Christian Modernizations
Circulating Media Practices of the Mission along the Nile

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« Cush International Church is an Indigenous Cushitic nondenominational Church, envisioned, appointed, tasked and motivated by God for the land of Cush and other nations of the World. It is to take Cush land for Christ, sound the trumpet of Salvation and lift up the banner of God’s seasons for the nations of the world, and to present the bride (the church) to the bridegroom on Mount Zion » From the Book of Testimonies of « Cush International Church », South Sudan, 2011

In the history of the Nile, Christian evangelism proceeded upriver, driven by missionary societies from the global North, with centers in Cairo and Khartoum. As advance guard and representatives of the colonial administrations, these institutions divided the regions of today’s South Sudan among themselves. As a result, to this day, the Christian denomination of many Nilotes is determined by their geographical origins. While the mission in the colonial era started out from the imperialistic centers, today there are many local movements, like the « Cush International Church » quoted at the beginning, that evangelize in and from what were once the peripheries.

Then as now, the Churches in question claim to differentiate between the sites of their activity and the places that remain in an undifferentiated state, as well as between divinely saved adherents and the outsiders remaining in the darkness of separation from God. Both the mission societies that (to this day) come to Africa from the global North and the local Churches must mobilize resources and develop strategies on site in order to set off for the universalistic horizons of Christianity and of individual and communal success. To this purpose, an infrastructure must be built to circulate ideas of faith, practices, and formats and to translate them into new « religious fields » (Bourdieu, 2000).

This point is largely ignored in the current debate that critically addresses the “localizing forces on which anthropologists of global religions have tended

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to focus” (Keane, 2007, p. 69, Robbins, 2003) and that instead tries to bring the effective force of universal dogmas and globalized formats into view (Engelke and Robbins, 2010). “In the case of those scripture-based, universalizing faiths most commonly called religions today, there is no obvious locality to which they can be tied. This is true sociologically (institutions and people circulate), culturally (ideas and practices circulate) and epistemologically (the dominant world religions make universal claims)... Part of the appeal of global religions may lie in their very lack of location” (Keane, 2007, p. 86). Keane makes an important point when, in studying the missionary history of Sumba, he focuses on the circulation of persons, signs, and things and derives the formative power of religious movements from their universalistic claims to transcend local contexts as part of a global modernization narrative. In different locales, the missionaries’ modernization strategies consist in providing validity for standardized procedures and globalized formats by putting local forms of knowledge and practice to the test and devaluing them: modernization narratives transport a hierarchization of values. The reflexive distancing from the local life-world makes it possible to make a differentiation that demands a “break” with existing orders in order to create a better future.

The reproducibility of standardized forms of knowledge (like a globally spread creed) or specific ritual forms (like prayer techniques) and the circulation of certain media (like a corpus of holy scripture) abets a worldwide spreading of ideas and forms of organization that affect local cosmologies and practices. But at the same time, this should not obscure the fact that these facilities are produced, invoked, and shaped locally. A media history of the Christian mission soon encounters conditions that are not exhausted in the question of standardizations and formattings that mobilize ideas, practices, and specific formats (Latour’s “immutable mobiles”). Rather, the missionary societies in Europe, the missionaries at the various locales of their activities and the converts, have always had to mobilize various resources in order to actualize the universalistic horizon of conversion in situ. This entails not only a substantial expense of capital (which must be mobilized through social relationships), a corresponding persuasion and training of people, and the involvement of media that fit local environs, but also the shaping and translation of “sensational forms that tune the senses and allow for personal religious experience to occur” (Meyer, 2010).

The rupture that modernistically behaving Churches strive to make prevail on site (cf. Meyer, 1998, Engelke, 2004), reduces the complex processes and contexts of action in different settings to a before-and-after conversion. But in situ, conversion is a fundamentally uncertain endeavor that aims to meet the challenges of the present by working out a religious identity. Evangelical Churches in particular use a rhetoric of rupture that intends to make an “agential stance towards the self” (Keane) possible; conversion, however, is a process that retrospectively-prospectively undertakes to redetermine the present. Many of my informants associate with the Evangelical revival movement “yumkaniat”, (new) opportunities they pursue as part of what I call their own modernizing strategies. These “spaces of opportunities” result from a tightly woven net in transnational space and are opened up through the ongoing accomplishment of conversion. As reports about converts and their spiritual awakening indicate, conversion nonetheless entails at the same time a “turning back to” something that was already inherent in the individual life,
but also in the history of a collective. The increased mobility of people, signs, and things in these Church networks is often accompanied by a politics of local autochthonization, according to which the world of a transnational, Christian community that is to be newly created is already rooted on site. It may be no coincidence that conversion’s promise of modernity manifests itself for many Nilotes in the narrative of a Cush identity. This echoes the assumptions of the missionary scholars who thought they had found the world of the Old Testament in these pastoralist, patrilinear groups with their own prophetic traditions and narratives (Lienhardt, 1982, James, 2014). The cosmology of the Dinka appeared to be a sort of proto-Christianity to Missionaries and converting Dinka alike. As the Dinka prophet Abraham, whom I will introduce at greater length below, told me, three pillars support the Cush movement: historical roots, Cushite identity, and promised future. The ongoing accomplishment of conversion is not restricted to a change of denomination, but must be understood as a translation process in which one unit is converted into another: ethnicity into piety, hope of salvation into nation-building, and a mythical past into an emphatically modern future. To make it possible to understand the negotiation processes that take place on site and along the trajectories of signs, things, and Nilotes that condensed into a local prophetic movement and its program of action in Juba in 2011, my argument is that the history of Christian evangelization is part of a media history (Behrend, 2003) and I will treat missionary activity as a question of media techniques.

