## **PROPOSITIONS**

It might be remarked here that the position of the Ngork Dinka as a friendly buffer state between the Homr and the Bahr el Ghazal has proved of such value for the preservation of good feeling and the prevention of friction that apart from the impossibility of drawing a boundary it would be a political mistake to transfer them on racial grounds to another province. Such a proposal should only be considered at their own request (at present most improbable) or in the event of the Homr becoming a sedentary people.

K.D.D. Henderson, 1935

The competing claims of the GOS, Misseriya, SPLM, and Ngok can be summarised in nine propositions:

- 1) The Ngok Dinka territory originally extended to El Oddaya, and the boundary between the Ngok and Misseriya should run from Lake Keilak to Muglad (Ngok oral testimony);
- Misseriya territory originally extended south of the Bahr el-Arab as far as the current Kordofan–Bahr el-Ghazal border (Misseriya oral testimony);
- The Ngok are newcomers to the territory, having left the Zeraf Island in the Upper Nile in the nineteenth century, and were brought in as destitute refugees at their own request to Humr leaders (Misseriya oral testimony and GOS presentation);
- The inclusion of the Abyei Area in "Dar Messeria" District is recognition that Ngok territory belongs to Dar Misseriya (Misseriya oral testimony and GOS presentation);
- 5) The Ngok were administered as part of the Misseriya, both in taxation and in the court system (Misseriya oral testimony and GOS presentation);
- 6) The Misseriya claim that specific locations north of Abyei Town (e.g., Goleh/Langar, Pawol, Dembloya/Dak Jur, Umm Bilael/Tordach, Chigei/Thigei, Lukji/Kol Yith, Lau, Nyama) have belonged to them since

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> K.D.D. Henderson, "Note on History of Western Kordofan Baggara", January 1935, SAD 660/11/165, emphasis added.





the time of the Turkiyya, through 1905, to the present (Misseriya oral testimony);

- 7) The only area affected by the 1905 decision of the Condominium authorities to administer the Ngok Dinka as part of Kordofan was an area south of the Bahr el-Arab; and that the Ngok Dinka settled in territory north of the river only after 1905 (GOS presentation);
- 8) There was a continuity in the territory occupied and used by the nine Ngok Dinka chiefdoms which was unchanged between 1905 and 1965, when armed conflict between the Ngok and the Misseriya began (Ngok oral testimony and SPLM/A presentation);
- 9) The Abyei Area is defined as the territory of Kordofan encompassed by latitude 10°35′N in the north to longitude 29°32′ E in the east, and the Upper Nile, Bahr el-Ghazal and Darfur provincial boundaries as they were at the time of independence in 1956 (SPLM/A presentation).

These propositions can be tested by comparing the oral testimony gathered with contemporary records to which the Commission had access.

**Proposition Number 1:** The Ngok Dinka territory originally extended to El Oddaya, and the boundary between the Ngok and Misseriya should run from Lake Keilak to Muglad. (Ngok oral testimony, **Appendix 4.2**)

There are very few contemporary records of any kind referring to the region between El Oddaya and the Bahr el-Arab before the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the few sources is an itinerary recorded by W.G. Browne, obtained while residing in Darfur in 1794-5, which describes the Misseriya in Baraka and the Dinka a five-days journey to the southeast. K.D.D. Henderson, who was district commissioner in Nahud in the early 1930s confirmed this itinerary, finding that it placed the Misseriya in the Muglad–Baraka area<sup>2</sup> and the Dinka at Debbat el-Mushbak, near Hasoba on the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol (**Appendix 5.1**).

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  The wells at Baraka were described in 1905 as "one of the few permanent villages in Dar Homr" (W. Lloyd, "Report of patrol in Dar Homr, November and December 1905", 16 December 1905, *SIR* 137 (December 1905), App E, p.10. NRO INTEL 6/4/15)





Even if future archaeological evidence were to establish that Dinka settlements at one time did extend as far north as El Oddaya, Browne's itinerary and Henderson's confirmation establish that this was not the case by late eighteenth century. This claim, which was not supported by all the Ngok (**Appendix 4.2**), therefore is not relevant to the current issue.

All of the twentieth century administrative reports the Commission saw agreed that the Muglad was the headquarters of the Humr, and that Lake Keilak had been used as the summer pastures of the Felaita Humr (and in some cases occupied throughout the year) since at least the beginning of that century (**Appendix 5.2**). P.P Howell, District Commissioner at Nahud in 1948, wrote, "Among the Homr the central zone is the muglad which is the pivot on which all movements are based and provides a rallying ground for the tribe during the rainy season." Ian Cunnison, the anthropologist who lived among the Humr in the early 1950s, wrote in 1954, "The Muglad is regarded by the Humr as their home. Their arrival there from the Bahr is the occasion for great rejoicing and anticipation" (both cited in **Appendix 5.2**).

The claim of a northern boundary for the Ngok reaching from Keilak to Muglad, therefore, cannot be sustained.

**Proposition 2:** Misseriya territory originally extended south of the Bahr el-Arab as far as the current Kordofan–Bahr el-Ghazal border. (Misseriya oral testimony, **Appendix 4.1**)

The claim made by several Misseriya witnesses that Misseriya territory extended south of the Bahr el-Arab, and that the Misseriya boundaries were with the Rek and Twich Dinka was compared with other oral testimony.

This claim was not made by the informants recorded by Henderson in the 1930s or by Cunnison in the 1950s. One of Cunnison's informants does make the claim that the Humr began going to Goleh on the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol and the Umm Bieiro/Nyamora late in the Turkiyya, but this does not place them south of the Bahr el-Arab (**Appendix 5.3**).

The oral testimony of the Rek and Twich Dinka heard at Agok specifically rejected the Misseriya claim to have borders with them (Agok interviews in **Appendix 4.1**).

