REPORT

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PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

Informal armies

Community defence groups in South Sudan's civil war

February 2017

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Abbreviations

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
REMNASA	Revolutionary Movement for National Salvation
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SPLA-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Army-In-Opposition
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
SPLA/M-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement-In-Opposition
SSDA/M	South Sudan Democratic Army/Movement
SSNLM	South Sudan National Liberation Movement
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

Preface

Paul Murphy

THE FOLLOWING COLLECTION OF REFLECTIONS on aspects of community (and state) security in South Sudan is a valuable example of the type of locally-grounded analysis that has been missing from the last decade of statebuilding engagement. I remember well the excitement and hopefulness that accompanied the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. But even then, it was striking how the task of addressing underlying grievances from decades of conflict and securing basic public safety and security (both fundamental building blocks for future peace) were relegated by decision makers in the rush to establish an interim period of southern governance. Twelve years later, the human and political cost of side-stepping these 'fundamentals' has exceeded our worst imaginings, especially since 2013. Unthinkable violence and abuse has followed, immobilising critical thinking and strategic actions to stop violence and re-set the country on a credible pathway to peace.

So in what way are these essays on community defence groups helpful when considering South Sudan's future? At the outset, they cast a nuanced understanding of some of the different ways communities seek to protect their lives and assets in a context where government institutions either don't exist, or can no longer be depended upon. This is not to deny the sometimes extraordinary dedication of individuals scattered across South Sudan who offer communities degrees of safety or justice, whether as a police officer, judge or community leader. But in the end, many citizens have no other option but to mobilise, making community defence groups as relevant today as they have been in the past.

The collection sheds light on the purpose, complexity and sophistication behind a small number of these groups: the *gelweng*/*titweng*, White Armies and arrow boys. Tracing their historical and community roots, the essays untangle the myths and romanticism that have often coloured depictions of their role. Such groups have been heavily shaped by South Sudan's conflicts and have frequently fallen into the manipulative hands of self-seeking political leaders. They have sometimes helped achieve relative security, or contributed to local peace agreements. More frequently however they have exacerbated violence, presenting harsh dilemmas for vulnerable community members involved. At the same time, defence groups pose critical policy dilemmas for South Sudan's fledgling state – incorporate, disband or transform them? To ignore them, as the collection makes clear, is not a viable option.

The authors make no suggestion that local defence groups can fill the vacuum created by the absence of a functioning state security system. Rather, by highlighting how communities are *actually* responding to insecurity, the collection's value lies in helping

identify entry points, actors and local concerns that should inform measures to restore peaceful coexistence and build a more responsive security system in South Sudan in the long term. The safety of citizens and communities will need to be placed at the centre of these endeavours.

Undoubtedly, the journey to transform the drivers and effects of violence will require immense political courage and sustained investment at every level of the state. But moving beyond our traditional approaches to security building – and recognising the significant and complex role that actors outside the state play in community lives – must be central to that process. Let's begin by putting the realities in front of us and be ready to engage with South Sudan's informal and emerging state security institutions.

1

Introduction

The state, security and community defence groups in South Sudan

Jok Madut Jok

SOUTH SUDAN WAS BORN OF A HISTORY OF ARMED STRUGGLE. During the long second civil war against the government of Sudan (1983–2005), it was rendered one of the most war-ravaged places on earth, as a result of damage inflicted directly by the Sudanese state and by South Sudanese themselves in the course of fighting each other as they fought the north. What was then Southern Sudan experienced multi-level splits within the armed movements, even as they agreed on the goals of liberation. As such, at independence, the challenges of becoming a unified, cohesive, stable and successful state could not be any more daunting, given the history of violent acrimony.

This history has left a serious burden on the country's psyche and shoulders. Much of the violence that has now come to engulf the world's newest country is unquestionably rooted in that history, as well as in the deficits of post-independence statecraft and nation-building, or perhaps in the shortcomings or failure of those endeavours. To manage this burden of history requires a complex and nuanced combination of efforts. It involves sifting through a growing subculture of violence produced by that protracted liberation war, examining the changing livelihood landscapes at communal levels, understanding the crumbling social order and coming to terms with the nation's weak security sector and rule of law. This is a potent mix that has to be carefully studied and understood if the dreams of the population for a stable country and human security are to become a reality.

Background: South Sudan's complex security challenges

On security issues, the sigh of relief that greeted the signing of the CPA in 2005, which ended the two-decade north-south war, was short lived. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) retreated to the north and with them went the indiscriminate aerial attacks, torture and repression that had characterised the relationship between civilians and army in the southern garrison towns. Also gone was Khartoum's recruitment of counter-insurgency militias within the south, which had pitted ethnic groups against each other. But it was not long before these threats were replaced by different sources of

1 In October 2015, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir decreed that the country's ten states would be sub-divided into 28 states, a measure that was subsequently approved by parliament. This article refers primarily to the ten state borders that existed prior to the announcement, for ease of reference only.

insecurity, some home-grown, some building on the history of SAF involvement in the south and others coming from across the border.

Violence continued to claim just as many if not more lives as the north-south war had done in a similar period. There were recurrent and deadly episodes of cattle rustling in seven out of then ten states.[1] Various fighting forces sprung up, some left over from the war days and others created at communal levels as defence measures against the increasing levels of violence and to confront the decline of human security all across the country. Rebellions emerged within South Sudan's army – the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) – as soldiers reacted to their exclusion from the gains of peace and others protested alleged rigging by the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) during the 2010 general elections in favour of party cadres who lacked local support. Some episodes of violence took on ethnic dimensions, sowing the seeds of discord that paved the way for the 2013 civil war.

All these dynamics wreaked incredible havoc. Communities bought into the myth that more arms meant increased security. But the more guns that South Sudanese – civilian and combatant alike – had in their possession, the less secure everyone became. Nowhere did it become more evident than in South Sudan that a society where everyone is armed on the pretext of self-defence is a society where no one can be assured of safety. This is the climate in which the so-called White Armies in Greater Upper Nile, the arrow boys in Equatoria and the *titweng* or *gelweng* in Bahr el Ghazal were all formed, primarily as community defence outfits but in some cases later turning violent and unwieldy, in ways community leaders who initially supported their formation could not have predicted, or can now rein in. These groups have put the government in a dilemma. To support them as extensions of its security apparatus risks outsourcing a dangerous enterprise to entities that are not constrained by the central command and control of the national army. To disband them or fight them as they become sources of insecurity risks further militarising community-state relationships. Their removal also risks creating a security vacuum that the state is currently fundamentally unable to fill.

Drivers of community mobilisation

Community protection forces have their origins in historical patterns of community mobilisation in South Sudan and the intensification of violence from 1983, when South Sudan started the second Sudanese civil war against the government in Khartoum. Since then, and despite the north-south war, which united southerners against the government in the north, much fighting occurred within South Sudan. This has followed three interconnected tracks.

The first is resistance against the Sudanese state's armies by local communities that were targeted by SAF and its allied militias. Threats to communities were particularly acute along the north-south borders during the liberation era. During this period, especially between 1986 and 2002, the Khartoum government collaborated with or encouraged and armed Baggara Arab militias from South Darfur and South Kordofan known as the *Muraheleen*, and used them to attack Dinka and Nuer because these communities formed the support base of the SPLA. In response, the Dinka of Northern Bahr el Ghazal organised bands of armed youth to fight the *Muraheleen*. Dinka youths were sometimes assisted by the SPLA or directly recruited and armed by it, making them an informal extension of the SPLA's fighting strategy. This was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, these forces provided much-needed protection against the *Muraheleen*. On the other, their presence and mixing into civilian areas, including residential villages, exposed entire villages to indiscriminate reprisal attacks by the Sudanese army. It was different groups of these armed youth that eventually developed into the so-called *titweng* or *gelweng* – 'cattle guards'.

The second strand is the political contest for power within the various liberation movements during the civil war, which continued into a contest for state power when South Sudan became autonomous in 2005 and then independent in 2011. This type of

violence happens when political leaders draw their local communities into political contests that are fundamentally individual power struggles. This dynamic was central to the evolution of the *titweng* or *gelweng*, which morphed into an informal militia after the 1991 split in the SPLA, when Riek Machar and Lam Akol broke away, eventually forming SPLA-United (led by Lam Akol) and the South Sudan Independence Movement (led by Riek Machar). With backing from Khartoum, these splinter groups fought against the main SPLA under John Garang. What was predominantly a personal battle for power eventually degenerated into a Nuer-Dinka confrontation, at least in Jonglei and along the Western Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal border, as leaders pulled their civilian populations into violence.

Armed groups such as the *gelweng* and *titweng* on the Dinka side became central to that confrontation, defending Garang's faction of the SPLA, but with devastating consequences for the communities where they operated. When Kerebino Kuanyin Bol, along with several prominent SPLA commanders, joined SPLA-United and stationed himself back in his home territory of Gogrial and Twic, offshoots of the *titweng* developed into local defence forces against Kerebino's forces. This pattern consolidated later on, when some politicians who failed to win office through peaceful means reached for the ethnic card and, drawing their ethnic constituencies – their political support base – into violence, turned their individual quests for power into a matter of survival for their entire ethnic communities. This has played very prominently into the ongoing civil war that erupted in late 2013.

The third stream of violence is localised competition for resources that has occurred along ethnic lines, and which often escalates into all out ethnic warfare. The raiding and counter-raiding between the Dinka of Warrap and the Nuer of Unity State, among the Agar Dinka of Lakes, and in Jonglei State between Dinka, Murle and Nuer, have been some of the most deadly in South Sudan over the past ten years. This type of violence often becomes protracted due to the inability of the state to contain armed groups, disarm civilians and monopolise the legitimate use of force. The result is that large-scale destruction and deaths have continued for years, devastating communities. On the occasion this type of conflict abates, it often does so without a political resolution and without investigation, compensation or justice for the victims. Ends are often temporary, and happen when fighters get tired of war, run out of ammunition or food, when well-known militia leaders move away or join the SPLA, or when the onset of the rainy season causes people to turn to cultivation. But these unsettled conflicts strain ethnic relations for long periods of time, leaving communities with a sense of injustice and injuring dignity in a sub-culture where men feel an obligation to avenge past incidents of aggression. And in the absence of the state, some communities are left to fend for themselves, allowing a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge to become the only form of justice available to rural communities where government is virtually absent.

All these strands connect to cause pervasive militarisation among South Sudan's population. Community militia have often been formed for self-defence in conflicts between competing communities. They have also been deployed against the state's armies, particularly when communities suspect formal forces are not neutral. They have been appropriated by politicians protesting missed positions in government. The following chapters address each of these drivers. Common to all of the groups is their roots in ethnic groups or region. In other words, they are responses to the localised nature of violence and a suspicion that the state has become monopolised by some ethnic groups while others are excluded, forcing them to rely on their own means of defence. In this way, the community defence groups reviewed here differ from other armed actors, including those with political identities and objectives.

The arrow boys, the subject of one of the chapters in this collection, was formed locally when groups of Azande young men found themselves without a choice but to protect their communities and property from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), who from 2005 began attacking their villages, abducting children and displacing people from

their homes. The LRA, a rebel movement with its origins in northern Uganda, is arguably one of the most vicious non-state armed actors still operating on the African continent. When the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), with the aid of the United States Marines, finally chased the LRA out of Uganda, it entered South Sudan's Western Equatoria. Their retreat in 2011 was due to a combination of efforts and political events, including a reduction in support from the Khartoum Government, UPDF collaboration with the United States Marines, the 2005 International Criminal Court indictment of LRA lead Joseph Kony and South Sudan's 2006 attempts to broker a peace deal between Kampala and the group. But it was the arrow boys that managed to reduce LRA attacks and the young men were praised widely, including by leaders in the national government in Juba and by the SPLA command in Western Equatoria. The justification for forming the arrow boys played out and bore fruit.

Developments since 2011 however have changed the dynamics of civilian mobilisation in Western Equatoria. The first was the outbreak of the new civil war, which saw the arrow boys gradually become drawn into conflict with the SPLA. Secondly, other militia groups began to emerge led by actors with political ambitions beyond community defence. The proliferation of security actors in Western Equatoria has complicated the security scene there significantly.

There is already a long list of militias who have used their informal fighting roles as assets they could sell to the government or opposition. The government may be tempted to absorb them into the army in order to buy peace, as these groups have the potential to disrupt stability if they are not accommodated, and to join the opposition in a war that had already gained disastrous momentum. But rushing to integrate them into the army, as had been the norm for many years since the CPA, means that the SPLA is being kept at ransom until it puts everyone with a gun on the payroll. Given the size of South Sudan's army, which includes a number of generals unprecedented in Africa, further absorptions bankrupt the country while failing to contribute to efficiency and professionalisation.

The second group is the *titweng* or *gelweng* – cattle guards in Dinka – whose involvement in intra-SPLA fighting during the 1990s marked some of the worst south-on-south violence during the long civil war. Some of the *gelweng* were absorbed into the SPLA and others returned to civilian life. The majority however remained cattle guards on the Warrap-Unity-Lakes tri-state border, engaging in seasonal fighting internally, with the Nuer and with the *Murahileen*. In his chapter, Professor Luka Biong Deng Kuol describes the changing role of the *gelweng* since the second Sudanese civil war, which has seen fierce internecine fighting in Lakes State and Bahr el Ghazal. The communities in these locations face a perpetual dilemma of both needing locally-organised defence forces and facing few options when the same forces threaten local security. What the government should do about them is also uncertain. To disarm them is operationally hard, and needs to be done evenly across communities. To allow them to continue means ceding the state's control over security.

The third group in the study is Jonglei's White Armies. In their chapter, Ingrid Breidlid and Michael Arensen highlight the origins of the White Armies in old patterns of Nuer mobilisation. They have since evolved however to become perhaps the best known and most feared of all South Sudan's non-state fighting forces. Their infamy derives from a mix of mythical stories of prophecy about South Sudan's independence and the history of local confrontations among and between ethnic groups, including Nuer, Dinka and Murle. This chapter however illustrates that the White Armies – their origins, linkages to Nuer society, and leadership structures – are more complex than popular narratives suggest. Those factors underlie the White Armies' ability to mobilise in significant numbers, and are what have made Nuer forces such a desirable ally among political leaders. The White Armies were mobilised against the Sudanese army as early as the 1970s, against the SPLA from time to time, and for local confrontations with neighboring ethnic communities.

These local confrontations are fuelled by revenge for past incidents of killing, cattle rustling, abduction of children and competition for dry season grazing lands. Jonglei has long-entrenched community feuds that reach back decades, but feuds have taken a more deadly turn following the CPA. From 2006, violent attacks between Murle youth and Lou Nuer were frequent, in 2011 culminating in a 6000-man strong assault on the Murle. The incident underlined the potential for South Sudan's ethnic disputes to escalate at any time. Besides the history mentioned above, these deadly attacks are made recurrent by two realities that are not likely to be resolved in the near future: namely, an absence of justice in the wake of attacks that leaves revenge the only recourse available to South Sudanese citizens and the failure of the state to provide protection.

The White Armies' more recent growth can also be found in elite political rivalries for control of state power, where the White Armies are sometimes used to augment one's power base and leverage position in power-sharing negotiations. When Lou Nuer youth mobilised at the outset of the new conflict, Riek Machar, the former Vice President, and other prominent Nuer politicians responded quickly to cooperate with the forces in Jonglei and Eastern Upper Nile. Lou Nuer youth and the Nuer political leadership found common ground, with the former angered by the massacres in Juba and eager to protect Nuer civilians and the latter needing to swell its forces.

The following chapters put a spotlight on these complex dynamics. In doing so, they help outline the bases for a more informed approach to peacemaking in South Sudan – and to tackling some of the security dilemmas at the heart of the current crisis.

2

Arrow boys, armed groups and the SPLA:

Intensifying insecurity in the Western Equatorian states

Mareike Schomerus and Charles Taban

i. Introduction

IN JUNE 2016, the road leading towards the small town of Ezo in South Sudan's new Gbudue State was impassable: large trees were strewn across it, cut down and placed there by an armed group hiding in the vast bushland alongside the road.[2] The purpose of blocking the road was to impede the government army, the SPLA, and to make it possible to rob civilian cars that were passing through.

The group hiding in the bush answered to a leader called Alfred Futiyo (or Futuyo). At the same time, in Yambio, the capital of Gbudue State in Western Equatoria, a leader of another armed group – James Kabila of the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) – was moving around town with government-supplied body-guards and an entourage that announced his new status as a military big man. He had been elevated to this status after leading armed violence in the region in late 2015 and early 2016. He and his group had signed a peace deal with the South Sudanese government in April 2016. The agreement provided that Kabila's troops would be retrained and integrated into the national army.

Both groups – Alfred Futiyo's men in the bush and James Kabila's, now in a government training camp – are part of an increasingly complicated security landscape in the three Western Equatorian states. Now comprising Maridi, Gbudue and Amadi states, the Western Equatorian region has experienced high levels of violence since mid-2015. The years 2005 to 2016 saw brutal attacks on civilians in major towns and surrounding areas -including Yambio, Ezo and Source Yubu – violent clashes between the SPLA and armed groups, and fighting linked to livestock movement. Several groups have announced new rebellions against the government. Civilians have been targeted and are suffering from hunger due to the closing of roads.

