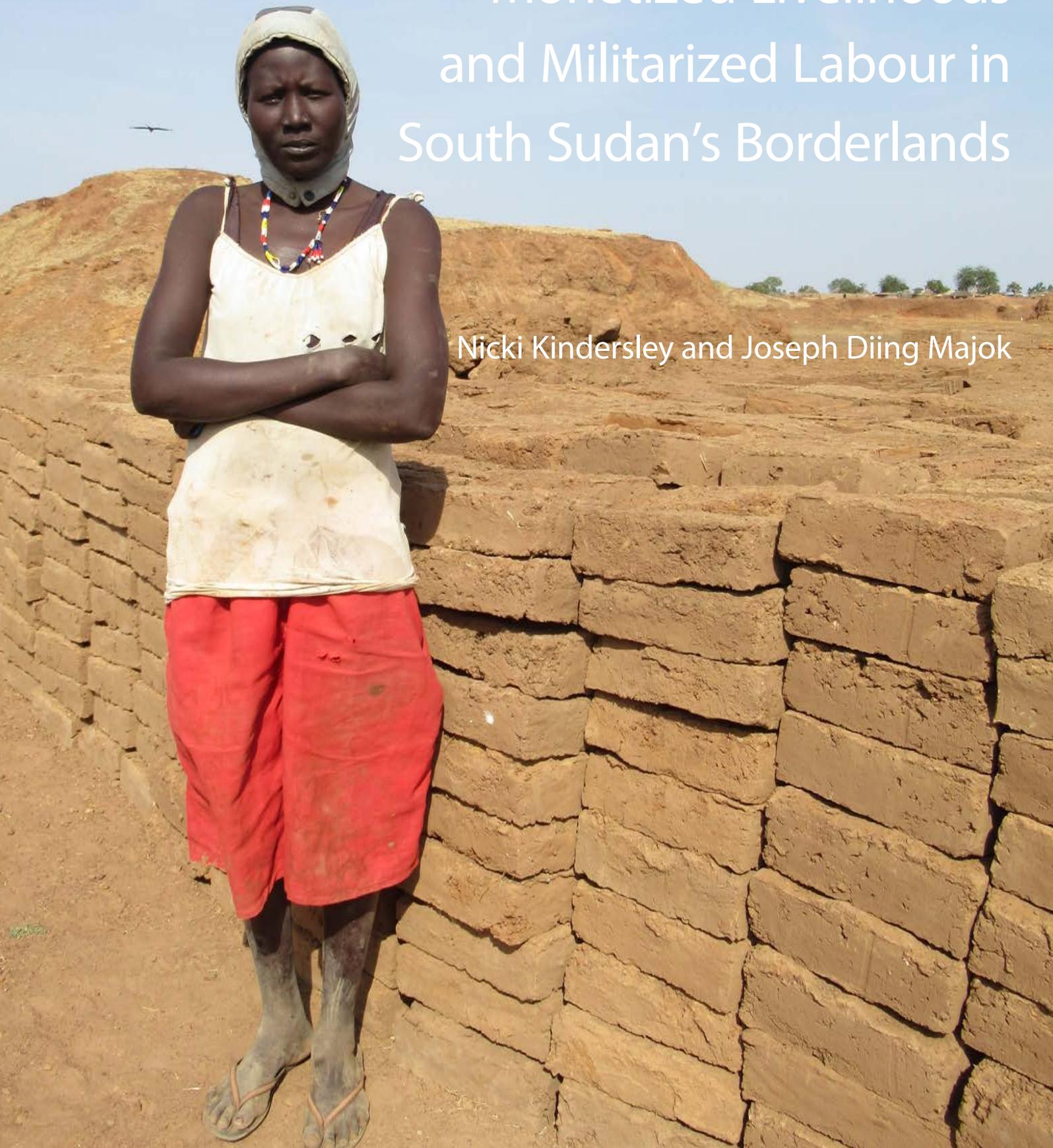


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# Monetized Livelihoods and Militarized Labour in South Sudan's Borderlands

Nicki Kindersley and Joseph Diing Majok



Rift Valley Institute  
Taasisi ya Bonde Kuu  
معهد الاخدود العظيم  
Machadka Dooxada Rift  
የቦንድ ኩህ ተላላሽ  
Instituto do Vale do Rift  
东非大裂谷研究院  
Institut de la Vallée du Rift





