje tells, it emerges that SEF, gathering representatives of partner churches and organisations, would ask the Sudanese partners to elaborate around the theological basis of their peace and advocacy work, and to make such theological reasoning available to a broader audience. SEF members would ask for the biblical and theological perspective on peace engagement, they would ask to make explicit in biblical and theological terms what the relation was between faith and peace praxis. From this quote it seems that more than sharing a defined theological position, partners in SEF would suggest a methodology consisting in relating theological reflection to praxis.

In the next quote, Joy Kwaje refers more specifically to theological influences that she understands in terms of liberation theology:

>so to me it influenced, the liberation theology influenced the thinking and impacted on all the events, so that when we talk about the People to People events and we are talking about liberation, we would go to the biblical perspective of liberation itself, we would go further to talk about Christ having come to liberate us and
if we are liberated then you know everybody needs to be liberated and Christ is the Liberator, you know, that
influenced us in our thinking so, so much, until if you look at the last document that was produced before the
Machakos on the issue of referendum [“Let My People Choose”], on the issue of self-determination, that was a
very strong message which was clearly influenced by liberation theology.

Through this theological cooperation, says Joy Kwaje, liberation theology did influence the
Sudanese ecumenical structures, either because SEF members would share their theological
positions or because the biblical and theological reflection around a praxis for peace had also to
address, both biblically and theologically, the reality of the struggle for liberation and the position
of the churches on it.

Joy Kwaje further points to the fact that the influence in matters of theology on the Sudanese
ekumical structures translated into influence on the level of the activities that were run by the
SSC and NSCC, particularly the People to People.

When in the frame of the People to People church people would address the issue of
liberation, they would refer to their understanding of liberation in biblical terms. We have seen how
the text of Exodus was of key importance in such operation of grounding a biblical understanding
of liberation. Joy Kwaje refers further to an understanding of Christ as the Liberator. Everyone is in
need of liberation, both spiritual and material, and Jesus is the Liberator from spiritual and material
affliction. That kind of thinking, liberation theology, influenced the elaboration of the Sudanese
ekumical structures, says Joy Kwaje, and it found full expression in the document “Let My
People Choose” on the issue of self-determination, issued right before the Machakos meeting. In
the opinion of Joy Kwaje, “Let My People Choose” was influenced by liberation theology. As
mentioned in the previous chapter, “Let My People Choose” is a highly political document with
little theological content. The fact that Joy Kwaje considers it influenced by liberation theology
allows us to draw the conclusion that political positions by churches are here understood as
expressions of liberationist theological positions. In other words, theology expressly addressing
political issues is seen as liberation theology.

During the years in which the People to People was conducted, the Sudanese ecumenical
structures, the SCC and NSCC, were influenced not only by the reflection and work of donors, but
also of other organisations the Sudanese were working closely with. Joy Kwaje refers to women’s
organisations working for peace:

You know during the conflict in the Sudan then, there was a very thin line you could draw between the
ecumenical movement and other women’s groups, for instance when we had meetings for peace, which were at

825 See Chapters 7 and 15
the end funded by the Netherlands Embassy and other groups, you know every time we had meetings that brought all of us together whether from the Sudan Council of Churches, from the New Sudan Council of Churches, from the other women’s groups, the SWAN, the other called the non-partisan group, and then the different SPLM/SPLA factions, ... so when it came to the women’s work and working for peace, we had very, very little division really. People, women came together.

Peace initiatives by women in Khartoum and in Nairobi, sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands, would become fora where several organisations would meet and cooperate. In these fora, the SCC and NSCC would come in close contact with women’s organisations like the Sudanese Women’s Association in Nairobi (SWAN) and the Sudanese Women’s Voices for Peace (SWVP). These meetings were attended also by Sudanese political groups representing the various factions of the SPLM/A. Women’s engagement for peace would create spaces where various organisations would meet, share ideas and strategise together. Ideas from other organisations would influence the reasoning of the SCC and NSCC.

Joy Kwaje elaborates more on the influence of international ecumenical partners:

Q: You said that at the meetings of SEF they would ask you about your theological ground. Who would ask you?
A: You know normally we worked as partners, our international partners like WCC, AACC, and other churches from Norway, from Sweden, the whole international ecumenical partners would ask whether for instance if we were undertaking an activity, what is the theological basis of our undertaking that particular activity.

Beside the WCC and AACC, Joy Kwaje mentions the Scandinavian churches, especially Norway and Sweden (the Norwegian Christian Council had been involved in Pastoral Conferences, exchange meetings among Norwegian and Sudanese pastors, since 1996). The various ecumenical actors worked as partners, and part of the work of supporting the Sudanese ecumenical structures involved encouraging an elaboration of the theological ground for their engagement.

Q: So there was a requirement from the ecumenical international partners?
A: That’s right, so that we are not just dragged into doing maybe political things but that what we are doing, being an ecumenical movement, would really be rooted in our beliefs also, and I think that that was important because it gave us an opening for even the funding, they would fund us as an ecumenical movement as long as what we are doing really conformed to our theological basis.

In response to my question, Joy Kwaje defines the challenge from ecumenical international partners to define the theological ground of the SCC/NSCC’s peace engagement, as a requirement to preserve an identity as church actors. Such an operation was also important in terms of securing access to funding. It is because of their articulation of biblical and theological reasons for peace and advocacy engagement that Sudanese ecumenical structures could access funding channelled by partners. Here, Joy Kwaje relates theological influence and financial support. I further ask:

Q: Do you think that any of this theological language that was used in the documents was also used to show the international donors that you were talking the same language?

With this question posed to Joy Kwaje I aim at following up on the comments of Anonymous 3 and William Lowrey, that the language of the official documents of the SCC and NSCC was learned language and often language formulated by international staff in the Sudanese ecumenical organisations. My question points towards the possible conclusion that the terminology of liberation theology was used to show mainly to partners that the Sudanese were talking the same theological language, to highlight a closeness of intentions and, on this basis, increase the chances of receiving support (not necessarily only financial). Was the use of liberation theology mainly aimed at gaining the sympathy of partners? Joy Kwaje answers in the following terms:

Maybe partly so, partly to show that we are talking the same language, but we genuinely wanted to prove that we really were partners and that when we talk on ecumenical issues, on theological issues, there would not be a divide just because we were for instance from Sudan, from Africa or from the South or the global South, but that in Christ we are one, and because we are one, the theological basis of things would not be different for us in the global South and different for those in the West. I think that was really the underlining principle.

“Partly yes”, replies Joy Kwaje, but rather than to secure financial support, efforts at establishing a common theological language are aimed at highlighting and strengthening a sense of close partnership and cooperation. Talking the same theological language would strengthen a sense of ecumenical fellowship. In other words, ecumenical unity would be stressed also by common theological references.

Bishop Enoch Tombe presents a position similar to that of Joy Kwaje when he refers to the role of partners in stimulating a theological reflection around peace engagement. Still, in line with Agnes Abuom and Emmanuel LoWilla, he does not refer to a specific theological line shared by partners. In the next quote, Bishop Tombe tells about an important meeting held in Oslo in 1996 where the text of “Here We Stand” was drafted:
So I want to say that it was that joint meeting in Oslo which was actually also the role played by the Christian Council of Norway and Norwegian Church Aid and the other partners who made it possible for us to reflect. In fact when we look at it now it looks as if it was easy, I know we were struggling to write that paper, I was in the editorial team with Andrew Wheeler from the UK, Evelyn Anduka from the New Sudan Council of Churches, Jeremiah Swaka who is here, a lawyer and Undersecretary of Legal Affairs, James Mabior, we wanted to figure out what role should we play.

In Oslo, partners challenged the Sudanese to reflect theologically around their peace and advocacy engagement. The outcome of that meeting was a first version of the document “Here We Stand United in Action for Peace”, as we have seen an important document defining the theological position of the Sudanese ecumenical organisations on their engagement for peace. The process of producing that paper was not effortless, says Bishop Tombe. It could be assumed that it met several challenges, from the demanding task of elaborating and formulating reflections around praxis, to finding a language that would reflect the position of the Sudanese structures and at the same time meet the priorities of partners.

Although partners would not dictate a theological line, they were not ready to unconditionally support whatever position was expressed by the Sudanese. As we have seen in Chapter 7, relations got quite tense around the issue of self-determination at the 2002 SEF General Assembly. In the words of Bishop Tombe:

he [Rev. Taban Adonai, member of the SCC delegation to London] had assumed that partners would always support us. In that meeting he could see that it was not easy and we argued, they said this is politics, this is not what you should have said, it should have been the Movement or the political leaders to say it, and we said, well, we are the voice of the people, we are hearing what the people are saying, this is what our people want.

Military and political events develop and require a renewed reflection by the Sudanese churches concerning their stand towards the peace process and possible political scenarios concerning the status of the South, primarily the two options of unity with the North versus independence. The challenges posed by the evolving military and political situation create and unveil tensions between the Sudanese ecumenical structures and their international partners. Such tensions come notably to the fore at the General Assembly of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum held in London in March 2002. The Sudanese had relied on almost unconditional support from partners, says Bishop Tombe, but such confidence was shaken in the frame of the debate on the issue of self-determination. Partners express their opinion that the Sudanese churches and ecumenical structures are engaging on political issues beyond their mandate and task, that churches are taking up tasks that pertain to the...
military and political leadership. Bishop Tombe refers, as we have seen above, to the role of churches as voice of the voiceless, voice of the people, expressing the political aspirations of the people on the issue of self-determination. Bishop Tombe continues:

*Marina Peters who was, she is the one who knows us very well, she came and said: “what do we do now?” I said: “Marina, if you are not supporting this paper I think this is the end of partnership, but let us do like this, you let each group meet alone, review their stand and come back exactly to say what they want”.*

Marina Peters was at that time coordinator of the Sudan Focal Point - Europe. During the conversation with Peters, the Bishop expresses his concern that the conflict around the political stand of the Sudanese churches on the issue of self-determination might cause such a deep rift as to irremediably compromise relations and cooperation with international partners. As seen in Chapter 7, the solution found was separate meetings. Sudanese churches and international partners met separately to voice their opinions on the draft of “Let My People Choose”:

*so we met and we said we are not going to change our mind, you just have to say what you want. I think after one hour we came back, the partners took more than two hours, they argued and argued and argued. ... We said: “we stand with our paper, “Let My People Choose”, and then they said: “okay, we also said the same, but we have the right to question you”. So it was a double yes, so they were not just coming and saying “yes” to whatever we said, it was critical, but they wanted us to be sure of what we were saying, so later when we realised what we said together, it had an impact on the peace process.*

The outcome of the meeting of the Sudanese was an irremovable stand for the right of self-determination. Partners, on their end, had decided to support the position taken by the Sudanese, reserving the right to question the theological reasons of such a position. The result was a ‘double yes’, both by the Sudanese and by international partners, to “Let My People Choose”. The document influenced the outcome of the Machakos protocol that paved the way to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (see Chapter 7). The eventually reached agreement among Sudanese and partners had a substantial effect on the development of the peace process in Sudan.