This tumultuous security scene is often misleadingly attributed to a group of young men who once protected their own communities and are now seen to have turned

2 In October 2015, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir decreed that the country's ten states would be sub-divided into 28 states, a measure that was subsequently approved by parliament. This chapter refers to those new 28 state borders.

against them: Western Equatoria's so-called arrow boys. This depiction overlooks the important role civilian protection groups have played in Western Equatoria, the incentives that drive the various armed actors that have emerged since 2014 and the broader developments in South Sudan that have contributed to increasing insecurity in this region.

This chapter sheds light on the political and security context in Western Equatoria in which recent developments can be better understood. Sections i and ii trace the history of the arrow boys and their former role and links this history to emerging new actors. Section iii situates these developments in South Sudan's wider civil war and the 2015 peace agreement. A concluding section draws out implications for engagement with the security situation in Western Equatoria in particular and with armed groups in South Sudan more generally.

The chapter draws on empirical material collected in Western Equatoria since 2006 in addition to interviews conducted with residents of Maridi State in early 2016 and in Gbudue State in June and July 2016. Some of the conclusions presented are based on previously published research by the author.

ii. Background: who are the arrow boys?

The challenges of designation

Labelling perpetrators of violence in South Sudan is always difficult. Titles claimed by or applied to rebel groups can suggest a level of stability in their aims and membership that is rare in South Sudan's shifting security landscape. Armed violence is more often characterised by side-switching, changing loyalties and incentives, also because actors respond to opportunities generated by peace deals and security reforms.[3] The security scene in Western Equatoria is no less complex, and has become ever more changeable since insecurity intensified in 2015.

Some important actor groups can nonetheless be identified. This chapter uses the term 'arrow boys' to describe civilian groups that between 2005 and 2015 were the main provider of civilian protection. 'Armed groups' describes movements that have emerged as part of South Sudan's ongoing civil war since 2013 and have made political claims or announced their loyalty to the SPLM-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO).[4] A third category – 'disgruntled SPLA' – describes particular armed groups that have their roots in discontent within the army. 'Unknown gunmen' has become a prominent term for those committing crimes without any discernible political agenda or readily identifiable alliances. Unidentified armed groups have also engaged in fighting with the government army, the SPLA.[5]

These are not clear-cut categories: there can be – and has been – overlap between them. Members of the arrow boys have also joined the ranks of armed groups and periodically aligned with disgruntled SPLA soldiers. But drawing distinctions is necessary to highlight that not all groups in the region are the same and that differing incentives, security functions and identities need to be taken into account in programme interventions that aim to bring peace and stability to the region.[6]

Origins in community protection

The term 'arrow boys' was for years used to describe community-based protection militias that emerged in the mid-2000s to protect civilians from attacks by the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).[7] The 'arrow boys' – named after their

3 For analysis on this process in other contexts, see Seymour L J M (2014), 'Why Factions Switch Sides in Civil Wars: Rivalry, Patronage and Realignment in Sudan', *International Security* **3**, pp 600–617.

4 South Sudan News Agency (2015), 'Former Western Equatoria State's minister joins rebellion, vows to topple "kiir's tribal regime"', 24 November.

5 Radio Tamazuj (2015), 'Understanding new violence in South Sudan's Western Equatoria', 10 October.

6 *Ibid*.

7 Schomerus M, Tumutegyereize K (2009), 'After Operation Lightning Thunder: Protecting communities and building peace' (London: Conciliation Resources); Koos C (2014), 'Why and How Civil Defense Militias Emerge: The Case of the Arrow Boys in South Sudan', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* **37**, pp 1039–1057.

primary weapons – mobilised in 2005 following the movement of the LRA from Eastern Equatoria into Western Equatoria along the Congolese border, where they attacked communities in 2005 and again from late 2008. Attacks were interrupted by two years of peace talks from 2006 mediated by the vice president of what was then the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan, Riek Machar.[8] Many residents in Western Equatoria were critical of Machar's engagement with the LRA. An agreement to designate an area in Western Equatoria's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as the official assembly area of the LRA kept the armed group in the area, which was threatening even during the times when the LRA did not attack. It was clear during peaceful times that there would be no meaningful protection of civilians. Movements by Ambororo nomads in the area added to security fears. While very few violent incidents involving the Ambororo were ever confirmed, rumours of Ambororo collaboration with the LRA increased citizens' perception that effective protection was urgently needed.[9]

The formation of the arrow boys was thus a response to a clearly identifiable security threat. Patrick Zamoyoa, state governor for Western Equatoria in 2005 (who returned to the post in 2015) supported the formation of the protection militia. Such political support for the arrow boys' activities by the state government and later the central government was an implicit acknowledgement that neither SPLA nor the UN forces present in the area at the time were able to effectively protect communities from LRA attacks.[10]

Among Western Equatorians, the SPLA's failure to respond to the LRA threat confirmed long-held perceptions of marginalisation by the Juba government. Western Equatorians regularly express frustration about the lack of recognition for their contribution to the SPLA war effort during the 1983 to 2005 second Sudanese civil war.[11] People complain that the region missed out on many of the benefits of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Another concern is that the SPLA regularly fails to act in the interests of Western Equatorians, which residents link to low representation of their region in the national army.[12] There are also fears among local farmers that farmland is under threat of being taken over for cattle grazing. This has created tensions between Western Equatorians and cattle keepers migrating into the area from further north; these tensions have at times turned violent, most notably in 2005 and 2015.

From late 2008 until 2014, the arrow boys mainly operated in rural areas along the border with the DRC where they patrolled and responded to attacks. With the majority of Western Equatorians dependent on agriculture and hunting, the arrow boys functioned superbly in the remote bush along the border with the DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR), for them both hunting ground and farm land.

During this period, which marked the height of the arrow boys' activity, there were very few incidents reported in which the the arrow boys did not act in the interest of their communities. Continued community support for the arrow boys shows that they were seen as a legitimate actor.[13] One notable exception came in June 2013, when close

8 Schomerus M (2008), 'Violent Legacies: Insecurity in Sudan's Central and Eastern Equatoria', Working Paper 13 (Geneva: The Small Arms Survey); Schomerus M (2007), 'The Lord's Resistance Army in Sudan: A History and Overview', Working Paper 8 (Geneva: The Small Arms Survey); Gordon S, Vandewint C, Lehmeier S, (2007), 'Reluctant Hosts: The Impact of the Lord's Resistance Army on Communities in Western Equatoria State, Southern Sudan' (Nairobi: World Vision).

9 Schomerus M, De Vries L (2014), 'Improvising border security: "A Situation of Security Pluralism" along South Sudan's Borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo', *Security Dialogue* **45**, pp 1–16; Schomerus M, Allen T (2010), 'Southern Sudan at odds with itself: Dynamics of conflict and predicaments of peace' (London: LSE/DESTIN/Pact Sudan/DfID).

10 Schomerus M (2015), *Protection and militarisation in Western Equatoria*, USAID/VISTAS; Schomerus M, De Vries L (2014), 'Improvising border security: "A Situation of Security Pluralism" along South Sudan's Borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo', *Security Dialogue* **45**, pp 1–16.

11 Schomerus M (2014), 'Policy of Government and Policy of Culture: Understanding the Rules of Law in the "Context" of South Sudan's Western Equatoria State' In: Marshall D, Rosenbaum M (eds) *The International Rule of Law Movement: A Crisis of Legitimacy and the Way Forward* (Cambridge: Harvard Law School Human Rights Programme/Harvard University Press).

12 *Ibid*.

13 For detailed information on community attitudes towards the arrow boys, see Rigterink A S, Kenyi J J, Schomerus M (2016), 'Report of the Justice and Security Research Programme survey in Ezo and Tambura Counties, South Sudan' (London: London School of Economics and Political Science); Schomerus M, Rigterink A (2016), 'Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in South Sudan: The Case of Western Equatorias Arrow Boys' (Waterloo: Center for Security Governance); Rigterink A S, Kenyi J J, Schomerus M (2014), 'Report of the Justice and Security Research Programme Survey in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan' (London: London School of Economics and Political Science).

to 100 arrow boys from Tambura County launched a cross-border attack on armed forces in the town of Obo in CAR. The circumstances and reasons for the attack – during which seven arrow boys died in custody – remain unclear.[14]

The community's response to the LRA threat, through the arrow boys, was widely acknowledged to be more effective than that of any other armed forces stationed in the area. From 2008 onwards, these other armed forces prominently included the Ugandan army and then later also US military advisers, in addition to the SPLA and UN troops. American and Ugandan soldiers regularly consulted the arrow boys and periodically furnished them with equipment in exchange for information.[15]

Structure, command and relationship with the state

Since the formation of the arrow boys, membership had been fluid and not limited by age or sex.[16] Core groups were often made up of young men, who would suspend their livelihood activities, such as farming or hunting, to go on patrol. When security threats were acute, however, arrow boy numbers would swell (sometimes to encompass whole villages) and included women and older men if the situation required. Groups of arrow boys organised locally, the most active operating along the border from Maridi to Tombura counties. Even bigger towns like Yambio mobilised if needed, though generally only in response to acute security threats. Groups depended on community donations for sustenance, with a specific arrow boy tax levied in some communities.[17]

Embedded in the community, the arrow boys reflected and drew upon local governance structures. This also meant that they generally did not pose a political or social challenge to local mechanisms. Leadership was flexible and impermanent, often tight for the duration of a patrol but easing up soon after. And while many areas nominally had an arrow boys 'head', command powers varied significantly between individuals and heads always worked closely with local chiefs or *payam* administrators.[18] In some areas, the arrow boys also supported local justice systems, working with chiefs and helping to apprehend people called to the local customary court.[19] Loose connections existed between groups.

Beyond adhering to a loose hierarchy, the arrow boys never clearly organised into military ranks, nor did they aspire to a unified structure across all of Western Equatoria. This is significant in the highly militarised environment of South Sudan, where a military title is great currency, offering status and material rewards.

The arrow boys' failure to adopt overtly military structures reflects the strength of their community connections and the uneasy relationship groups often maintained vis-à-vis the central government. In the early days, the arrow boys were cautiously accepted by the central government, with the national assembly in September 2010 promising to provide monetary assistance (which never materialised).[20] From 2010 however this muted support shifted. Initially closely associated with Governor Zamoyoa, the arrow boys had an even more vocal advocate in his successor Joseph Bakosoro, governor between 2010 and 2015. Bakosoro often paid visits to the arrow boys to show his support for their community protection work. A vocal critic of the central government, Bakosoro's relationship with the arrow boys gradually aroused the suspicion of the Juba elite, who feared he was using the groups to build an anti-government Western Equatorian front.

14 UN Security Council (2013), 'Briefing Security Council, Senior Envoy in Central Africa Calls for Sustained International Focus on Eliminating Lord's Resistance Army, Other Threats' In: 7065th meeting (ed), 20 November.

15 Schomerus M, Rigterink A S (forthcoming), 'The fear factor is a main thing: How radio influences anxiety and political attitudes', *Journal of Development Studies*.

16 See Rigterink A S, Kenyi J J, Schomerus M (2014), 'Report of the Justice and Security Research Programme Survey in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan' (London: London School of Economics and Political Science).

17 *Ibid*.

18 Administrate districts in South Sudan.

19 Schomerus M, Rigterink A S (2015), '"And then He Switched Off the Phone": Mobile Phones, Participation and Political Accountability in South Sudan's Western Equatoria State', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* **4** (10).

20 Ruati R (2010), 'Arrow Boys in W. Western Equatoria to be armed against LRA – Governor', Sudan Tribune, 28 September; Willems R C (2015), *Security and Hybridity after Armed Conflict: The Dynamics of Security Provision in Post-Civil War States* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge).

Allegations of such a broad-based rebellion were never very compelling. During their most active years, few arrow boys seemed to view themselves as part of the governor's private militia. Many stressed that while Bakosoro was supportive in his speeches, meaningful material assistance was never forthcoming. On the contrary, in many regions – particularly in areas northwest of Yambio and in the Maridi area – members of the arrow boys stressed that their existence was proof the governor had failed to provide for the community's protection. However, even when they were expressing disappointment at not having received recognition for their protection work, the arrow boys did issue demands. These tended to be social rather than political, for example requesting government funding to send orphaned children to school.[21]

For ordinary Western Equatorians, support for the arrow boys did not appear to entail rejection of other authorities, including central government. Quantitative and qualitative empirical data collected in 2013 indicates that popular loyalties locally did not divide sharply between state and non-state authorities: those who supported the arrow boys did not necessarily oppose the SPLA, just as those who supported traditional authorities did not always oppose central government.[22] The issue that divided people more clearly instead appears to be mode of governance – support for military or security forms of governance on the one hand and civil forms of governance on the other. Specifically, some interviewees conveyed a clear conviction that force – whether delivered by the arrow boys or the SPLA – was a legitimate way to govern.[23] This conviction is likely to have shaped individuals' decision to join other armed groups as the civil war progressed.

iii. New behaviour and actors

Rising tensions in Maridi and Mundri counties

A confluence of factors during 2014 saw the arrow boys become gradually absorbed into South Sudan's unfolding civil war. Dinka pastoralists from neighbouring Lakes State had for generations moved their cattle southwards into Western Equatoria's more fertile grazing lands during the annual dry season. From early 2014, however, serious fighting in Jonglei and Lakes states – in addition to the emergence of new cattle diseases – drove cattle into Maridi and Mundri counties in even greater numbers.[24] Cattle movements contributed to rising tensions between cattle-keeping nomadic communities and resident communities in the two counties, as cattle keepers disrupted agricultural production and access to water sources. The SPLA was again not seen as a protective force – on the contrary, interviewees highlighted that they had witnessed the SPLA directly aiding the cattle movement, citing political and ethnic loyalties between some soldiers and cattle keepers. The SPLA's failure to halt clashes between cattle keepers and residents continued to feed the sense among communities that the army was acting against them. Community accusations included the suggestion that the SPLA even provided guns to the cattle keepers.[25]

The growing tensions underlined a longer-term deterioration in the arrow boys' relationship with the SPLA and the central government. Throughout 2014, the narrative that Western Equatorians were getting ready to 'rebel' against the government – possibly in direct alliance with the SPLM-IO under Dr Riek Machar – continued to gain traction and had in various cases been the explanation for SPLA action.[26]

21 Mohandis R (2016), 'Recent armed groups in WES are not Arrow Boys', *Sudan Tribune*, 7 January; author interviews in Maridi and Yambio, January–March 2015.

22 Schomerus M, Rigterink A (2016), 'Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in South Sudan: The Case of Western Equatorias Arrow Boys' (Waterloo: Center for Security Governance); Rigterink A S, Kenyi J J, Schomerus M (2014), 'Report of the Justice and Security Research Programme Survey in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan' (London: London School of Economics and Political Science).

23 Schomerus M, Rigterink A (2016), 'Non-State Security Providers and Political Formation in South Sudan: The Case of Western Equatorias Arrow Boys' (Waterloo: Center for Security Governance).

24 De Vries L (2015), '"The government belongs to other people." Old cycles of violence in a new political order in Mundri?', USAID/VISTAS; Okoth S (2015), 'Livestock diseases and movement as conflict trigger in Greater Equatoria', *Case studies series: Conflict and cooperation in the Equatorias* (Juba: VISTAS/USAID).

25 Interview with Maridi resident 8, 24 January 2016.

26 Sudan Tribune (2015), 'Juba accuses Sudan of supporting new insurgency in Western Equatoria', 26 May.

Reports linked the rebellion to the sitting governor, Bakosoro, and to the arrow boys, rumoured to be providing the necessary military strength. As a result, 38 arrow boys from Maridi were arrested by National Security and accused of participating in a rebellion. One was killed.

The SPLA accusation that the arrow boys were part of a fledgling rebellion was used to justify violent crackdowns by the army against civilians. If there was a rebellion to be quashed and if this rebellion was seen to come from within the community, violence against communities was justified.[27] Allegations circulated that the SPLA were harassing and attacking civilians in the Yambio and the Maridi areas. Community leaders describe the SPLA as becoming increasingly aggressive, particularly so in July and August 2015: "The army would shoot people. This area was frontline and no one was passing. The army was burning houses."[28]

What had been a source of Western Equatorian pride – successful community-based defence through the arrow boys – had become a security issue that could not be talked about for fear of government repercussions. Interviewees stated that they were not afraid of the arrow boys, but of government soldiers.[29]

The clashes that erupted in Western Equatoria, including in Maridi, in early 2015 marked the beginning of a different phase. In early 2015, the arrow boys in Maridi County seemed to have reached a decision – due to increasing tensions between resident communities and cattle keepers as well as tension between resident communities and the SPLA – that their community protection role should be expanded to include the protection of community crops and preventing violence between residents and cattle keepers. In mid-2015, as violence against civilians from both SPLA and cattle keepers increased, the arrow boys acted, clashing with cattle keepers and SPLA soldiers deployed particularly in Maridi and Mundri counties and who had failed to enforce orders to press cattle keepers to return to their home states.[30]

Events in 2015 spurred changes in the behaviour of the arrow boys and triggered the emergence of new armed actors in the Western Equatorian states. The involvement of the SPLA in actions against the community triggered violent responses from the arrow boys. Meanwhile, the signing of a peace agreement in August 2015 between the national government and opposition forces in Addis Ababa appears to have triggered the emergence of new armed actors, some linked to arrow boy groups/mobilisation structures and others entirely separate. However it is important to note that armed actors now present in the Western Equatorian region are not simply the same as the community protection arrow boys.