My considerations are based on field research in Arabic-speaking Evangelical networks in the greater Brussels urban area and its surroundings (2008-2011) that include North and South Sudanese Christians. In the year the state of South Sudan was founded, I followed some of them to Juba. The activities of the Cush International Church and its prophet Abraham were omnipresent during my stay – not only in talks with my Evangelical interlocutors, but also in interviews with representatives of the official Sudan Council of Churches and of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). My stay in November/December 2011 cannot provide the basis for thick description of the South Sudanese situation; for a more detailed work, refer to the long awaited ethnographic studies of Christiane Falge (Bremen) and Timm Sureau (Halle) (cf. the instructive depiction by Falge 2005, 2008, and 2008b).

Early Failure

A crucial characteristic of the mission in Sudan is its long lack of success. As Heather Sharkey shows in her works, no significant number of European and American missionary societies came to Khartoum via Egypt until the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in 1898 (Sharkey, 2002, whose works I will refer to extensively in this article). Despite a government ban, their programs of action aimed at Muslims, whose conversion was part of a strategy of stemming the spread of Islam in Africa (Prasch, 1989). The mission to the Muslims failed for various reasons. For one thing, the modernization narrative that promised that conversion would make one part of a globalized religion that would enable social mobility and that had the authority of a Holy Scripture encountered local scholars who could also take recourse to a holy scripture, a tradition of written scholarship, and systematic doctrines.
enabling them to threaten divine and social sanctions against those who renounced the Muslim faith. The colonial administration also feared unrest in the Muslim population and restricted permissions for missionary churches to social and educational functions. The local elites preferred the government’s institutions, which also existed, teaching classical Arabic and preparing students for service in the local administration. In contrast, the Catholic, Presbyterian, and Protestant Churches had to concentrate on marginal groups – the children of the European stratum of society (Austrian Catholics) and the sons (American Presbyterians) and daughters (British Anglicans) of former slaves; and, among rural migrants and in the rural periphery, they had to make do with a mission to the “borderland pagans” (Trimingham, 1948, quoted after Sharkey, 2002, p. 52). Infrastructurally, the missionary Churches had no unique selling points and were more hindered than fostered by the state – unlike in the south of the country. In addition, the missionaries failed in the choice of media with which they sought to operationalize their “program of action”. Molded by reformatory experiences in Europe and by their evangelizing in illiterate societies, the missionaries tried to distribute Arabic-dialect translations of the Bible among the people. For the mission to the underprivileged, they believed that the local Arabic dialect would be more effective than the Classical Arabic of the Koran, which was reserved for the elites. While it is true that ever more people along the Nile were learning to read and write, their knowledge generally did not suffice to read Classical Arabic. But even these half-literate segments of the population and also the local Christians preferred the literary fuṣḥa Arabic, as an expression of linguistic beauty and social distinction, to the local dialects (Sharkey, 2005). A first translation of the Gospel of Mark into Sudanese Arabic was oriented toward the form of Arabic that the British translators learned from “uneducated” employees of the mission hospital – and beyond that, it was transcribed into the Latin alphabet. For Northern Sudanese, and especially for the male elite, the Holy Scriptures thus manifested themselves in the despised “broken Arabic” of uneducated women (Sharkey, 2011, p. 41). Only after almost two decades of presence in the metropolitan area of Khartoum were native elites attracted to educating their daughters in Christian mission schools, as a part of marriage strategies (Sharkey, 2002, p. 60). In this way, the mission’s modernization narrative was ultimately realized on site – but conversion did not become an option for Muslim families.