In the next two sections, I will address the issue of the influence of Kenyan and South African partners on the Sudanese ecumenical structures.
Agnes Abuom tells how the NCCK became involved in the initial formulation of the NSCC through the two main Southern Sudanese church leaders, Bishop Paride Taban and Bishop Nathaniel Garang:

*NCCK was involved with the NSCC through Bishop Garang and Bishop Taban in the initial formulation of NSCC. … There was cooperation between the Sudan Working Group under Bethuel Kiplagat and NSCC … but in terms of formulation of the program, theoretical framework, no, it was purely NSCC, but NSCC of course was informed by the thinking of people like Paul Lederach, all these peace practitioners.*

As has already been mentioned, the Sudan Working Group had been established in Nairobi within the NCCK under the leadership of Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat. Relations between the Sudan Working Group and the NSCC were close. While the Kenyan organisations had been instrumental in the formation of the NSCC, the formulation of their programmes, says again Agnes Abuom, was entirely by the NSCC. NSCC staff and key representatives were nevertheless influenced by the ideas that were shared in the networks they were part of.

As seen above, Bishop Tombe shares the position expressed by Dr Agnes Abuom that partners, and among them Kenyan partners, did not indicate any specific theological line:

*He [Kobia] had that sort of moral support to us, but in terms of theology I don’t think he had said anything more than what we already, I know he had always emphasised that the advocacy must be driven by the message coming from South Sudan, I mean from the Sudanese themselves, we must be at the centre of the advocacy. WCC should not be giving the message but it is us, and so he had been supporting us by saying it should be us saying what is needed, and then they will go by, but what it should be said he didn’t say much.*

Bishop Tombe, in those years General Secretary of the SCC, saw Samuel Kobia as a solid supporter of the Sudanese ecumenical structures. As Dr Abuom, Bishop Tombe asserts that Samuel Kobia’s support did not include indications about theological options. On the contrary, according to what Bishop Tombe expresses in this interview, Samuel Kobia’s interest was exactly that, in order to be effective, advocacy work should be supported by ideas and theological positions developed in Sudan and conveyed by Sudanese actors. WCC would support and help convey a message that was articulated by the voice of the Sudanese.

What opinion does Samuel Kobia express about liberation theology in the documents of the SCC and NSCC, and on the issue of the influence of international ecumenical partners in the publications and positions of Sudanese church actors?
Q: Is it possible that church leaders, church people are expressing themselves in a language that can be understood by the international ecumenical partners?

A: Yes. In 1987 I was General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya and I established a program that we called Ecumenical Program for Sudan ... and if you look at that work of Ecumenical Sudan Programme we had a justification of what we were doing for humanitarian work, but also for supporting the liberation process. In 1991 when we began to talk about the establishment of the New Sudan Council of Churches, we also had to justify why we supported the creation of the NSCC and remained independent of the SPLM, because John Garang, his view, and I had long discussions with him on this, he wanted the NSCC to be the spiritual wing of SPLM and I said: “no, that we cannot do”, because if you do that, we couldn’t even be able to support SPLM, because we would have been seen as being partisans in that respect ... and it is not a rebel council, and that is why the day we established the New Sudan Council of Churches the General Secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches was with us here in Nairobi, I invited him, you know, Ezechiel Kujok, he came here if to show that this is not a rebel council, is not a council in exile, but it is the New Sudan Council of Churches embracing the ideology of New Sudan.

It was the initiative of Samuel Kobia as General Secretary of NCCK to establish a programme of assistance to Sudanese refugees called the Ecumenical Program for Sudan. Kobia adds that the NCCK in those years had the largest programme for Sudanese refugees in Kenya. This programme of assistance to refugees, says Kobia, gave the opportunity to support the liberation process while providing humanitarian assistance. Assisting people from Southern Sudan implied assisting those who were engaged in the liberation struggle.

Kobia refers to the instrumental role of the NCCK in establishing the NSCC in 1991, and to the fact that the NCCK had to distinguish between support for the NSCC and the SPLM/A. Although John Garang wanted to see the NSCC as the spiritual wing of the SPLM/ A, church people were eager to preserve the independence of the ecumenical organisation. The issue of the status of the NSCC vis-à-vis the SPLM/A was the topic of extensive discussions between Samuel Kobia and John Garang. Samuel Kobia’s point was that an NSCC independent from the SPLM/A would have been easier to support, both ideologically and financially, by other ecumenical organisations.

Through support to the NSCC, on the other hand, it would have been possible for the NCCK to extend support to the SPLM/A. The SCC, based in Khartoum, could not operate in the ‘liberated areas’ of the South, the areas under the control of the SPLM/A. The NSCC in Nairobi needed to be seen, also by John Garang, as an extension of the SCC. To convey this message in clear terms, the General Secretary of the SCC in Khartoum, Ezechiel Kujok, was invited to attend the inauguration of the NSCC in Nairobi.

Were Sudanese church actors aware of liberation theologies and, if so, what role did Kenyan partners play in the theological elaboration of the Sudanese? Samuel Kobia continues:
And therefore I would say that already there were articulations of why churches or Christians were being involved [in the liberation struggle], so objectively there was influence of black theology, of liberation theology etc., but subjectively I can understand that many of them [Sudanese church people] would say: “no we didn’t know [about liberation theology]” because they did not attend a seminar, but these ideas that obviously were live because when the Sudanese, Southern Sudanese came to Kenya or went to Uganda or other places, suddenly there were influences, but they were not structured as a way of indoctrinating or even trying to theologically articulate why we are doing. I think people were so busy struggling for liberation to spend time on theological debates.

Q: But the ideas were there.
A: The ideas were there. That is why I have given you this example even before 1992, 1993.

Seminars and meetings organised in Kenya or Uganda were not meant to dictate to the Sudanese ecumenical networks any specific theological line, but ideas and theologies were circulating and were discussed, and therefore by the mere fact of attending such meetings, Sudanese church actors were exposed to various liberation theologies.

By the year 1991, when the NSCC was established, the very situation of the SPLM/A making claims on the loyalty of the churches and the NSCC regarding the liberation struggle, had prompted reflections about what position the churches should hold. In such reflections, Samuel Kobia sees the influence of both black theology and liberation theology. Still, says Kobia, it is understandable that several people would not ‘brand’ their theological reflection, would not necessarily associate it with theological trends already established. Those who attended seminars arranged by partners would be aware of theologies elaborated abroad, but even those who were not aware of theological discourses defined abroad, says Kobia, by the fact of being in Kenya or Uganda and meeting partners there, would be influenced by the ideas that were circulating. There was no indoctrination, and not all had the time to sit, define and name their theological positions, busy as they were addressing the consequences of conflict.

Samuel Kobia agrees that official documents were primarily meant for an international audience:

Then the reason why some of the documents were clearly addressed to the international community is because at the time of the drafting of “Here We Stand United for Peace” there was the question about self-determination, was this an objective of the liberation struggle? Was this part of the objective of the SPLM/A and should we support it as such? And there were those who were saying: no, self-determination is the ultimate goal, and in fact the NSCC and SCC within the framework of SEF once it was formed in 1995, then that is what became actually the forum that discussed even these theological issues, and that brought together the international ecumenical community, it brought together the two councils of churches as well as AACC, so in that respect it was important for us to have a common mind and a common position particularly on the
controversial issues like self-determination, ... so it was important to articulate these ideas, and when the Sudan Ecumenical Forum was formed it really became the platform and the space that brought together I would say the entire ecumenical community in a way that I have not seen anywhere else in terms of accompanying and being in solidarity with the people who are struggling, so the SEF really became a model of how the ecumenical community at the international level, at the regional level, and at local level can work together in a fairly agreed manner.

The opinion expressed by Kobia is that the official documents of the SCC/NSCC were primarily meant for the international community, both church and secular organisations.

Was the SPLM/A fighting for a united, secular Sudan, or for an independent Christian South? Should the churches support the liberation struggle regardless of the goal concerning the status of the South? The churches took a progressively clear stand for self-determination, and theological articulations around this issue, says Kobia, became one of the tasks of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum. The Sudan Ecumenical Forum was a meeting and connecting point for the two Sudanese Councils, regional and international ecumenical networks such as the AACC and the WCC as well as other partners of the two Sudanese councils. Here Kobia is providing relevant additional information: it was important for all these actors gathered in SEF to have a common stand on issues as controversial as the issue of self-determination. Expressing such a position was even more challenging for the SCC based in Khartoum (we are dealing with issues of independence of the South from the North) and therefore it was quite urgent to define a position around which the Sudanese actors could feel the support of the international partners. SEF gathered a particularly wide spectrum of national and international church actors and remains one of the best examples of ecumenical international cooperation and support.

Beside the hot issue of self-determination and the stand of churches towards it, it was important, says Kobia in the next quote, to relate theological reflection and practical engagement:

*The reason that every time we had major conferences we came up with either a communiqué or a statement, was precisely to link ideas and the practical engagement. And I would say that as it influenced the general liberation process, even the participation of women, I think one could say that they also were, it is really ideas in action if you will, that is how I would see it.*

Kobia sees theological reflection behind the praxis of the Sudanese churches and ecumenical networks. At the end of each major gathering, a communiqué would be issued to articulate and communicate the rationale – also theological – behind positions and initiatives. Communiqués were issued exactly for the purpose of connecting ideas and practical engagement. The issue of
participation of women in the People to People can be seen as the expression in practice of ideas about broad participation and ownership of the peace process.