The arrow boys' changing role in violence

In late 2015, violence continued in the western part of the Western Equatorian region, including in and around Ezo and Tombura counties. Violence was largely attributed to the arrow boys – that is, to members of the community – collaborating to fight the SPLA. In fights between the SPLA and arrow boys in Ezo, it was reported that 18 SPLA soldiers were killed.[31] A group of arrow boys attacked Yambio town in September 2015, causing heavy fighting with the SPLA over several days. A few triggers appear to have caused this rise in violence: accusations of rebellion in the Western Equatorian region, the emergence of disgruntled SPLA being referred to as arrow boys, unfulfilled promises and an increasingly difficult economic situation, the dismissal of the elected governor, and possibly the lure of gaining access to the benefits of the peace deal.

27 De Vries L, Schomerus M (2015), 'Talking about war makes it more likely. Look at South Sudan', Monkey Cage Blog/ *The Washington Post*.

28 Author interview community leaders, Yambio, July 2016.

29 Interview with Maridi resident 1, 21 January 2016; Interview with Maridi resident 3, 21 January 2016.

30 Nashion J (2015), 'SPLA Accused Of Causing Havoc In Maridi County' *Gurtong*, 1 July; Sudan Tribune (2015), 'Western Equatoria state condemns South Sudan army crackdown', 2 July.

31 Nyamilepedia (2015), 'South Sudan: Arrow boys declare vicotry over the army in Ezo, Western Equatoria', 21 November.

However, it appears that after these events, the arrow boys as a community loosened. While most stopped fighting and returned home, a few did not. The once tight relationship between communities and members of the arrow boys who continued to fight also appears to have begun to strain from this period.

Tensions between the arrow boys and the SPLA in Ezo were calmed with the help of the church, who brokered a local peace deal. "But some of the boys went back to the bush [to continue fighting]," explained a resident. "The community was very confused and disappointed. They cannot understand why the boys turned against them."[32] While local leaders agree that some of the community arrow boys were involved in fighting now, they were adamant that "it's the same boys but they are not attacking civilians, only ever SPLA. The SPLA has been aggressive."[33]

By late 2015 – and continuing into 2016 – communities appeared to be caught between a rock and a hard place: "The community was in trouble because in the bush there was the problem of arrow boys and in the town the problem of SPLA."[34]

Other armed groups emerge

These tensions increased with the signing of a peace agreement between SPLM and SPLM-IO in August 2015. In the months leading up to the signing, the security landscape in Equatoria had been shifting.[35]

One of the first groups to emerge in Western Equatoria (without any obvious links to the arrow boys) was the Revolutionary Movement for National Salvation (REMNASA). REMNASA announced its presence through a press release in early 2015. The group appeared to be supported by the diaspora, had an internet presence,[36] and circulated press releases that highlighted a range of long-term anti-government grievances.[37] However, reports of its activities were difficult to verify, particularly reports of attacks on the SPLA, and its numbers appear to have been tiny.[38] After just a few months, the group – if it did ever exist as a group – joined the SPLM-IO.

Two other rebellions announced their presence around the time of the August peace agreement. Both operate near or in the main city of Yambio, which in late 2015 experienced prolonged fighting and reports of forced recruitment.[39] While the sources of fighting are often referred to as the 'arrow boys' in press reports, interviews or government statements, a local government official argued that the nature of how the groups behaved – primarily that they were no longer a community protection force and instead aggressive fighters –marked a significant shift away from the arrow boys: "These groups should not really be called arrow boys."[40]

Armed groups: Alfred Futiyo

Alfred Futiyo's group – responsible for felling the trees on the road to Ezo in June 2016 – emerged as a prominent armed actor in Western Equatoria in 2015. Declaring his allegiance to SPLA-IO and Riek Machar in May 2015, for a while it seemed that with Futiyo's loyalty declared, the emergence of IO in Western Equatoria was confirmed, which created further fighting between the SPLA and the armed group.[41] Futiyo himself, speaking through a translator, explained that one reason for the escalation between his forces and the SPLA was his alliance with IO: "When Riek said we are with

32 Author interview Ezo resident, Yambio, July 2016.

33 Author interview, community leader, Juba, June 2016.

34 Author interview Ezo resident, on phone, June 2016.

35 See also International Crisis Group (2016), *South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias* (Brussels: ICG); Small Amrs Survey (2016), *Conflict in Western Equatoria* (Geneva: Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan/Small Arms Survey), July.

36 https://www.remnasa.com/home.html

37 REMNASA (2015), 'REMNASA: Why Revolutionary Movement for National Salvation was formed', 2 February.

38 Sudan Tribune (2015), 'S. Sudanese army comes under another attack in Western Equatoria', 25 May; Schomerus M (2015), 'Protection and militarisation in Western Equatoria', USAID/VISTAS.

39 Mohandis R (2016), 'Recent armed groups in WES are not Arrow Boys', *Sudan Tribune*, 7 January.

40 Author interview, local government official, Yambio, July 2016.

41 International Crisis Group (2016), *South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias* (Brussels: ICG).

him, our state government got very angry. And that is when the government started fighting us."[42]

The exact origins of Futiyo's group and its links with IO are unclear: the IO has never confirmed this close connection. Futiyo had been a trader in Yambio market since 1988 after fleeing to the town when his land was reportedly taken by Dinka cattle keepers. He was in Yambio when residents clashed with cattle keepers in 2005. A local leader reported that between 2005 and 2015, Futiyo had made a living selling teak illegally and that when the shift in state leadership in mid-2015 closed off this source of income, he had started an armed rebellion.[43] The story contradicts Futiyo's claim that he joined the IO rebellion on 15 May 2014.[44] Locals highlighted in interviews that they themselves were confused by Futiyo's alliances.[45] Local leaders also doubt the extent to which Futiyo's group is connected to IO.[46] "Machar never came. There is no real connection," was how another leader summed up the link.[47] Among local officials, there is no knowledge of supplies having been brought to the group.[48]

While it is the case that IO officers have sought information on Futiyo's group through various channels, Futiyo's group was in interviews asking to be connected to the IO, which casts a doubt on his connection to the IO.[49] At other times Futiyo's group claimed to be in touch with IO and had been told by IO representatives that no military supplies could be sent to them since the IO had already signed a peace deal in Addis Ababa.[50]

Futiyo's group is fiercely distrustful of the state government, having also accused other actors seeking to make connections to start peace talks of being government agents. At the same time, local residents report that there was more to the tension between Futiyo's group and the state governor: it was described as a personal fall-out.[51]

When asked why a group of Western Equatorians now wanted to align themselves with Machar – who had been despised during the LRA talks – Futiyo's group argued:

"We are not angry with [*Machar*] *now. It is true that he was not helping us or giving the arrow boys support. The reason we are trusting Machar now is because we are in the bush and he is talking about the peace and the rights of the people… There are other Equatorians who are saying that when the government comes with the money, they will take the money.*

The reason why we are still with Riek Machar is about the rights of the people. There are other politicians in Equatoria, when the government gives them money they will do their work. That is the reason why we stand with Dr Riek Machar… The reason why we don't want to talk with the state government is because they plan to bring cattle keepers to our areas. That is the reason why we don't want to talk with him [*the state governor*]. *If the other governor would be sent in we would talk with him, not with Zamoyo. The reason why we don't want to talk with Zamoyo is in 2005, he was the person who said let us not fight with those of Dinkas. In 2005 he came as a governor, and now we consider him an agent of cattle keepers."*[52]

Inclusion in a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process mandated by the August 2015 peace agreement appears to have been a particularly important incentive in the case of Futiyo's men. In July 2016, Futiyo's spokesperson spelt out the group's demobilisation demands, including cantonment sites (usually referred to colloquially as 'containment' sites) for IO fighters: "What we want now that we have

42 Author interview, spokesperson/translator of Alfred Futiyo, on phone, July 2016.
43 Author interview, leader 1, Yambio, July 2016.
44 Author interview, spokesperson/translator of Alfred Futiyo, on phone, June 2016.
45 Author interview, leader 2, Yambio, July 2016.
46 Author interview, leader 2, Yambio, July 2016.
47 Author interview, community leader, Juba, June 2016.
48 Author interview, leader 2, Yambio, June 2016.
49 Author interview, spokesperson/translator of Alfred Futiyo, on phone, July 2016.
50 Author interview, spokesperson/translator of Alfred Futiyo, on phone, July 2016.
51 Author interview, residents, Yambio, June 2016.
52 Author interview, spokesperson/translator of Alfred Futiyo, on phone, July 2016.

joined with Riek Machar, we want our containment [sic] area…We expect in containment [sic] area, what we want is one [lieutenant] general Alfred Futyo, and two major generals, and eight brigadier generals and 36 brigadiers and other officers. That is why we want in our containment [sic] area and then we will sit quiet. That is our agreement with Dr Riek Machar and then we will sit in the containment area and it will be good for our lives and our nation."

Other ways that national politics were influencing violent actions in the Western Equatorian region were expressed through Futiyo's dismissal of the newly created 28 states of South Sudan: "We want federalism in our containment [sic] area… Federalism. We want to be an Equatoria region, Upper Nile region or Bahr el Ghazal region. We have 62 tribes in South Sudan. So we are from Zande. We want to be in our own area. We are Equatorians. We want to have power like those of the government. That is what we mean by federal system. We don't want 28 states. We want three regions. The reason why we don't want 28 states is because it can divide other people. We want ten states according to the agreement."[53]

The extent of Futiyo's access to weapons and supplies remains unclear. A foreign engineer who was abducted by the group in June 2016 and kept by them in the bush for five days recounted that he estimated their camp held about 150 people, including women and children. Many, he said, spoke English and all men had guns and ammunition. In addition, all men were dressed in uniform. "These were military men", was how he judged the group.[54] It is unclear, however, whether the equipment points towards close military connections – either to SPLA or SPLA-IO – or whether what was on display came from other sources. A reported raid by Futiyo's men on a number of wildlife force stores in the Yambio area is also alleged to have provided the group with a new influx of weapons and supplies. More recently in December 2016, however, it seems that Futiyo's group has been rearmed; the source of these arms is unclear.[55]

Disgruntled SPLA: the SSNLM

The SSNLM appear to have been formed in mid-2015 by Western Equatorian soldiers frustrated by the SPLA's treatment of local residents and by the region's continued marginalisation by the central government. In July 2016, the SSNLM leadership with James Kabila – now comfortably situated in Yambio town with their forces in a nearby government training camp – highlighted a range of grievances linked to regional neglect. These include the central government's failure to acknowledge Equatoria's contributions to the second civil war, the under-representation of Equatorians in the national government, army, judiciary, and the lack of promotion opportunities for serving Equatorian soldiers. SPLA harassment of local civilians and the removal and arrest of the popular elected governor was also cited by the SSNLM leadership.[56] While the grievances echo long-held sentiments of many Western Equatorians, the timing and pursuit of an integration deal with the SPLA suggest an opportunistic use of these.

Kabila had left the SPLA in mid-2015 and fled to the bush, taking others with him. Residents from Maridi pointed out that some individuals within the newly-formed SSNLM had been members of the arrow boys, but that this did not mean that the SSNLM was composed of arrow boys.[57] This group was described by a resident as: "The arrow boys was just like a brand name, within them were police, civilians, army personnel, but they were all under one umbrella. All leaders of the arrow boys rebellion came from SPLA."[58]

53 Author interview, spokesperson/translator of Alfred Futiyo, on phone, July 2016.

54 Author interview, Yambio, July 2016.

55 Author interview, December 2016.

56 One SSNLM leader explained that "there are reasons why we were fighting and then we already gave the reasons, like one our people were being killed by the government forces, we had been in the army, I was an offer in the government and I have stayed in the rank more than 16 years, so we need promotions and we also need training and the government forces also to be trained in order not to kill the population." Author interview SSNLM leadership, Yambio, July 2016.

57 Author interview, Maridi resident, Juba, July 2016.

58 Author interview, Maridi resident, Juba, July 2016.

Church leaders facilitated a peace agreement between SSNLM and the government in April 2016.[59] Having signed the deal, the SSNLM was quick to distance itself from the arrow boys.[60]

The SSNLM is indicative of another South Sudanese security phenomenon: the dismissal of 'rebellion' as a means to marginalise groups. The leadership of the SSNLM was adamant that it was the description of them as 'rebels' – meaning of people who are excluded from the power and resources of the government – that drove them to actually rebel. The labelling as rebels continues to create feelings of grievance even after the signing of a peace deal.[61]

Another Maridi resident saw the motivation for the SSNLM rebellion elsewhere – particularly the SSNLM's insistence to be moved into a training camp in Yambio. "I know these guys from Maridi. They were in the army and mistreating people, raping. They will not go back to Maridi because the community will target them."[62]

The muddled picture of armed violence

Asked to explain the confusing proliferation of armed actors in Western Equatoria since 2014, a local leader linked events to the broader situation in South Sudan: "People make use of political instability to incite people here."[63] The trajectory of actors in the Western Equatorian region – the retreat of the arrow boys (at least as originally constituted) and the emergence of new armed groups – highlights the encroaching influence of national political dynamics. It also shows the shift away from community protection mechanisms. In the Western Equatorian states, tensions between the central and state government, and between agriculturalists and pastoralists, resulted in an SPLA-led campaign against the arrow boys that made their existence untenable. It also made popular support for the arrow boys outright dangerous. This means that current armed violence in the area is not community-driven as a way to rebel against the government.

Neither SSNLM nor Futiyo's groups seem to be broadly supported by the community. This is likely because not everyone fighting in those groups used to be an arrow boy, although some are clearly identified by their community members. The attacks on displaced people and religious sisters in 2015 have further cost the armed groups' credibility. Individual reports of violence against civilians contrasts with the behaviour of the arrow boys since 2005, as do reports of forced recruitment into these armed rebellions.

There are persistent claims by community members that the 'armed rebellions' are not former or current 'arrow boys', but rather town dwellers who have enough access to information and connections to Juba to understand that being part of the broad SPLM-IO affiliates could be beneficial if the national peace deal is implemented. Known members of the arrow boys interviewed in 2016 often refer to the armed groups as 'town people'. Some also highlight that looting and attacks on civilians – which have increased since 2015 – are carried out by those who joined the rebellion in search of financial rewards.

South Sudan's dire economic situation – which has entailed sharp rises in food prices and a shortage of basic food stuffs in local markets – may well have fed this dynamic, increasing the movement of Western Equatorians from rural areas to towns in search

59 UN Mission in South Sudan (2015), 'Government signs peace agreement with armed group in Western Equatoria', 16 November.

60 "We are not arrow boys, we are SSNLM. Our bodyguards do not have arrows. We are not arrow boys. Arrow boys were formed to fight the LRA so some of them joined us. So when they joined us there is no need to call them arrow boys. There were people who are from the army and people who are not from the army. Like those people whose people were killed most of them were annoyed so they joined. I cannot tell the exact number of arrow boys." Author interview SSNLM leadership, Yambio, July 2016.

61 "One things which annoys is that we signed the agreement, there are still people in the government who call us rebels. That is why we went to the bush because they called us rebels. There are still people in the government calling us rebels. When they call you rebel it is somebody who is doing bad things. This is how people understand, but we are not doing bad things." Author interview SSNLM leadership, Yambio, July 2016.

62 Author interview, Maridi resident, Yambio, July 2016.

63 Author interview, leader 2, Yambio, July 2016.

of livelihood opportunities, spurring criminal activity and increasing the attractiveness of armed rebellion. Unknown gunmen, who are at times called arrow boys or rebels by those reporting on their actions, might primarily be made up of those who had formerly sought livelihoods in towns, often as motorcycle taxi drivers. Since joining an armed rebellion did likely not result in quick gains, criminal violence was the most obvious choice.[64]

IV. South Sudan's civil war structures and violent incentives of the peace agreement

Even though there are marked differences between the original arrow boys and the various armed groups described above, it is worth highlighting their similarities. For all armed actors in the region, there has been, as one resident described "very high frustration over many years with the lack of acknowledgement [for the community protection work done by the arrow boys]."[65] This lack of acknowledgement refers to the arrow boys' claim that they were promised money in 2009 which was never received, the SSNLM's expressed frustration with lack of promotion in the SPLA and Alfred Futiyo's group's insistence of being a part of IO and asking for demobilisation programmes. One of the central factors driving the uptick in armed activity in Western Equatoria since 2015 appears to have been awareness among armed protagonists about the significant opportunity offered by the peace agreement for rebalancing a longer-term lack of access to security positions and finances.