**Vernacular Christians**

The mission in South Sudan, too, could not be realized until after the Anglo-Egyptian troops’ victory over the Mahdiya. For a long time, geography sufficed to obstruct missionaries from South Sudan. Into the 1870s, for many men of God, trips along the Nile and through the vast swamps ended “in the missionaries’ grave, the Nile Basin” (Streck, 1982, p. 318). Only with the establishment of the British protectorate around the turn of the century did a true “Via triumphalis of South Sudanese Church history” begin (Streck, 1989, p. 319): for the sake of peace, the British administration assigned different regions to Anglicans (Mountain Nile), Presbyterians (Sobat River), Catholics (Gazelle River), and Lutherans (East Equatoria); some of these regions had extensions about nine times the size of Germany’s at the time (Streck, 1982, p. 319). The aim was to
make the influential missionary societies, which were lastingly restricted in the North, serviceable for the colonial administration. The latter wanted missionary presence in South Sudanese regions that were extremely remote and difficult of access to consolidate British presence on site. In addition, the establishment of mission schools served to reduce the costs of state “development work”. The missionary societies could implement instruction in local languages or English at least *prima facie* more easily than in Arabic, at the same time helping push back a feared “cultural dominance” of the Muslim North in the South. Soon the first lists of numbers of converts reached the mission centers in Khartoum and in the mother country, with the aim of demonstrating the successful evangelization of broad segments of the population in South Sudan (Sharkey, 2002).

Francis M. Deng reports that the South Sudanese Dinka sent their children to the mission schools even though they regarded them as morally dubious. But trained “children of the missionaries” increased the social prestige of their families (Deng, 1988). For the Dinka and elsewhere, the mission’s media techniques, like reading and writing, became a resource in local social relationships that would be put to test and used individually, in (kinship) groups, and finally in forms of organization, like churches. The universalistic program of Christianity thereby developed into a resource and could be combined with other resources on site to open up new options and opportunities. In this way, social process was transformed into a metaphor for social progress, as Lienhardt clear-sightedly wrote in reference to the new forms of competition among the age classes of the Dinka, in which appropriating “foreign knowledge” now took a central role (Lienhardt, 1982). According to Lienhardt, the conversion of the Dinka was introduced through a gradual suffusion of various values and views (like that of “progress through learning”). In the various regions, an early beginning was made in developing systems of writing and in beginning to translate the Bible into local languages with the aid of native converts (Johnson, 1988). This led to shifts in the meaning of the Dinkas’ religious vocabulary: certain terms took on new significances and were recombined. *Linguistic Parallax* is what Godfried Lienhardt called the formation of alternative systems of meaning “caused by a change (or difference) of the point of observation” (Lienhardt, 1982, p. 89). In the worst case, certain religious terms could take on different, at times juxtaposed meanings that could not be brought into harmony – as he and his former student Deng explain for the terms for soul (*wei*) and “holy spirit” (*wei santo*) (Lienhardt, 1980, Deng, 1988). While the term “*wei*” would probably prevail among converts, in order to express a reflexive distance between one’s own moral personality and a personalized God, Lienhardt and Deng point out that it was as good as impossible for a Dinka to follow the Christian doctrine that cattle have no souls: the term “*wei*” originally connoted the much wider field of meaning of “to breathe” and “to live” and everything enlivening – precisely what cattle possess without limit in the Dinka cosmology and what is released as *wei* in sacrificial rituals (Lienhardt, 1982, p. 90). Sacrifice thus became a central question for the inner mission of the Evangelical Churches, because Christian converts, too, generally continued to carry out this practice. In the 1980’s, Lienhardt assumed that this ambiguity

1. On similar controversies and practices among the neighboring herdsmen, the Nuer; see Hutchinson, 1996.

would gradually wane when children grew up in Christian communities, certain doctrines of the Christian faith were acknowledged, and certain persons were invested with the necessary authority to define this doctrine in a generally binding way. In this process, new terminological registers can be created that overlay the conventional meanings; however, these registers, too, are situationally mobilized to locate oneself retrospectively-prospectively in situ. As Wendy James aptly noted: "In translating god’s words we orient ourselves to each other" (James, 2014, p. 342).

