

# **Restorative Justice Sudanese Style: How African Spirituality Impacts Notions of Right and Wrong**

by

Teresa A. Booker, Ph.D.

tbooker@jjay.cuny.edu

Assistant Professor, Department of African-American Studies  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York, NY

Teresa A. Booker is Assistant Professor of African-American Studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Her doctoral dissertation examined the strategies used to deliver humanitarian relief during Operation Lifeline Sudan. Her research interests include peacekeeping, peacemaking, and restorative justice. Recent publications include: "Babies' Daddies: Can the Masai Community Help Heal the Wrongs of Peacekeeper Fathers?" *The International Journal of Restorative Justice* 3, no. 1. (2007), 90-99; "Cow Reparations for the Dinka." *The International Journal of Restorative Justice* 4, no. 1 (2008) 101-114; and "Genocide in Sudan: a Look at Three Events" in *The International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* (forthcoming).

## **Abstract**

Religion was a source of tension in Sudan long before the British colonized it. While Islam and Christianity receive the most attention when it comes to the coverage of religious issues in the country, there are, indeed, many indigenous religions observed by the Sudanese. Also, there are hybrid variations of Islam and Christianity, as well. For most Sudanese religion permeates all aspects of life.

This paper discusses how various Sudanese ethnic groups' notions of right and wrong result from their religious beliefs. Using examples from the indigenous religions of the Nuer, Shilluk, Atout, and Dinka, this article seeks to elaborate on belief in God, the concept of justice and, where possible, how victims and offenders should be treated.

## Introduction

In 1976, Sudanese and Egyptian officials decided to combine their interests and revenue to build a canal in the south of Sudan. The purpose of the canal (known as the Jonglei Canal after the Dinka village that was closest to it) was to divert wasted swamp water from the South to drought-like areas of need in the Sudanese North and (even farther North) to Egypt. If all went well, the two governments would successfully irrigate 400,000 acres of land at a cost of \$300 million dollars. Specifically, the Jonglei Canal would efficiently divert “4.7 billion cubic meters of water” from the South to the North each year, and would be 211 miles long—some 40 miles longer than the Panama and Suez canals together (Eshman, 15-20).

While the idea of saving such a large amount of water from waste is quite admirable, the problem with the Sudanese-Egyptian plan was that the water to be diverted from the North to the South was not wasted “swamp water” at all. Rather it was the life-sustaining run-off of the Nile River which had served as a valuable flood plain for local inhabitants for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. In short, when the Nile overflows it creates a flood plain which widens during the rainy season and becomes an environment rich with exotic plants, fish, and wildlife (Eshman, 15-20). By diverting the “swamp water” from the flood plain in order to transport it to the North, the government of Sudan was effectively depriving the Dinka, the Nuer, and others of their ability to grow their traditional crops and to catch the fish that they would have netted as the Nile receded. Therefore, without water, the cattle were limited in their access of grasses which would have enabled them to produce sufficient quantities of milk. “Milk from cows and goats are the best sources of protein for the Dinka and Nuer people.” (Garang).

Hence, while the draining of the flood plain directly involved the Dinka, Nuer and the Muslims, the key question was: how might those groups (as well as others) have interpreted their situation in religious terms? After all, according to Paris, “scholars have always agreed that religion permeates every dimension of African life” (Paris 27). Where ever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death (Paris 27).

The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1. To describe how various groups in Sudan perceive notions of right and wrong; and 2. to extrapolate from the above how these notions might affect and determine issues arising from the case of the Jonglei Canal. Examples from the indigenous religions of the Nuer, Shilluk, Atout, and Dinka, will help explain how a group’s religious beliefs and attitudes influence that group’s notions of justice and, where possible, how victims and offenders should be treated.