These developments highlight a central dilemma of the recent peace agreements and wider history of demobilisation in South Sudan: the deal and the demobilisation and reintegration process it outlines for non-state actors have generated new incentives among armed actors in Western Equatoria to organise, position themselves for security rewards, and address the region's exclusion from the post-2005 political dispensation in Juba. Reflecting this, in Western Equatoria the agreement heralded the start of a new period of armed activity, as actors struggled to create a platform for entry into the post-conflict security apparatus in the context of worsening economic crisis.[66]

There are signs that the recent upsurge in armed activity in Western Equatoria – and particularly the changing image of the arrow boys – may also be used by the central government to justify new popular disarmament campaigns, which have typically involved high levels of violence against civilians. Government officials from Yambio argued that allowing the arrow boys to operate freely for many years was a mistake, enabling them to acquire arms that ultimately "fell to the wrong people."[67] With the arrow boys predominantly dependent on bows and arrows and older guns (often loaded with hand-made bullets), the narrative is likely a convenient line used to legitimise the reassertion of government control in the region in the wake of the August 2015 deal.

V. Conclusion: Rethinking the role of non-state armed actors

The arrow boys and armed groups that have dominated Western Equatoria's recent security scene appear to vary significantly in terms of their legitimacy, accountability and interests, despite some spheres of overlap. Before 2014, the arrow boys were closely tied to their communities, providing protection and deferring to community leaders and structures. The arrow boys' legitimacy stemmed from their composition and success: membership was highly inclusive, expanding quickly to include all members of a community able to patrol the bush when danger was announced. Meanwhile, their effectiveness in repelling LRA attacks gave them authority in the eyes of local communities. The arrow boys' accountability to community decision makers also

64 Various author interviews.
65 Author interview, Naandi resident, Yambio, July 2016.
66 Author interview, community leaders, Yambio, July 2016.
67 Author interview, leader 1, Yambio, July 2016.

seems to have regulated their behaviour, resulting in very few abuses of power and helping to sustain popular support.

The close attachment of the arrow boys to local communities sets them apart from many of the armed actors that have announced their presence in Western Equatoria since 2015. The SSNLM argues that its legitimacy lies in its objection to SPLA behaviour and resistance to SPLA structures. The extent to which this makes them legitimate in the eyes of the community, however, is questionable. Anecdotally, residents interviewed in Yambio in mid-2016 suggest that the SSNLM were quick to agree to be reintegrated into the SPLA once they had been promised higher ranks. Alfred Futiyo's group locates its legitimacy in having aligned itself with a larger and more powerful actor in South Sudan's civil war – the SPLA-IO. This has little appeal among a community who has suffered rising levels of violence in the months since the group's formation in 2015. The unclear – or at best ad hoc – connection to the IO also highlights that command-and-control structures within the IO are difficult to ascertain if loyalties are declared without obvious central support.

The varied origins and interests of main actors in Western Equatoria's recent security scene – the arrow boys, disgruntled SPLA soldiers and those fighting for a share of the peace agreement – pose three substantially different dilemmas for consolidating peace and strengthening security at the state level:

1. The arrow boys' formation and regional importance as a security actor highlight the serious protection gap that has existed in Western Equatoria since 2005, a gap that the state was unable to fill. This gap has widened since 2014, as state violence has stepped up and the arrow boys have found their activities curtailed. The community protection militia now no longer exists.
2. Violence by disgruntled SPLA soldiers highlight that force is seen as an effective – if not the only – available path for securing promotions.
3. Those seeking to leverage access to power and resources highlight political grievances, including perceptions of exclusion from the benefits of recent peace agreements. Escalating violence since 2015 is partly grounded in efforts to address Western Equatoria's long-term marginalisation, and underscore the heavy toll that seeking entry by force can involve for communities. Impacts have been magnified by the SPLA response, which has entailed violent crackdowns on suspected rebels and their supporters. This has further decreased already low levels of trust between the SPLA and communities, which likely makes it harder for community-led security actors such as the arrow boys to operate in the post-war period.

Developments in the Western Equatorian region highlight a number of themes with relevance across South Sudan. State-led attempts to respond to localised unrest – through repression or disarmament – have regularly worked to exacerbate mistrust at a community level, and have entailed little to no attention to the political grievances underpinning armed rebellion. International security engagement in South Sudan since 2005 has been similarly apolitical in nature, focusing overwhelmingly on technical support to the security services with little attention to sub-national conflict dynamics and tensions.[68]

Events in Western Equatoria since 2014 also highlight the perverse effects of South Sudan's 2015 peace deal between SPLA and SPLA-IO, which has increased incentives at a local level to fight for access to power and resources and to do so through violence. The period in the run up to the agreement's signature and afterwards saw a flurry of new alliances between local groups and national armed actors – both real and imagined – as actors sought to position themselves to benefit from the deal's terms. The process highlighted the sizable gap that exists between the deal's objectives at the national level and its effects locally.

68 Lacher W (2012), *South Sudan: International State-Building and its Limits* (Berlin: SWP).

The implications of the above processes for safety and security in Western Equatoria are wide-ranging. First, the arrow boys as originally constituted – a community protection force with fluid membership – do not currently exist: protection against the SPLA is difficult, by virtue of the SPLA's substantially greater numbers and fire power, and claiming linkages to the arrow boys exposes people to arrest, harassment and other forms of retaliation. This also means that communities have lost their only effective protection mechanisms – the defunct arrow boys – while gaining more security threats from armed groups and an aggressive government army.

The feeling of exposure to armed groups and the SPLA is itself destabilising, fuelling fears of violence that can inform decisions to join armed groups. Protection needs have thus increased at the same time that community mechanisms for meeting them have become defunct. Communities are unlikely to trust government forces to protect them, with SPLA forces widely seen as abusive and ethnically partisan.[69]

A crucial shift is required to address three interlinked challenges.

1. It is necessary to revisit assumptions that underpin security sector reforms that suggest that strengthening the state will constructively strengthen local security.
2. To make communities safer will require community engagement in meeting security needs.
3. It will be crucial to engage politically to deal with the long-term problems of marginalisation and neglect that underlie Western Equatoria's current security crisis.

69 Interview with Maridi resident 4, 22 January 2016.

3

Dinka youth in civil war:

Between cattle, community and government

Luka Biong Deng Kuol

i. Introduction

GELWENG AND TITWENG have played a major, if less visible, role in South Sudan's present civil war. Since December 2013, groups of Dinka youth have fought alongside SPLA soldiers in offensive attacks and in defence of the Bahr el Ghazal region against SPLA-IO in former Unity State.[70] To the south, the *gelweng* have been embroiled in violent clashes with farmers in the Equatorias, fuelling a climate of tension from which new armed groups have emerged. At the same time, *gelweng* and *titweng* have continued to engage in Dinka-Dinka violence, in the form of lethal inter-clan raiding and revenge killings in Lakes State during 2014 and 2015.[71]

The *titweng* and *gelweng* have also been a source of recruits for new SPLA configurations whose struggles lie at heart of the ongoing national crisis. Over the last five years, commanders from Bahr el Ghazal enlisted many *gelweng* and *titweng* into their more formal, government forces. Individual commanders were able to consolidate power in the SPLA during the ongoing civil war because of the expanding force under their direct command. This remaking of the SPLA has intensified internal ethnic divisions within its ranks: already poorly unified, these waves of recruitment have produced an army of soldiers who are primarily loyal to individual commanders.

Gelweng and *titweng* can both be translated as 'cattle guard'. They are community-based groups of armed actors whose guardianship of communities' cattle herds is a central part of their identity. Young adult Dinka men have long had responsibility for caring for and protecting their cattle. Formed in collaboration with the SPLA during the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005) in the late 1980s and 1990s, they were used by the community as a local defence force against Arab militias and Nuer raids. Commanders in the SPLA also used them as an informal paramilitary force, carrying weapons and equipment and proving a large, mobile reserve of fighters.[72] Through their absorption into the war, these groups of Dinka youth acquired weapons and became a conduit for the transformation of the war into a larger Dinka-Nuer confrontation.

70 In October 2015, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir decreed that the country's ten states would be sub-divided into 28 states, a measure that was subsequently approved by parliament. This article refers primarily to the ten state borders that existed prior to the announcement, for ease of reference only.

71 See for example Sudan Tribune (2014), 'Cycle of Lakes State Violence Continues, 15 Dead in Cueibet', March 21; Sudan Tribune (2014), 'Chief's death sparks rapes, looting in remote Lakes state villages', 10 August; Sudan Tribune (2015), '27 killed, dozens wounded in Lakes state raid', 13 July.

72 Saferworld (2015), 'South Sudan's galweng: filling a security gap or perpetuating conflict?', 29 April.

The *gelweng* and *titweng* continued to operate to the west of the Nile in the wake of the 2005 CPA, which provided no clear, uncontested options for their future. Local demand for their protective services also remained high, as western Dinka communities continued to experience lethal, costly raids on their cattle. But new proximity to the military also spelt significant changes, reducing the influence of chiefs and elders over their behaviour and eroding community norms that had limited their participation and conduct in violence. Military interest in the *titweng* and *gelweng* has also underpinned a struggle for control over the forces between the community and government, and contributed to a gradual blurring of the line between home and more remote 'political' wars. This process has continued since December 2013, as many former *titweng* and *gelweng* have been drawn into the SPLA and others have fought alongside the army and their Bahr el Ghazal leadership.

ii. The changing role of Dinka youth during the second Sudanese civil war

Animal husbandry, particularly cattle, is the primary feature of the economy among the Dinka. Like in other pastoralist communities, Dinka youth play a pivotal role moving and protecting cattle, guided by a number of normative principles that govern their conduct as an adult – principles of *cieng* (morals), *adheng* (the behaviour expected of an adult man and a gentleman) and *dheeng* (dignity).[73] Until the SPLA's arrival in rural communities of South Sudan in the mid-1980s, governance among the Dinka sat apart from state government structures, and relied instead on traditional institutions to maintain law and order and protect cattle and property. Political life was organised by age-sets – discrete, traditionally leaderless groups united by generation and a common identity – to which all Dinka belong.[74] Age-sets worked as the basis for military mobilisation and a rite of passage for all able-bodied men that marked his transition into adulthood.[75]

The military functions of Dinka youth have often overshadowed other social responsibilities. Before the late 1980s, however, discipline and recourse to violence was regulated by a number of factors. The cattle camps operated as important learning institutions in which youth learned the Dinka way of life, and the ideals of *cieng* and *dheeng*. After initiation, youth were subject to training under the guidance of elders and oriented on the use of violence as a last resort to protect their community and cattle; 'legitimate' violence was supposed to be defensive, and only in this case should youths be assured of ancestral support and the blessing of God.[76] Dinka typically resorted to violence when cattle were raided or they were denied access to grazing lands and water points, but retaliation would ordinarily be guided by a defined structure of beliefs, ideas and values.[77] Generational age-sets also competed for dominance. Among the western Dinka, Pendle describes this competition gradually becoming predominantly theatrical and symbolic.[78]

The second Sudanese civil war brought significant changes in Dinka society. Attacks by Khartoum-backed northern militia in the late 1980s terrorised Dinka communities in the Greater Bahr el Ghazal region. The Government of Sudan used youth from the western Dinka and western Nuer alongside Arab pastoralist groups as proxy forces in their campaign against southern rebels, intensifying violence against civilians. Dinka lost large portions of their livestock. In the context of increasing violence, the *titweng* – the protectors of cattle – were organised with the support of some commanders in the

73 Deng F (1998), 'The Cow and the Thing called "What": Dinka Cultural Perspectives on Wealth and Poverty', *Journal of International Affairs* **52** (1).

74 Salih (1994); also Deng and Pendle. Pendle N (2015), '"They Are Now Community Police": Negotiating the Boundaries and Nature of the Government in South Sudan through the Identity of Militarise Cattle-Keepers', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* **22**, pp 410–434.

75 Deng F, 'The Cow and the Thing called "What": Dinka Cultural Perspectives on Wealth and Poverty'.

76 Deng F (ed) (1972), *The Dinka of Sudan* (Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston) p 73.

77 Lienhardt G (ed) (1967), *Divinity and Experiences: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

78 Pendle, p 4.

SPLA among youth who had a traditional role defending the community and cattle. SPLA commanders benefited from the additional support of these armed youth, but the need for the *titweng* also highlighted the inability of the SPLA to protect the people and cattle of Bahr el Ghazal.

Compared with the SPLA, the *titweng* wielded greater legitimacy among local communities because of their respect for local norms, relationship with chiefs and elders, and their emphasis on protecting cattle.[79] They became a significant source of local pride, and in turn attracted new young recruits. New names emerged – *Tit Baai* (protectors of the home) as their role extended to the protection of community and *Machar Anyar* (black buffalo) in recognition of their bravery.

The formation of the *titweng* also disrupted traditional patterns of Dinka mobilisation and initiation. Their emergence was a clear departure from the age-set system, organising men into military units that cut across generational divides. Initiation processes, in which elders played a role instilling values of *cieng*, *adheng* and *dheeng* weakened, as youths instead looked to the SPLA for training and orders. The SPLA also provided some *titweng* with guns, which were in turn sometimes bought by family members.[80] Elders would often sell cattle to generate money to purchase weapons.

The split in SPLA in 1991 brought new dynamics to the role of *titweng* and contributed to militarising divisions between Nuer and Dinka.[81] The SPLA splinter group headed by Dr Riek Machar rallied western Nuer youth (see chapter 4, 'The Nuer White Armies') in the mid-1990s to defend against and raid Dinka villages to the west, strongholds of the main SPLA led by Dr John Garang.[82] Increased attacks by western Nuer on western Dinka communities in current Lakes State encouraged the SPLA to adopt a similar strategy of community mobilisation. The *titweng* were mustered among western Dinka at the border with Sudan, and the *gelweng* organised further south to defend western Dinka against raids from western Nuer.[83]

Many youth responsibilities remained the same despite their absorption in large numbers into the *gelweng*/*titweng*. Yet the youths' new weapons – and the brute power it gave them in the community – and the division that emerged between youths' allegiance to traditional authorities and the SPLA also challenged traditional relationships between youths and elders. This appears to have disrupted the sway of *cieng*, *adheng* and *dheng* among young men and their mediating influence on violence and its resolution. In some areas, traditional conflict resolution processes – whereby perpetrators of violence would pay compensation, or 'blood money', to the families of victims of killings, among other measures – were gradually eroded by the sheer scale and indiscriminate nature of killing made possible by automatic weapons.[84] Effects were not universal: the *titweng*'s proximity to the SPLA did not always undermine their relationships with local chiefs, where chiefs also worked closely with the SPLA.[85] In some areas, chiefs were able to remake local norms to keep relatively tight control over gun use at least among the local community (even if not in inter-ethnic raids).

The SPLA itself was also divided over the *titweng* and *gelweng*. Local communities of western Dinka and their elites in the SPLA, including Salva Kiir (then deputy leader of SPLA), supported their role in defence in the Bahr el Ghazal region. Dr John Garang (then leader of SPLA and eastern Dinka), however, was more sceptical, as their activities

79 Pendle, *supra* note 2.

80 Pendle, *supra* note 2.

81 Jok J and Hutchinson S (1999), 'Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ehnic Identities', *African Studies Review* **42** (2).

82 Jok, *supra* note 4.

83 As such, the *titweng* and *gelweng* as institutions are the same but with geographies and security challenges. In particular, *gelweng* was established in 1992 by Daniel Awet, the SPLA Zonal Commander of Bahr el Ghazal by then, with clear objective of protecting the Dinka communities adjacent to western Nuer against the Nuer White Army and other Nuer militias; see Pendle, *supra* note 2, and Nyaba P (2001), 'The Disarmament of Gel-Weng of Bahr el Ghazal and the Consolidation of the Nuer-Dinka Peace Agreement 1999', New Sudan Council of Churches and Pax Christi.

84 Skiner S (2012), 'Civilian Disarmament in South Sudan: A legacy of struggle', Saferworld Report.

85 Pendle, *supra* note 2; Safterworld (2015), 'South Sudan's galweng: filling a security gap, or perpetuating conflict?' (www.saferworld.org.uk/news-and-views/case-study/58-south-sudanas-galweng-filling-a-security-gap-or-perpetuating-conflict), 29 April.

were not under his direct control and SPLA supervision.[86] The differing positions of Kiir and Garang on the *titweng* and their role is likely to have contributed to the political rift that emerged between them over the SPLA leadership in 2004. The division that emerged between Salva Kiir's government and the so-called Garangists – which included some of the 11 SPLA heavyweights accused of plotting to overthrow the government and detained in late 2013 – has its roots in this period of friction within the SPLA leadership.

iii. **Post-CPA years: fragmentation and escalating violence**

The church-mediated Wunlit peace agreement brokered between western Nuer and western Dinka (known as the Wunlit Dinka-Nuer Covenant) on 8 March 1999 contributed both to easing ethnic tensions in the war-torn South and to the reunification of SPLA in 2002, following the return of Dr Riek Machar to the SPLA/M fold. Unlike peace agreements before or since, the process of disarming local militias such as Nuer White Armies and the Dinka *gelweng* was discussed and agreed in the Wunlit Covenant, with chiefs and local authorities playing the lead role formulating those provisions.