Among the Dinka and Nuer between the long periods of war that ravaged the country, re-conversion into an evangelical movement that subsequently brought forth new church-communities had already become a question of individual modernization strategies and of the expansion of agency – i.e. as one’s capacity to act and give meaning to action. An important impetus for the re-evangelization by Protestant Churches, which since the 1970s has massively transformed the Church landscape in South Sudan (which previously consisted of so-called mainline Churches), came through labor migration into North Sudanese cities. Here the South Sudanese organized themselves in Churches and, in the Muslim environment, laid claim to having their own book religion, which they also increasingly practiced there, since cattle as a medium of spiritual matters were out of the picture (Hutchinson, 1996). Conversion to Christianity, the ability to read, and occupational success correlated, and this convinced many Nuer to join the newly founded Evangelical Churches. At the end of the 1970s, in the administrative district of the Gaaok Nuer alone, Hutchinson counted 56 separate, vibrant church communities with an Evangelical background (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 312). In the 1980s, there were additional mass conversions that made these Christian communities the “fastest growing movements of Christian conversion in the world” (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 337). Hutchinson reports on hundreds of Nuer who, during the war, moved through the bush singing Christian hymns to find a pastor who would baptize them – until finally a commander of the rebel army had a pastor brought in and organized a mass baptism. The rebel movement (SPLM) saw conversion to Christianity as a way to bridge ethnic differences and unite the resistance against the Muslim North. In this case, the religious songs served to call up and connect various programs of action in the local practices: the liturgy of the Churches and the treasury of songs of the rebel army (SPLA) became ever more similar and began to overlap, so that, in this cultural technique, the imagination of national, religious, and individual modernization flowed together in conversion (on the significance of religious songs as missionary and cultural techniques, see James, 1988).

**God’s Lawnmower**

Not only the Christian communities in South Sudan, but also the Churches in Khartoum (which had remained marginal in terms of evangelizing; the last European missionaries had had to leave the state territory of the undivided Sudan in 1964) experienced a revival movement during the civil war. In the 1980’s, millions of South Sudanese fled the civil war, most of them moving into barrack settlements in cities in North Sudan. During this war, which would not end until 2005, about a million and a half South Sudanese lived in Khartoum alone (for the recent history of Sudan, see Collins, 2008). Upon arrival

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in Khartoum, conversion to Christianity increasingly became a practice to distinguish one’s identity from the Muslim North Sudanese, especially because, when registering, it was less humiliating to call oneself an adherent of a book religion than to have the responsible bureaucrats treat one as a “heathen”. For the South Sudanese, the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) organized inwardly, possibilities to join a community and, outwardly, help from international aid organizations and political representation for the refugees. Recognized by the Muslim authorities as the legitimate representation of the Christian minorities, the SCC provided the various Church groups space and infrastructure to make it possible to maintain community life. Existing Bible translations in Dinka and Nuer were supplemented (in a process still continuing today) and sold like hotcakes in the course of a literacy campaign in Khartoum (Hutchinson, 1996). But especially popular, along with the religious services and Bible schools in local languages, were the church groups that worked ecumenically and to this purpose addressed the up-and-coming generation of refugees in Arabic. After the tightening of Sharia law in 1990, the Christian Churches and their leaders had initially adjusted to their situation as *dimmi* (*ahl ad-dimma*) and had cultivated a *modus vivendi* as a protected but disadvantaged minority in an Islamic state. The rights and developmental possibilities of the Christian communities nevertheless remained fragile, and in biographical interviews older Dinka told me much about chicanery and sometimes violent attacks by Muslim splinter groups that they felt the community was exposed to. On the initiative of indigenous missionaries from the South and under the umbrella of the SCC, the *Sudan Inner Mission* [SIM], now growing in strength, built up a platform for the inner mission among young South Sudanese in Khartoum. These youths increasingly claimed a self-confident presence in public space and appropriated the modernization narrative of the Evangelical born-again Christian movement. Bible courses and prayer meetings in the SIM’s *Khartoum International Church* brought a wide range of language communities and ethnic groups together. In the narrative of my informants, unlike most Churches, which separated their offerings for different language communities and in part also for different regions of origin, the SIM worked inclusively, because it worked in Arabic, precisely thereby reaching the younger generation that had grown up in Khartoum and had been brought up speaking Arabic (Dimmendaal/Mugaddam, 2006). Work with the Bible and religious services were scheduled on the Muslim Sabbath, Friday, in order to reach the greatest possible number of participants and explicitly also Muslims. Supported by the American Operation Mission, these young people met for conferences under the umbrella of the Pentacostal *Young Christian Fellows* and organized prayer groups at their colleges. Finally they began publicly praying during breaks at schools and colleges and promoting Christian Churches with book exhibitions in public space. Christian devotional literature and life guidebooks circulated among the refugees and also addressed Muslims from the majority society. Electrified by their prayer practices, many of the young men in North Sudan began evangelizing. Equipped only with Bibles and textbooks, they fanned out in pairs into the various regions of North Sudan and lived from donations and the sale of books. In short, a movement developed

2. On the export of Christian evangelizing formats from the United States, see Gifford, Rose, Brouwer, 1996.
that would become popular as the Christian Revival Movement and from which many leaders of today’s Churches emerged of.