Kobia refers to Dr Agnes Abuom as a person who was vigorously involved in the activities of the Sudanese church councils:

Dr Agnes Abuom was deeply involved and she clearly was one who would say she accepted liberation theology, black theology of liberation, etc. and her involvement perhaps more than any other woman in this region that I know of, actually contributed to the thinking, to the development of these ideas and she was very much in touch with the women from Southern Sudan.

Agnes Abuom, says Kobia, was aware of and agreed to the principles of various liberation theologies, and with her thinking and her involvement influenced the reflection around the People to People and the principle of inclusive participation in the process. Also through Agnes Abuom, indicates Samuel Kobia, ideas articulated by liberation theologies reached Southern Sudanese actors in the People to People.

3.1. The influence of African theology

Several interviewees indicate that African theology, especially as articulated by Kenyan theologian John Mbiti, was an important influence on the People to People:

Anonymous 2: The main element of the People to People is the focus on community. In this respect see Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy, Bantu, the ideal of connectedness. Rituals from birth to death, played also an important part. They are central to African culture.

The focus on communities and on the people, was a key element of the People to People. For Anonymous 2, the inspiration for this focus on the people comes from African theology, the work of John Mbiti and his elaboration on Traditional Religions (at that time Mbiti would still use the plural). In other words, according to Anonymous 2, the focus on the people comes from Traditional Religion, mediated by African theology. African theology does the important service of elaborating in Christian terms ideas and principles that are central to African culture and religion.

Also for Rev. George Riak, African theology is mainly associated with the work of John Mbiti:

I remember that Kenyan Professor John Mbiti wrote that the African God is not confined to churches, is always everywhere. You go to the shamba, your garden, you cultivate, good things come, they don’t only come in church. You can also consult a book written by him called African Religions and Philosophy. Another book
Rev. George, a Nuer Presbyterian pastor, refers to two key texts of Mbiti: *African Religions and Philosophy* and *Concepts of God in Africa*. From the work of Mbiti, Rev. George gathers that even for Christians, God is not to be conceived of as confined to limited spaces, such as churches. It might be useful to remember that in Nuer religion God is *kuoth*, spirit, and this determination of God as spirit accentuates the aspect of Divinity as free from any restrictions of space. Every space is the space of the activity of God.

It is interesting to note that both books referred to by Rev. George, deal with Traditional Religion rather than with Christian theology. The recovery of Traditional Religion, a task taken up by African theology, seems to be most appealing to a Southern Sudanese Presbyterian Pastor such as Rev. George.

In the course of the interview, Rev. George encourages me to read *Concepts of God in Africa* and relates the fact that the book is out of stock to the fact that white people (missionaries, representatives of Western churches) might have not liked the approach of Mbiti, the way Mbiti refers to African Religion as a resource for African theology. Rev. George perceives Western church people as opposing such an operation of positive evaluation of Traditional Religion.

Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi also exerted an important influence on the African ecumenical networks and accordingly, on the SCC and NSCC. I will refer to him in the next section, as his name is brought up in interview material in relation to South African theologians.

4. The South Africans

Dr Agnes Abuom informs that there had been contacts between South Sudanese and South African Catholics on a South African programme called ‘Healing of Memories’:

when you talk about the People to People process then you also have to think whether you will bring in the role that the South Africans, through John Ashworth, brought in of healing of memories, you know, because and maybe when you talk to John he can locate it clearly, because that came up strongly later, the healing of memories, and the Catholics, the Sudanese people and mainly Catholics were the facilitators. Quite a number of people including women, went to South Africa on this issue ... Reconcile was supposed to be built on this theoretical framework.

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827 Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*
The contact person between Sudanese and South Africans was John Ashworth. Lessons learned from the programme ‘Healing of Memories’ should have later been implemented by the Reconcile Centre that was supposed to promote and bring forth in Southern Sudan the methodology and agenda of the People to People to promote peace and reconciliation among communities.

Also, Archbishop Paulino of the Catholic Church stresses the importance of the relations between Southern Sudanese and South African Catholics:

“So I can believe that from Nairobi, Kenya, since our Church centre was in Nairobi, could at least be receiving some encouragement, some contribution, consultation about it as well as South Africa because until today our Church here in South Sudan is very well connected with South Africa.”

Anonymous 3 provides further details about the theological contribution of the South Africans:

“South Africans had borrowed heavily from the theology of James Cone. There was dialogue between the South African Marxist Cone-ian theologians and theologians in Kenya. This debate influenced AACC very much and through AACC the NSCC. That language became part of the rhetoric of NSCC.”

Anonymous 3 refers to theological debates between South African and Kenyan theologians in the AACC (namely debates on the relation between liberation and inculturation) and to the fact that the NSCC was exposed to such debates and the language in which they were articulated. Such language became part of the rhetoric of the NSCC, and was also employed by the NSCC in their documents and official statements. In relation to South African partners, here again is expressed the opinion that the theological language of liberation was for the Sudanese ‘learned language’, primarily meant for partners.

The cause of the South Africans in their struggle against apartheid and the theological elaboration around that struggle functioned as a connecting element among various church councils in Africa. Anonymous 3 explains:

“James Cone influenced South African theologians. In the AACC the churches were together because pulled in by South Africa and the anti-apartheid struggle. That brought all of us together and all the African countries together.”

United in the AACC in solidarity with the South African people and churches, other African ecumenical networks were motivated in their own liberation struggles and in the elaboration of
theologies in response to situations of oppression. The reality of apartheid was perceived as so serious that it mobilised and held together across the African continent.

Anonymous 3 provides further information about the important role of Desmond Tutu in the AACC and how the theological work of South Africans and Kenyans produced joint results:

Tutu was President of the AACC from 1989 to 1999. There was a constant look at South Africa through Tutu. Then Tutu became the Chair of TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission]. From that position he coined “Ubuntu”, post-liberation, post-Marxist word for where we are now in Africa. Then he said: we are already in the promised land but we don’t have a language for it. He said thank you Cone, thank you Carr, but we have arrived now. So in a particular meeting he said to Mugambi: I assign you now to find fresh language for where we are at this moment. And out of that came the word ‘Reconstruction’.

Tutu was President of the AACC for ten years, a span of time long enough to allow for a strong influence on the AACC, their member churches and the ideas that were there developed. Tutu’s centrality kept the attention of the AACC focused on South Africa while he pushed the theological reflection in the post-liberation time. Tutu popularises the concept “Ubuntu”, humanity as interconnectedness, and assigns to Kenyan scholar Jesse Mugambi the task to create new theological language to reflect the situation of African countries after the acquisition of independence. Such a request from Tutu marks the birth of reconstruction theology.829

Not only the NSCC in Nairobi was influenced by South African churches and theologies through the AACC. Joy Kwaje tells about links between the SCC in Khartoum and South African church partners:

We actually linked ourselves a lot, in the beginning not physically but we had like the films and so on from South Africa that influenced our thinking, and we saw how the South Africans were able to move as a group to resist, so we did get an influence from the South Africans ... That’s right, but also from the South Africans because I remember for some of the things, we had to go down and do our meetings in South Africa.

The Sudanese were kept informed about the situation in South Africa and the engagement of churches against apartheid. Such information, says Joy K waje, influenced the thinking of the SCC. The lessons Joy K waje remembers concern how South Africans were moving as a group, could strategize together, act together, concert their efforts, and how such common efforts were aimed at a praxis of resistance against the apartheid regime. These lessons influenced the thinking and

strategizing of the Sudanese ecumenical structures oppressed, as they felt they were, by the regime of Khartoum. Later, there were also visits of SCC staff to South Africa. Relations were strengthened by meetings in person, and by first-hand experience of the South African situation.

Anonymous 4, another staff member in the SCC, confirms that there was considerable interaction with South Africa through the AACC:

> we had South Africans interacting with us through the AACC, we got visitors from there, they would come to Khartoum through the AACC and our interaction increased when our Bishop from South Africa [Desmond Tutu] became the chair of AACC … So he begun involving the African churches, South African churches which resulted into several visits of church personnel from South Africa to Khartoum.

Anonymous 4 confirms that cooperation between Sudan and South Africa increased when Desmond Tutu became President of the AACC. He would motivate delegations from South Africa to visit other members of the AACC.

Several interviewees, therefore, point to the fact that Tutu built a strong African ecumenical network in which the South Africans played a prominent role, the anti-apartheid struggle functioned as a catalyst and the black theology of liberation became an inspiration for theological elaboration about situations of oppression in other African countries.

5. International staff in the NSCC

We have looked at the influence international ecumenical networks and specifically Kenyan and South African partners had on the SCC, NSCC and Sudanese churches. We have also seen how this influence was exerted through ecumenical structures (NCCK, AACC, SEF and WCC) and prominent figures, among them Kenyan Samuel Kobia, Agnes A buom, Bethuel Kiplagat, John Gatu and South African Desmond Tutu.

William Lowrey, as I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, also relates the theological language in the official documents of the SCC and NSCC to the presence of international staff, often seconded by partner organisations, in the offices of the NSCC. Interviewees refer mainly to five persons: Phil Rieman, Louie Rieman and William Lowrey (North Americans), Paul Murphy (Irish) and Elizabeth Philippo (British).

Phil and Louie Rieman were a married couple who, sent by the Church of the Brethren, worked as staff of the NSCC from 1992 to 1996.

According to LoWilla, Between the two, Louie, was the one who was more clearly articulating and proposing a Christian, biblical perspective on grassroots peace engagement:
particularly Louie, I think was focused more into the Christian thinking, into using elements in the Bible to pursue peace, into encourage people, also those who were in difficult situation. So you could say to some extent, yes, they brought some theological elements in the process. ... They encouraged some people for Bible studies even during that time.