Unlike Wunlit, the 2005 CPA focused on power-sharing arrangements among elites and excluded the large range of non-state security actors that existed across the South. The only reference to southern armed groups outside the SPLA was through the umbrella term 'other armed groups', which were to be either incorporated into formal forces or disarmed and reintegrated into civilian institutions. Discussion on 'other armed groups' focused on armed militias used by the Government of Sudan to wage war in southern Sudan, such as the South Sudan Defence Force and even the Nuer White Armies. Little attention was given to pro-SPLA armed groups such as *gelweng*/*titweng*. This might partly be because these forces were not seen to pose an immediate threat to the SPLA government, due to their historic role supporting the SPLA and pro-SPLA communities.

Excluded from the CPA and overlooked in subsequent security sector reform initiatives the *gelweng*/*titweng* continued to play a major role in the post-conflict period from 2005. The Southern Sudanese Government maintained an ambiguous relationship with the groups, veering between repression and intermittent cooperation. In most parts of South Sudan and particularly in the former regions of Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile, serious gaps in government security provision meant that popular incentives to relinquish small arms remained very low and that pressure continued to be placed on young men to defend their families and communities.

While the CPA's security provisions had included a requirement that internal security in the South be taken up by a newly created Southern Sudanese police force, policing capacity in practice remained desperately low. Internationally-led police reform programmes struggled to train and support a force that consistently fell to the bottom of the security pecking order for the new central government. National government budgetary allocations to the force remained meagre and unreliable throughout this period, and far below resources channelled to the national army. The police service was widely acknowledged to operate as a welfare system for absorbing older or illiterate former soldiers unable to perform in the SPLA. Large numbers of officers on the payroll are thought to have been inactive: in 2014, a senior police official with the South Sudan peacekeeping mission estimated that of the 3,000 plus South Sudanese police officers on the payroll in Lakes State, a maximum of 500 were involved in active policing work and the bulk of those engaged as personal bodyguards for senior politicians.

The weakness of South Sudan's security institutions created a context in which violence between sections of the *gelweng* escalated unchecked. Extreme poverty, few livelihood

86 Johnson D (ed) (2003), *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

opportunities and a ready supply of small arms meant that as the second civil war wound down, the *gelweng* in Lakes State turned their guns on each other.[87] Violence was fuelled by a demand for cattle wealth, required as dowry to marry, and by a tit-for-tat pattern of revenge killing that neither the security services nor the nascent justice system were able to contain.

From 2005, rival Dinka sections armed with AK-47s and sometimes heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, clashed regularly in different parts of Lakes State and with armed youths in neighbouring Warrap. In December 2011, county commissioners reported that at least 249 people had been killed and 319 injured in cattle raiding since the start of the year. Violence between Dinka sections escalated again in August 2014, after the killing of Paramount Chief Apareer Chut Dhuol – brother of the governor – in Rumbek East reignited a 12 year-old conflict between the Thiyic and Gony sections. Eighteen cases of rape were reported in retaliatory attacks that followed the killing, according to a senior UNMISS official.

Disarmament campaigns carried out by the SPLA in 2000, 2006, 2008, 2010 and in 2014 recovered a few thousand weapons, which were often quickly replaced through the easy trade in small arms with neighbouring communities across the state border.[88] Operations have done little to quell the violence in the long term, with heavy-handed tactics used by SPLA soldiers as part of the 'forceful' phase of disarmament campaigns (generally preceded by a brief period for voluntary disarmament) spurring an increase in violence and deepening local hostility to security forces. Interviews with senior government security officials in mid-2014 indicated that at the time the government and the military believed cattle camp youth heavily out-armed SPLA troops stationed in and around Rumbek.

Violence has been fuelled in part by the involvement of state and national politicians, and by government policies that have run counter to disarmament. *Gelweng* in Lakes protect not only their communities' cattle but also the cattle of county commissioners and other government and army elites, who often use relatives in cattle camps to guard their herds. Rising bride prices in the post-2005 period has increased the susceptibility of young men to elite patronage, where cattle protection and military loyalty are exchanged for gifts from elites of guns and ammunition.[89] Traditional bride-wealth practices – and inflationary pressures on dowries – have operated as a critical conflict driver in Lakes. In turn they are a potentially important focus for conflict management.

Disarmament targeting the *gelweng* has drawn criticism for its violence, its limited returns, and because of the intrusion of political interests on the conduct of campaigns, with elite-sponsored herds reportedly overlooked as others were targeted. Other state government measures have also undermined disarmament impacts. Following the outbreak of the current civil war, a disarmament process underway in Lakes State was suspended and, sometime around February 2014, a stockpile of weapons in SPLA stores was released to the general population.[90] Periodic initiatives to co-opt parts of the *gelweng* as so-called 'community police' – initiatives that have often entailed little by way of training or salaries – has also reinvigorated the *gelweng*, increased incentives for joining, and elevated young men with no experience of civilian policing into a poorly-defined and unstable force. In February 2015, the national government announced that upward of 10,000 irregular troops would again be recruited from Warrap and Lakes states. Initiatives suggest that the national and state governments continue to see the young men as a flexible, irregular reserve force for reinforcing state security capability, even as those forces continue to inflict violence on local communities.

87 O'Brian, A (2009), 'Shots in the Dark: The 2008 South Sudan Civilian Disarmament Campaign', (Geneva: Small Arms Survey); also Saferworld Community Security Assessment: Rumbek, 2014.

88 On disarmament in Lakes until 2008, see O'Brian A (2009), 'Shots in the Dark: The 2008 South Sudan Civilian Disarmament Campaign' (Geneva: Small Arms Survey).

89 Sommers M, Schwartz S (2011), 'Dowry and Division: Youth and State Building in South Sudan'. *Special Report 295*, United States Institute of Peace.

90 Saferworld interviews, Rumbek, August 2014.

Despite their central role in violence in Lakes State, it is clear that the *gelweng* continue to garner some legitimacy and support among local communities. Interviews in Rumbek and Rumbek East from 2014–15 indicate that young boys widely aspire to become *gelweng* when they grow up. During heavy violence in central Lakes during mid-2014, communities in Rumbek town also reported population movements from town to the cattle camps, as people sought the protection of the *gelweng*.

iv. Dinka youth and the current civil war

Disarmament campaigns in Lakes and elsewhere contrasted from 2012 with moves by the SPLA leadership to use the *titweng* from the north of South Sudan for military operations. The process saw part of the *titweng* transform into a personalised force and later become absorbed into the SPLA.

In April 2012, the *titweng* were reportedly organised into a quasi-formal force known as the *Mathiang Anyoor* (brown caterpillar in Dinka) to reinforce government offensives in the contested oil-rich border area of Panthou (Heglig).[91] Interviews with the military elite carried out by the African Union Commission of Inquiry formed to investigate abuses committed during the conflict in South Sudan from December 2013 indicate that the *Mathiang Anyoor* were never formally incorporated into the armed forces.[92] The group appears to have existed outside the SPLA hierarchy, and no budget was ever acquired for their activities.[93] Senior military officials estimate the group to be between 7,500 and 15,000 people strong.[94]

Another force known as *Dotku Beny* ('rescue the chief' in Dinka) was formed in mid-2013 from *titweng* and *Mathiang Anyoor*. Moved to a location near Juba immediately before the crisis, the *Dotku Beny* along with the Presidential Guard are reported to have carried an initial recce of Nuer households on 9 December 2013 before carrying out atrocities against Nuer civilians from 15 December 2013.[95] Because of their ethnic composition and their association with the president, the SPLA High Command resisted recognising the forces as part of the formal national army. The replacement of SPLA Chief of Staff General James Hoth in April 2014 with Paul Malong however triggered a shift in their status, with recruits ordered to report to SPLA bases during early 2014. The formation of *Mathiang Anyoor* from the *titweng* – and their incorporation into the SPLA – marked a shift in the status of these non-state security actors from their traditional role protecting cattle and communities to one focused on the protection of elites in the national government, particularly elites hailing from their homelands in Bahr el Ghazal.

Gelweng/titweng and defence against the SPLA-IO

Mirroring events in the early 1990s, the *gelweng* and *titweng* in 2014 again found themselves guarding grazing lands against an opposition led by Riek Machar. They acted as a community-based line of defence to protect government-held areas. In 2014 and 2015, however, the SPLA-IO did not launch large-scale offensives to raid cattle from Warrap or Lakes states. Thus, while the western Dinka-Nuer grazing lands became a *de fatco* frontline between the SPLA-IO and Juba government, there was little active fighting.

The *gelweng* have fought along SPLA units, though often only for short periods and where participation in attacks offered opportunities to fulfill other, more local aims.

91 African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (2014), 'Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan', Addis Ababa, 15 October, p 22, paragraphs 53–54.

92 African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (2014), pp 22–23, paragraph 54.

93 Radio Tamazuj (2015) 'Formation of the 'Mathiang Anyoor' in South Sudan' and 'Generals say Juba massacres done by private militia, not SPLA', 9 March.

94 African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (2014), p 22, paragraph 53.

95 African Union (2015), 'Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan: Executive Summary', Addis Ababa.

In December 2013, a number of *gelweng* seized the opportunity offered by the national crisis to attack from Rumbek North County in Lakes State to grab contested lands in Madhol to the north.[96] In 2014, gelwemg from parts of Lakes and Warrap states also launched an attack through Madhol into Panyijar in southern Unity State, towards the centre of the national conflict.[97] As yet, however, these individual incidents have not become a constant feature of the national crisis.

Gelweng/titweng and fighting in the Equatorias

Since 2014, *gelweng* have also worked as a conduit for the intensification of fighting in the Equatorias. During the driest months of the year, from January until May, Dinka cattle herders cannot find adequate pastures for their cattle in much of Lakes State. For their cattle to survive, they face a choice of migrating their cattle to pasture either to the northeast (near the Nuerlands) or to the southwest (near Western Equatoria). By late 2014, fighting between the government and SPLA-IO caused the borders with the Nuerlands to become a frontline in the national conflict, and highly militarised. The conflict meant that many *gelweng* herded their cattle to southwest, to Maridi and Mundria counties in Western Equatoria. As usual, the *gelweng* were armed, and the influx of cattle aggravated tensions with local populations.

In January 2015, significant fighting erupted between *gelweng* and local communities in Western Equatoria and northern Central Equatoria. An April 2015 presidential decree ordered the *gelweng* to leave with their cattle, which the *gelweng* refused to heed, prompting community retaliation including by the arrow boys. SPLA-IO leaders used this tension around cattle movements to mobilise local support.

Clashes between cattle-herders and farmers in the Equatorias during the current civil war reflect longer-term political tensions, dating back to the movement of the Dinka's cattle to the Equatorias in the 1990s. After the 1991 'Bor massacre', Dinka Bor found safety for their cattle by moving them to the Equatorias, where they forcibly demanded grazing for their cattle and ignored previous systems to peacefully negotiate grazing rights. Dinka from Bahr el Ghazal have also sought grazing land for their cattle in the Equatorias, due to its relative safety. In 2014, many *gelweng* herded cattle to grazing areas they knew from the 1990s.

Equatorian resistance to Dinka cattle herders does not reflect an intrinsic hostility between pastoralists and farmers. Rather, Equatorians' frustration appears to be with herders' militarised approach to negotiating access and associations with the brute force of the SPLA. In 2016, it appeared that cattle movements and the close relationship between the *gelweng* and the SPLA had again sparked violence. Tensions point to the value of further research on historic relationships between Dinka herders and communities in the Equatorias, including to help identify fruitful opportunities for dialogue.

96 See USAID (2013), 'Recent reported incidents of violence in South Sudan' (https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/02.25.14%20-%20Recent%20Reported%20Incidents%20of%20Violence%20in%20South%20Sudan.pdf).

97 See Sudan Tribune (2014), 'SPLA attempted to recapture Unity state county, rebels claim', 7 February.

V. Conclusion: harnessing and managing the role of non-state security actors

The *gelweng* and *titweng* have received little attention in analysis of South Sudan's conflicts and among international observers. This appears to reflect a number of factors, including their relative invisibility during past civil wars and in the CPA's provisions, their ambiguous relationship with the state in the post-CPA period, and the limitations of an international security sector reform field that has tended to overlook the wide range of non-state and hybrid actors that exist outside the formal security services. Embroiled in local cattle raiding from 2005, conflict perpetrated by these actors has often been consigned to the less political category of 'inter-communal' violence. The current civil war, however, has highlighted the ability of commanders to use these forces to violently cement power at the heart of government.

At the local level, people have experienced the *titweng* and *gelweng* as both sources of protection and instability. *Gelweng* or *titweng* have undoubtedly asserted themselves as 'legitimate' security providers among some communities and reinforced central government through the *Mathiang Anyoor* or Doku Beny.[98] Their shifting relationship with government also has implications for local governance, changing the authority of chiefs and elders over local youth. There is still much space however to better understand the role of the *titweng* and *gelweng* in current South Sudanese conflicts. International and nationally-led initiatives to support a more constructive role for Dinka youth should seek to address important gaps in knowledge about their roles in violence and relationships locally. These include, for example, evidence of resistance among the *titweng*/*gelweng* to elite or military pressure to fight, sources of authority or legitimacy that might regulate their behaviour and conduct in violence, and signs of more productive, peaceful relationships that exist locally – among Dinka youth or between Dinka youths and Nuer community forces – all of which could provide constructive entry points for peace measures.

Programmatic considerations also abound. Disarmament alone has failed to deliver improvements in local security or security provision in Lakes State, often instead deepening violence and worsening relationships with communities. A more effective approach to security will need to respond to the reality that arms possession is both a cause of violence and an unsurprising response to the pressing lack of state security provision. In this context, measures geared at simply disarming or repressing the *gelweng*/*titweng* – without concomitant work to reduce local violence risks – are unlikely to succeed. Conflict resolution expectations and measures in Lakes and elsewhere instead need to be tied to generating livelihoods and entrepreneurship that preserve local cultural attachment to cattle. Elite involvement in bride-wealth payments and the inflation of bride-wealth over recent years has also spurred violence. Local calls for measures geared at limiting dowry payments exist, and need to be supported.

98 Pendle, *supra* note 2, p 434.

4

The Nuer White Armies:

Comprehending South Sudan's most infamous community defence group

Ingrid Marie Breidlid and Michael J. Arensen

i. Introduction

WITHIN DAYS OF THE OUTBREAK OF CONFLICT in Juba on 15 December 2013, and the subsequent targeting of Nuer civilians by government security forces, armed Nuer civilian youth – commonly known as the White Army – mobilised on a massive scale to avenge the killings. In the following months, Nuer youth, fighting alongside the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-in-Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), clashed with the government army (the SPLA) and its allies across the Greater Upper Nile region. Both warring parties committed grave human rights violations against civilians residing in conflict-affected areas.[99]

While multiple civilian defence groups have mobilised in South Sudan since the start of the present civil war, the Nuer White Army has received perhaps the most attention from international observers. Media reports have perpetuated popular images of the White Army as a ferocious, disorderly and uncontrollable force, driven by deep-rooted hatred for the Dinka ethnic group.[100] Researchers have often reinforced some of these narratives by focusing on secondary sources and the perspectives of the educated, political and urban (or peri-urban) elite.[101] Meanwhile, the views and perspectives of the core membership of the White Armies – cattle camp youth residing in rural areas of South Sudan – and the communities they reside within are rarely included. As a result, the origins of the White Armies, their historical role in conflict, and their complex leadership and mobilisation structures remain poorly understood.

This chapter aims to complement and challenge existing literature on the White Armies by situating them in wider Nuer society and the history of Nuer responses to local and political violence. It highlights a number of factors that are central to understanding the nature of the White Armies today, including their origins in community defence and protection, sophisticated leadership and mobilisation structures, historical involvement in political wars, and the complex motivations behind their decisions to

99 Human Rights Watch (2014), 'South Sudan's New War: Abuses by Government and Opposition Forces'; International Crisis Group (2014), 'South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name', April.

100 See for example Paterno S, Morgan S (2014), 'South Sudan: The White Army factor in South Sudan's conflict', *All Africa*, 27 January; BBC News (2013), 'Conflicting reports over White Army clashes', 29 December (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25543061); Vice (2014), 'Saving South Sudan', May (www.vice.com/read/saving-south-sudan).

101 Young J (2016), 'Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan's Civil War' (Geneva: Small Arms Survey); Adeba B (2015), 'Making Sense of the White Army's Return in South Sudan', Centre for Security Governance (1), February; Paterno S, Morgan S (2014), 'South Sudan: The White Army factor in South Sudan's conflict', *All Africa*, 27 January.

participate in violence. Far from a recent or 'unruly' feature of South Sudan's changing security scene, the White Armies are continuations of traditional Nuer defence structures, which have evolved in response to an increasingly hostile and militarised environment. As they usually engage in defence and offences on behalf of their communities, the White Armies are locally perceived to be legitimate security providers. The White Armies' efficient leadership and mobilisation structures have at the same time made them desirable allies for military actors, as illustrated by their alignment with SPLA-IO in the current civil war.

The chapter concludes by outlining the steps needed to engage the White Armies in constructive peace and security sector reform processes in the future. Attempts to manage the White Armies in the past through disarmament campaigns or measures to integrate forces into state security organs have failed largely because the factors underpinning their existence as a force – a failure of governance, particularly in security and justice provision – have never been addressed. Better understanding of and engagement with community defence structures such as the White Armies in security provision will be essential to facilitate a durable peace in Greater Upper Nile and South Sudan more widely.