The high point of this Christian revival movement in Khartoum came in Easter 2000, on Green Square, where young people had begun organizing family meetings in public space. My research unfortunately did not uncover who put the SCC in contact with the German Evangelical preacher Reinhard Bonnke. But his invitation apparently drove the city into a frenzy. Weeks before the event, posters advertised his Fire Conference, which would reach tens of thousands on Green Square with the help of the SCC. The missionary, who calls himself God’s Lawnmower, must have put the gathered masses in Khartoum into a state of ecstasy (cf. his website “christ for all nations” and a purported photo of the event on his Facebook wall: http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=22912608&id=8fa9a2c70a&id=210552700257, last accessed on 25 Feb. 2014). The annual family gatherings on Green Square developed into a demonstration of South Sudanese presence in public space, which Bonnke’s performance turned into a demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit – with healings of the blind and mass conversions of Muslims, according to my interlocutors. One year later, when he was expected at the same event once more, the authorities cancelled his appearance because there had been murder threats. The crowd boiled over and there were several days of street fighting (Schmidinger, 2001). The young men, well educated both at school and in missionary work and spurred by the ecstatic events, swarmed out now, mostly along the Nile, to find their livelihoods and to evangelize in the migrant communities of the South Sudanese, many of which dwelled in Egypt. Almost all of them later assumed important functions in Churches and looked back on the “Christian reawakening” in Khartoum as preparation for their tasks today in building a new state, South Sudan.

In Khartoum and Cairo, the young Christians developed media competences with which they not only advanced the inner mission in Sudan, but also networked themselves transnationally. Along with circulating books and designing religious service plans and, in the late 2010s, also Power-Point projections with pictures and song lyrics for religious services, Church members founded a Christian media production company that shoots documentaries about Christian life in Sudan and is dedicated to “Christian themes”. Along the Nile, persons, signs, and things circulated along the paths of migration between Cairo and Khartoum, leading to wide-ranging forms of cooperation.

In the expansive and highly conflictual Evangelical networks, media play a special role – in particular the satellite and Internet television station al-Hayat, which was founded by circles associated with the American Christian Television Networks around the evangelist Joyce Meyer (http://wwitv.com/tv_channels/b4217.htm). On the translation of Christian movements from the United States into globalizing Christian networks, refer to Brouwer/Gifford/Rose, 1996). With a comparatively modest budget, the two men who run the station, a former Muslim from Cairo and a Sudanese Coptic Christian, reach an audience of millions. Conceived for evangelizing among both Muslims and Christians, the station provides an effective platform for popular television preachers, some of whom come from the growing Christian communities of North Africa and the Middle East and some who are recruited among converts found in specially set up chat rooms.
As the central medium for Arabic-speaking Christians to find their identity in transnational space, relevant film clips from the station are widely distributed on various Arab Christian websites and on YouTube. In the course of the Evangelical revival movement in Khartoum, Christians founded “In Jesus all things become new”, which is meanwhile the largest Christian chat room in the Arabic-speaking world. Here, administrators from Al-Hayat supervise the heated discussions Muslims and Christians conduct about competing claims to truth and modernization. They intervene via microphone in the chat rooms to comment on and steer the ongoing discussions, while people follow by listening, texting and reading. In these media, Muslims willing to convert and Christians seeking contact are recruited by call-in functions. When contact is made with Church congregations along the Nile or in Europe they are invited to join in conferences, in part after extended security checks. These conferences are organized by local Churches and are an essential part of the mobilization strategies by which the transnational, Evangelical community of Sudanese and Arabic-speaking Christians constitutes itself.

The universalistic modernization narrative of the mission manifests itself in the media-technological interweaving of the actors on a regional and international scale, who invoke and put this narrative to the test on site. Only recently have the various forms of knowledge and media-technological facilities been located in the newly founded state of South Sudan and in local cleansing work.

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Crusade for Cush

Some of the evangelizing young men migrated along the Nile to Egypt and gained technical know-how in media production firms there. Some of them remained in Cairo, while others went to Europe as students. American missionary societies got some of them out of Sudanese prisons where they had been jailed for their commitment to Churches, and helped some of them to emigrate to the United States. All of them worked for Churches and some have founded their own Churches, which they often named Cush Churches and placed in the “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) of the legendary Cush people of the Bible. The differentiation narrative of revelation proves itself in the world via the historicistic tales of the Old Testament, a historicity that can become manifest in the present through one’s own divinely chosen prophets. This is especially clear in the movements of the Dinka prophet Abraham from Jonglei state. As a refugee in Khartoum, like many others, he did not go to the Anglican mainline Church he nominally belonged to, but joined the born-again Christians of the SIM movement. Following visionary inspirations he had in Khartoum, he travelled to Egypt, where he says he founded a number of Churches along the Nile, but where according to other versions his constant prophetic activities created so much unrest in existing congregations that he regularly founded schismatic Churches with small bands of adherents. Abraham gained great popularity within the Sudanese diaspora community in Cairo, where he became known as a broker between the Sudanese community and the Egyptian government. He took care of administrative processes, for example when the dead had to be buried and no gravesites could be had or other congregational matters, and he gathered experience in the organization of a Church. Finally, he had a vision calling him to return to South Sudan, to found an international Cush Church there, and to work God’s wonders for the people of Cush. His activities had brought him together with the primary actors of the transnational, Evangelical media networks – for example with the aforementioned Zacharias Boutros. In practical terms, these contacts helped him to build up his Church in South Sudan when he was able to persuade a former migrant to Cairo, now working at a commercial radio station in Juba, to allow him broadcast time, after the Catholic radio station had cancelled his program because of his attacks on the Catholic Church.