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## Executive Summary

- In common with much of South Sudan, local authority in its far north-western border with Sudan (former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal state) is built on a militarized economy. Evidence from extensive field interviews there shows how the last forty years of civil war, military recruitment, mass displacement and return, have shaped this borderland.
- The local power structures in the borderland exert significant control over the limited opportunities that exist to escape a captive and repressive market. This includes outward migration routes towards Juba and Khartoum.
- The militarized economy was entrenched by the second Sudanese civil war (1983-2005). This included the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and their subsequent return after the war ended in 2005. Since then, the economy has been reworked around the market, using the instruments of cash, debt and paid work.
- These fundamental changes are deepening societal inequalities. While some people have profited from the commodification, accumulation and exploitation of land, herds, labour, markets and revenues, the majority have been impoverished by the same processes.
- Cash and commodification have undermined or reworked older forms of social security provided by kinship systems and established gender relations. The stresses caused by these economic shifts and growing inequalities are mostly borne by women.
- Many men have left the region to seek work in Sudan or to join the South Sudan government's military operations across the country. War deaths and long-term injuries have further depleted the male population and undermined family and community welfare.
- Today, most of the region's residents, particularly women, are trapped in a system of low wages, economic control and coercion. There is a limit to the resilience of the local population in the face of continued ecological and economic insecurity. This uncertain future is reflected in continuing migration into Sudan, in spite of the risks involved.
- This pilot study demonstrates how the economy in one area of the Sudan-South Sudan border, and its pool of easily mobilized military labour, is controlled and exploited by political-military authorities. This political economy helps to maintain the power of these elites across the country. The thesis outlined here will be examined in further studies in South Sudan's extensive and diverse borderlands by the X-border Local Research Network.

## Timeline

c. 1981–1982	Drought in Darfur; increasing Rizeigat raids into Northern Bahr el-Ghazal for food and animals
c. 1982	Anya-Nya II group active in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal in response to raids and grievances
1983	Bor Mutiny and founding of Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA); beginning of second civil war; local chiefly mobilization of <i>gel weng</i> (cattle guards, or self-protection units) across Northern Bahr el-Ghazal
1984–1985	Famine in southern Darfur
1984–1985	Arrival of first SPLA brigades in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal; mass mobilization and SPLA territorial gains
1986	Escalation of <i> Murahaleen</i> (militias with origins in Darfur) militia raids, mass murders and abductions; mass displacement of approximately 500,000 people
1986–1988	Continued <i> Murahaleen</i> raids; famine in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal; extreme death rates across refugee camps and routes northwards
27–28 March 1987	Daein massacre in Darfur
1987	Truce between Anya-Nya II and SPLA groups
1987–1988	SPLA’s civil-military administration reorganizes
1988	SPLA establish control of Bahr el Arab river bordering Darfur, re-establish trading and grazing route agreements with Rizeigat, limiting raiding
1991	SPLA splits into factions
1992–1998	<i> Murahaleen</i> raids continue in dry seasons along the Wau to Darfur train line
1997–1998	Famine in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal
1999	Wunlit peace conference (held in the village of Wunlit in eastern Tonji Country in Bahr el-Ghazal state)
2000	Dinka–Misseriya treaty; peace markets established at border towns of Warawar, Manyiel and Majok Yinthiou

2002	Machakos Protocol signed, signaling the start of serious peace negotiations
2005	Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ends the second civil war
2006–2013	Mass returns from Darfur, Khartoum and northern Sudan to Northern Bahr el-Ghazal
2006–2013	Majok Yinthiou clashes in 2006 between Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and SPLA; Heglig crisis; continued tensions over Mile 14 disputed area on the Darfur–Northern Bahr el-Ghazal border; large-scale recruitment to Governor Paul Malong’s SPLA-affiliated militia
2010	General elections; Paul Malong wins Northern Bahr el-Ghazal governorship against independent candidate Dau Aturjong
2011	South Sudan independence
2012	Oil shutdown and beginning of economic crisis
July 2013	Government reshuffle; President Salva Kiir Mayardit appoints Paul Malong as chief of general staff of the SPLA
December 2013	Intra-SPLA clashes in Juba escalate into civil war; <i>Mathiang Anyoor</i> (the brown caterpillar; militia force under Paul Malong) involved in violence, including against civilians, and in further pro-government assaults against rebel forces in Upper Nile and Jonglei states into 2014
2013–2017	Growing economic crisis; severe inflation
2016	Renewed violence in Juba between warring parties; hyperinflation and further use of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal recruits on new battlefronts in Equatoria state. Rebellion of Agany Abdel Bagi from Meiram in Darfur, and defections of Mathiang Anyoor soldiers to Agany’s militia
November 2016	Clashes between Agany Abdel Bagi’s forces and SPLA in Aweil East
February-June 2017	Severe food shortages and malnutrition across the region; hundreds of thousands of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal residents move into Darfur
May 2017	President Salva Kiir replaces Paul Malong as Chief of General Staff; Malong leaves Juba but is detained in Yirol, and placed under house arrest in Juba