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There are also explicit statements from local observers in 1902, 1904 and 1905, recording that the section of the Bahr el-Arab occupied by the Ngok was known either by its Dinka name, "Kir", or as the "Bahr el Jange [Dinka]" (Wilkinson 1902 in **Appendix 5.10**, Boulnois 1904 in **Appendix 5.11**, Bayldon 1905 in **Appendix 5.12**), and that even in the early 1950s the Humr themselves referred to it as the "Bahr ed Deynka" (Cunnison 1954 in **Appendix 5.3**).

Professor Cunnison, in his description of the Humr migration through the Sudanic "Baggara Belt", is sensitive to the variations in ecology in his reconstruction of Humr and Ngok migration into and settlement of their respective territories. Cunnison points out that the Misseriya migration into the Sudan followed the savanna belt, "in a natural environment of the same general kind," neither semidesert (to the north), nor seasonal swamp (to the south). The Ngok, on the other hand, settled along the rivers and waterways, similar to the ecological niche along the White Nile from which they came. (Cunnison 1966 in **Appendix 5.1**; Cunnison testimony in **Appendix 4.3**) The Humr and Ngok have occupied these different environments for long enough to be reflected in their different breeds of cattle.<sup>3</sup> The environmental evidence argues against any historical or long-term Humr occupation of the river system.

There is, however, evidence of the expansion of the Humr grazing area in the twentieth century throughout the Condominium period.

The Humr were heavily taxed during the Turkiyya, especially by Zubair Pasha's agents when he controlled this area from his base in Deim Zubair in Bahr el-Ghazal (El Fiki El Nur Musa and Henderson 1939 in **Appendix 5.6**). During the Mahdiyya the Humr were split: many going to Omdurman when called by the Khalifa Abdallahi, but many also evading the Khalifa's agents and seeking refuge among the Ngok Dinka of Arop Biong along the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol until the overthrow of the Khalifa in 1898-9 allowed them to return to their homes further north (Abu Mastura and Lloyd 1908 in **Appendix 5.3**; Deng 1986 in **Appendix 5.6**). The herds were much reduced by the beginning of the twentieth century (Howell 1948 in **Appendix 5.6**). Their grazing area, in consequence, was also reduced.

The earliest British administrators in the area commented on how quickly the Humr took advantage of more settled conditions to expand their seasonal grazing further south into Dinka country (Bayldon 1905 in **Appendix 5.12**). In

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ian Cunnison, *Baggara Arabs: Power and the Lineage in a Sudanese Nomad Tribe*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, pp.36-37.



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the dry season of 1902 they were found grazing their cattle at Pawol ("Fauwel") on the Ragaba esh-Shaib, and along the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol at places such as Abu Kareit and Mellum (**Appendix 5.10**). By 1908 the Condominium government had mapped out Humr movements and recorded that they had dry season grazing in four main areas besides Lake Keilak: around Turda; around Kawak ("Koak"); along the Ragaba Dawas at Dawas, Antila, and Buk ("Bok"); along the Ragaba ez-Zarga at Goleh ("Goli"), Abu Azala, Abu Uruf, Dimsoia ("Demsoi"), Fagai, Mellem, Hasoba, and on to Pawol ["Fauel"] on the Ragaba esh-Shaib (Lloyd 1908 in **Appendix 5.3**) [see **Map 3**].

By the 1920s the Humr were reported to be grazing in the dry season along the Bahr el-Arab, and by 1933 they were using extensive areas along the north bank of that river (**Appendix 5.3**, **Appendix 5.4**). This movement brought them into conflict with the Dinka of Bahr el-Ghazal province, living south of the Bahr el-Arab. In the early 1920s there were complaints of Humr trespass into Twich Dinka territory (Bahr el Ghazal Province Intelligence Reports 1923 & 1924 in **Appendix 5.4**). In the 1930s the complaints were reversed, with Humr objecting to Malwal Dinka incursions north of the Bahr el-Arab. The Humr objection was supported by the Ngok, who also sought to limit Malwal incursions (**Appendix 5.4**) [see **Map 4**].

In the meantime, the Ngok were also expanding their own grazing south of the Bahr el-Arab, and in the mid-1930s negotiated full grazing rights as far south as Khor Alal in Twich Dinka country, in return for Twich grazing rights up to the Bahr el-Arab (**Appendix 5.4**). According to the Twich and Rek Dinka, the Ngok were instrumental in bringing Humr further south, into their territory (Agok interviews in **Appendix 4.1**; Twich interviews in **Appendix 4.2**). In so far as it was the Ngok who opened up the way to the common grazing south of the Kordofan–Bahr el-Ghazal Province boundary, the documentary evidence lends some support to this claim.

A comparison with the contemporary grazing dispute between the Malwal Dinka and the Rizeigat Arabs along the Darfur stretch of the Bahr el-Arab/Kir is instructive. Before 1916 Darfur was an independent state and the Sudan government in Bahr el-Ghazal Province supported the Malwal Dinka in their resistance to Rizeigat Arab incursions south of the Bahr el-Arab/Kir from Darfur. After 1916 Darfur was conquered and incorporated into the Sudan. The Rizeigat and Malwal were now both subjects of the same Sudan government, with the difference that the new provincial administration in Darfur sought to woo Rizeigat loyalty, while the Bahr el-Ghazal Province administration increasingly regarded

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the Malwal as hostile and difficult to deal with. Both the Malwal and Rizeigat claimed dominant rights to the grazing area south of the Bahr el-Arab/Kir. In 1918 the two province administrations awarded the Rizeigat dominant rights to an area forty miles south of the Bahr el-Arab. This was rejected by the Malwal and led to unrest among the Dinka in Bahr el-Ghazal. In 1924 the line was readjusted to fourteen miles south of the river, in a compromise that seemed designed to reward the Rizeigat for their loyalty to the government (in contrast to the Malwal), but, which through its qualifications tacitly acknowledged that the Rizeigat did not have full "Dar rights" (**Appendix 2**) south of the river. Despite what some might have seen as a concession to the Dinka, the Malwal never gave up their claim to the south bank of the Bahr el-Arab/Kir, even though the Sudan government refused to reopen the case (**Appendix 5.5**).<sup>4</sup>

Given the Condominium government's favourable treatment of the Rizeigat claim, even after considerable doubts were raised about its validity, it would be surprising if the Humr had not also received at least a sympathetic hearing if they had ever made similar claims. No such claim was recorded in the documents the Commission saw.