Also Anonymous 3 refers to the contribution of the Riemans:

*The Riemans came from the Church of the Brethren. They operated heavily from that tradition. They had techniques for managing good dynamics.*

Anonymous 3 relates the peace engagement and the biblical and theological ground for such peace engagement to the peace tradition of the Church of the Brethren to which the Riemans belonged. From their tradition, the Riemans had also brought to the NSCC and the People to People techniques for peace training and conflict management.

As a pastor and a theologian, William Lowrey is seen as contributing theologically to the work of the Sudanese churches on peace:

Anonymous 2: *Bill Lowrey certainly contributed with theological reflections.*

Emmanuel LoWilla, beside mentioning the Riemans, refers to the key role William Lowrey played in the core concept of building peace moving from the grassroots level:

*Well the People to People Peace Process came as the result of many attempts. The first attempt was with the churches led by NCCK, I think it was 1992 whereby the main leaders Dr John Garang and Riek Machar they, there was a delegation here, they had discussions here, they went to Washington, it didn’t work out, and then after a while we thought of why not work with the people who are being mobilised in order to fight. And so the churches with the help of a consultant, Dr Bill Lowrey who is an American and a Presbyterian, started looking at the concept of working with the grassroots. It was also embedded in one of the churches’ thinking of positioning peace makers in amidst of conflict. And by then we had two staff members, Phil and Louie [Rieman] who were sent by the Church of Brethren to work for the New Sudan Council of Churches, and that is what they were doing, and so when Bill Lowrey came and people started talking about it and looking at some of the things, Bill Lowrey did his PhD looking at the issues of the Nuer particularly as a tribe, so that in most cases also helped to bring in the thinking culturally how the Nuer would react to such a situation. So Bill Lowrey as a consultant helped us in the NSCC to think about that, and the first step to that I think was having the first meeting which took place in 1998 in Lokichoggio with community leaders... for me Bill Lowrey was part of the people who at the beginning worked and started developing this process since 1998.*
LoWilla tells about how the churches, with the help of William Lowrey, started looking into ways of working with communities. The focus on communities is transversal, it is Traditional, it is Christian, it is drawn from peace theories and it materialises in a specific peace process, the People to People, with the assistance and contribution of an external actor, William Lowrey. With Lowrey’s contribution, the People to People begins to take shape, and with the financial support he manages to secure, the Lokichoggio meeting could take place in 1998.

Bishop Tombe also refers to the influence William Lowrey exerted on the Sudanese ecumenical structures and on the People to People, and sees this influence particularly in terms of peace theories:

Q: So you’re saying Bill Lowrey in a way
A: Influenced us, he influenced us.

Q: But it was more in terms of peace theories or more in terms of theology?
A: More theory, conflict resolution, yes more conflict resolution, I think the theology is basically more from the church, I mean from the Bible.

According to Bishop Tombe, while the influence of William Lowrey was most significant in terms of theories of conflict resolution, the theological inspiration for the People to People came primarily from the churches as a reflection on the message of the Bible.

While I share in the opinion that the theological inspiration of the People to People came primarily from Sudanese actors, I believe it is important to keep in mind that, as we have seen in Chapter 13, the theological interpretation of Traditional sacrifice provided by William Lowrey in Wunluit was of great importance to facilitate broad participation, also by conservative Christians, in the Traditional peace-sealing ritual. On the basis of interview material presented in this and in previous chapters, I draw the conclusion that the influence of William Lowrey on the People to People was also significantly theological.

To the role of Paul Murphy, NSCC staff from 2000 to 2005, I have referred in Chapter 11 in relation to the publication of the document “Leading from Behind”, an important review of the People to People aiming at defining the role played by the NSCC.

About Elizabeth Philippo, in charge of the peace desk of the NSCC and organiser of the Yei Dialogue, Agnes Abuom says:

*When the People to People peace process started, the critical person for me was Elizabeth [Philippo], I think you have come across her name ... and John Ashworth. Because in as much as Dr Haruun was mounting up*
the programme, the programmatic staff, of course John was the Africa Focal Point, but Elizabeth in particular was very key in this programme at the very initial stages, and so some contacts with her were kept over how they were doing. And then later I came in also to facilitate the women, much later, ja, the Dinka-Nuer women programme.

Elizabeth Philippo, British staff in the NSCC, played, in the words of Agnes Abuom, a key role in the definition of the People to People in its initial stage.

6. The role of the NSCC in the People to People

We have looked at the role and contribution of international partners on the People to People, specifically in terms of the ideas that contributed to and supported the process. What relation can be traced between the level of reflection of international partners, living and moving mainly abroad and at the level of international ecumenical networks such as the NCCK, AACCC, SEF, WCC, and church people acting on the ground in Southern Sudan? I argue that an important connecting function between the international and the local level was covered by the NSCC, both Sudanese staff and key church people such as Bishops Paride Taban and Nathaniel Garang who represented it, were in contact with the larger international networks and had a firm foot on the ground. These were the middle-range leaders, according to the definition of Lederach, connecting external and internal players, and connecting other middle-range actors to the grassroots level in Southern Sudan.

The very set-up of churches on the ground constituted an important structure to channel ideas. According to Rev. James Ninrew:

NSCC was privileged because of its setup of churches and parishes and congregations that are based deep in the communities. That structure helped the church to pass the message and influence people.

The widespread church presence in Southern Sudan gave ecumenical structures a unique opportunity to reach and influence large numbers of people in remote areas that would otherwise be difficult to reach.

Much of the success of the People to People is due, according to Rev. Ninrew, to the leadership of the NSCC:

831 See Chapter 10
The NSCC was lucky in the leadership. Haruun, Bishop Taban, and other leaders. Leaders who had been with the people in conflict, that helped in shaping the thinking. That gave to NSCC ideas on how to implement the peace process.

Haruun Ruun, Executive Director of the NSCC, and Bishop Taban are mentioned here. They are seen as church representatives who had been close to the people in conflict, knew the context, knew the needs of the people and on the basis of this knowledge of the context and of the people could elaborate an effective plan to engage people in peace and reconciliation.

The very fact of being connected in an ecumenical organisation is seen by Rev. George Riak as a tool for effective peacebuilding:

Working under NSCC, together as the body of Christ, so we can be able to make peace among the different communities.

From the perspective of local church leaders, it was of great importance to work under the umbrella of an ecumenical organisation. The national network could reach places the single denominational church could not, because the NSCC could reach across confessional, denominational and ethnic divides, because of the resources it could mobilise and because of the authority and credibility it had vis-à-vis the military and political authorities. Cooperation under the NSCC is also seen as the realisation of a biblical and theological vision of different churches being united as the body of Christ. Ecumenism facilitates the work for peace providing both resources and theological motivation.

According to Agnes A buom, the NSCC contributed to the rationale of the People to People and to its outcome, also through logistics:

The logistical choice to build a village of tukuls and have all participants work, eat and sleep in them, had a remarkably democratising effect. All participants, also women from the local communities, moved in familiar surroundings and structures, felt equal to other participants and felt
they could equally contribute to the peace process. The choice of the NSCC to lodge all the Wunlit participants in *tukuls*, positively affected the outcome of the process.

Both NSCC representatives and some ecumenical partners are seen by Gachora Ngunjiri as connecting the grassroots and international levels:

> People who were involved in the process like Bishop Garang, Nathaniel Garang, Samuel Kobia, Kiplagat, these were the people who moved both at the local level and at the international ecumenical level. Each level influenced and informed the actions of the other.

People who could move across several levels, from the local to the national to the international and back, beside playing a crucial role in connecting people and creating synergies for peace, could also transfer ideas from one level to the other, from the local to the international and from the international to the local, creating syntheses that were true to the context as well as enriched by ideas and theological ideas produced elsewhere. Intersections of ideas and the agency of people moving at the local and the international level contributed to the theoretical profile and accordingly to the outcome of the People to People.

7. Conclusions

The Sudanese Churches and their connecting organisations, the SCC and NSCC, did not move in a vacuum. They were part of large networks of international of ecumenical organisations. In such networks people and ideas would move.

The NSCC was fully donor funded, meaning that without the financial support of donors it would have not been able to conduct its activities, among them the People to People. Interview material indicates that the NSCC was not dependant only on financial support. In order to function and to function effectively, it also needed relationships, friendships, moral support and the sense of being part of a larger ecumenical family. The support of international partners translated into effective advocacy, resources, visibility, credibility and authority. Not least, it translated into leverage, at least for some time, towards the leaders of the military factions.

Did the moral, logistical and financial support from international partners translate into influence on the level of activities conducted by the NSCC and the ideas that supported such activities? Perceptions of the extent and nature of such influence, as interview material indicates, vary.

According to some interviewees, there was direct influence. The theological elaboration in ecumenical circles, particularly the AACC, NCCK, SEF and the WCC, influenced the theological
elaboration of actors in the NSCC. Such theological elaboration is connoted in terms of theologies of liberation and of inculturation understood as an attempt at relating African Traditional Religion and Christian theology. Liberation theology was primarily articulated in the WCC and SEF, while the influence of African theology and its goal of inculturation is mainly related to Kenya and particularly Kenyan theologian John Mbiti. I will return soon to the influence of the AACC and Desmond Tutu, proposing a synthesis of the two theological trends.

Another group of interviewees refers to what could be termed indirect influence. By the fact of attending meetings abroad and interacting with other participants, Sudanese actors were exposed to and influenced by ideas that were circulating there.

A third perspective is that, more than an influence on the level of ideas, it would be appropriate to assume an influence in terms of methodology. The fact that partners, particularly Kobia as indicated in interview material, stressed that advocacy work should be supported by ideas contextually articulated, illustrates how, more than indicating a theological line, partners gave indications about the method for conducting peace and advocacy work.

International ecumenical partners expected Sudanese actors to relate their praxis to theological motivation, in other words, they expressly encouraged an articulation of the ideas and theological ideas that supported peace engagement, and the stand of the churches towards the liberation struggle and the issue of self-determination. In fact, interviewees tell that efforts at articulating theological motives supporting praxis were particularly requested in relation to political issues. Theological articulation aims at connoting and preserving the identity of church actors in the Sudanese ecumenical structures and in the People to People. Such an operation is also considered important in terms of securing access to funding.