This chapter is based on primary research on the White Armies conducted in various rural locations of the Greater Upper Nile region between 2011 and 2016.[102] During this time period, more than 300 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were carried out with primary respondents, including current and former White Armies members and leaders residing in cattle camps and villages, educated town youth, elders, women, and traditional authorities. Separate interviews were also conducted with government officials at the local and national level and with representatives of the Nuer elite and SPLM/A-IO politicians in Nairobi, Kenya and Gambella, Ethiopia.[103]

ii. **Origins: kinship, conflict and community defence**

The name the White Army, or *dec in bor* in Nuer, is commonly thought to derive from the ash youth cover their bodies with to protect against mosquitos.[104] According to current and former White Army members, however, the term refers to their lack of uniforms and training, and contrasts with the Black Army, or *dec in char*, a Nuer term for trained soldiers in uniform.[105] The White Army is not a single cohesive force, but is comprised of various Nuer community defence groups in the Greater Upper Nile region.[106] These forces might therefore more accurately be referred to as the White Armies.[107]

Although the name emerged at different times in various Nuer areas over the last few decades, the White Armies are continuations of traditional Nuer mobilisation

102 In this period, the authors have conducted multiple field studies of youth/White Armies involvement in violence. Michael J. Arensen conducted research and has done peace programming for different organisations, including AECOM, Pact, Oxfam, IOM and RVI. Ingrid Marie Breidlid carried out research for the PRIO project 'Youth and Violence in South Sudan' funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and her PhD, under the PRIO project 'Dynamics of State Failure and Violence', funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The researchers carried out primary research in various *payams* and bomas of Akobo, Uror, Nyirol, Pibor, Twic East, Duk, Leer, Mayendit, Ulang and Nasir counties of South Sudan, as well as in Matar and Lare in Gambella, Ethiopia.

103 While these interviews contributed to complement and corroborate some of the data collected among the primary respondents in rural areas of Greater Upper Nile, their responses were often biased and influenced by the political context, and in many cases differed significantly from the responses by White Army members and other Nuer community members residing in rural areas. This further illustrates the importance of interviewing primary respondents directly in studies of the White Armies, especially those residing in rural areas of South Sudan.

104 Young J (2007), 'The White Army: An Introduction and Overview' (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva; Thomas E (2015), *South Sudan's Slow Liberation* (London: Zed Books). BBC News (2013), 'Conflicting reports over White Army clashes', 29 December (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25543061).

105 Breidlid I M, Arensen M (2014), 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go' (Oslo: Peace Research Institute) p 5. In the recent conflict, as well as in the past, some White Army fighters received military uniforms from regular forces. They are nonetheless regarded as 'civilians' – and commonly make alterations to their uniforms in order to distinguish themselves from the regular soldiers. Although the Nuer White Army is the most well-known example, the term 'white' to describe untrained civilian fighters is also used by other ethnic groups in South Sudan.

106 Breidlid I M, Arensen M, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'. Greater Upper Nile is comprised of the former states of Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity. The government has since dissolved these states, as part of the presidential decree to create 28 new states, but SPLM/A-IO rejects this decree.

107 John Young also used the plural form of the 'White Armies' when describing the different White Army units in eastern Nuer areas, see *The White Army: An Introduction and Overview* p 16.

structures documented by the anthropologist Evans Pritchard in the 1930s.[108] The involvement of Nuer youth in the White Armies is closely linked to their security responsibilities at home – to their role as cattle keepers and protectors of the family's cattle wealth.[109] Similar to other pastoralist communities in South Sudan, after Nuer boys go through an initiation ceremony to become men, they are given the prime responsibility of protecting the family's cattle herd against wild animals and potential enemies.[110] This can involve participating in 'blood feuds', inter-communal wars and revenge attacks.[111]

Nuer youth coordinate their protection responsibilities as part of territorial units at various levels – ranging from the smallest homestead unit to larger sections and even sub-ethnic groups. The Nuer ethnic group is divided into 11 different sub-ethnic groups – such as the Lou Nuer and Eastern Jikany Nuer to the east of the Nile, or Bul Nuer and Dok Nuer to the west. These groups are again divided into primary sections and sub-sections (or *cieng* in Nuer).[112] Importantly, Nuer peoples identify more closely with their immediate kinship groups than the larger sections and the greater ethnic group.[113] Reflecting this, intra-Nuer feuds frequently occur between sections at various levels, over social matters, cattle, grazing and water points, as well as homicides. When faced with external threats, however, members of these groups often temporarily seek unity.[114] Members of the Lou Nuer primary sections of *Gun* and *Mor*, for example – based in Greater Akobo – fight each other frequently, but unite when threatened or attacked by other ethnic groups (as they have done in response to the Murle in Pibor and Dinka in Bor) or sub-ethnic groups (such as the Jikany Nuer). On rare occasions, sub-ethnic groups like the Lou Nuer and Jikany Nuer – which fought frequently between 1993 and 2010 – have also aligned. This was most recently illustrated in their joint mobilisations in support of SPLA-IO during the civil war.[115] The ability to unify Nuer youth across sectional divides accounts for the White Armies significant mobilising power. Efficient local leadership structures in place also play significant roles in large-scale mobilisations.

iii. **Leadership, legitimacy and command and control**

Popular presentations of the White Armies as an unruly mob ignore the complex leadership structures regulating violence within and between Nuer communities and their neighbours. Leadership within the White Armies is flexible and has evolved over time in response to changing security risks and dynamics. During the colonial period, war leaders at village levels were self-appointed or selected on a temporary basis for specific raids or local feuds because of their skill and bravery.[116] Larger mobilisations required the permission and guidance of Nuer prophets, who would perform sacrifices and sometimes accompany youth in battles against neighbouring communities.[117]

108 Evans-Pritchard E E (1969), *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

109 *Ibid*; See also Simonse S (2005), 'Warriors, hooligans and mercenaries: failed statehood and the violence of young male pastoralists in the Horn of Africa', in Abbink J, van Kessel I (eds) (2004), *Vanguard or vandals: youth, politics, and conflict in Africa* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers).

110 Hutchinson S E (1996), *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War and the State*, 1st Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press); Lienhardt G (1961), *Divinity and Experience?: The Religion of the Dinka: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). The initiation process to become a man involves the receiving of a gaar, or tribal scarring.

111 Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*. "A feud or ter, is fighting within a tribe (sub-ethnic group) or a mutual hostility between local communities within a tribe (sub-ethnic group), with the possibility of arbitration and payment of bloodwealth. More accurately it describes the relations between the kin on both sides in a situation of homicide, for it then refers to a specific institution, often referred to as 'blood feud' (p 150). "*Kur* is a fight between tribes (sub-ethnic groups). If a community of one tribe attempts to avenge a homicide on a community of another tribe, a state of intertribal war ensues. No claims of compensation would here be recognized", p 161.

112 *Ibid*.

113 Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*; Johnson D H (1982), 'Tribal Boundaries and Border Wars: Nuer-Dinka Relations in the Sobat and Zaraf Valleys, c. 1860–1976', *The Journal of African History* **23** (2), 1 January, pp 183–203; Fukui K, Markakis J (1994), *Ethnicity & Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Woodbridge: James Currey Publishers).

114 Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer.*

115 The Lou Nuer and Jikany Nuer White Armies, however, fought under separate leadership structures. Breidlid I M, Michael Arensen M, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'.

116 Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer.*

117 Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*; Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer.*

The violence of the first and second civil wars, however, precipitated the introduction of new leadership positions and fighting tactics.[118] Recent research carried out among Lou and Jikany Nuer communities suggests that permanent leadership positions, known as *kuaar burnam*, were established in the 1960s and 1970s in several eastern Nuer locations in response to rising levels of insecurity, internal fragmentation among the Nuer, and local leadership vacuums.[119] Similar leadership structures spread to western Nuer areas in the 1990s.[120]

The *kuaar burnam* structures have since come to play critical roles in mobilisation and decision-making processes within the White Armies. Mirroring the hierarchical system of chiefs created by the British colonial administration, each unit of organisation within local White Armies is represented by their own *kuaar burnam* – from the smallest territorial unit (the homestead) to the county level.[121] Compared to Nuer war leaders in the past, *kuaar burnam* today have an expanded range of security responsibilities during both war and peace time. While they are better known for coordinating community defence and leading revenge attacks, these leaders are also responsible for mitigating internal disputes, as well as negotiating pasture access and peace agreements with neighbours. Elected by their youth, *kuaar burnam* perceived to be performing poorly can be voted out.[122]

Hierarchies organising the *kuaar burnam* enable efficient command and control, with representatives from smaller sections reporting to the representative a level above.[123] Currently, the highest permanent *kuaar burnam* position within the largest and most active White Army group – the Lou Nuer White Army in Jonglei – is at the county level. However, in times of war, requiring the involvement of all Lou Nuer sections, an overall Lou Nuer White Army leader for Greater Akobo is selected among the county leaders.[124] The leadership hierarchy enables Nuer communities to rapidly mobilise civilian fighters on a large scale. Despite being local initiatives, the White Armies efficient leadership and mobilisation structures have made them desirable allies for military and political actors, as seen during the second Sudanese civil war and in the ongoing conflict.

The increased decision-making powers of youth and their leaders within the White Armies has not eclipsed the role of elders and influential spiritual leaders, who continue to influence, both in terms of restricting and promoting, decisions to engage in violence.[125] As in the past, Nuer prophets play important roles promoting internal peace and social cohesion among Nuer sections.[126] Concurrently, some prophets have also promoted and morally sanctioned youths' participation in large-scale violence through guidance and blessings of youth fighters ahead of raids and offensives. Importantly, the powers and influence of prophets can extend beyond sub-ethnic

118 Breidlid I M (work in progress), *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations in the Dynamics of Violence in South Sudan*. PhD, University of Oslo.

119 Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*. The term was initially *kuaar bura*, but later changed to *kuaar burnam*. While most Lou and Jikany respondents dated the formation of *kuaar bura* positions to the 1970s, in some areas lower level positions emerged already during the 1960s. Interestingly, the historian Dereje Feyissa has also referred to the term 'bura' [Anuak word for youth], when discussing the mobilisation of Nuer and Anuak fighters on both sides of the Sudan/Ethiopia border during the first Sudanese civil war. See Feyissa D (2015), 'Power and Its Discontents: Anywaa's Reactions to the Expansion of the Ethiopian State, 1950–1991', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* **48** (1), 1 January, p 31. Meanwhile, Sharon Hutchinson and Jok Madut Jok also reference a Nuer 'youth brigade' known as burnam, emerging during the first civil war. See 'Sudan's Second Prolonged War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnicities.' *African Studies Review*, **42** (2), September, pp 125–45.

120 Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations.*

121 *Ibid*.

122 Breidlid and Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go', p 6.

123 *Ibid*.

124 *Ibid*. Greater Akobo includes the area that was comprised of the three counties of Akobo, Nyirol and Uror in Jonglei State, as of the recognised borders in 2013. Although not a permanent position, the current overall *kuaar burnam* for Greater Akobo has held his position since 2011 because of the longstanding warfare between Lou Nuer and Murle communities and involvement in the new civil war.

125 The critical role of contemporary Nuer prophets was reflected in a series of interviews conducted in Akobo, Nyirol, Uror, Duk, Leer, Mayendit and Matar (Gambella) in the period between 2012–2014. Apart from interviews with White Army members and other segments of Nuer society, interviews were also conducted with the influential Lou Nuer prophet in Uror, Dak Kueth (20 February 2012, Michael Arensen) as well as with a Lou Nuer prophet in Akobo east, Yien Tut (8 December 2012, Ingrid Marie Breidlid). See also Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'; Hutchinson S E, Pendle N (2015), 'Violence, legitimacy, and prophecy: Nuer struggles with uncertainty in South Sudan', *American Ethnologist*, 00 (0) pp 1–16.

126 Johnson, *Nuer Prophets.*

and even ethnic lines.[127] In one of the most significant examples from the post-CPA period, the Lou Nuer prophet Dak Kueth facilitated a military alliance between Dinka Nyareweng and Lou Nuer youth ahead of a major retaliatory attack on Murle communities in Pibor in December 2011.[128] Although the attack was organised and led by the high-level leadership of the Lou Nuer White Army in coordination with Nyareweng Dinka youth, Dak Kueth played a significant advisory, spiritual, and unifying role before and during the offensive.[129] Nuer prophets have continued to play an important role brokering and legitimising violence in the current civil war. Military actors – including SPLA-IO leaders – have in turn sought to collaborate closely with Nuer prophets in order to increase their leverage over Nuer youths and their involvement in the war.[130]

iv. History of involvement in government wars

When war broke out in December 2013, Nuer White Armies in the Greater Upper Nile region fought alongside SPLM/A-IO in their battles over control of the three state capitals of Greater Upper Nile: Bentiu, Bor and Malakal. These combined forces perpetrated extreme violence, including killings and rapes of non-combatants seeking refuge in churches, mosques and hospitals. Revenge for atrocities committed against Nuer civilians in Juba in the first few days of the war no doubt motivated many fighters. Participation of the White Armies in the violence, however, also needs to be understood in the context of a longer history of involvement in political violence. Although the organisation of the White Armies takes place at local levels, political and military actors have always had strong interests in using these structures to pursue their own political and military aims.[131]

The second Sudanese civil war 1983–2005

Existing literature traces the emergence of the Nuer White Armies to the 1991 split in the SPLM/A – triggered by the fall of its primary backer, the Ethiopian Derg – and the subsequent outbreak of violence between the SPLA-Nasir faction, led by Riek Machar, and SPLA-Torit, led by John Garang.[132] The November 1991 military offensive by the SPLM/A-Nasir faction and aligned Nuer civilians against Garang's faction and Dinka communities in Greater Bor has commonly been described as a turning point in the dynamics of South-South warfare. The attack, known as the 'Bor massacre', involved widespread violence against Dinka communities, including killings, abductions and looting. Villages in Kongor and Bor were completely destroyed and large parts of the population displaced.[133] The attack was followed by devastating retaliatory violence by Garang's faction and aligned Dinka civilians on Nuer communities in Jonglei, with the fighting subsequently spreading to Unity, Lakes and Warrap.[134, 135] Closely related to the available literature on the emergence of the Nuer White Armies, many South Sudanese and international academics have described the post-1991 factional violence, including the involvement of civilians in intentional killings of women, children

127 *Ibid*.

128 Interviews with Nyareweng youth in Poktap, Duk County, March 2013, Ingrid Marie Breidlid. Interviews with Lou Nuer youth in Uror, Nyirol and Akobo counties, 2011–2012, Michael Arensen.

129 *Ibid*. The prophet did not move with the youth to Pibor, but communicated with youth leaders via satellite phone.

130 Interviews carried out with White Army fighters and SPLA-IO soldiers in Nuer districts of Matar and Lare, Gambella, February-March 2014. See also Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone Who Can Carry a Gun Can Go'.

131 Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations.*

132 Young, 'The White Army'; Young, 'Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan's Civil War'; Thomas, *South Sudan Slow Liberation*; Skedsmo A (2003), 'The Changing Meaning of Small Arms in Nuer Society', *African Security Studies Review*, **12** (4) pp 57–68.

133 Human Rights Watch Africa (1994), *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by All Parties in the War in Southern Sudan*. (New York: Human Rights Watch). This event has commonly been referred to as the 'Bor massacre'.

134 In October 2015, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir decreed that the country's ten states would be sub-divided into 28 states, a measure that was subsequently approved by parliament. This article refers primarily to the ten state borders that existed prior to the announcement, for ease of reference only.

135 Human Rights Watch Africa (1994), *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by All Parties in the War in Southern Sudan* (New York: Human Rights Watch); Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*.

and elders, as unprecedented in Nuer-Dinka warfare.[136] The participation of civilian fighters in the factional warfare following the split of the SPLM/A in 1991, including the 'Bor massacre', undeniably marked important changes in the nature and form of violence in the South, both in terms of scale of civilian mobilisation and magnitude of violence. However, this narrative overlooks a longer historical process of civilian militarisation and mobilisations into political violence, including involvement in violence against non-combatants.

Importantly, the participation of Nuer and Dinka youth in political warfare and extreme violence were not new developments in 1991. According to previously unpublished research, eastern Nuer youth, organised by their respective leaders (*kuuar burnam*), participated in military offensives against the Sudanese army and rival southern factions as early as the 1970s and 1980s.[137] Interviews with Lou and Jikany Nuer former civilian fighters further suggest that the term *dec in bor* to describe Nuer civilian fighters had currency in some eastern Nuer areas during the same period, spreading to western Nuer areas in the 1990s (some Jikany and Lou Nuer former youth fighters even claimed the term was used in their areas as early as the 1960s).[138] Hence, the factional violence following the 1991 split of the SPLA did not mark the birth of the White Armies, but brought both the term and involvement of civilians in political warfare to the attention of international observers. The evolution of the Nuer White Armies should therefore be seen within the context of a gradual militarisation of local defence structures in response to an increasingly hostile environment.