I received most of my information on this prophetic movement in an interview with Abraham and two of his assistants that lasted several hours in a luxury hotel in Juba (December 2011). He and his assistants gave me access to their "Book of Testimonies", in which they have gathered and photographically documented all the wonders that happened during Abraham’s crusades and cleansing works in Juba. The history of the founding of the Church synthesizes various biblical motifs (Gifford, 2004), in particular (i) the differentiation narrative of the message of faith, according to which the (born-again) Christians are saved, while all others place themselves outside salvation history, (ii) as well as the overcoming of demonic possession. His calling is realized in a struggle against evil powers that resemble the pre-Christian earth divinities of the Dinka. Hardly had he arrived in Juba, Abraham wandered, fasting, through the streets waiting for a sign from God as to how he should design his program. In dreams, seven giants appeared to him, threatening him with death, and he resisted them. He realized that he had to cleanse Juba’s topography of these
powers and began to gather followers. In the first months, he seems to have lived and worked in the rooms of the Christian student union at Juba University. There he was able to recruit especially capable assistants, who joined him in organizing crusades. With their help, he established his political broadcast for the land of Cush, which manifested itself in the proclamation of the Gospels and in God-pleasing cleansing works. He thus (iii) implemented the biblical motif of the God-pleasing leader, in whose following alone God's blessing of his adherents is manifested (Gifford, 2004, p. 23).

Within two years, Abraham had gathered a large prophetic movement around him. Every day it offered Bible studies and singing courses on the public square, where in the 2011 Christmas season several hundreds of followers convened for religious services in the street. On crusades, he cleansed the city of magical forces and Satanic (earth) spirits and established a topography of Christian power, for example by rechristening Jebel Kujur, as Jebel Isū', Mount Jesus (in a language of the Nuba Mountains, kujur originally designated an indigenous presider over rituals, but connotes in today's Juba Arabic "sorcerer", Jebel Kujur meaning the mountain of "spirits" and "demons" (James, 2014, p.335). Inasmuch as Christ's Second Coming had been announced with the founding of the Cush Empire, Abraham's movement proved to be a millenarian movement that had to cleanse the country for the implementation of the universal empire of salvation.

Illustration 2. The prophet on a crusade

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The manuscript of the *Book of Testimonies* says:

“Cush International Church is pleased to announce the release of the untold stories (testimonies) of the divine healing of God in our land. God has remembered us and has shown himself to those who seek him in his glory and power through Divine manifestation in their lives by signs and wonders. The nation of Cush and Cush Land is witnessing the Divine visitation and restoration of the Almighty God. God is setting his children free from the bondage of sin, disease, poverty, failure and all sorts of suffering. Cush International Church having received the Vision, Purpose and Will of God for Cush Land has been instrumental in taking the Cush Land for Christ through Prophetic Evangelism.” (Testimonies, 2011: 4)

**Nation Building / Church Building**

As we have learned from Gellner, the nation must presuppose what it wants to embody – for example, a national identity that it must first create through its institutions (Gellner, 1983). During my fieldwork in Juba, representatives of the SPLM have repeatedly formulated to me – the German ethnologist – that *identity reconstruction* is the central project for reintegrating returning refugees. This ongoing project not only presupposes what must first be achieved (the nation), it must also tap the resources to be used to this end. Crucial to this are the procedural demands made by the countless state organizations and international NGOs currently gathered in Juba. These demands must be met if a group, a bureaucratic procedure, or a cause is to be recognized and funded. In his study of aid to development, Richard Rottenburg showed that cooperation in transnationally spanned organizations – as in all bureaucracies – becomes possible through standardization, in his case through accounting forms and lists that set monies in motion and that enable control of the various paths of circulation (Rottenburg, 2009). These bureaucratic practices are essentially media practices that enable and shape cooperation with various partners across time and space. The emerging South Sudanese state, too, is subject to the demands of the “ongoing accomplishment” of its realization (Garfinkel, 1967). Neither the state’s monopoly of power nor its master narrative are fully developed, and so they must prove themselves anew again and again in course of their implementation. For the international financial backers and for people on site, procedures are thereby central that bring forth what they simultaneously presuppose: a nation and/or a Church.