## **Brief History**

Sudan has about 450 ethnic groups. About 90 percent are farmers and 10 percent are elites who are well educated and live in urban centers (Burr and Collins 1). Twenty four million or so people belong to about 50 major ethnic groups, and they speak at least 100 or more various languages (Deng and Minear 3). The country is distinguished ethnically, culturally, and politically into either the North or the South. Traditionally, individuals who identify themselves as Arab and Muslim live in the North, while those individuals of non-Arab, African descent who are Christian (or belong to traditional ethnic religions), live in the South. Both groups live and work in opposite regions of the country to which they are traditionally affiliated. But these classifications are not set in stone because they are fluid as a result of intermarriages and internal migration. “There are Muslims among [Southern Africans of non-Arab descent] and Christians among northern Arabs [and] in some parts of northern Bahr el Ghazal, Arabs and blacks are neighbors and have intermarried” (Minear 1-2).

When the British colonized Sudan, they decided to separate the North (inhabited by Muslim Arabs) from the South (inhabited by Africans of non-Arab descent). While no specific reason has been given for this situation in the case of Sudan, it is a known fact that the British did the same thing when they colonized Nigeria. There, distinctions between Muslim northerners and non-Muslim southerners were determined by the colonialists’ first impressions. For example, the British were impressed by the Nigerian Muslims’ highly developed system of collecting taxes and “dispens[ing] justice” in their own territory. That, along with their refined architecture, the use of horses, and the skin color of the people led them to conclude that the “non- African people [were a] culture worthy of protection and preservation” while the half-naked blacks were not (Kalu 245). As in the case of Nigeria, the British enacted a very strict separatist policy in Sudan, too, which was designed to keep southerners in a constant state of indigenesness. They also mandated that Arab-Islamic influences were prohibited from entering the South. The only type of civilization allowed in the South was Christian instruction through the Christian missions permitted to enter the area (Deng and Minear 16).

Prior to independence, the British government passed a series of laws that formalized their racism and Sudan’s segregated society. The Closed District Ordinances gave legal backing to the division of the North from the South. The Passports and Permits Ordinance mandated that all travelers moving between the North and the South carry passports and other necessary permits specifying the reasons for their visits. Trade permits were required of Northerners in order to conduct business with southerners. In addition, southerners were forbidden from speaking any Arabic and were only allowed to speak either English or certain local languages like those of the Dinka, Bari, Nuer, Shilluk and Zande peoples (Teny-Dhurgon).

The origins of the longest lasting war in Sudan (which just recently ended in 2005), began as a clash between an Islamic North and a Christian, or indigenous South. In 1983, Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri, a devout Muslim and leader of the now British-colony-turned-Islamic state, instituted his infamous September Laws. In addition to prohibiting the sale of liquor and the collection of interest on debts, the September Laws authorized the use of the *hudad* (physical punishments such as flogging, amputation, stoning, and execution) for crimes in which some Muslim societies were rarely, if ever, involved. Not only was the implementation of this policy offensive to Southerners who were the apparent targets of punishment, but it was equally offensive to the Christian Southerners who, along with Jews anywhere, were acknowledged by the Prophet Mohammed and referred to as the People of the Book. When Nimeiri decided to save his presidency by implementing September Laws and islamizing Sudan, he managed to appease Islamic fundamentalists, but he also wound up voiding the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement that the government of Sudan and the main and southern opposition party, the SPLM/A had signed. As a result, the country was re-divided once again and war began (Burr and Collins 15).

## **How Spirituality Shapes the Lives of the Indigenous Peoples**

### *The Nuer*

One of the groups definitely affected by the creation of the Jonglei Canal was the Nuer. The Nuer say that their god is “like wind” and “like air” and they respectfully refer to him as Spirit or the “Spirit of the Sky” or the “Spirit who is in the Sky”. According to the Nuer version of Creation, Spirit “imagined the universe,” and it came into being. Spirit not only sees all and hears all, but He is the protector as well as the creator. Consequently, among the Nuer pride is considered to be an offensive trait in the eyes of Spirit because He may take away that which was bragged about (Evans-Pritchard 2, 4-5, 14). This is why, for example, the Nuer resist commenting on how well a wound is healing and they will not brag about the number of children they have. In fact, rather than complimenting a baby for its attractiveness, the Nuer will spit on that baby instead.