South-South violence after the 1991 split of SPLM/A was widespread. While government and rebel forces remained the key perpetrators of violence against civilians, aligned civilian fighters, who had their own local grievances, also participated in killings, raiding, looting and destruction of villages. The involvement of civilians in extreme forms of violence during this period has been attributed to the miltiarisation of Nuer and Dinka ethnic identities (see also below discussion of 'ethnic conflict').[139] As suggested by Hutchinson and Jok, the brutality of warfare, combined with direct interventions by military leaders, redefined the ethics of war as well as the social and spiritual consequences of homicide in 'government wars.' This contributed to the erosion of traditional social control mechanisms and facilitated indiscriminate killings of non-combatants, including women, children and elders.[140] While atrocities against civilians intensified in many areas – reflecting local fighters increased experience with and exposure to extreme violence and modern firearms – the types of violence committed against civilians after the 1991 split were not new in the history of South-South violence.[141] Indeed, according to local Dok and Haak Nuer respondents in Leer and Mayendit, Unity State, women and children were also directly targeted in a series of brutal revenge attacks between Nuer and Dinka communities of Unity, Warrap and Lakes states in the 1980s.[142] Meanwhile, during the factional warfare between SPLM/A

136 Jok, Hutchinson, 'Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities'; Hutchinson S E (2000), 'Nuer Ethnicity Militarized', *Anthropology Today* **16** (3), June, pp 6–13.

137 While the nature of cooperation became more sophisticated in the 1980s, eastern Nuer youth fought in support of Anyanya II rebels against the Sudan Armed Forces already in the period 1975–1983. Following the split between SPLM/A and Anyanya II and subsequent factional warfare (1983–1987), many eastern Nuer youth mobilised to fight alongside Anyanya II against SPLA. After the merger between the two rival factions in 1988, eastern Nuer youth were used by SPLA in military offences against SAF and rival southern factions (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*) Evidence also indicates Nuer civilians were involved in political warfare in the first civil war, but more research is required on their organisation and relations with regular forces. See Feyissa, 'Power and Its Discontents'; Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.

138 Interviews with former Lou and Jikany Nuer civilian fighters in Akobo, Nyirol, Uror, and Matar (2012–2016) (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

139 Hutchinson S E (2000), 'Nuer ethnicity militarized', *Anthropology Today* **16** (3), pp 6–13; Jok J M, Hutchinson S E (1999), 'Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities', *African Studies Review* **42** (2) pp 125–45.

140 *Ibid*.

141 While some Nuer politicians may want to divert the responsibility of Bor massacre to Nuer civilians, interviews with both Nuer and Dinka respondents suggest that many of the killings were carried out by Anyanya II fighters and SPLA-Nasir soldiers. Anyanya II fighters, who recently had merged with Machar's Nasir forces – were mainly from Bul Nuer and Lak Nuer. While White Army fighters also engaged in the brutal killings of civilians, many focused their activities on cattle raiding, looting and abductions (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

142 Interviews with Dok and Haak Nuer respondents, Leer and Mayendit (November–December 2013) (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*); Although intentional killings of women, children and elders during Dinka-Nuer warfare were rare in the period preceding the second civil war, there has been a tendency to romanticise the past. As documented by Douglas Johnson, extreme violence did also occur during violent revenge attacks between rival communities during the colonial period. See Johnson, *Nuer Prophets*.

and Anyanya II (1983–1987), both parties committed grave atrocities against Nuer and Dinka civilians.[143]

Importantly, although most of the literature focuses on Nuer-Dinka warfare, much of the South-South factional warfare after the 1991 SPLM/A split actually took place between internal Nuer sections and factions in the Greater Upper Nile region.[144] Similarly, internal conflicts frequently occurred between Dinka communities during the same period. As the civil war endured, military factions fragmented further and rival commanders increasingly relied on community defence groups, such as the Nuer White Armies for military support. Local commanders frequently manipulated kinship and section identities to mobilise support from their own communities, contributing to militarise and fragment local communities further. Meanwhile, Nuer youth and chiefs were largely driven into alliances with military actors in their quests for weapons and ammunition, which advanced their abilities to protect their communities against state and non-state armed actors as well as to settle scores against rival communities.[145] These dynamics would inevitably contribute to intensify inter-communal conflicts in the post-2005 period.

The 'inter-war' period (2005–2013)

After the signing of the CPA in 2005, which ended the second Sudanese civil war, security in many rural areas remained in the hands of local youth.[146] In the absence of security and justice provision by the South Sudanese government, the Nuer White Armies remained the primary security force in their localities, regularly engaging in extreme violence and committing serious human rights abuses against civilians with impunity. Local grievances and trauma stemming from atrocities committed by warring factions and civilian fighters during the civil war were never adequately addressed, resulting in revival of inter-communal violence in many locations. In the period between 2007 and 2013, the Lou Nuer White Army and Murle youth in Jonglei engaged in a vicious cycle of revenge attacks. The violence reached its peak in 2011, with entire villages burned to the ground, tens of thousands of cattle looted, thousands of civilians killed, and women and children abducted on both sides.[147] Although the violence in Jonglei received more attention from international observers, western Nuer communities in Unity State were also involved in a series of violent conflicts with Dinka communities in Warrap and Lakes states in the same period, where Nuer White Armies and Dinka youth engaged in cattle raids, looting, destruction of property and killings of non-combatants.[148]

The South Sudanese government conducted three military-led campaigns to disarm civilians in Jonglei, in 2006, 2008 and 2012. These initiatives, however, had little impact curbing the violence, with abuses committed against civilians by SPLA troops during campaigns also deepening popular mistrust towards the central government.[149] Close links between local disputes and political conflicts at the centre also undermined such initiatives, as state and non-state actors sought to manipulate local grievances and mobilise local defence groups in pursuance of their own military and political goals. After losing an election in 2010 former SPLA General George Athor distributed

143 SPLM/A carried out atrocities against Lou and Jikany Nuer communities in Jonglei, Upper Nile and along the Sudan-Ethiopian border during the Anyanya-SPLA conflict (1983–1987). Meanwhile, Anyanya II units carried out brutal attacks against Dinka civilians and SPLA recruits (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*); See also Johnson, Root Causes; Nyaba P A (1996), *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan* (Kampala: Fountain Publ.).

144 Johnson D H (2009), 'The Nuer Civil Wars' in *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North-East Africa: Sudan, Uganda, and the Ethiopia-Sudan Borderlands*, Schlee G, Watson E E (eds) (Oxford: Berghahn Books). Interviews with Dok Nuer respondents in Leer, November-December 2013 (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

145 Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations.*

146 Rolandsen, Øystein H, Breidlid I M (2013), 'What is Youth Violence in Jonglei?' (Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo).

147 The magnitude of violence against civilians even reached international headlines. See www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16575153

148 Interviews with White Army members and *kuaar burnam* in Leer and Mayendit, Unity State, November–December 2013 (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*) .

149 Amnesty International (2012), 'South Sudan: Lethal Disarmament. Abuses related to civilian disarmament in Pibor County, Jonglei State'; O'Brien A (2009), 'Shots in the Dark: The 2008 South Sudan Civilian Disarmament Campaign', Small Arms Survey. Arnold M B and Alden C (2007), '"This Gun is our Food": Demilitarising the White Army Militias of South Sudan.' Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (722).

weapons and ammunition to Lou Nuer youth in an attempt to mobilise them for his insurgency against the government. Most Lou Nuer youth had no interest in his political agenda, however, and instead used their newly acquired weapons in local conflicts with the Murle.[150] According to several White Army members, SPLA also encouraged Lou Nuer youth to mobilise for a large-scale attack on Murle communities in Pibor in June 2013.[151] While many Lou Nuer youth sought revenge for a previous attack by suspected Murle in Akobo West in February 2013, the attack also indirectly supported the ongoing SPLA counter-insurgency operation against David Yau Yau's SSDA Cobra Faction in Pibor.

The 'new' South Sudanese civil war

The large-scale mobilisations of Nuer youth after the war broke out in December 2013 needs to be seen within this historical and socio-political context. As in the past, the White Armies organised and led by their respective youth leaders, participated in military battles both independently and in parallel with professional soldiers (Black Armies) in order to protect their communities and avenge atrocities perpetrated against Nuer civilians in Juba.[152] In the early stages of the war, SPLA-IO military commanders organised military offensives against the SPLA in Bor and Malakal in coordination with local *kuaar burnam* and their White Army forces. Members of the Jikany Nuer White Army involved in the assault on Malakal in December 2013 claimed that they – and not the SPLA-IO – were primarily responsible for capturing the town.[153] Throughout the conflict, the Nuer White Armies of Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity states were not fighting under a common command structure, but continued to mobilise and organise youth fighters separately under their respective youth leaders: they were not, as such, a single fighting force.[154]

Although the SPLM/A-IO leadership depends on the military support of the White Armies, they do not always have control over the youth or even their leaders.[155] Most youth, driven by local security obligations, have little interest in political agendas, long-term offensives, or being based in areas far away from home.[156] In an attempt to enhance control over the youth and encourage recruitment into its military units, the SPLM/A-IO military leadership, like the SPLA in the 1980s, has increasingly sought to integrate Nuer youth leadership into their command structures, with the top *kuaar burnam* in Lou Nuer areas receiving ranks, uniforms and training.[157] The integration of former *kuaar burnam* has facilitated coordination between the White Armies and SPLA-IO during joint civil-military offensives. While new *kuaar burnam* have been selected to replace those recruited into the military, the integration of influential *kuaar burnam* may at the same time reduce internal control within local White Armies, as the new leaders do not always have the influence or experience of those they have replaced.[158]

Commitment to their communities continues to motivate the White Armies and their leaders. As part of their social obligations to protect their communities, attempts to rescue Nuer civilians vulnerable to attack or displaced by fighting have been an

150 According to Lou Nuer White Army members, George Athor subsequently demanded payment for the guns in the form of cattle. Interviews with Lou Nuer youth in Akobo, Nyirol and Uror, 2011–2013.

151 Interviews with White Army youth in Uror, Nyirol and Walgak, 2013 and 2015. Similar dynamics were also documented during the second civil war (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

152 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone Who Can Carry a Gun Can Go'.

153 Breidlid I M, Arensen M J (2014), 'Demystifying the White Army: Nuer armed civilians' involvement in the South Sudanese Crisis', *Accord Conflict Trends Magazine*; Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'.

154 *Ibid*.

155 Reportedly tensions between the Lou Nuer *kuaar burnam* and the initial SPLA-IO commander in Jonglei, Peter Gadet, led to the redeployment of Gadet to Unity State.

156 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'.

157 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'. The *kuaar burnam* for the three Akobo counties were given the rank of colonel or lt. colonel. Interviews with White Army leader, Akobo March 2015 (Michael Arensen). During the second civil war as well as in 2005, SPLA also sought to integrate *kuaar burnam* into their units, giving them the military ranks (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

158 The mobilisation and failed revenge attack by the Lou Nuer White Army against Murle in February 2016 seems to confirm this. The numbers of mobilised youth were far lower than in the recent past and the lack of coordination between the youth led to a deadly ambush by Murle upon their return. Interviews with White Army members, Akobo February 2016 (Michael Arensen).

important driver for mobilisation. The White Army leader of Akobo County at the time, as well as other members, claimed in interviews that a failed offensive by the Lou Nuer White Army against the capital Juba in December 2013 was motivated not only by revenge but also by a desire to protect Nuer civilians.[159] Tens of thousands of Nuer civilians were seeking refuge in UNMISS bases – which had become protection of civilians (PoC) sites following the outbreak of fighting – and the White Armies intended on escorting them back to Nuer territory. The White Armies also took action to protect Nuer civilians displaced by fighting in Bor town, which saw some of the most devastating violence during the early weeks of the war. In early 2014, the Lou Nuer White Army escorted Nuer internally displaced persons (IDPs) sheltering in the Bor UNMISS base to Lou Nuer land.[160] An April 2014 attack on the Bor base by Dinka armed civilians culminated in the deaths of over 40 Nuer civilians. In the wake of the attack, some Nuer IDPs staying in the UN PoC sites in Bentiu and Malakal decided to travel by raft and foot all the way to Akobo town – a distance of over 400 km – to seek the protection of the White Armies.[161] Another attack by government forces on the Malakal PoC in February 2016 reinforced a conviction that they were safer under the protection of the White Armies than UN peacekeepers.[162]

The re-eruption of violence in Juba between SPLM/A-IO and SPLA soldiers in July 2016 has exacerbated fears among Nuer, including members of the White Armies, about the effectiveness of national and international security institutions. Reports that government soldiers targeted Nuer civilians during the violence, including dozens of cases of rape inside and nearby an UNMISS base in Juba, will increase perceptions that local security options continue to be essential to protect Nuer lives.[163] Unless the planned deployment of regional troops is able to enforce peace and protect civilians in the capital, another mass mobilisation of the White Armies to Juba will remain a possibility.

V. Conduits of an ethnic war? White Armies' motivations for participating in violence

The White Armies involvement in violent conflict – in the current war and in the past – largely reflects their social obligations to protect their families and livestock. Community defence and justice provision, in the form of revenge, has long been one of the strongest motivators for participation in the White Armies. Economic and social incentives – including opportunities to loot and raid cattle, access guns and ammunition, and obtain status and respect – also encourage many youth to participate in violence.[164]

Elders and chiefs frequently complain about their 'unruly' and 'disrespectful' youth. While engagement in warfare and looting, combined with the status and power accorded to the *kuaar burnam*, increased the socio-economic independence of youth, at the same time intergenerational interactions are marked by collaboration and mutual support.[165] This is demonstrated in regular consultations between White Army leaders, elders and local authorities on matters pertaining to security, as well as the widespread communal support for youth fighters ahead of large-scale raids and revenges, in the form of logistical support, food, and blessings. While participation in the White Armies is mainly voluntary, during times of high intensity conflict every able-bodied male is expected to join local units, from boys as young as ten to men in their late forties.[166] Social pressure to participate in the White Armies is especially

159 Interview, Akobo, March 2015 (Michael Arensen).

160 Interviews with IDPs in Bor PoC, December 2015 (Michael Arensen).

161 Arensen M (2016), 'If We Leave We Are Killed: Lessons Learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites 2013–2016', International Organisation for Migration South Sudan, p 34.

162 *Ibid*. Center for Civilians in Conflict (2016), 'A Refuge in Flames: The February 17–18 Violence in Malakal POC'.

163 Center for Civilians in Conflict (2016), 'Under Fire: The July 2016 Violence in Juba and UN Response', October.

164 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone Who Can Carry a Gun Can Go'.

165 Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*; Rolandsen, Breidlid (2013), 'What is Youth Violence in Jonglei?'; Skedsmo A (2003), 'The Changing Meaning of Small Arms in Nuer Society' *African Security Studies Review* **12** (4), pp 57–68.

166 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'; see also Rolandsen, Breidlid (2013), 'What is Youth Violence in Jonglei?'.

strong during times of war, making it difficult for youth to stay behind. During these periods, young women perform songs of encouragement and may insult those who do not join in the fighting.[167] Over the past decade and in the current civil war participation has expanded: involvement in large-scale attacks is no longer limited to young men in cattle camps but also includes educated town youth and military veterans.[168] Educated urban youth and businessmen provide important links between the leadership of the White Armies and government authorities and military actors, facilitating dissemination of information (and sometimes misinformation), and access to regional markets.[169] Uninitiated boys, some as young as eight, are also occasionally brought along to observe and assist.[170] From December 2013, support for and participation in the White Armies expanded further as many SPLA-IO soldiers, preferring to fight close to their home territories and alongside their kin, joined their ranks.[171]

Violence perpetrated by the White Armies continues to be constrained by community norms. While participation in large-scale revenges and wars are sanctioned and considered 'legitimate' by the community, small-scale cattle thefts, usually carried out by a small group of youth, are not.[172] Equally, during large-scale revenge attacks, not all forms of violence are condoned. Previously considered taboo among Nuer communities, the killings of women, children and elders have increasingly become socially accepted as a form of local justice during revenge. Other types of violence, however, such as sexual violence, torture, and mutilations, continue to be considered unacceptable.[173] Anecdotal evidence suggests these norms continued to constrain youth from participating in some forms of violence during the inter-war period and in the ongoing civil war.[174] There are, however, significant individual differences between White Army fighters. Military cooperation with professional soldiers, who frequently engaged in socially unacceptable forms of extreme violence, inevitably contributed to influence the tactics of some White Army fighters.[175] As seen in the past and in recent warfare, military and political actors' manipulation of local grievances and ethnic identities also contributed to intensify local and political violence.

Echoing the post-1991 split and factional fighting, the current conflict has pitted rival political leaders belonging to South Sudan's two largest ethnic groups – the Dinka and the Nuer – against each other. Media reports and international observers have in turn tended to attribute the violence and the drivers of Nuer youth mobilisation in the conflict to a "deep-seated hatred of the Dinka and a desire for revenge."[176] South Sudanese politicians have also sought to generate support and antagonise rural communities by playing the 'ethnic card', appealing to ethnic sentiment and invoking the memory of past factional violence.[177]

The focus on 'ethnic hatred' may, however, disguise more than it reveals. Importantly, contrary to this dominant narrative, alliances and cooperation across Nuer-Dinka ethnic lines have continued in some rural areas.[178] Ethnic identity remains fluid and contextual among many Dinka and Nuer communities, with members tending to

167 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Demystifying the White Army: Nuer armed civilians' involvement in the South Sudanese Crisis' p 35; Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'.