The Misseriya assertion that their territory traditionally extended south of the Bahr el-Arab, therefore, is not sustained. The documentary and oral evidence indicates that the expansion of Humr grazing areas along and to the south of the Bahr el-Arab/Kir dates from the Condominium period of the twentieth century, and was made possible by their collaboration with the Ngok Dinka.

**Proposition 3:** The Ngok are newcomers to the territory, having left the Zeraf Island in the Upper Nile in the nineteenth century, and were brought in as destitute refugees at their own request to Humr leaders. (Misseriya oral testimony, **Appendix 4.1**; GOS presentation, **Appendix 3.1**)

The evidence of the Browne itinerary, as confirmed by Henderson (**Appendix 5.1**) applies with equal force to the claim that the Ngok arrived only during the lifetime of Ali Abu Gurun (c. 1825-35), or, even later still, Ali Julla, who became Nazir of the Humr in about 1900. If Browne's evidence establishes that the

<sup>5</sup> K.D.D. Henderson, "The migration of the Messiria into South West Kordofan", Sudan Notes & Records 22/1, 1939, p.76.





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Gaim Kibreab, *State Intervention and the Environment in Sudan, 1889-1989: The Demise of Communal Resource Management*, NY/Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002, pp.80-100 for a fuller account of the politics surrounding the Malwal Dinka–Rizeigat decision.

Misseriya were in the Muglad–Baraka area by the mid-1790s, it also establishes that the Dinka were settled the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol by the same date.

None of the earlier oral testimonies from Humr informants recorded by Henderson and Cunnison make this claim. Rather, Henderson is quite specific that the Dinka were settled along the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol before the Humr occupied the Muglad (Henderson 1935 & 1939 in **Appendix 5.1**). One of Cunnison's sources did state that only a few "shady characters" were living around Goleh on the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol and along the Umm Bieiro/Nyamora when the Humr first went to the Bahr during the disturbed time of the late-Turkiyya (Humr History, Ali Rahma in **Appendix 5.3**; though Cunnison thinks this unlikely, **Appendix 4.3**), when the merchant king, Zubeir Pasha, was expanding his *jallaba* fiefdom from Deim Zubeir in Bahr el-Ghazal to the Bahr el-Arab and Darfur (Humr History as Related by El Fiki El Nur Musa and Henderson 1939 in **Appendix 5.6**).

The evidence that the Dinka referred to by Browne were Ngok and not Rueng (who inhabit part of the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol further to the east) is suggested, first, by Browne's specifically linking the Dinka of the area to the cultivation of the white sorghum known to the Baggara as *mareig* ("Mariekh" in Browne). Henderson notes that this is the Misseriya name for the Ngok (Henderson 1939 in **Appendix 5.1**), and, in fact, this name for the Ngok appears in many Sudan government reports and on government maps from 1902 to the present day (e.g. Wilkinson 1902 in **Appendix 5.10**; the 1934-6 documents formally establishing the Ngok court in **Appendix 5.7**; Summary of information from map 66-L in **Appendix 6**). Neither the Ngok nor the Rueng Dinka have an historical tradition that the Rueng preceded the Ngok to the Ngol (Abyei and Agok interviews in **Appendix 4.1**.)

Both the Misseriya and the Government of Sudan claim that the reason the Ngok came to Kordofan was that they were displaced from their home on the Zeraf Island in Upper Nile by floods and the Nuer invasion in the nineteenth century (Misseriya testimony, **Appendix 4.1**; GOS presentation, **Appendix 3.1**). They are confusing two separate series of events, involving two separate groups of Ngok, one now living along the Sobat in Upper Nile, and the Ngok in Kordofan.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Henderson's 1939 *Sudan Notes and Records* article (above) is the source for most subsequent dates for the Humr and Ngok migrations. He revised his dating between his 1935 draft (now in the Sudan Archive, Durham) and his 1939 publication.







P.P. Howell, who was often cited as the source for the claim that the Ngok came to Kordofan in the nineteenth century, explicitly stated the opposite when he wrote, "The Ngork do not mention this Nuer invasion of their original country and it may be that they migrated earlier. It is clear too that there were Dinka living in the present country of the Ngork long before the Nuer invasions eastward started" (Howell 1951 in **Appendix 5.1**). There are Dinka historical traditions of the Nuer attacking the Ngok, but this was after the Ngok were already established on the Ngol (Maker Manyrol Maker at Agok in **Appendix 4.1**).

An examination of such flood data as exists for the Zeraf valley in the early nineteenth century also throws doubt on the claim that the Ngok would have been driven westwards by floods at that time. The eighteenth century, the standard date when the Ngok arrived on the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol, was a period of generally high Niles, which could indicate periods of flooding upstream. The first quarter of the nineteenth century (when the Nuer eastward migrations began) was a relatively dry period for the Zeraf Island, whereas Nuer country west of the Bahr el-Jebel was affected by serious local flooding, part of the reason for their eastward movement. The area east of the Zeraf Island was also affected by floods in the 1820s.<sup>7</sup> For the Ngok to have split at this time, one group moving east to the Sobat and the other west to Kordofan, the western group would have had to have crossed the White Nile into Shilluk country before moving west through Rueng country and on to the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol. There is no record of such a major westward population movement of Dinka in Shilluk historical traditions, while they do recall the eastward movement of Nuer at that same time.8

The Misseriya assertion that the Ngok were destitute refugees is contradicted by the contemporary accounts of the incoming British officials at the beginning of the twentieth century. We have already seen the accounts of how the Humr were impoverished at the end of the nineteenth century (**Appendices 5.3 & 5.6**). This is confirmed by the observations of the earliest British administrators, many of whom remarked on the poverty of the Humr relative to their neighbours, both Baggara and Dinka, at the beginning of the twentieth century (Wilkinson 1902, Mahon 1902, O'Connell 1906 in **Appendix 5.6**; Wilkinson 1902

F. Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, Vienna, 1925, pp.94-9.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Douglas H. Johnson, "Reconstructing a history of local floods in the Upper Nile region of the Sudan", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 25/3, 1992. See also Douglas H. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets. A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, chapter 2, for a general account of the Nuer nineteenth century migration east of the Bahr el-Jebel.

in **Appendix 5.10**). The Ngok Dinka are singled out for their wealth in cattle and grain, while the Humr were noted for their poverty.