The Nuer are a simple people and, as such, there are some things that they do and do not understand (like everyone else). What they *do* believe, however, is that one should not complain about what is lost because, were it not for Spirit, one would not have had that thing to begin with at all. This applies to people as well as animals that are struck by lightning (a phenomenon which seems to occur rather frequently). For example, instead of being angry with Spirit for a cow being struck by lightning, the Nuer are taught to be thankful that “God has been gracious and... has taken something belonging to a man and has spared the man himself.”

Although the Nuer believe that some people are given “ritual powers” and that God has established a chain of circumstances in which “the Nuer should raid the Dinka and that Europeans should conquer the Nuer,” it is their nature to believe that Spirit has compassion and will “even things out.” After all, they believe, God punished Europeans with white skin after his ancestor committed maternal incest. Therefore, just as God ordained that the Nuer would “raid the herds of Dinka to the end of time” they believe that that which will come will be long-lasting. (Evans-Pritchard: 15, 13, 6, 15, 6, 11).

In short, because Spirit is the “final guardian of law and order and ...the keeper of moral and ethical codes,” the man who is right will not meet with the same fate as the man who is in the wrong. Because the Nuer believe that rewards and punishment may not be automatic but are forthcoming, they say that “a man [who] wishes to be in the right with God ... must be in the right with men [and] subordinate his interests as an individual to the moral order of society” (Evans-Pritchard, 18). That is to say that an offender must apologize to his victim if he is wrong and offer him some type of compensation. If, for example, an offender has killed someone, he must also be cleansed by the “earth priest” or the leopard skin chief so that the “bad blood” that was transferred to him when he killed the person does not pollute his (the offender’s) blood (Hutchinson 691).

### *The Shilluk*

The Shilluk’s god is called Nyikang and they believe that their first king was half-woman, half-crocodile water spirit (Wall, 158). This creation-like explanation of their societal origins makes sense considering that the Shilluk (while anthropologically related to the Dinka and the Nuer) are more fishermen than they are cattlemen. In Shilluk mythology and lore, they were the first of mankind to live on the banks of the White Nile. Their version of creation says that the creator of the world as the Shilluk knew it was *Juok*...But, omnipotent as *Juok* was, he still needed a mate to help him procreate a line of more mortal kings to carry on his good name so, like the good god he was, *Juok* decided to come back down to earth to give it the one thing it lacked. A nice long river caught his eye and the mythical river creature *Nyakaya*... became the willing recipient of his amorous attention. The coupling of god and myth managed to produce ... *Nyikang* (Shilluk Religion).

Because the king, or *reth*, is the medium through which man is connected with *Juok* and also *Nyikang*, one of the king’s most important functions is sacerdotal. He plays the role of “high priest”. While this concept is a bit difficult to understand because the Shilluk say that “Nyikang is *Juok* but *Juok* is not Nyikang,” P.P. Howell, in his essay *Observations on the Shilluk of the Upper Nile* (1952: 102) explains that Nyikang is *Juok* in the same manner that, according to Christianity, Jesus is God but God is not Jesus.

L. Lewis Wall, in his *Anuak Politics, Ecology, and the Origins of Shilluk Kingship* (1996), states that the Shilluk king was able to judge right from wrong “through trial by ordeal” (158). Before “Turkish interference”(when Sudan was under Ottoman control) when the wealth of the *reth* was vast and cattle-based and disagreements were based more on fighting than lawsuits, the *reth*, in addition to serving as high priest, was also the rainmaker, the leader of the military, and the disseminator of justice. The *reth* had the power to intervene and stop public disturbances and to adjudicate “certain disputes” (Wall 160; Howell, 104). P.P. Howell says that “the *Reth* is said to [even] have had the enviable privilege of killing a tiresome litigant with a club” (Howell, 105).