Interview material indicates that the theology developed in the frame of the People to People in relation to issues of liberation, justice and peace, is connoted in terms of liberation theology for two reasons: because it moves along a circle of reflection and praxis and because it is perceived as political theology. Churches cultivate their identity as voice of the voiceless, voice of the people, expressing the political aspirations of the people among others, on the issue of self-determination. As the issues of self-determination, liberation and peace are inevitably political, theological elaboration around such issues is, in turn, perceived as political. Political theology, or theology concerned with political issues, is associated with liberation theology.

Tutu represents the urge within the AACC of holding together the two perspectives of inculturation and liberation. Given the theological influence of Tutu on the AACC and through the AACC on several national ecumenical networks in Africa, would it be legitimate to assume an influence on Sudanese church actors and theological elaboration in terms of holding together
inculturation and liberation? While the type of theological debate conducted in the AACC could have influenced the NSCC in terms of openness to discourses on both inculturation and liberation, my conclusion is that the articulation of the two dimensions in the frame of the People to People is mainly contextual and moved by local religio-cultural and socio-political factors. It is moved by the specifically Southern Sudanese perception of traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution as the most effective means to reconcile communities and achieve sustainable peace.

NSCC staff and leaders functioned as middle-range actors (Lederach), connecting the international and the local as well as the top leadership to the grassroots level. Middle-range actors who could move across several levels, from the local to the national to the international and back, played a crucial role in connecting people, in creating synergies for peace, in circulating ideas, and in creating syntheses that were true to the context as well as enriched by ideas, also theological, produced elsewhere.

The People to People is indebted to the contribution of external actors, beside partners and donors, international staff in the SCC and NSCC. To try to define the impact of the influence of partners, donors and international staff in the Sudanese ecumenical structures does not reduce the importance of the efforts towards peace and reconciliation by Sudanese actors. Contextual and international dimensions are strictly interrelated in the People to People. The People to People owes its positive outcome to a fortuitous intersection of internal and external factors, among them actors, peace theories, theologies and methods to achieve peace and reconciliation.
PART FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

17. Discussion and conclusions

1. On contextual theology, inculturation, and the praxis model of liberation and peace
In this dissertation, I have argued that the theology that was developed in the context of the People to People Peacemaking Process, at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, Traditional Religion and peacebuilding, is a contextual theology of both inculturation and peace/liberation.
The theology developed in the frame of the People to People is contextual theology, as it is developed in the specific context of Southern Sudan at war and of the People to People, in relation to the four dimensions of context indicated by Bevans: experience, culture (and Traditional Religion), social location and social change. In that context, it is theology produced by local actors, using indigenous cultural and religious resources such as traditional methods of conflict resolution and biblical perspectives on peace, it is prompted by the experience of war and suffering and it aims at social change towards peacebuilding and liberation.

In the frame of the People to People, inculturation is primarily understood as an issue of the relation between African Traditional Religion and Christian theology as well as an issue of expressing the Christian faith through means (such as songs), language, images and categories organic to the local culture. In this dissertation, I have argued that the theology developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war, and that contributed to the People to People, was already developed in relation to African patterns of thought and elements of traditional culture and religion. Among such elements, I have elaborated around the issues of the perceived ambivalence of God, suffering understood as a consequence of human fault, the need to identify the causes of suffering in order to identify and enact the appropriate process to restore relations with God and fellow human beings, and translations into Christian terms of the significance of traditional objects and rituals.

As presented in Chapter 4, in his description of models of contextual theology, Bevans associates the praxis and the liberation model, as in both models context is primarily understood in terms of social change. Bevans prefers to call it the praxis model rather than liberation model, to indicate that the specificity of the model is not a particular theme, but a particular method, namely that of a critical reflection on praxis. In this sense, the praxis model suggested by Bevans applied to the theology developed in the frame of the People to People, allows for reading through the same theological lens and hold together the two themes of peacebuilding and liberation. In the context of Southern Sudan at war and of the People to People Peacemaking Process, a transformative, liberative praxis is primarily a praxis for peace. Liberation theology as a contextual theology of praxis for social change, in the context of Southern Sudan and of the People to People takes the form of active engagement in peacebuilding. In other words, liberation theology in the context of the People to People is a contextual theology of liberation and peace.

2. Defining a framework for both inculturation and peace/liberation

While the models of contextual theology offered by Schreiter and Bevans help in capturing aspects of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People, in their works a comprehensive
model is still missing that is capable of holding together and articulating the two dimensions of inculturation and liberation, cultural continuity and praxis for change.

On the basis of the analysis of empirical material and to illustrate the contextual theology that developed in the frame of the People to People, I have elaborated the following matrix or model of contextual theology:

![Image of the model]

According to this model, contextual theology in the frame of the People to People (the core of the triangle) is developed at the intersection of three elements: 1. Christian beliefs, 2. Traditional Religion and culture and 3. peacebuilding. The intersection of Christian faith and Traditional religion and culture primarily produces a theology of inculturation, while the intersection of Christian faith and peacebuilding produces a contextual theology of praxis for peace and liberation. A theology of inculturation addresses context primarily in its religio-cultural aspects, while a theology of praxis for peace and liberation addresses context primarily as socio-political. While a theology of inculturation builds on continuity with a religio-cultural past, a theology of peace and liberation is concerned with change.

Peacebuilding aims at social change, from conflict to peace and reconciliation. The People to People, and consequently the theology developed in its frame, primarily address the issue of peacebuilding in order to change, transform a situation of conflict in a reality of peacebuilding, peacemaking and reconciliation. To achieve the goal of peace, the People to People made use of
traditional methods of conflict resolution. Such traditional methods have strong traditional religious underpinnings. In their focus on peacebuilding through traditional methods of conflict resolution, actors in the People to People are also forced to reflect on the relation between Christianity and African Traditional Religion and culture. Two trajectories are therefore followed in the theology developed in the frame of the People to People and delineated in the matrix I have elaborated: the first, from Christian faith to praxis through Traditional Religion and culture, and the second, from Christian faith to Traditional Religion and culture through praxis. The contextual theological reflection that ensues, develops in the frames of both inculturation and praxis for peace and liberation.

The model of contextual theology that I am proposing in order to describe the theology that developed in the frame of the People to People is therefore a model that holds together and articulates cultural continuity and social change, inculturation and liberation.

In relation to cultural identity, according to Bevans, the practitioner of the praxis model presupposes the importance of the cultural aspects of context more in terms of cultural change than preservation. Culture is seen here by Bevans as part of the context that aims at being changed. In the articulation of inculturation and liberation in the frame of the People to People, social change is rather linked to cultural continuity understood as re-evaluation of traditional methods of conflict resolution.

In Chapter 5, we have seen how, in the debate between inculturationists and liberationists in relation to Traditional Religion, liberationists recommend a functionalist approach to tradition. In the frame of the People to People, Traditional rituals are functionally resorted to, as recommended by liberationists, as they serve the specific social purpose of achieving peace. The performance of rituals in the frame of the People to People links Traditional Religion to a religious praxis of transformation (peacebuilding), and therefore places the theological elaboration conducted in the People to People and the synthesis of Christian values and Traditional Religion there attempted, also in the frame of liberation theology or, as I have termed it, in the frame of a contextual theological model of praxis for peace and liberation. Cultural continuity (resorting to traditional methods of conflict resolution) is aimed at social change (peacebuilding). Inculturation is also aimed at liberation.

3. A contextual theology of peace and liberation

In this work, I have referred to how, in the context of Southern Sudan at war theology, particularly for the Protestants but also for Catholics, was a reflection on the Bible and what the Bible had to
say vis-à-vis their experience of war and of the liberation struggle as well as on the need to engage in peacebuilding. The result of biblical and theological reflection, by Catholics and Protestants alike, on the issue of the liberation of the South from the North and on the spiritual implications of liberation, is a contextual theology of liberation.

Bishop Taban’s theology focuses on justice, the rights of the people, and respect for the people. I have defined it as a contextual theology that has at its core a preferential option for the (poor) people and a deep commitment to justice.

At the 1997 Yei Dialogue meeting between the SPLM/A and church representatives, SPLM/A’s leader John Garang commissioned a theology of liberation that would support his armed liberation struggle. Garang also asked churches to hold a positive attitude towards Traditional Religion and culture in support of his vision for the New Sudan. While church representatives committed to promote respect for traditions, they also presented a theology of liberation expressed in the churches’ own terms. Among the features of such a contextual theology of liberation were commitment to be contextually relevant, commitment to be the church of the oppressed, and being a prophetic voice for the poor and dispossessed. In Yei, churches committed to participate in the liberation struggle by peaceful means and saw full liberation of the people (spiritual and material) as part of the liberation struggle. Such a theological programme holds together liberation, justice and peace.

The experience of war called for a form of theological elaboration that could meet people in their suffering and provide spiritual and theological answers to new questions. A contextual theology of liberation and peace aimed at properly addressing the spiritual needs of the people. In the encounter with trained theologians, such aspirations were found to resonate with elements of liberation theologies developed elsewhere.

4. Political theology as liberation theology

Interview material indicates that international ecumenical partners expected Sudanese actors to relate their praxis to theological motivation, in other words, partners expressly encouraged an articulation of the ideas and theological ideas that supported peace engagement, as well as the stand of the churches towards the liberation struggle. Rather than indicating a specific theological line, partners recommended a methodology of relating praxis to theological reflection. Interviewees tell that efforts at articulating theological ideas supporting praxis were particularly requested in relation to political issues. Theological articulation aimed at connoting and preserving the identity of church actors in the Sudanese ecumenical structures and in the People to People. Such an operation of
articulating theological reflection and praxis was also considered important in terms of securing access to funding and maintaining an international network of support. In the present work, I hold a broad understanding of the People to People as a process extending over time and involving people and activities at the local, national and international level, from communities at the grassroots level to the offices of ecumenical organisations where the influence of external actors was mainly felt.