This claim was first formally made by the Misseriya in 1966, at the beginning of the current conflict between the Humr and Ngok (Abdelbasit Saeed 1982 in **Appendix 5.9**). The fact that two separate Humr leaders, Ali Abu Gurun and Ali Julla, who lived fifty years apart, are mentioned as the persons who first welcomed the Ngok, is further evidence that the "tradition" is recent. Repetition of the claim over the last forty years has re-enforced Misseriya conviction, and by now there are many Misseri who may genuinely believe it is true. It is, however, refuted by contemporary documents; if anything, the reverse is true. It should be set aside, once and for all.

**Proposition 4:** The inclusion of the Abyei Area in "Dar Messeria" District is recognition that Ngok territory belongs to Dar Misseriya. (Misseriya oral testimony, **Appendix 4.1**; GOS presentation, **Appendix 3.1**)

Documents from the end of the Condominium period record that from 1948 to 1952 there was great uncertainty about whether to incorporate the Ngok Dinka into what later became the "Dar Messeria" Rural Council. Not only were a number of Ngok Dinka opposed to this incorporation, but so were a number of Misseriya. In the end the inclusion of the Ngok Dinka as equal members of the council was a pragmatic decision. The choice of the name "Dar Messeria" Council was made to reassure the Misseriya, since the district commissioner responsible for the area had always been known as "DC Dar Messiria". The testimony of Mr. Michael Tibbs, the district commissioner in charge at the time of the change, is categorical that this name did not imply any recognition of the Misseriya having "Dar rights" over the entire territory (Appendix 5.8, Tibbs interview in Appendix 4.3).

The Commission finds that the inclusion of the Ngok in "Dar Messeria" Council cannot be used retroactively to lay claim to ownership of the entire Abyei Area on behalf of the Misseriya.

**Proposition 5:** The Ngok were administered as part of the Misseriya, both in taxation and in the court system. (Misseriya oral testimony, **Appendix 4.1**; GOS presentation, **Appendix 3.1**)







Claims made by various Ngok Dinka and Misseriya informants that the Ngok never paid taxes to Bahr el-Ghazal Province (**Appendix 4.1**) were found to be true. The administration made a conscious decision not to collect tribute before closer administration could be established (Mahon 1903 in **Appendix 5.7**). Tribute or tax was collected only after the Ngok had been transferred to Kordofan. Such records as the Commission saw were consistent in recording that the Ngok Dinka tax was calculated and collected separately from the Misseriya tax from 1908 (the first tax record available to the Commission) through to independence. Whereas at independence (1956) the Misseriya paid both a herd and a poll tax, the Dinka paid a poll tax only (**Appendix 5.7**).

Local courts, administering sharia law and customary law under the authority of shaikhs and chiefs were formally established with specific powers in legislation in the 1930s. The evidence from the Condominium records is conclusive that the Ngok Dinka courts were separate from the Misseriya courts, and were administered separately throughout the period of the Condominium. Chief Kwol Arop's court functioned informally up through the 1920s, until it was designated as Court Number 12 (distinct from the Misseriya courts) in 1936, under a warrant issued under the Native Courts Ordinance 1932. Because the court was a Dinka, and not a Muslim, court, the warrant was modified to make the court conform with the regulations of the Chief Courts Ordinance 1931 applied to customary courts in the three southern provinces. At independence the Ngok court continued to be under the direct responsibility of the district commissioner, the chief civil administrator in the district, while the Misseriya courts had been placed under the judiciary and were the direct responsibility of the Resident Magistrate in Nahud (**Appendix 5.7**).

The evidence of both tax and court records substantiates the Ngok Dinka assertion that they were administered autonomously within Kordofan Province and Dar Messeria District and were not absorbed into the Misseriya native administration. The fact that no tax was levied on them until after 1905 has no bearing on this case.

**Proposition 6:** The Misseriya claim that specific locations north of Abyei Town (e.g., Goleh/Langar, Pawol, Dembloya/Dak Jur, Umm Bilael/Tordach, Chigei/Thigei, Lukji/Kol Yith, Lau, Nyama) have belonged to them since the time of the Turkiyya, through 1905, to the present. (Misseriya oral testimony, **Appendix 4.1**)







Competing claims to the ownership of a number of sites between the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol and the Bahr el-Arab/Kir are both justified and complicated by the fact that many places have both Arabic and Dinka names. Dinka place names were recorded on Sudan Survey Department maps up through 1918, but began to be removed in 1931, for what reason is not known (**Appendix 6**).

When the Commission visited Lau, Pawol, Goleh/Langar, Dembloya/Dak Jur, Um Bilael/Tordach, Lukji/Kol Yith, and Chigei/Thigei, they found no permanent structures of any kind. There were temporary markets and wells dug into the ragabas for watering livestock, but there were no Misseriya permanent settlements in evidence. Nor was the Commission shown traces of any former Dinka villages that were said to be in those locations before being destroyed in the conflict.

Two of the above places, Lau and Pawol, have Nilotic names (Lau is from *lou*, a Dinka cattle colour; Pawol has the prefix *pan* or *pa*, meaning village, which is a common in the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk languages and is found in many of the place names of Upper Nile and Bahr el-Ghazal; it is a contraction for *pan awol*, the place of water).

Pawol, as we have seen above, has been a major centre of Humr dry season grazing since at least the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chigei/Thigei is mentioned by a Ngok source as long ago as 1974 – before the armed conflict began – as a Ngok Dinka site visited seasonally by the Misseriya (Pagwot Deng cited in **Appendix 5.9**).