Among the Shilluk, it was once recorded that when the *reth* sat as a judge in a case where an unintended homicide had occurred, the offender’s side of a family would have to give to the victim’s family a girl child while the gift of a boy child, also presented by the offender’s family, would be given as a slave to the *reth*. If, on the other hand, disputes still existed after such an exchange and/or if one village attacked another village unprovoked, the *reth* would gather his military and take all of the offending village’s cattle and/or burn the village to the ground. According to P.P. Howell:

Murder cases were tried by a court of chiefs and the king. If a man was condemned, he was disgraced in many ways before the people. Sometimes he was led about the village with a cow-rope around his neck, and then executed by hanging. If a man was executed on account of a crime, his whole family and everything [he owned] became the property of the king (105, 111).

Hence, according to the Shilluk, it is clear that justice is more immediate and comes directly at the hand of God (or his intercessor). While it can be restorative--in an effort to make things right for victims --- it can also be retributive if offenders are not willing to let bygones be bygones.

#### *The Atuot*

The *Atuot* call their god, *Decau*. He is the Creator and breathed life into man. The *Atuot* “speak of themselves as God’s ants in comparison with the omnipotence of the Creator.” While *Decau* is responsible for large feats like death, the smaller, but equally “malignant powers” are manifested in the form of *jok*. Therefore, when a person dies or when twins are born, the *Atuot* will say “it is God the Creator only” (Burton “Ghosts” 608; Burton “The Proverb” 87-87; Burton “Ghosts” 603).

The Atuot incorporate proverbs in their normal conversation and their acceptance of God's control over their lives is reflected in these proverbs. For example, surrounding the topic of creation, they have aphorisms and formulae such as, "these are the hard things of life which have been so since the time of creation," and "the first food is not like the last" (meaning, according to Burton, that the first of anything is superior to rest –especially God to His creation) (Burton "The Proverb" 86; 86-87). According to the Atuot, the story of creation is as follows:

At one time the sky and earth were very close and people traveled back and forth by means of a rope. At this time there was no death because God would raise the people up again to have life. When the people were hungry, women took a single grain of *dura* to pound into flour and that was sufficient food for all to be satisfied. Once a newly married woman said she would work harder and pound more grain. When she lifted the pestle to do this, she struck God and he became angry. God said to the people, 'Before this you were always satisfied with this small bit of food, but now you will always know hunger, even if you cultivate great gardens.' Then a bird flew by and severed the rope ("Ghosts" 602).

In a way, the Atuot are similar to the Nuer in that their god abhors boastfulness. One reason for this is found in their story of Malek:

A man named Malek had a very great wealth at one time and he boasted, 'What is this thing called hunger? I have never seen it.' Another man replied, 'Hunger is the oldest and strongest of the powers.' After some time the rich man's cattle became sick and died. His children then had no milk to drink, so they died as well. Then Malek had seen the truth of the man's word (Burton. "The Proverb" 85).

For the Atuot, "ghosts, ancestors and the living participate in a single moral and spiritual world. This explains in part why sentiments of the dead must be respected after life." When a person dies and his ghost can still communicate with the living and appears to someone in the form of a dream, it symbolizes that something bad is about to happen. Illnesses and misfortunes are attributed to ghosts and, more often than not, the ghost of a woman is considered to be the "source of misfortune for the living [because her heart is] 'hot unlike the 'coolness' associated with the heart of a man'" (Burton. "Ghosts" 615; 606; 603).