As we saw above, the Cush movement legitimates itself by recourse to the Bible and is tied to a promise of a rosy future that will be implemented in a newly installed (and newly named) religious topography that is symbolized in the movement’s emblem:

In their efforts for orderly methods of tapping and distributing resources, Abraham and his associates drew up operation plans for the religious services and radio broadcasts, set up a central office, and trained missionaries with the aid of experienced adherents from Egypt. The goal was the establishment of the “United States of Cush” as laid out in the “back of testimonies”:

“[T]he book of Zephaniah also speaks of Cushites as people of prayers or intercessors “my worshippers”. Our intercessory prayer mission will bring about God’s seasons for us and other nations of the world. The revelation of the new nation of Cush is confirmed after 10 years of powerful intercessory prayers. However, this vision is put into 3 categories:

1. The rising nation of Cush (South Sudan) as the nucleus for the nation of Greater Cush. Isaiah 18:3 “All inhabitants of the world and dwellers of the earth. When he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you’ll see it; and when he blows a trumpet, you’ll hear it.”

This rising nation will serve as the nucleus for the bigger nation of Cush. This Nucleus will take about 10 – 12 years to come to its maturity i.e. to shape its identity, entity and destiny as foretold by the Prophets in the Bible.

2. The nation (Republic) of Cush

This will be made up of all the various break away parts of the current state of North, Western, Eastern, and Central Sudan coming together to form a stronger Republic under God’s guidance and leadership through his appointed servants. Gathering these parts will take about 15 years to realize.

3. The whole Cush United States which originates from the roots, identity and destiny (i.e. the spirit of nationalism and the citizenship:) will be made up of all the neighboring states found in the ancient land of Cush from Lake Victoria in Uganda up to Alexandria in Egypt, the ancient Biblical land of Exodus and Babylon. Realizing this dream will take about another 25-50 years of formation, establishment and full work as a Nation (Greater Cush)
4. The unity of Cushites around the world and other nations coming to the will of God may also take about 1 century." (Testimonies, 2011, p. 6).

The Cush movement’s cleansing works for the establishment of a salvatory historical order become understandable as part of situated modernization strategies in the context of recent processes in Juba. With the formation of the state and the massive presence of international organizations, Juba developed into a hot spot of international interconnections. As if magically, more and more organizations and people in search of access to resources and the suitable procedure for obtaining a share of these resources appeared to be drawn to this hot spot. Similarly to how the SPLM monopolized political events in postwar South Sudan, Church matters in the new State are monopolized by the Sudan Council of Churches. The two organizations are very closely interlocked, and the Sudan Council of Churches was and is a weighty political player. In the long decades of the civil war, representatives of the Council acquired and administered monies from international, usually Christian, aid organizations like Brot für die Welt and Operation Mercy. The Sudanese Church’s stipend fund financed the education of South Sudanese students in Uganda and Kenya, who now occupy important positions in the government apparatus. In collaboration with the Lutheran Church of Germany (EKD), rival sections of the rebel army were brought to one table and talks with North Sudan were mediated. As can be read in a Christian history of the Churches in Sudan, the Council’s increasing politicization has been a difficult and controversial matter. The more its work concentrated on keeping records and making lists to secure the money transfers from Brot für die Welt, Oxfam, the GIZ, etc., the less distinguishable the organization was from the other NGOs; this paradoxically threatened the loss of important Christian donor organizations for which these procedures had been specifically developed (Werner, Anderson, Wheeler 2010). At the same time, in the 1980s, Nuer and Dinka prophets appeared, like today’s Abraham, who decisively positioned themselves against dependence on international donor organization and who drew believers with a local revival movement (Johnson, 1994, Hutchinson, 1996, 2001). While Abraham clearly draws from the monotheistic traditions by using the Arabic notion of “nabi” (prophet), he, too, insists on the independence from international, and especially Western support. I could make donations, he explained to me, but not actively take part in the development project of a Cush Church. “Previously, God was revealed to us by men like Reinhard Bonnke,” his assistant added, “but today God’s power and miracles are manifested through the prophet for the people of Cush.” How threatened the established actors in Juba’s religio-political structure felt was revealed by two attempts to evict the Cush Church from its dusty site (to this day, the construction of a cathedral remains an ideal). Once, the army was sent in; it drove the people apart with live ammunition and injured some of them. Another time, in January 2012, schoolchildren cleared the grounds “to be able to learn”, as they proclaimed, thereby violently articulating their own modernization ambitions.