Nyama, which the Commission was not able to visit, is a site of clay soil within the Goz where water can usually be found throughout the year. It has been an abundant source of fish for the Ngok at the end of the rainy season and towards the beginning of the dry (Abyei interviews in **Appendix 4.1**)<sup>9</sup>. It has also been the site of increasingly intensive cultivation by the Misseriya, beginning with cotton in the 1950s. We have Michael Tibbs' testimony that it was merely a site, with no settlements, when he visited it in March 1954 (**Appendix 5.9** and **Appendix 4.3**). Against this we have confirmation by some of the Ngok's Dinka neighbours that it was a Ngok settlement (Agok interviews in **Appendix 4.1**).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The Commission was given two meanings for the name of Nyama. One is the Dinka word *nyam* for gill, from the number of fish heads people ate there during the fishing season (Appendix 4.2; see also Arthur Nebel, *Dinka-English*, *English-Dinka Dictionary*. Bologna: EMI, 1979, pp.66, 144). The other is that Nyama is an old Shatt place name whose meaning is unknown.





The fact that fishing usually took place in December, and the fishing camps would be abandoned later in the dry season by the time an administrator might visit the area, partially explains the discrepancy between the two testimonies, but does not fully reconcile the difference between a reported "site" and reported "settlements".

Such evidence as the Commission has been able to gather suggests the following:

> 1. The Ragaba Lau is unquestionably a Ngok Dinka primary settlement area; it was not visited by the Humr at the beginning of the century; the Humr were able to expand their seasonal use of the area only later in the Condominium period, as a result of the stability fostered by the government of the day and the good relations between the ruling families of the Ngok and Humr (Appendix 5.9);

> 2. The Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol has similarly been a site of Ngok Dinka permanent settlement since at least the late eighteenth century. This was formally recognized by the Misseriya in the peace agreement between the Humr and the Ngok of March 1965

(Abdelbasit Saeed, 1982, Appendix 5.9);

3. The Dinka established seasonal use of Nyama as a fishing ground which was used at the end of the rainy season. The expansion of Humr cotton cultivation into the Nyama and Subu areas dates from the early 1950s and was part of the government's preindependence development policy. It was the outgrowth of an earlier desire to increase the percentage of the sedentary population among the Humr (Appendix 5.9).

The Commission finds that the Ngok have dominant rights to Chigei/Thigei, the Ragaba Lau and Ragaba ez/Zarga Ngol, while the Misseriya have established secondary rights to those areas. The Ngok and Misseriya have shared secondary rights to the Nyama area.

The only area affected by the 1905 decision of the Proposition 7: Condominium authorities to administer the Ngok Dinka as part of Kordofan was an area south of the Bahr el-Arab; and that the Ngok Dinka settled in territory north of the river only after 1905. (GOS presentation, Appendix 3.1)





It is the claim of the Government of Sudan that the southern boundary of Kordofan Province at the inception of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium was the Bahr el-Arab river, and that all peoples living north of that boundary before 1905 were already in Kordofan. It is also their claim that in 1905 Sultan Arop Biong, paramount chief of the Ngok Dinka, was living south of the Bahr al-Arab; that the Bahr el-Arab was recognised by the government of the day as Arop Biong's northern boundary with the Humr; and that the only territory transferred to the administration of Kordofan Province in 1905 was this territory lying immediately to the south of the Bahr el-Arab, occupied by both Ngok and Twich Dinka. The Twich were subsequently re-transferred to the jurisdiction of Bahr el-Ghazal Province, leaving the southern Ngok settlements in Kordofan.

The government's proposition was supported by reference to the Annual Reports of both Kordofan and Bahr el-Ghazal Provinces prior to 1905, which made explicit statements about the Bahr el-Arab being the boundary between the two provinces (Bahr el-Ghazal Province Annual Report 1902, Kordofan Province Annual Report 1903, and Bahr el-Ghazal Province Annual Report 1904, all cited in **Appendix 3.1**).

The government also produced a number of contemporary and near-contemporary maps showing the location of the province boundary as running along the Bahr el-Arab (Specifically: "Map of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan drawn by H.W. Mardon Oct. '01, Revised Oct. '03", in Count Gleichen, *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, Vol. I, London: HMSO, 1905; "The White Nile and Kordofan", Survey Department, Cairo, 1907, compiled from 1904 Sudan Intelligence Department sheets).

In support of the maps the government presented the 1902 route report of Major E.B. Wilkinson, reprinted in Count Gleichen's 1905 *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*. This report situates Dinka country south of the Bahr el-Arab, and places Arop Biong ("Sultan Rob") even further south, below the "Kir or Bahr el Jange". The government also cited a 1905 report by Bimbashi A. Percival to the effect that the Bahr el-Arab was Sultan Rob's "Arab frontier on the north" (**Appendix 3.1**).

The evidence presented supporting the government's interpretation of the 1905 boundary is strong. In testing it, the Commission compared it with contemporary administrative reports from the early years of the Anglo-Egyptian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Count Gleichen, *The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, Vol. II, London: HMSO, 1905, pp.151-157.





Condominium, in order to discover what the local administrative understanding and practice of the day was on the ground.

The Commission discovered that there was considerable geographical confusion about the Bahr el-Arab and Bahr el-Ghazal regions for the first two decades of Condominium rule. This was part of a general geographical confusion for the whole of the Sudan.