Interview material indicates that the theology developed in the frame of the People to People in relation to issues of liberation, justice and peace, is connoted by some actors in terms of liberation theology for two reasons: because it moves along a circle of reflection and praxis, and because it is perceived as political theology. Sudanese churches cultivated their identity as a voice of the voiceless, voice of the people, expressing the political aspirations of the people among others, on the issue of self-determination. As the issues of self-determination, liberation and peace are inevitably also political, theological elaboration around such issues was in turn perceived as political. Political theology, or theology concerned with political issues, was associated with liberation theology.

5. Syncretism and dual faith-systems

In this dissertation, I have interpreted syncretism and dual faith systems as attempts at recomposing fragments of cultural and religious identities in order to live a spiritually satisfying, integrated life.

Traditional Dinka and Nuer Religion had provided the parameters for a world-view, the framework to read and understand the universe and relations between the visible and the invisible within it. Traditional Religion had also provided resources for group binding, for keeping and restoring relationships albeit within the limits of a defined group (clan or tribe). Was the new Christian faith able to provide a satisfactory alternative both in terms of life orientation and holding and restoring community ties?

The issues of syncretism and dual faith systems reveal a problem in the way the inculturation of the Christian message had (or had not) been conducted: if the transmission of the Christian message in Southern Sudan had been conducted in a way that sufficiently took into consideration the receiving culture, in continuity and not necessarily dramatic discontinuity with the cultural context in which it was inserted, in other words, if the Christian message had been sufficiently inculturated, issues of syncretism and dual religious systems would not have been perceived as so problematic. Such principles can be applied to other contexts.

Schreiter suggests approaching the issues of syncretism and dual faith system from an angle wider than theological discourse, that takes into account the function of religious practices in
maintaining relations and finding viable solutions to spiritual quests. For this reason, and to the end indicated by Schreiter, I have resorted to the maximalist theory of religion proposed by Henriksen.

6. Orientation, transformation, and legitimation

In the course of this work, I have referred to the categories of orientation, transformation and legitimation suggested by Jan-Olav Henriksen (see Chapter 6), to be employed as interpretative categories for the articulation of Traditional Religion and Christianity in the context of Southern Sudan at war as well as for the theology of inculturation and liberation developed in the context of the People to People.

The articulation of Traditional Religion and Christianity or the assimilation by Christian theology of elements of Traditional Religion provided the parameters for highly needed orientation and personal transformation (conversion and resilience) in a situation of chaos, material and spiritual, created by war.

The process of conversion from Traditional Religion to Christianity, particularly from the 1980s, implied a process of ‘translation’ of old religious meanings, values and practices to new ones. Such a process of translation, of both rupture and continuity, can be understood as a process of transformation.

The perception of Christians of being caught in a conflict that was simultaneously spiritual, material and eschatological, made them long for orientation, or clues to understand the role of God as well as their role in the ongoing conflict and in the liberation struggle. The experience of multiple conflicts made Christians long for transformation, both personal and collective, spiritual and political. Engagement in the liberation struggle required a process of theological legitimation of such political engagement by Christians. The theology developed in the context of Southern Sudan at war can be read as a response to the needs of orientation, transformation and justification determined by the experience of extreme suffering and longing for redemption.

The goal of peacebuilding in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process adds more layers to the perception of a theology of inculturation and liberation as a response to the need for orientation, transformation and justification.

Henriksen stresses the role of religious practices in contributing to the understanding of ‘what matters’, practices such as storytelling, symbols, rituals, reflection and cooperation. All the named practices are, as we have seen in the course of this work, of great importance in the frame of the People to People, most of all Traditional ritual. Sacrificial ritual is the religious element around which evolve theological dilemmas and a theological debate about inculturation.
It is my understanding that Traditional ritual slaughtering at People to People events maintains an important function in terms of orientation and transformation for Traditionalists and Christians alike.

Traditional ritual makes present a familiar world view in which people are able to navigate. It makes perceivable a system – spiritual, cultural and religious – that holds together the visible and the invisible, relations with fellow human beings and with God.

Traditional ritual transforms: it creates the right disposition to reconciliation and peace, it transforms relations, it recreates a moral community, and it holds people accountable to the peace achieved. Traditional ritual ‘is powerful’, ‘it works’, as interviewees tell, and for this reason it is resorted to in order to achieve peace among conflicting communities. Still, it is perceived as problematic by some Christian participants, and therefore requires an operation of legitimation or justification, in the terms of Henriksen, or in my own terms, the elaboration of a theology of inculturation, a theology that manages to constructively articulate African world-view and Christian faith.

We have seen how Henriksen points to the fact that practices of orientation and transformation lead to practices of justification and legitimation, in other words to the doctrinal and normative elaboration and justification of such religious practices.

In the frame of the People to People, theological elaboration is conducted as the justification of a number of practices: 1. theology is developed as justification of support for the liberation struggle; 2. theological elaboration justifies the stand of the churches towards the issue of self-determination; 3. identifying the concept of peace as the key hermeneutical principle in the Bible legitimises engagement in peacebuilding; 4. the need of achieving peace also through the Traditional practice of slaughtering the white bull requires an operation of theological elaboration or legitimation; and 5. inculturation as the theological effort to articulate Traditional Religion and Christianity can be read as an effort at justifying both religious practices and spiritual quests.

I am suggesting here that peacebuilding is, in the frame of the People to People, understood as religious practice that, given the contextual political and religious conditions (an ongoing liberation struggle and the persistence of Traditional Religion), requires theological justification. The theology of inculturation and liberation developed in the frame of the People to People is, to a large extent, a theological justification of religious practices.
7. From peace to inculturation

The theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People assumes the compatibility of African Traditional Religion and culture on the one hand, and Christian values and beliefs on the other, on the basis of the peace potential of both religious traditions.

Theology in the context of Southern Sudan at war in the ‘80s and ‘90s, as mentioned, is to a large extent a contextual biblical theology of peace. Peace is understood as a key biblical concept, as a hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the rest of the scriptures and as an ethical guiding principle. Such a theology preceded the People to People and retained its popularity long after the process had come to an end. In the frame of the People to People, peace becomes a hermeneutical principle also used to assess the value of Traditional Religion in the sense that the peace potential of Traditional Religion is understood as an indicator of the value bestowed by God on it.

The peace potential of both Traditional Religion and Christian faith also became the motivation for a renewed appreciation of Traditional Religion by some Christians, and for a theological elaboration on their articulation. In the frame of the People to People, therefore, a renewed reflection is carried on inculturated theology, and a positive perspective on the relation between Traditional Religion and Christian faith is articulated. Active engagement for peacebuilding not only enhances the inculturation of theology, I have claimed that it also highlights inculturation that had already taken place.

Beside the general description of inculturation as articulation of Traditional Religion and Christian faith, in the context of Southern Sudan and in the frame of the People to People inculturation can further be described in the following five terms: 1. elaborating theological perspectives to recognise and appreciate the value of Traditional Religion; 2. finding points of contact, or what I have called interfaces, between the two religious traditions (such as the Eucharist in relation to Traditional ritual or the compatibility of traditional and Christian understandings of peace); 3. using contextual tools (ritual, song, dance) to express faith; 4. elaborating alternatives to Traditional ritual to preserve its intrinsic religious value; and 5. allowing for the coexistence of Christian faith and African world-view.

The aims of peace, ecumenism and inter-religious cooperation condition the theological elaboration that moves towards inculturation or that reveals the inculturated character of contextual theology. The example of the People to People indicates that the task of achieving reconciliation and peace in religiously mixed communities, in this case of Traditionalists and Christians, is better served by an inculturated Christian message. The example of the People to People also shows that an inculturated theology, a theology that can constructively integrate elements of Traditional Religion, is more suitable to supporting effective peacebuilding.
In the frame of the People to People, praxis for peace and liberation calls for reflection and articulation of inculturation. In the praxis of peacebuilding, inculturation and liberation intersect.

8. Contextual religious peacebuilding

Contextual theology in the frame of the People to People, a contextual theology of both inculturation and peace/liberation, elaborates on contextual peacebuilding. The traditional methods of peacemaking and peacebuilding employed in the People to People are indigenous and therefore contextual. Also peacebuilding in the frame of the People to People moves in a circle of theory and praxis, of reflection on action with the goal of increasing the level of effectiveness of peace engagement and sharing lessons learned with a wider audience. We have seen how the publication of *Building Hope for Peace inside Sudan* as the outcome of action-reflection responded to the need to reflect on lessons learned and record them in order to apply them in other contexts at other times. As contextual peacebuilding in the frame of the People to People is supported by contextual theology and Traditional Religion, it can be defined as contextual religious peacebuilding.

9. Need for a theological debate

Theological dilemmas call for theological elaboration. Such theological elaboration was collectively conducted in the frame of the People to People with different modalities. While William Lowrey shared his theological articulation of Traditional sacrifice, Jewish sacrifice and the sacrifice of Christ, creating in this way the conditions for full participation of the more conservative Christians in the Traditional peace sealing ritual, Samuel Kobia refers to the early phases of a debate. A sufficiently articulated theological debate might have further eased the theological dilemmas of the more conservative; would have prepared a fuller, more effective participation in the People to People and more generally in peace work in Southern Sudan; would have supported an understanding of dual religious systems; and finally might have helped in the transmission of an inculturated Christian message capable of meeting people with their spiritual needs and cultural and religious dilemmas. The urgency of the task to achieve peace and the scarce availability of theologically trained actors prevented the articulation of such a theological debate. Still, theological elaboration in the frame of the People to People is perceived as conducive to peace work. Theological articulation is perceived as a relevant enterprise, vis-à-vis peacebuilding.
10. Perspectives on religious grassroots peacebuilding

While the primary focus of the present study is the articulation of theological reflections on inculturation and liberation in relation to peacebuilding, this study also contributes with perspectives on religious peacebuilding, grassroots peacebuilding and religious grassroots peacebuilding, as I will indicate in the following paragraphs, primarily concerning the People to People, but also applicable in other contexts.