While the Atuot may or may not have a specific king with overwhelming power, there is a respected individual in their various communities who does have the power to discern right from wrong and that is the *tiel*, or diviner. According to Atuot cosmo-logy, the *tiel* gets his power from God:

[There once were people living] by the riverside in a fishing camp. Nearby lived 'the powers' engaged in the same activity. One man became jealous of the power and the catches of fish they had accumulated. When the powers had gone off to fish one morning he stole some of those they had left behind. When they returned as a group, one power protested to this injustice and went 'up to God,' complaining that 'people have now become very strong and (are) stealing our fish.' God replied, 'I will close their eyes'. As indicated, when the man did suddenly become blind, people said among them 'what is it that is killing us that we cannot see?' [Later when God saw the people mourning one of theirs...], He selected one among the many who were blind and gave him the ability to 'see' powers, and thus originated the first *tiel* or diviner (Burton "The Divination" 2-3).

When the *tiel* performs his rituals, he becomes a mediator between the human and the spiritual realms. If he shakes his rattle, it is not the man but the *jok* within him that makes him do so. Burton says,

A *tiel* sees *jok* as you see people in the reflection of water. This is how it comes to your eyes. It comes with the thing that was taken. The *jok* comes to claim its property. The *tiel* will know the reason because he can see it. If a man steals a cow the *jok* comes and says, 'this is mine'. The *jok* says 'I am coming because of this and that' (Burton "The Divination" 4).

*Tiels* can (but do not have to) reveal offenders by instigation; they can do so by invitation, as well. For example, when a family group believed that a wife had experienced multiple miscarriages because her uncle was unhappy with the bride price that he had received at her wedding, a *tiel* was solicited to help with the matter of the *jok*. Burton says that because the family firmly believed one of the Atuot sayings which stated that "everyone has something in their heart," they intentionally sought out a *tiel* to make things right. Similar statements which urge people to strive for right standing include the saying: "each person has his back" (which means that a person's future is made up of his today) and "a man who has ...lied to a kinsman 'will see his word tomorrow,'" (which means a liar who lies to his own family member will have that lie exposed in the not-too-distant future) (Burton "The Divination" 4-5; Burton "The Proverb" 87).

### *The Dinka*

The Dinka's god, Divinity, is associated with phenomena that are unknown to the Dinka like thunder, lightning and rain. Thunder is said to be the "angry voice of God" and "lightning is the glittering club with which He strikes evils of this world" (Deng, The Dinka, 1978: 52).

According to their cosmology:

[The Dinka] and the Arabs came from one place in creation. But when [the Dinka] came out of the Byre of Creation, we came with a white cow. And the Arabs had a brown cow. We also had a bull of our own—our pied bull [pied being the most senior color for the Dinka]. This pied bull served this white cow of ours and the white cow gave birth. When our white cow gave birth, the Arab brought his brown cow. Our people said, 'This cow is yours, we will not allow our bull to serve.' He had to take it back. That cow of his was impregnated by a brown snake. His cattle now have mottled sides because of the brown snake which served his cow (Deng, Africans of Two Worlds 72).

Divinity creates life and, as for many other societies, when a person dies, his community says, "God brought him and God has taken him." However, while the Dinka do not believe in life after death, they do believe in that which affects their everyday lives even more than God--the ancestral spirits, clan divinities, and free divinities. Hence, while "the over-all God" is all powerful, the Dinka believe that "the exclusive Dinka divinities do not have much power over Arabs, Europeans, or educated Dinka. Likewise, exclusively European and Arab gods do not have much power over the Dinka." Hence, if a Dinka man is stricken with a disease, it would be attributed to his own divinity (Deng, The Dinka 57; 48; 50-51).

The god Divinity judges who is right and who is wrong. The Dinka believe that their god will leave no right uncovered whether it takes one year or many years. In other words, they say, "If a man is not given his right, God never loses sight of the right." It is for this reason that the Dinka disregard any man who appears to be prospering as a wrongdoer because they know that the justice of Divinity will catch up with him. Deng says that "since...every man at some time must meet with suffering or misfortune, death or disease among his family or his cattle, there is always evidence, for those who wish to refer to it, of Divine Justice." For example, a woman who has committed adultery would feel physical pain as the result of her action because of divine justice. The pain would not be alleviated until she confessed her wrongdoing (Deng Africans of Two Worlds, 65-66; Deng The Dinka 50).