Prior to the Reconquest (1896-8) the incoming Anglo-Egyptian forces relied heavily on the nineteenth century exploration literature for their knowledge of the geography of the country. Captain Count Gleichen wrote in his first Handbook of the Sudan, issued prior to the Battle of Omdurman, that "it can hardly be expected that important changes can have taken place in the territorial aspect of the countries dealt with," and he was confident that the geographical account "will be found to be accurate." Within the first year of re-occupation Gleichen had to issue a supplement to the handbook, admitting an unanticipated geographical confusion. The new supplement cautioned that, "owing to the fact that no two descriptions (whether per map or report) of the same bit of country or river agree as to distances or spelling, several discrepancies as to mileage, &c., will be noticed. An attempt has been made to strike an average between the various authorities, but it is not expected that the result will be entirely satisfactory..." (Appendix 6)

With specific reference to the Bahr el-Arab Gleichen wrote,

It will be all the more interesting to learn the details of the course of the Bahr el Arab; that great river, which rises far away to the west in the heart of Dar Fertit...Almost a century has passed since Brown [sic] marked it vaguely on the map, and our knowledge of it is even now hardly more definite. No European has explored the whole course of the stream; in two places only has it been crossed...The Arabs even have not much to say about it, as their convoys have always preferred the route by Dara or Shakka towards the North, so explorers have only been able to collect very vague and contradictory information.... It therefore follows that nothing definite has resulted from these diverse observations, except that the Bahr el Arab is subject to violent changes, a fact to be expected by the length of the dry season.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.188-9.





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Captain Count Gleichen, Intelligence Division, War Office, *Handbook of the Sudan*, London: HMSO, 1898, p.iii.

The map accompanying the *Supplement* showed the Bahr el-Arab joining the Bahr el-Ghazal north of a second river labelled the Bahr el-Homr, which joined the Bahr el-Ghazal just north of Lake Ambadi. The location and identity of these two rivers were to be a source of confusion over the next few years (R.M. Saunders 1900; Lake No–Meshra el Rek itinerary 1905, both in **Appendix 5.12**). This geographical uncertainty for the Bahr el-Arab basin continued until the end of World War One. The 1912 edition of the Sudan Survey 1:250,000 map 65-K, covering what was later to be known as the Abyei area, warned that "*The course of the Bahr el Arab is entirely unsurveyed.*" This was not corrected until December 1918, when major changes to the courses of the Bahr el-Arab and the Ragaba ez-Zarga to the north were added to the map (**Appendix 6**).

The Commission plotted Major Wilkinson's 1902 route from Lake Keilak to the Kir (the relevant extract of which appears in **Appendix 5.10**) on the current 1:250,000 Sudan Survey maps NC-35-H (Lake Keilak) and NC-35L (Ghabat el Arab) (**Appendix 6**).

As can be seen on **Map 2**, the following locations south of Lake Keilak are still clearly identifiable: Keilak, El Geref, El Yoi, El Debekir [Ed Dibeikir], El Anga [El Angar], Kuek [Duhul Kawak], H. Debib [Dabib], Fula Hamadai [F. Hamedai], Fut, and Fauwel [Pawol] . Shortly after Fauwel was reached the road turned S.S.E. along a river identified as the Bahr el-Arab. This is in fact the Ragaba ez-Zarga (Arabic name), or the river Ngol (Dinka name). As Wilkinson's return itinerary clearly stated, Fauwel is on the Ragaba esh-Shaib, which flows into the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol.

It is apparent from this, and other, reports that administrative officials mistook the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol for the Bahr el-Arab, and treated it as the boundary between Kordofan and Bahr el-Ghazal. Bimbashi Percival's 1904 visit from Wau (the capital of Bahr el-Ghazal Province) to Arop Biong on the Kir river repeats this mistake, describing the Kir as being 50 miles south of the Bahr el-Arab (**Appendix 5.11**).

It was not until 1905-6 that surveys along the Bahr el-Ghazal, and into the mouths of the "False Bahr el-Arab" and the Bahr el-Arab corrected this error. Lt. R.C. Bayldon, R.N. first correctly identified the Kir as the Bahr el-Arab in his survey in March 1905 (**Appendix 5.12**). He further identified the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol as the "Bahr el-Homr", the place where the Humr brought their cattle in the dry season (it was to be labelled the Bahr el-Homr on official maps for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., Map "The Sobat and Bahr el-Ghazal".

some time thereafter). His findings were confirmed by surveys in 1906, where it was noted that the local name for the Bahr el-Arab was the Kir, and that the Ngok Dinka chiefs Arop Biong (Sultan Rob) and Alor Ajing (Sheikh Lar) both lived along this river (Huntley Walsh, **Appendix 5.12**).

The Survey Department noted this change in 1906 (Lyons, **Appendix 5.12**), after the Ngok had been transferred to Kordofan, but did not record the name changes on their 1:250,000 maps until 1909 (**Appendix 6**). Local administrators in Kordofan continued to confuse the two waterways. It was not until 1908 that they consistently described the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol as the Bahr el-Homr in their official reports.<sup>14</sup>

The maps submitted by the government in support of their claim do not reflect these corrections. The 1907 map "White Nile and Kordofan", which was compiled from 1904 Sudan Intelligence Department sheets, has been misunderstood. The dotted lines along the two southern-most rivers, including the Bahr el-Arab, do not show the province boundary, as the Government of Sudan has interpreted them; they show that the area had not yet been surveyed.

The government's claim that only the Ngok Dinka territory south of the Bahr el-Arab was transferred to Kordofan in 1905 is therefore found to be mistaken. It is an understandable mistake, given the geographical confusion at the time, but it is based on an incomplete reading of the contemporary administrative record, the full context of which reveals that the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol, rather than the river Kir, which is now known as the Bahr el-Arab, was treated as the province boundary, and that the Ngok people were regarded as part of Bahr el-Ghazal Province until their transfer in 1905.

Evidence of the Ngok presence north of the Bahr el-Arab before 1905 is found in many of the same sources the Government of Sudan has cited to prove that they were south of the river. The 1902 Wilkinson itinerary (**Appendix 5.10**) notes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> J.R. O'Connell, Governor of Kordofan Province in 1906, descried Hasoba as "on the Bahr-el-Arab" (J.R. O'Connell, Governor Kordofan Province, "Annual Report. Kordofan Province 1906", Reports on the Finance, Administration and Condition of the Sudan 1906, London: Waterlow & Sons, Ltd., 1907, p.671). Watkiss Lloyd, Governor of Kordofan Province in 1907, described the southern boundary of Dar Humr as "between the Bahr el Arab and the river Kir, the latter being occupied by the Dinkas under Sultan Rob" (Watkiss Lloyd, "Some Notes on Dar Homr", The Geographical Journal, 29/6, June 1907, p.649). By the end of that year he had changed the reference from Bahr el-Arab to Bahr el-Homr (W. Lloyd, "Report on a Tour of Inspection in South-Western Kordofan, 26 December 1907", SIR 162 (January 1908), App G, p.55. NRO INTEL 6/5/18). See also Lloyd 1908 in Appendix 5.3.