With the many migrant workers, sub-Saharan mega-churches also streamed into the country and drew up strategies to “take possession” of the city, as the pastor of the Nigerian “Winner’s Chapel” put it, and to turn people’s strivings for modernization into a following. The different Christian organizations, movements and churches compete with each other for followers.
by government officials in the various disputes that have emerged in the last couple of years, e.g. about its claim to the public square in order to gather its followers and as to build a cathedral, his movement has been successful in consolidating its position in the religious landscape in and outside Juba. Continuous press statements by the Catholic Church and the Sudan Council of Churches on presumed charlatanry of Abraham – not only claiming to heal HIV but also to raise believers from the dead – testify to the continuous public impact of his movement. Film clips and photos on YouTube and Facebook show followers in the hundreds during gatherings, while my interlocutors in Juba mentioned thousands and the prophet and his assistants spoke of ten-thousands convening for his crusades.

Claims to Modernization

This complex of institutions and bureaucratic processes is not the background against which local social practices unfolded or translocal practices were implemented. Rather, they are a part of these practices. The government, the United Nations, the NGOs, the Churches – they all appear with a claim to modernization through which resources can be tapped and transnational networks can be accessed. Convergences thereby arise, for example collaboration between the government and Churches, as does competition to find the right cooperation partner. The city of Juba, already exponentially expanded by streams of refugees has downright exploded since the state’s founding came into view, while the various actors with politically ambitions throng here. Their (respective) standardized procedures conveyed the promise of orderly participation in modern institutions like education, health care, paid employment, and not least international networking. But not only the organizations, also the local actors had modernization claims and pursued modernization strategies. Migrant laborers, the migrants returning from Khartoum, Brussels, and Rotterdam, and the people who survived the local civil war, were all trying to use local resources and transnational connections to secure a share in economic and political processes and to gain scope for action.

What is the Evangelical movement’s specific promise of modernization? In Europe or Khartoum, it offers the first generation of converts a way to compensate for the disadvantage of separation during the migration process through the advantages of various connections. The Sudanese Christians in Europe, for example, visit a Cush Church in Den Haag once a month, meet at the aforementioned Arabic-speaking, interdenominational conferences in Belgium and Holland, and cultivate contacts with successful preachers and other Arabic-speaking Christians in Europe, whose commitment to action extends into Sudan – where they help young Sudanese to explore opportunities for education and new pathways to individual success – and last but not least in State formation. Conversion – from other Christian Churches as well as from Islam – promises people in all the sites of this transnational movement a departure for several universalistic horizons: (i) that of Christianity, (ii) through assistance and intra-congregational social disciplining, that of professional success, (iii) the prospect of new migration routes leading all across the world and back to the countries of origin, and (iv) the means by which to organize their affairs effectively on site. The invention of a pre-Arab identity, whether

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Christian, Coptic, or Cush, presupposes and anticipates a collective that uses these media platforms to seek powerful, transnational cooperation partners. And it finds them, for example, in the Christian Right in the United States, a form of cooperation that, according to my SPLM interlocutors, not least accomplished a turnaround in US policy toward South Sudan.

The appeal of charismatic Churches and other movements that act supra-locally and emphasize their global connections lies in the claim to open up and enhance agency on site. Certain techniques and procedures, like singing and dancing, praying and working, preparing lists and developing plans for further procedure, aim to tap resources that help one to become what one already anticipated with conversion: a saved Christian and part of a salvatory history.

Cleansing the city of impure spirits and things is accompanied by the adherents’ self-cleansing. The movement is characterized by body practices in which the adepts are filled with the Holy Spirit. In the ritual I took part in, we gathered in a circle after a Bible study session and the adepts tried for about 30 minutes to attain visions by constant ecstatic jumping, shouting, and weeping. Abraham turns the knowledge of macropolitical and administrative processes he gathered in Egypt into a clear Church program, which he seeks to realize with his movement and to translate into political power, namely the aforementioned establishment of a Cush Empire stretching from Lake Victoria to the Euphrates. It seems to me that a crucial aspect of the success of the Evangelical movements – as of other religious reform movements – is that they make a change of scale possible. Practices on the micro-level of personal relationships are transposed to universalistic horizons and the scope for individual options for action is recast.

But the movement’s universalistic program is realized thoroughly subjectively in constantly repeated body techniques that evoke local formats of religious prophecy. Like other Nilotic prophets before him, Abraham purifies places and bodies in order to charge them with the power of “the Supreme Being” and connects local history with universal revelation. Claiming prophecy in the Christian-Judaic tradition (nabi Abraham), he draws all available resources on site together: “[W]here religion incorporates the visions of a prophet, it can be said to be a revealed religion; and where there is prophecy, there is also history.” (Johnson, 1994, p. 356).

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