The Dinka believe that people should be respected regardless of their race or religion, because to wrong a person is to wrong God and to risk bringing on a curse. Chiefs and priests, in addition to God, also have the power to curse, as well. Thus, when bad things happen to the Dinka, they immediately begin to seek inside themselves for the roots of their negative circumstances. Even a broken arm or leg is viewed as the result of a sin which has angered some divinity. If a man cannot, by himself, determine the source of his misfortune (or if he has attempted to make amends to the gods to no avail), he is likely to resolve himself to believing that “Divinity has no heart’ or Divinity’s eyes have no tears.” If need be, however, he will consult a diviner.

A Dinka chief is considered a spiritual leader who is depended upon for his wisdom and “divine enlightenment” and is expected to use “consensus and reconciliation” when mediating a matter. The Dinka believe that *Jok*, their great elder, was given a “sacred spear –belonging to all the blacks in the world--with which [the] people used to take [any sacred] oath” (Deng The Dinka 54; 54-55; 56;61-62; Deng Africans of Two Worlds 73-74). As the master of the fishing spear, the chief makes matters right by:

... emphasi[zing] persuasion rather than coercion...The chief and elders are mediators whose aim is to reconcile the adversaries...Every detail is examined, every chief and elder who wishes to be heard is heard, and a general dialogue of persuasion continues until the alleged wrong is revealed to the party at fault and the parties concur. In many cases, when a final settlement is reached, a ceremony of reconciliation usually follows either [in front of] the chief or privately. Only then is the case fully resolved and harmony restored. To the chief are attributed the divine association or power for life and death, and other forms of benefits and deprivation” (Deng, The Dinka 64).

## **Discussion**

Only time will tell if the Jonglei Canal situation can be resolved. The civil war led to a halt in the building of the Canal and now that the war has ended, it is possible that the project will resume. Furthermore, in 1983, the reporters who investigated the matter of the Jonglei Canal had difficulties collecting facts pertaining to it because neither Sudan nor Egypt chose to comment on the project. What is known, however, is that after the demonstrations of locals were ignored in the 1980s, someone eventually burned the enormous, digging machine to the ground (Eshman, 15-20).

So how might these various groups have viewed the presence of the canal in light of their religious worldview? In the case of the Jonglei Canal, the Nuer might have surmised that the five-story digger was brought to their area at the insistence of the government even if they had never seen such a structure before. (After all, like the Dinka they have had much contact with the Arabs in the North and have organized to fight against them). As the water in the flood bed decreased, they might have noticed a difference in the decrease of the flora and fauna but may not have complained about it for fear that Spirit would cause them to lose more than they had already lost. Under the same conditions, the Shilluk, on the other hand, were bound to have considered the creation of the Jonglei Canal as particularly offensive since their *Nyikang* is a half-crocodile water spirit. Moreover, because the *reth* serves as the medium between man and *Nyikang*, it would be interesting to know if the *reth* at the time had been asked to intercede for the people, or if the people had assumed that their misfortune had more to do with *Nyikang's* specific displeasure with their *reth* than with them. After all, the *reth's* presence represents fertility for the crops and cattle; the water needed for both was being depleted.

As mere ants in God's divine scheme, the Atuot almost certainly believed that the building of the Jonglei Canal was the result of some young man who had bragged about the bounty of the Nile or of the bountifulness of his crops thus bringing on *Decau's* wrath. Or, perhaps all Atuot women or womankind (or even the ghost of some woman), was blamed for the inability of the Nile (and the land) to continue its life-giving sustenance. If the latter were the case, perhaps a *tiel* was called in to address the matter of the *jok* which had manifested itself in the form of the five-story digging machine. The *tiel* may have even attempted to ritually identify the one "thing" in some community member's heart which had caused the curse to come. Had some type of ritual been performed close to the time when the wheel was destroyed, the *tiel* might have even declared, after the fact, that he had seen the reason behind the actions of *jok* and that the destruction of the wheel signified that the correct action to pacify it (the *jok*) had been taken.