Dinka settlements south of the Ragaba ez-Zarga (the supposed Bahr el-Arab) and north of the Kir or "Bahr el-Jange" (the real Bahr el-Arab). All references before 1908 to "Sultan Rob's" northern boundary with the Arabs being the Bahr el-Arab now must be understood as meaning the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol.

There is an environmental argument, too, concerning Ngok permanent settlements north of the Bahr el-Arab/Kir and their seasonal pastures south of it. As P.P. Howell noted, permanent villages and cultivations are located on higher ground, which is found along the banks of the rivers and "north of the Bahr el Arab, while dry season grazing grounds are for the most part in the open grassland (toich) south of the river" (Howell 1951 in **Appendix 5.13**). The toich is seasonally flooded grassland, unsuitable for permanent settlement (see, for instance, Twich Dinka interviews in **Appendix 4.2**).

It is evident that there was a certain amount of internal movement by the Ngok Dinka both north and south of the river after 1905. The GOS has interpreted this movement as Ngok migration into lands upon which they had no previous claim. Such a clear-cut distinction is hard to maintain from contemporary records. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Condominium government believed that the population of the Sudan had declined some seventy-five percent under Mahdist rule, from around 8,000,000 to less than 2,000,000. The conclusion drawn from these figures was that the Sudan, as a whole, was desperately underpopulated, and people displaced during the Mahdiyya were encouraged to return to their abandoned homes. Reporting the return of these "immigrants" was a regular feature in province annual reports in the early years of the Condominium. Kordofan Province, for instance, noted with satisfaction the return in 1904 of people from Sennar and the Gezira, "These are generally the most desirable people, as they come in families with goats, sheep, etc., and rebuild old villages." Also

The fact that land may have been abandoned or left unused during the Mahdiyya was not treated as evidence of the lack of any claim to that land. The general policy of the Condominium government was to revive and repopulate tribal

<sup>16</sup> J.R. O'Connell, "Annual Report. Kordofan Province, 1904", in *Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan, 1904*, Khartoum: El Sudan Printing Press, 1905, p.99.





Lord Cromer, "Annual Report by His Majesty's Agent and Consul General on the Finances, Administration, And Condition of the Sudan, 1904", in *Reports on the Finances, Administration and Condition of the Sudan, 1904*, Khartoum: El Sudan Printing Press, 1905, p.13. For a discussion of these population estimates and their implications on policy see M.W. Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp.18-23.

homelands wherever they could. In Kordofan, as much of the evidence already cited in the **Appendix 5** shows, both the Misseriya and the Ngok were encouraged by government not only to return to their homes, but to expand their use of the land.

This has a direct bearing on the Commission's evaluation of the evidence for the continuity of Ngok Dinka territory between 1905 and 1965.

**Proposition 8:** There was a continuity in the territory occupied and used by the nine Ngok Dinka chiefdoms which was unchanged between 1905 and 1965, when armed conflict between the Ngok and the Misseriya began. (Ngok oral testimony, **Appendix 4.1 & 4.2**; SPLM/A presentation, **Appendix 3.2**)

In examining this proposition we must first evaluate the detail and authenticity of the oral testimony.

It is an established principle in historical research that the best sources for a people's internal history are the people themselves. The historical traditions of neighbours can add different perspectives on a people's history, but generally their neighbours will lack the same detailed internal knowledge. It is also recognised that in disputes over territory the disputants might produce "invented" oral traditions to support their claims.<sup>17</sup>

The Ngok oral response to the questions the Commission asked about their settlements and grazing areas was detailed and extensive (**Appendix 4.1** and **4.2**). The Commission has not been able to verify each of these statements, either through systematic field visits or by corroborating testimony from many other sources, but something can be said about the testimony itself.

Representatives of each of the nine chiefdoms were able immediately to give detailed accounts of their territory, both permanent villages and seasonal grazing areas, when asked. Some of the sections mentioned that they shared villages and grazing areas with other sections, which confirms what is attested in even the earliest sources, that sectional use of territory is not exclusive, but overlaps, and people live where they can (e.g. Willis 1909 in **Appendix 5.13**). Despite the paucity of Dinka place names on the Sudan Survey maps, a number of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the claims and counterclaims in the dispute over Kikuyu ownership of Kenya's "White Highlands", in Godfrey Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975.





names given by Ngok witnesses could be located on the older maps (**Appendix 6**), including Akotok (Aradeib), Barajak (Dul), Kol Adet (Rg. Dibdi), Aigel (D. Aman), Abin Angui (D. Saheib), Kol Dhur (D. Fadlullah), and Noong (Naam). These Dinka names no longer appear on the Sudan Survey map. A number of the settlements that the Ngok mentioned were also confirmed by the testimony of their Dinka neighbours in Agok (**Appendix 4.2**), specifically the sites of Dhinydhuol (Tebeldiya), Nyama, Pagai, Tuba, Ruba, Akotok, Maper Amal and Majeng Alor.

This contrasts with sparse details given by Misseriya witnesses (**Appendix 4.1**), who confined themselves to mentioning a few contested sites, such as Nyama, Chigei/Thigei, Lau and Pawol, and the current boundary points with Bahr el-Ghazal. When asked direct questions about the location of the graves and shrines of prominent Dinka chiefs, which were well known to the Dinka, they would neither confirm nor deny their existence. We have already seen how the Misseriya have also invented traditions about the Ngok being displaced by the Nuer in the nineteenth century and brought into their present territory as guests by Ali Julla at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the opinion of the experts, the detail cited by the Ngok witnesses, especially that detail corroborated by the testimony of neighbours and by maps no longer in current use, is in itself evidence of an intimate knowledge of the area, while the Misseriya witnesses demonstrated a more restricted knowledge of the same area.