168 *Ibid*.

169 Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*.

171 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'.

172 *Ibid*.

173 Interviews with Lou Nuer, Dok Nuer and Jikany Nuer respondents in Akobo, Nyirol, Uror, Leer, Mayendit, Matar (2012–2014). These socially taboo forms of violence were frequently carried out by state and non-state armed actors during the second civil war, post-CPA period and in the recent warfare. Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*.

174 Some testimonies focus on how some White Army youth protected them from other fighters. For instance, pregnant women and old men are not valued abductees, however, a pregnant Murle woman explained how she was abducted by a youth to prevent her murder during an attack on Pibor in 2011 (Interview Pibor April 2012, Michael Arensen). More recently a Shilluk elder from Malakal narrated how a member of the Lou Nuer White Army abducted him in 2014 to prevent him from being killed. Both stories were shared by the victims themselves, who explained their abductions as a means of protection. See Arensen, 'If we leave we are killed: Lessons learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites 2013–2016', p 51.

175 Importantly, some fighters engage more actively in extreme forms of violence, while others mainly participate in raiding and/or abductions.

176 Young J (2016), 'Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan's Civil War' p 15; Adeba B, 'Making Sense of the White Army's Return in South Sudan'.

177 In a televised speech on 17 December 2013 President Kiir alluded to the 1991 Bor Massacre carried out by Machar's SPLM/A Nasir Faction against Dinka civilians.

178 Breidlid and Arensen, 'Anyone Who Can Carry a Gun Can Go'.

identify more strongly with their kinship groups or tribal sections than with their ethnic group.[179] The Lou Nuer and Nyareweng Dinka have especially close kinship and social ties due to a long history of intermarriage and assimilation, including military and socio-economic cooperation.[180] At the beginning of the present civil war, representatives from Lou Nuer communities in Uror and from Nyareweng Dinka in Duk county, Jonglei State, claimed youth fighters from the other community did not directly target their civilians while the Lou Nuer White Army marched through their territory on their way to Bor.[181] A recent study found that the Lou Nuer had requested and been granted access to Dinka Nyaraweng pastures in November 2015, and in 2016 were reliant on the cattle markets in Duk despite the greater conflict.[182]

Meanwhile, political alliances during the previous and present civil wars were never purely along ethnic lines: Dinka leaders defected to the SPLA-IO or the 'third bloc', while some Nuer leaders remained with the government.[183] Some Nuer sections also fought on behalf of the government against SPLA-IO and Nuer civilians, the most well-known being sections of the Bul Nuer sub-ethnic group in Unity State. As noted, most civilian fighters have little interest in the political agendas of the national elites, many whom are primarily interested in personal gain. As in the past the 'Nuer-Dinka narrative' is an efficient tool to mobilise communities, while at the same time disguise local grievances civilians on both sides have over failures of governance, development, security and high levels of corruption.[184]

vi. A more effective approach to peace and security in Greater Upper Nile

Underlying the continued strength and relevance of the White Armies in the Greater Upper Nile region is the prevailing government security vacuum. Even during times of peace, formal government institutions have been unable to provide adequately for civilian security, particularly in rural areas. Government policy towards the White Armies has instead been marked by an inconsistent mix of support and repression in response to changing political and military interests.

Disarmament and integration

Attempts in the past to manage the Nuer White Armies have primarily focused on disarmament campaigns, which have caused more harm than good. The widespread ownership of arms is a major issue, but as long as the government is unable, or unwilling, to provide security and justice in rural areas, disarmament alone is not a sustainable solution.[185] Abuses carried out during civilian disarmament campaigns, such as the 2006 disarmament of the Lou Nuer White Army, further increased local grievances and reduced trust in government institutions. The corruption found in the reselling of confiscated weapons by the SPLA, along with widespread insecurity and porous international/regional borders, prompted Lou Nuer youth to almost immediately rearm to ensure local security and protect their communities against external threats.[186]

179 *Ibid*. Hutchinson, S E, 'Nuer Ethnicity Militarized'.

180 Johnson, 'Tribal Boundaries and Border Wars'. Interviews with Nyareweng Dinka youth, Poktap, Duk, March 2013 (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

181 Interviews with Nyareweng Dinka youth, Duk, April 2014; Interviews with Lou Nuer youth, Matar, March 2014 (Breidlid, *Youth, Identities and State-Society Relations*).

182 Johnson C, Thomas E, Mozersky D, Marekia N (2016), 'Developing Strategic Responses to Displacement in South Sudan' (Nairobi: Center for Humanitarian Dialogue).

183 The 'third bloc' is used to describe seven South Sudanese politicians who were initially detained at the outset of the fighting. They were later released and did not ally with the government or SPLA-IO.

184 Breidlid, Arensen, 'Anyone who can carry a gun can go'.

185 Three different disarmament campaigns were carried out in Jonglei State in the eight years between the CPA in 2005 and the civil war in 2013 (2006, 2008 and 2012), yet security continued to degrade during this period. This is commonly blamed on the Murle, who were believed to be excluded from the disarmament processes (*Young, Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation*). However, the Murle were actually included in all three disarmaments. Like other cattle camp youth in Jonglei Murle respondents explained they were often sold back their disarmed weapons by the SPLA in exchange for cattle or bought new ones on the black market. Arensen, 'Murle Age-sets' AECOM, 2012. (unpublished).

186 Amnesty International (2012), 'South Sudan: Lethal Disarmament. Abuses related to civilian disarmament in Pibor County, Jonglei State' (London: Amnesty International); O'Brien A (2009), 'Shots in the Dark: The 2008 South Sudan Civilian Disarmament Campaign' (Geneva: Small Arms Survey); Arnold M B, Alden C (2007), '"This Gun is our Food": Demilitarising the White Army Militias of South Sudan', (Oslo: NUPI).

As noted above, in the post-CPA period as well as in the recent conflict, SPLA and SPLA-IO's integration of White Armies members and leaders into their military command structures has been used as means of enhancing control and countering the independence of the White Armies. However, until public trust and confidence in government justice and security apparatus is enhanced, these leaders will continue to be replaced with new White Army leaders. Therefore, much like in the past, disarmament campaigns and the integration of armed youth into conventional security forces will only lead to the replacement of arms and leaders, and not end the role of the White Armies in Nuer society.

Jonglei Community Police Units 2013

In January 2013 government orders to establish 'community police' throughout Jonglei reinforced perceptions among communities that local security was primarily delegated to traditional community defence structures.[187] Prior to the creation of these units, the *kuaar burnam* for Uror had already initiated youth patrols along the border with Pibor to reduce cattle raids, while the community had donated food and supplies to help. In theory the establishment of 'community police units' was a means of creating community ownership over local security. It could also help harness the role of existing youth structures to mitigate negative practices, such as major revenge attacks. In 2013 the unit was also meant to register the lawful ownership of weapons, and therefore help future disarmament campaigns.[188] If implemented correctly this type of engagement could have acted as a temporary solution for the prevailing security gap in many parts of the country, and successful examples, such as Kuron, Eastern Equatoria, do exist. However, the Jonglei community police programme in 2013 faced predictable challenges over accountability, politicisation and budgetary limitations.

Following the creation of community police units, challenges regarding budgets, training and monitoring quickly arose.[189] There was no government budget for training or monitoring by the professional police, while the new taxes proposed by the government to cover the costs were deemed too high by the communities.[190] Not surprisingly, by the end of 2013 when the war broke out weapons had been distributed to some units, but the planned training, uniforms and code of conduct had still yet to be implemented. Meanwhile, the distributed weapons were not fully registered or monitored by the South Sudanese Police Service.

In the eyes of many observers the programme quickly became politicised and acted primarily as a means of rearming certain communities after the 2012 disarmament. Indeed the order to create the community police units in Jonglei in January 2013 meant that Jonglei youth, with the exception of the Murle, were able to rearm and openly carry weapons.[191] In consequence, the Lou Nuer White Army was able to carry out a major revenge attack on the Murle in July 2013.[192] Not surprisingly the Murle community perceived the initiative as a means for the government to arm their rivals and use their historical grievances to support a failing SPLA counter-insurgency against the Murle rebel David Yau Yau. While local security initiatives could have an important role to play in addressing security gaps in South Sudan if done well, accountability and independence from political interests are necessary for successful implementation.

Future policy directions

Past efforts to engage with local community defence groups in South Sudan, and descriptions of the White Armies as a 'wildcard' by the international community,

187 Sudan Tribune (2013), 'Community policing will boost security in Jonglei, says new police boss', 26 February (www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article45664).

188 Fleischner J (2014), 'Protective Measures: Local security arrangements in Greater Upper Nile', HSBA Issue Brief, July (Geneva: Small Arms Survey).

189 *Ibid*.

190 *Ibid*.

191 Public rally with the Jonglei state authorities, Yuai, February 2013; Meeting with Commissioner of Uror, March 2013.

192 Deutche Welle (2013), 'UN worries over South Sudan's Jonglei clashes', 15 July (www.dw.com/en/un-worries-over-south-sudans-jonglei-clashes/a-16951755).

reveals a lack of proper understanding of their history, evolution, function and motivations.[193] To curb the worst of their behaviour and harness the legitimacy they wield within their communities, security and peace actors in South Sudan need to recognise the White Armies complex history and significant role in Nuer society. Involving the White Armies in peace processes and local security arrangements is vital in ensuring durable solutions.

Although the White Armies have become increasingly militarised in the past few decades, their leaders (*kuaar burnam*) continue to play important peacemaking and conflict resolution roles within their communities. In close collaboration with customary authorities and traditional spiritual leaders, White Army leaders mitigate blood feuds between families and sections and are frequently involved in arresting perpetrators and returning looted cattle. *Kuaar burnam* are also responsible for negotiating annual dry season grazing rights with other Nuer communities and ethnic groups, and have been involved in locally organised inter-communal peace negotiations (for example, Jikany Nuer-Lou Nuer 2010 and Lou Nuer-Murle 2014).[194]

Rural communities, who are both the primary victims as well as major perpetrators of violence, are largely excluded from national peace processes and dividends. Despite their important peace and security role at the local level, the international community has failed to recognise and adequately engage with community defence structures such as the White Armies. White Army leaders are rarely given prominent roles in regional and national peace processes and are, at best brought in as token representatives of cattle camp youth. Instead educated youth representatives and politicians are prioritised, which deprives the cattle camp youth directly involved in these conflicts of representation and a sense of ownership over agreements and their implementation. The exclusion of White Army fighters from the Addis Ababa peace process and from the terms of the August 2015 peace agreement has augmented local frustration towards elites.[195] To ensure the sustainability of negotiated peace agreements, local leaders responsible for community protection and security need to be included in the process.

vii. **Conclusion**

The mass mobilisations of Nuer civilians in the Greater Upper Nile region at the onset of the ongoing conflict illustrated the complete breakdown of trust in government, particularly its ability and willingness to provide security, protection and justice for all citizens. Ethnic rhetoric masks the grievances many civilians hold towards the government and political elites. The recent return of violence in Juba in July 2016, including reported targeting of Nuer civilians, has further decreased confidence among Nuer civilians in the implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement. The White Armies are likely to mobilise again unless immediate and concrete improvements in terms of security and protection are undertaken.

The involvement of the Nuer White Armies in inter-communal clashes and political violence has made them perhaps the most notorious community defence group in South Sudan. However, their security function and motivations are remarkably similar to community defence groups across the country: they work to fill the prevailing vacuum in security and justice provision in rural areas. Until the government is able to ensure security and create confidence in a functional justice system, community defence groups such as the White Armies will continue to play a major role in South Sudan's security landscape in the future. A durable solution to the conflict will need to address local grievances through a reconciliation process and hybrid court, include

193 BBC (2013), 'South Sudan: UN concerned by "wildcard" White Army', 29 December (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-25543061).

194 In the case of the Jikany Nuer and Lou Nuer agreement in 2010 the respective *kuaar burnam* from Ulang and Akobo held the initial meetings before the chiefs got involved. Jikany (Nasir) and Lou (Akobo) *kuaar burnam* also met in 2013 to finalise the agreement.

195 Also see Young J (2016), 'Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan's Civil War', p 56.

local defence structures in security sector reform, and re-build relations and trust between the state and society. An inclusive process is necessary to ensure widespread ownership and support for any agreement and create accountability for the elites. The people of South Sudan have faced incredible hardships and suffering and it is imperative that their voices are heard and their grievances are addressed. The success of the peace agreement depends on it.

5

Conclusion:

Community defence groups and the future of security in South Sudan

Jok Madut Jok

THIS PUBLICATION PROVIDES PERSPECTIVES on why violence has persisted in South Sudan despite the 2005 and 2015 peace agreements and in times when South Sudan was expected to enjoy stability. The preceding chapters present views on the origins of some of this violence, outlining how community defence groups have mobilised over the past 30 years (and earlier) to respond to insecurity in the absence of state protection. As such, they capture a persistent security conundrum from the bottom up, providing a micro perspective on human security often buried in grand narratives that treat South Sudan's security challenges as national issues only.

That conundrum is rooted in the tension that has emerged between security provision and the consolidation of the state. On the one hand, the state has proven incapable and often unwilling to protect its citizens and monopolise the legitimate use of force, so communities have moved to secure themselves, by encouraging or arming their youth. On the other hand, the state has generally interpreted these local security responses as having a corrosive effect on its authority and sought to dismantle them. But it is unable to rein them in without creating a sort of war between state and community. To accommodate them, meanwhile, is to further undermine the rule of law, as perpetrators of violence are never brought to justice. One of the common tools the government has used is to issue amnesties for some armed groups or their leaders in exchange for peace. This has fed into the dynamics of conflict, encouraging individuals and groups to use violence to secure positions in the national army.

No consensus exists among the politico-military elite about how to approach these armed groups. National leaders might see the dangers of parallel defence mechanisms but maintain a sneaking suspicion that militias might be needed should security decline in their own regions, especially given that state security agencies are often slow to react or incapable of confronting the sources of insecurity effectively. This has undermined the evolution of a professional military culture, as politicians look to informal forces as personal armies. This came to the fore from late 2013, as communal defence forces drew behind competing national leaders or vied for their support.

The groups raise two questions for those engaged in security and security reform in South Sudan over coming months and years: 1) have the security threats that

necessitated the creation of these armed groups dissipated, such that dismantling these groups can be done concurrently among competing ethnic nationalities and will not leave some communities exposed to attacks by other, similarly armed groups? and 2) does the government now view them more as a threat to public safety than a necessary informal extension of the state's security apparatus? The chapters presented here have attempted to answer these questions.

What is presented in this publication is a description of a crumbling security system, the pressures that force communities to arm themselves and the consequences of this mix of factors for human security and the viability of the South Sudanese state as the entity with the chief responsibility to protect citizens.

Of the various non-state armed groups in South Sudan, some of which are described here, two of them – the White Armies and successor groups to the arrow boys – are the most likely to rise to a level where they directly challenge state authority. This is due, particularly, to the ability of politicians from those regions to appropriate local forces to leverage power at the national level. The *titweng* and *gelweng*, meanwhile, have been drivers of insecurity in various places in Bahr el Ghazal and worked in support of government forces elsewhere. In this too they operate as a security threat to people on the margins of the state and to the country as a whole, undermining prospects for national social cohesion. In the ongoing civil war, increasing numbers of citizens are unable to count on the government for their protection, reducing confidence in the state as the latter retreats further from rural communities. With the increasing absence of government from people's lives, the armed groups fill the gap but do so in ways that mean no one can restrain them when their ability to protect also becomes a capacity for harm.

As Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force, which was lauded for helping stop Boko Haram abuses, turned abusive in its own actions, and as communities in Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan and others set up self-protection militias that have turned out to be ruthless within their communities, the creation of vigilante-style community protection forces has proven a questionable security measure. It challenges the notion that protecting civilians, whether from other civilians or against an external force, is the ultimate responsibility of the state. And it is the lack of trust in the ability of the state to do its duty that leads to the creation of local protection forces. Changing these dynamics – and addressing the conundrum community defence groups raise – requires significant, long-term investment in reform and development of the security sector, to strengthen the state's monopoly on the use of force, its capacity to provide equitable protection to all citizens and its role as a source of security. Until the country's security forces can be trusted by citizens, communities will continue to arm themselves.

Looking to the future, even as the government manages to broker agreements with South Sudan's various opposition forces, agreements are unlikely to deliver improvements in the state's ability to deliver security and protect civilians. Unaddressed, the weakness and instability of the army will continue to drive community mobilisation, as it has done for many years. To the extent that the international community can assist with security sector reforms, national level security arrangements will always falter under the weight of local security dynamics and needs. Important aspects of a more effective security sector reform strategy will be the down-sizing of the national army, investment of resource savings from such reduction in better training and equipment, and quick deployment of a multi-ethnic police force in hotspots throughout the country, especially along cattle migration corridors and trading routes.

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

COVER PHOTO: A young man guards the herd at Lakatoc cattle camp, Tonj North. Boys look after the cattle at the camps while young men, often armed to protect themselves and their cattle, move the cattle to graze during the day. Conflict increases during the dry season as cattle keepers are forced to move in search of grassland and water sources, creating risks of confrontation with other communities. © MARCUS PERKINS

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