Either as the result of their ongoing feuds with the Arabs or, perhaps, because of their perspective on Creation which corroborates their perception of the deceitful Arab, the Dinka might have had a slightly different interpretation for the presence of the Canal. In other words, their perspective, combined with their belief that neither side's god has power over the other's, might have led them to believe that one of them (a Dinka) had angered Divinity. Knowing what they know about Arab northerners, there would have been no need to contact a diviner to determine who built the Canal, only to punish the evildoer. In fact, since the person (or persons) who destroyed the digger was never identified, it is possible that a Dinka chief raised his spear to the digging machine and sanctioned its destruction.

While it is difficult to say how Muslims might view the case of Jonglei Canal—it is clear that they are the ones who decided to build the canal and displace the Southerners. Their history with Southerners, coupled with knowledge that Muslims consider non-Muslims (with the exception of Jews and Christians) to be heathens, speaks volumes concerning their actions.

On one hand, these people who revere the Prophet Mohammed, the holy man of Allah, are commanded by the Qur'an to "seek upright behavior and to prohibit behavior that is offensive to Islam [and] avoid unjust practices or behavior" (Baig ). However, on the other hand, they are (presumably) only obliged to treat the People of the Book (e.g. the Christians and the Jews) with respect and, according to some independent reports, even this does not always happen. All of the religions in Sudanese society have specific views pertaining to notions of right and wrong. What differs the most is the method by which each attempts to obtain justice.

Unfortunately, it seems that those in power could care less about providing real or symbolic justice to heathens. Ironically, however, if the North really wanted to do so, there is precedence for combining elements of one religion with those of another. For example, Christian missionaries looked the other way when their new converts opted to maintain some of their hedonistic traditions. Similarly, there is also some precedence in which individuals, like chiefs, only partially converted to Islam (Skinner 1112, 1106). It is not clear, however, how well this idea would be received in Sudan today.

## **Conclusion**

A variety of spiritual perspectives of right and wrong in Sudan have been examined -- many of which are presumably still practiced daily in spite of Sudan being primarily and officially an Islamic state. Whether or not the continuation of the Jonglei Canal project will result in more hard feelings, destruction, and/or death will rest on whether or not the project is seen as a blessing or curse from God and whether the source of the curse is believed to stem from internal or external forces. While spirituality strongly affects all the religious groups in Sudan, the Jonglei Canal case highlights the problems and difficulties of having a theocratic government in power which does not view every Sudanese as corporally or spiritually equal. It is conceivable that the Government of Sudan will always dig where it wants and with whom it wants. It is conceivable, too, that their Southern subjects—the Nuer, the Atout and Shilluk, the Dinka and the Christians—may acquiesce a bit longer while waiting on their god(s) to administer justice on their behalf. However (as the Dinka already know), "Dinka divinities do not have much power over Arabs, Europeans, or educated Dinkas." This implies that the more educated the people get, the less likely they are to wait on the godly type of justice which trickles down "in the by and by" and the more likely they will be to taking justice, and their fates, into their own hands.

It should be noted that although the Jonglei Canal is a local project with religious implications for many, like other conflicts which involve ethnic, religious, and environmental factors, there is always a chance that a local disturbance could trigger a regional or international crisis. As mentioned previously, the local disagreement over between Muslims, Christians and others over the existence of the September Laws resulted in a wave of refugees spilling over into neighboring countries like Egypt, Eritrea, Uganda, Kenya, the Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, and Ethiopia.