The SPLM/A also presented a table of Ngok Dinka age-sets, along with a map showing the sites where the age-sets were initiated (**Appendix 3.2**).

It has not been possible to verify the dating of these age-sets from other sources. Applying the age-set dates to some of the events mentioned in interviews (**Appendix 4.2**) revealed some anomalies, especially with the earlier dates from the mid-nineteenth century back. No interval between initiations is given, so it is difficult to know on what basis the calculations are made. Those age-sets dated from the mid-nineteenth century onwards are probably more reliably dated than the earlier ones. If one confines one's analysis of the age-set map to these later sets, then the clustering of age-set initiation sites south of latitude 10°35′ N does illustrate a continuity of settlement from before 1905 to the late twentieth century. But without supporting evidence, it is not possible to accept such a claim on its own.



There are strong arguments for the continuity of Ngok Dinka settlement along the main waterways of the Bahr el-Arab basin (the Bahr el-Arab/Kir itself, the Umm Bierio, the Ragaba Lau, the Ragaba ez-Zarga/Ngol and its tributaries). This is not only suggested by the evidence cited in the previous propositions, but is confirmed by the testimony of two impartial witnesses who were familiar with the area and the use to which its inhabitants put it immediately prior to independence (Tibbs and Cunnison in **Appendix 4.3**).

We do not have a detailed and systematic description of Ngok settlement and land use patterns throughout the Condominium period, because of the seasonality of administrative visits to Ngok territory. Since officials came only in the dry season (between December and April: Tibbs in **Appendices 5.7** and **5.13**), what few descriptions we do have are of Ngok dry season activities, which were concentrated around the rivers. But there are suggestions from the beginning of the twentieth century that administrators were aware that Ngok Dinka territory extended further north (Mahon 1903, Willis 1909 in **Appendix 5.13**), and this seems to have been the basis on which settlement and grazing patterns were condoned and managed by subsequent generations of administrators throughout the Condominium period, following the general principle of reviving tribal homelands.

There is, as yet, no clear independent evidence establishing the northern-most boundary of the area either settled or seasonally used by the Ngok. The lack of distinctive physical features and the overlapping use of the area discouraged Condominium administrators from attempting to define such a boundary (see Henderson's 1935 comment, quoted above). There is some evidence in the administrative records of attempts to segregate Ngok and Humr communities in some areas: e.g. the expulsion of Ngok and other Dinka from Hasoba in 1932, at the request of both the Humr and the Ngok leaders (Henderson Diary in **Appendix 5.13**); the allegation that chief Kwol Arop was encouraging the Ngok to settle among the Humr in 1940 (Kordofan Monthly Diary 1940 in **Appendix 5.13**). But these citations lack either the context or the details that would enable us to draw any firm conclusions from them.

The Ngok assertion that the boundary between the two peoples is the Goz belt that separates them has yet to be tested by a systematic survey. There is general agreement from other sources, however, that the band of Goz intervening between the Humr permanent territory and the Ngok permanent settlements is settled by nobody; that it is an area to be traversed, rather than occupied; and that there is regular seasonal use of the Goz by both peoples





(Cunnison 1954 in **Appendix 5.2**; Cunnison 1966 in **Appendix 5.3**; Tibbs 1999 in **Appendix 5.13**).

The Commission finds sufficient evidence, therefore, to accept Ngok claims to permanent rights southwards roughly from latitude  $10^{\circ}10'$  N, and of Ngok secondary rights extending north of that line.

**Proposition 9:** The Abyei Area is defined as the territory of Kordofan encompassed by latitude 10°35′N in the north to longitude 29°32′ E in the east, and the Upper Nile, Bahr el-Ghazal and Darfur provincial boundaries as they were at the time of independence in 1956. (SPLM/A presentation, **Appendix 3.2**)

The SPLM/A's sketch map of the Abyei area places the northern boundary at latitude 10°35′ N, running from the current Darfur boundary in a straight line east to approximately longitude 29°32′15″ E. The eastern boundary then runs south along this line until it joins the boundary with Upper Nile at approximately latitude 10°05′ N. The southern and western boundaries coincide with those of Upper Nile, Bahr el-Ghazal and Darfur provinces, as established at the time of independence.

The SPLM/A's description of these boundaries uses Dinka place names and refers to a presidential decree from 1974 establishing the Abyei Area northern boundary with the Misseriya and Nuba as Jiekdi, Kol Chuei, Mabior, Kol Chom (Ghibebish), Dhinydhuol (Tebeldia), Thur, Ruba, Nyin Thau, Thuba, Rum Lukuk, Kuok, Aniak, Miding, Miyen-Gier, Mardhuk and Panthuor (Heglig). These place names, as located on the SPLM/A sketch map, do not exactly coincide with the lines on that map, most being contained within the area of latitude 10°35′ N and longitude 29°32′15″ E, with a few north of latitude 10°35′ N.

In the absence of a copy of the presidential decree, or verbatim quotation from the text, and a more precise location of the sites mentioned, it is impossible to accept this definition as conclusive.

The Misseriya have established secondary rights through the Goz belt to the area south of it, while the Ngok have secondary rights north of latitude 10°10′ N. Taking latitude 10°35′ N as the northern limit to Ngok Dinka claims, and noting that the Goz belt is roughly contained within these limits, it is reasonable to treat the Goz as a transitional zone where there are shared secondary rights, and to

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place the boundary at  $10^{\circ}$  22' 30" N, so as to bisect equally the band between latitudes  $10^{\circ}10$ ' N and  $10^{\circ}35$ ' N.

As neither the Ngok nor the SPLM/A have presented claims to the territory east of longitude 29°32′15″ E, it is reasonable to take this line as the eastern boundary.

All other boundaries of the area that coincide with the provincial boundaries as they were at independence on 1 January 1956 shall remain as they are.

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