10.1. *The example of the People to People indicates that peacebuilding efforts capitalising on religious resources have the potential to mobilise for sustainable peace.* In this sense, the People to People contributes to theorisation on religious, grassroots, indigenous methods of conflict management and peacebuilding.

10.2. *The People to People revived the memory and practice of traditional methods of conflict resolution that had been compromised by war.* While small scale traditional reconciliation ceremonies had been attended by Christians in the 1990s, the 1994 Akobo conference relaunched such practices on a larger scale and taught lessons that, with the help of an external actor, William Lowrey, were employed at People to People events.

In Yei, John Garang had expressed his wish for peace to revive traditional practices; in the frame of the People to People it is traditional practices that substantially contribute to peace. The effectiveness of traditional practices of conflict resolution and peacemaking should not surprise, as the goal of Traditional Religion, as we have seen (Magesa, Evans-Pritchard, Lienhardt), is to preserve life, and a state of peace is what allows life to flourish. The goal of traditional practices to preserve life by maintaining peace explains the peace potential of Traditional Religion and culture.

10.3. *The example of the People to People indicates that the sustainability of peace efforts is related to their contextual character.* Peacebuilding capitalising on the experiences and meaningful practices of the people involved, has a greater chance of being sustainable. We notice here an interesting relation between contextual theology and contextual peacebuilding: both aim at being relevant in a given context, and at building on the experiences of people in the sense of responding to specific needs and making use of local resources. In the frame of the People to People, a contextual theology of both inculturation and liberation contributed to contextual peacebuilding holding the same two strains of inculturation (use of local cultural resources) and liberation (positive change from war to peace).
10.4. The People to People as peace of the people, by the people and for the people, assumed as its guiding principle, as the name of the peace process indicates, concern for the needs of the people and the issue of people’s full participation in peace work. This focus on the people was sustained by Traditional and Christian principles (furthermore, it was part of the rhetoric of the SPLM/A). In this sense, focus on the people constitutes another interface that links Traditional and Christian motives in the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People. As a guiding principle that is validated by positive results (for example, the peace agreement reached in Wunlit), it confirms what is already indicated in literature, specifically on women and peacebuilding, that peace is more sustainable when it is inclusive.

The principle of full participation in the frame of the People to People translated into the full involvement of women. The involvement and active participation of women was a deliberate choice by the staff of the NSCC and was expressly recommended by traditional leaders, as interview material indicates. In the course of this work I have referred to how women played a crucial role as connectors across conflict divides, as peace mobilisers and therefore educators on peace issues, and as active participants at People to People events. Interview material indicates that the participation of women was recognised as a decisive factor in the positive outcome of Wunlit and other People to People events.

10.5. The positive outcome of the People to People was largely due to the intersection of internal and external factors: among them, extensive training held in other countries with the contribution of external trainers, the contribution of international staff, the support of donors, partners, and perspectives from research conducted elsewhere. “Modern is the blend”, says one interviewee, meaning that what is defined as modern in the ‘framework’ is exactly the mixture of different elements and contributions.

The concept of intersection is significant both in theological/religious terms and from the perspective of peace studies: theology develops at the intersection of different religious traditions and the aim of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding in turn is sustained by the intersection of internal and external, local and international factors, people and ideas. A contextual theology of liberation and peace develops at the intersection of context (both religio-cultural and socio-political), events, actors (internal and external) and ideas.

People act as connectors of local and external resources. NSCC staff and leaders play the role of middle-range actors (Lederach), mediating between the leadership and the grassroots level and between the local and the international. In connecting people, middle-range actors create synergies for peace, and in transferring ideas from the international to the local and from the local
to the international they created syntheses true to the context as well as being enriched by ideas and theological ideas produced elsewhere.

10.6. The theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People as recorded in the publication Building Hope, was the result of reflection conducted after the process had come to an end. At the beginning of the process, what was employed was what was at hand: personal initiatives, insights, experiences, theological perspectives, traditional knowledge and the available knowledge on current methods of conflict management and resolution. From its application to its final formulation, the method of the People to People is, therefore, to a large extent inductive and empirical, as it takes as its starting point resources available on the ground and builds competence and knowledge from practical experience.

10.7. One further interface in the theoretical ‘framework’ of the People to People is a holistic understanding of peace, Traditional and biblical (shalom). Peace, particularly in traditional terms, is inextricably linked to reconciliation or restoration of relationships. The People to People expands the notion of peace to include spiritual and material factors and the principle of inter-relatedness, contributing in this way not only to religious peacebuilding, but also to peacebuilding in general. Traditional resources employed in the People to People expand the notion of peace and contribute to definitions and practices of restorative justice.

10.8. Peacemaking and peacebuilding in the frame of the People to People are religiously inclusive, thought out and planned in order to fully involve both Traditionalists and Christians. The practice of the in-betweens, those converts to Christianity who continue to perform Traditional rituals, as problematic as it is perceived by the more conservative Christians, draws attention to problems related to the insufficient inculturation of the Christian message, identifies interfaces between Traditional Religion and Christian faith, and calls for theological reflection on issues of dual faith systems, syncretism, African Christianity and the inculturation of the Christian message in the context of Southern Sudan at war. It is the attitude of the in-between that, while prompting negative reactions among the more conservative Christians, contributes to the need for further reflection on the issue of inculturation of the Christian message.

10.9. A study of the work of Lederach draws attention to a consistent number of similarities between the framework of sustainable peace the author envisions, and the main features of the People to People. In this dissertation, I have argued that such similarities are not accidental and that
influences can be traced both ways. In his work, Lederach acknowledges his indebtedness to researchers and practitioners who had been involved with Sudanese ecumenical structures and local peace initiatives. At the same time, actors in the People to People expressly refer to the elaboration of Lederach as an inspiration for their work.

From the study of both the work of Lederach, practices in the frame of the People to People and a comparison between the two, I gather that in the People to People the focus is more specifically directed toward the grassroots level: middle-range leaders such as Bishops Nathaniel Garang and Paride Taban chose to be active primarily at the grassroots level. Training aimed at understanding the mechanisms of conflict, acquiring skills to engage in peacebuilding activities as well as facilitating restoration of relationships is central both in the peace framework defined by Lederach and in the methodology of the People to People. Still, in the frame of the People to People, such training conducted by means of peace mobilisation, is particularly aimed at people, often women, at the grassroots level. Women at the grassroots level approaching people and even military leaders of conflicting groups, as interview material indicates, also cover the important role attributed by Lederach to middle-range leaders, to connect horizontally across the conflict divide.

11. Conclusion

In this work, I have argued that the theology that develops in the frame of the People to People Peacemaking Process at the intersection of Christian values and beliefs, Traditional Religion and peacebuilding, is a theology of inculturation and peace/liberation, a theology that addresses peace engagement and liberation through inculturation, and inversely, that in view of the urgent need to achieve peace is led to reconsider issues of inculturation. Such contextual theology holds in creative tension the two dimensions of inculturation and peace/liberation. In this way, I have produced a study, not yet available, of the theology developed in the frame of the People to People. With this study I have also responded to the call of Emmanuel Martey to contribute to theological syntheses of inculturation and liberation in the African context. Furthermore, this study contributes to the area of research on religious peacebuilding, and grassroots, religious peacebuilding, exploring the potential of religion and theology towards positive social change.

While this is a study of the theology that developed in the frame of the People to People, it also offers indications and hopefully inspiration for further research on a theology of peacebuilding that is contextually relevant, that builds on contextual religio-cultural resources, and that is at its core inclusive.
Annex I: Themes of liberation theology

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<td>Liberation, oppression, oppressors, oppressed</td>
<td>We have longed for a true liberation from the oppressors in Khartoum. We have tasted liberation but Believing that all human beings are made in God’s image, we are concerned for the</td>
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Boff and Boff, 8: “Commitment to the liberation of the millions of the oppressed of our world restores to the gospel the credibility it had at the beginning”. Now the taste has turned sour as some of our liberators have become oppressors of our people.

Boff and Boff, 14: “It is not hard to see what liberation theology is when one starts at its roots – that is, by examining what the base communities do when they read the Bible and compare it with the oppression and longing for liberation in their own lives”. In every area church leaders will organise and conduct this period of spiritual liberation... All SPLM/A leaders, soldiers and civilians are urged to join in this church-led period of mourning so that joy may come with changed lives and commitments.

Gutierrez, 74: “Rather, what is called for is to search out theological responses to the problems which arise in the life of a Christian who has chosen for the oppressed and against the oppressors”. Well being and for justice for all the marginalised and oppressed people of Sudan. As leaders of the Sudanese Church we commit ourselves to defend and promote these principles and to work for reconciliation at all levels. We commit ourselves to pray for peace, reconciliation, for those who suffer, for the oppressed and for the oppressor.
Political connotations of liberation

Boff and Boff, 9: “if we are to understand the theology of liberation, we must first understand and take an active part in the real and historical process of liberating the oppressed”.

Connection of peace and justice; focus on human rights

Boff and Boff, 61: “The love of God ... for us today must become first and foremost a labor of justice on behalf of the oppressed, an effort of liberation for those who are most in need of it”.

Gutierrez, xxxvii: “necessity of proclaiming and building a peace based on justice for all”

Gutierrez, xxx: “Shalom in facts refers to the whole of

Millions of our people are denied the basic essentials of life, basic human liberties and access to health care and education. In the search for a just and lasting peace we offer ourselves without reserve in the service of God and for our people.

A recognition that a lasting and a true peace must be based on justice and full and equal rights for all citizens.

with deep concern for the well being of all the people.

2 peace as the foundation for justice and equality.

11 justice and peace.

13 NSCC to work for human rights, justice and peace.

15 creating conditions for a just and lasting peace.

25 ideals of participation, equality and democracy to be achieved in the framework of a just and lasting peace.

24 Justice and peace are inseparable in Southern Sudanese and Christian values and philosophies.

53 harmonious and friendly relationships, security of life and property, common sense of human rights and justice.

54 NSCC’s reasons for peacemaking are explicitly Christian and Biblical. Fortunately, the Christian understanding of peace has fundamental similarities to
life and, as part of this, to the need to establish justice and peace”

Boff and Boff, 61:
“The rights of the poor are the rights of God ... first must come basic rights, the rights to life and to the means of sustaining life (food, work, basic health care, housing, literacy); then come the other human rights: freedom of expression, of conscience, of movement, and of religion”.