Since “where ever the African is, there is his religion,” when the Sudanese became refugees and took their varied beliefs across border, they were, in turn, met by locals with their *own* sets of beliefs. The type of reception that refugees received would have depended on the compatibility of their beliefs with that of the host country. For example, Sudanese Christians immigrating to Egypt would have received better protection in that country under the Qur’an than in their own country while any other ethnic group’s religion (e.g. the Dinka, Nuer, etc...) probably would have fared worse. Similarly, Christians migrating to Eritrea might have received treatment equal to their Muslim counterparts since the country is composed of an equal balance of Muslims and Christians.

Finally, refugees present their own type of problems for host countries in that their presence puts a financial burden on a host country’s food, sanitation, and health resources. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, refugees are often blamed for spreading HIV/AIDS throughout a host country’s population (UNHCR). There are at least two documented cases in which the followers of some ethnic religions in Uganda and Zambia consult witch doctors for the AIDS treatments and/or “cures” (Yamba; Hooper). While these are only two examples, it is easy to see how conflicting notions of good, bad, right and wrong –especially those colored with elements of spirituality– could ignite disputes between individuals and groups who normally would have no contact with each other at all.

## Works Cited

Burr, J. Millard, and Robert O. Collins. Requiem for the Sudan: War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile. Oxford: Westview Press, 1995.

Burton, John W. "The Divination of Atuot Philosophy." Journal of Religion in Africa 13.1(1982): 1-10.

---. "Ghosts, Ancestors and Individuals Among the Atuot of the Southern Sudan." *Man, New Series* 13.4 (1978): 600-617.

---. "The Proverb: An Aspect of Atuot Collective Thought." Folklore, 92.1 (1981): 84-90.

Deng, Francis M. Africans of Two Worlds: The Dinka in Afro-Arab Sudan. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978.

---The Dinka and Their Songs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Deng, Francis M. and Larry Minear. The Challenges of Famine Relief: Emergency Operations in the Sudan. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992.

Eshman, Robert. "The Jonglei Canal: A Ditch Too Big," Environment 25.5:15-20.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. Nuer Religion. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Garang, Joseph Deng. "Sudan's Jonglei Canal: The Imperial Intentions of the Second Digging," The New Sudan Vision, <<http://www.newsudanvision.com/document/sudan-s-jonglei-canal-imperial-intentions-second-digging-202>>.

Hooper, Ed. "Aids in Uganda," African Affairs, 86.345 (1987): 469-477.

Howell, P.P. "Observations on the Shilluk of the Upper Nile: The Laws of Homicide and the Legal Functions of the *Reth*." Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 22.2 (1952): 97-119.

Hutchinson, Sharon. "'Dangerous to Eat': Rethinking Pollution States among the Nuer of Sudan." Africa: Journal of the International African Institute 62.4 (1992): 490-504.

Kalu, Ogbu U. "Shari'a and Islam in Nigerian Pentecostal Rhetoric, 1970-2003." Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, 26.2 (2004): 242-261.

Minear, Larry. Humanitarianism under Siege: A Critical Review of Operation Lifeline Sudan. Trenton: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1991.

Paris Peter J. The Spirituality of African Peoples: the Search for a Common Moral Discourse. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

"Shilluk Religion." God-u-like <<http://www.godulike.co.uk/faiths.php?chapter=91&subject=who> (accessed May 23, 2008)>.

Skinner, Elliott P. "Christianity and Islam among the Mossi," American Anthropologist, New Series, 60.6 (1958): 1102-1119.

Teny-Dhurgon, Riek Machar "South Sudan: A History of Political Domination-A Case of Self-Determination." 21 April 2008. <[http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/sd\\_machar.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/sd_machar.html)>.

UNHCR. "Refugees and HIV/AIDS." <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home?page=protect&id=401915744> (accessed July 31, 2008)>.

Wall, L. Lewis. "Aniak Politics, Ecology, and the Origins of Shilluk Kingship." Ethnology, 15.2 (1996): 151-162.

Yamba, C. Bawa. "Cosmologies in Turmoil: Witchfinding and AIDS in Chiawa, Zambia." Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 67.2 (1997):200-223.