Equality

Boff and Boff, 56: “It is because of the Spirit that the ideals of equality and fellowship, the utopia of a world in which it will be easier to love and recognize in the face of the other the maternal and paternal features of God, will never be allowed to die or be forgotten under the traditional understandings within the cultures of Southern Sudan.

A recognition that all human beings are created by God and are precious and equal in his sight. (See also above)
Commitment to bring about change

Boff and Boff, 88: “humanity, solidarity, and the opportunity to live in dignity and peace. Today, such objectives can be achieved only after a harsh struggle for liberation, to which Christian faith seeks to make its contribution.”

Change must come soon in the SPLM, in the armed forces, among the civilians and with the churches. We are willing to risk all, even our very lives to make this change happen.

Shalom as integral peace

Boff and Boff, 90: “‘Liberation’ is an ‘evangelical’ term in the original sense of the word: a life-giving word, good news, a joyful announcement. The prophets spoke of shalom, meaning security, reconciliation, fullness, and peace”.

24 Lasting peace as realisation of symbolic justice. Rebuild broken relationships and restore harmony.

51 a multifaceted concept of peace including harmony of relations, security, access to resources.

54 “Shalom”. Well-being, prosperity, security, growth in the community. Peace relies on the establishment of just
From the perspective of the people

Boff and Boff, 68-69: “The first theological reflections that were to lead to liberation theology had their origins in a context of dialogue between a church and a society in ferment, between Christian faith and the longings for transformation and liberation arising from the people.”

Churches in solidarity with the poor; prophetic role of the churches

Boff and Boff, 7: “we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common

We are filled with pain for the suffering of our people.

Therefore, Sudanese Church leaders from all parts of Sudan have met in Norway in February 1996 and in Switzerland – September 1996 to reflect on the war in the country; the appalling suffering of

2 expressing in the publication the perspectives of Southern Sudanese.

24 Peacemaking is fundamentally driven and motivated by the underlying values and philosophies of the involved groups and people.

3 There are no claims of neutrality as the Church is aligned with the poor, suffering people.
cause with the poor
and working out the
gospel of liberation”

Boff and Boff, 88:
“There is a prophetic
call coming from
liberation theology,
in that it denounces
the causes that
produce oppression,
and inspires an
outpouring of
generosity destined
to overcome
destructive
relationships and
build freedom for
everyone”

We then felt it is our
responsibility to
speak for all the
people of Sudan and
to suggest ways
forward out of the
present deadlock.

The Church in Sudan
exists for all the
people.

We will stand with
all the suffering
people in the Sudan
and speak on their
behalf.

Agency of the
people; empowerment

Boff and Boff, 5: “In
liberation, the
oppressed come
together, come to
understand their
situation through the
process of
conscientization,
discover the causes
of their oppression,
organise themselves
into movements, and
act in a coordinated
fashion”.

A resolve to steadily
widen the effective
participation of all
people in political
processes and
decision making.

Closely following
the cessation of
hostilities a process
of popular
participation must be
in place to resolve
urgent political
problems.

2 People to People:
Peace of the People,
By the People, For
the People.

2 Grassroots
peacemaking
initiative.

15 the work of
NSCC does more
than “include”
population – it is of the
people, by the people
and for the people.

15 empower people
for their involvement

12 NSCC to play a
prophetic role, to be
a voice for the
voiceless.

13 the Churches felt
an obligation to be in
the midst of and care
for the suffering of
Southern and
marginalised Sudan.

13 ownership of
peace.

13 People to People
helps people
articulate, define and
establish
commitments, values
and agreements.

13 peace can be
achieved when people

4 community based,
people oriented.

10 building peace
constituencies that are
empowered.

349
Boff and Boff, 12:

“This also shows how this theological current is indissolubly linked to the very life of the people – to the faith and the struggle of the people”

in political processes. (See above)

15 these goals lead NSCC to develop the People to People that includes participatory processes.

15 empowerment, people to take responsibility for their negative attitudes and perceptions.

25 ideals of participation, equality and democracy to be achieved in the framework of a just and lasting peace.

15 a fundamental and non-negotiable feature of People-to-People Peacemaking is its roots in the community participation and leadership.

15 People to people Peacemaking is people-centered, people-driven and people-owned.

30 people-oriented peace process strives to empower individual community members to analyse and understand their own situation and to provide interpretation.

42 all parties receive an increased sense of power and self worth from the attention of other parties.
49 ownership of peace among the involved communities.

70 Empowerment and commitment, empowerment of grassroots people.

80 empowerment of people to take charge of their own destiny.

80 Inclusivity and empowerment are essential for achieving the desired reconciliation, healing, and unity.

Link between theory and praxis

Boff and Boff, 69:
“Gustavo Gutierrez described theology as critical reflection on praxis”

Gutierrez, xxix:
“liberation theology is "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God”

15 these goals lead NSCC to develop the People to People that includes participatory processes.

2 This book is the result of action-research that has involved in-depth study of People to People Peacemaking process through analysis of activities and experiences.
Inclusivity, focus on women

Boff and Boff, 93: “Liberation theology has a spirituality at its roots and a dream of its final aim: that of a society of freed men and women. Without a dream, men and women will not mobilize themselves to transform society.”

Boff and Boff, 29: “We have to look also to other levels of social oppression, such as ... sexual oppression: discrimination against women”

Gutierrez, xiii: “This book is an attempt at reflection, based on the gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America”

Participation in political, social and economic life should be open to all irrespective of racial, ethnic, social and religious background.

48 Workshops and meetings were held with women and women’s groups which are very active and play important roles in communities, especially as youth and men are taken by the war. These groups, such as the Women’s Voice for Peace, actively organise women to work for peace in non-violent ways to reach across the divisions.

11 wider inclusivity.

19 inclusivity.

19 involvement of women and youth.

35 It is by this process that different community/population structures such as women, elders, youth, spiritual leaders, and chiefs share their stories and experiences about prevalent conflicts. Each member of the community articulates their understanding of the broad issues, positions and issues about the conflicts.

80 Inclusivity and empowerment are essential for achieving the desired reconciliation, healing, and unity.
Annex II: List of Interviewees

1. Anonymous 1, woman, South Sudanese, was NSCC staff

2. Anonymous 2, man, East African, researcher

3. James Ninrew, man, South Sudanese, Nuer, Presbyterian, Pastor, attended Wunlit
4. George Riak, man, South Sudanese, Nuer, Presbyterian, Pastor, attended Wunlit

5. Matthew Mathiang Deng, man, South Sudanese, Nuer, Presbyterian, Pastor, attended Wunlit, was Peace mobiliser and staff of the NSCC, lately Member of Parliament

6. Agnes Abuom, woman, Kenyan, Anglican, was ecumenical partner of the SCC/NSCC through the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) and AACC, currently Moderator of the Central Committee of WCC

7. (Late) Bethuel Kiplagat, man, Kenyan, Ambassador, was facilitator of the Sudan Working Group established by the NCCK, facilitated the Yei Dialogue in 1997, lately head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Kenya. Ambassador Kiplagat passed away in July 2017

8. Monica Ayen, woman, South Sudanese, attended Wunlit as a women’s leader, lately Member of Parliament. Translated by June Mael, woman, South Sudanese, was member of Sudanese Women’s Association in Nairobi (SWAN), lately Member of Parliament

9. Emmanuel LoWilla, man, South Sudanese, was staff of the NSCC, director of Reconcile, in the recent past Minister of the Government of South Sudan (GOSS)

10. Anonymous 3, man, Western, ecumenical partner

11. (Late) John Gatu, man, Kenyan, Presbyterian Pastor, participated in the Addis Ababa peace negotiations, was Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Kenya, facilitator at the Yei Dialogue in 1997. Rev. John Gatu passed away in May 2017

12. Awut Deng, woman, South Sudanese, was Peace mobiliser and staff of the NSCC, lately Minister of GOSS

13. Joy Kwaje, woman, South Sudanese, was staff of the SCC, in past years Chair of the Human Rights Commission and Member of Parliament
14. Janet Ayaa Alex, woman, South Sudanese, was member of SWAN, lately Member of Parliament

15. Enoch Tombe, man, South Sudanese, was General Secretary of the SCC, now Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Sudan (SCS)

16. Peter Gai, man, South Sudanese, Nuer, Presbyterian, Pastor, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church and Chair of the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC)

17. Paulino Lukudu Loro, man, South Sudanese, Archbishop of the Catholic Church of Sudan

18. Gachora Ngunjiri, man, Kenyan, journalist, researcher on the Sudanese churches

19. Anonymous 4, man, South Sudanese, staff of ecumenical structures

20. Pauline Riak, woman, naturalised South Sudanese, leader of SWAN, Professor in Nairobi, Rumbek and Juba, Chair of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Chair of the SUDD research institute

21. Paride Taban, man, South Sudanese, Bishop of the Catholic Church

22. William Lowrey, man, North American, Presbyterian Pastor, PhD on the People to People (Akobo conference 1994), staff of the NSCC, facilitator of Lokichoggio (1998) and Wunlit

23. Isaiah Dau, man, South Sudanese, theologian (PhD from Stellenbosch), Bishop of the Pentecostal Church and Principal of the Nairobi Pentecostal Bible College

24. John Ashworth, former Catholic missionary, head of Church Ecumenical Action on Sudan (CEAS) and Sudan Focal Point – Africa

25. Anonymous 5, woman, North American

26. Samuel Kobia, man, Kenyan, Methodist, General Secretary NCCK and Secretary General WCC, Ecumenical Special Envoy to Sudan for the AACC
27. Anna Kima, woman, South Sudanese, was Peace mobiliser and staff of the NSCC, lately Vice-president of the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) Commission

28. David Demey, man, South Sudanese, pastor of the Sudan Interior Church, Member of Parliament

29. Paul Yugusuk, man, South Sudanese, Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Sudan

30. Anonymous 6, man, Kenyan, scholar
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