June 2017	Hussein and Agany Abdel Bagi declare a new rebel group, South Sudan Patriotic Army, which attacks government posts near Waguet and Malek Gumel, operating from around Meiram
December 2017	Committee negotiates Paul Malong's release from house arrest in Juba; Malong travels to Nairobi
January 2018	Paul Malong declares a rebellion (the South Sudan United Front / Army (SSUF/A)); his allies begin recruitment in southern Darfur refugee camps and around Meiram
January 2019	Agany Abdel Bagi Ayii ends his defection in a reintegration rally at Wanyjok, Aweil East
March 2019	Paul Malong agrees to join the revitalized peace agreement; President Salva Kiir tours Northern Bahr el Ghazal with a series of meetings and rallies

# 1. Introduction

Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, like much of South Sudan, is in a protracted state of social and economic crisis, which has prompted a sustained humanitarian response to an apparently permanent emergency.<sup>1</sup> The crisis is rooted in a fundamental societal restructuring through generations of armed conflict, forced resettlements, and a long-term but significant shift towards a cash and market economy across South Sudan and its borderlands.<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1980s, family units and livelihoods have been destroyed, displaced or reworked by conflict and most people have been forced to engage in precarious work for survival. Chronic crises—while terrifying and urgent—are an anticipated reality for most residents of borderlands.<sup>3</sup> Political-economic systems have developed that exploit these processes of commodification, labour exploitation and basic insecurity. These systems have become entrenched and institutionalized over the last three decades in South Sudan.<sup>4</sup>

Today’s political-military power structures rest on their control of these markets and labour systems. To better understand these systems and their control, this research asked three core questions:

What does it mean for a society to have production and distribution reworked around coercive, predatory markets? Who is benefitting from control and investment in these systems? How is this process reshaping societal relationships and the political economy?

This study focuses on the specific case of the South Sudan borderland with southern Darfur in Sudan, particularly around three main border trade routes in what was formerly the state of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. Since the 1960s, residents have been drawn into patterns of labour migration to Sudan, trade and markets in often dependent or exploitative relationships. These have built on much older histories of conscription and enslavement. The wars of the 1980s and 1990s, and the post-war reconstruction of the region since 2005, have fundamentally altered the political economy of the borderland.

The study contextualizes the rise of military-political elites and of militia work within the wider politics of this crisis economy. It highlights the forms of financial and personal

1 Jairo Munive, ‘Resilience in Displacement and the Protection of Civilians in South Sudan’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* (2019): 18–19.

2 See Edward Thomas, ‘Moving towards markets: Cash, commodification and conflict in South Sudan’, London, Rift Valley Institute, June 2019.

3 See: Marjoke Oosterom, ‘Youth and social navigation in Zimbabwe’s informal economy: “Don’t end up on the wrong side”’, *African Affairs*, published online (2018).

4 Helen Young et al., ‘Livelihoods, Power, and Choice: The vulnerability of the Northern Rizeigat of Darfur, Sudan’, Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2009; and Daniel Maxwell et al., ‘A Synthesis of Feinstein International Center Work on Building Resilience and Protecting Livelihoods in Conflict-Related Crises’, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University (2017): 10.

dependence, inequalities and exploitation that have been constructed by politico-military powers in the borderland. These include the human impacts of conflict—the family deaths, missing men, marital separations and repeated re-establishment of homes and lives—and the material consequences, including unemployment, price inflation and starvation.

This study uses the concepts of stress, risk and precarity as a frame of reference for understanding the fragmented and contingent futures that people in the borderland are navigating. What choices and possibilities do people have for self-development? How are these opportunities controlled and manipulated, and by whom? Who is trapped into being simply resilient<sup>5</sup>—forced to focus on weathering shocks and on basic survival—and who can seek opportunity and challenge the terms of this often coercive and dangerous economy?

Field research for the study was undertaken during December 2018 in market centres, cattle and fishing camps, along the two main border routes running north from Aweil into Darfur (from Aweil to Nyamlel, Gok Machar, and the border post of Kiir Adem to the west; and towards Warawar and the border town of Majok Nyin Thiou to the east, towards Abyei). Semi-structured qualitative interviews were undertaken with about a hundred market workers, police, pastors, teachers, chiefs, underemployed young men and women, traders and truck drivers from across Darfur and the Kordofans, South Sudanese women (and some men) traders across the borders, and a few long-distance migrants from central-west Africa.<sup>6</sup> This report is based on their statements.

5 It is still unclear what makes people resilient, as noted by Maxwell et al., 'A Synthesis' and Munive, 'Resilience', 4–5.

6 A three-person research team from Aweil, and one international researcher, completed 52 interviews with more than 100 people, across a range of ages (18 – 80) half of whom were women. Names and identifying details have been changed. Names and details have been omitted where full anonymity was requested.

## 2. War, Peace and Economic Change

The South Sudanese economy has been fundamentally restructured by three generations of conflict and insecurity. Before these wars, the borderland economy of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal was based on transhumant animal husbandry, fishing, agriculture, trade, seasonal migration to the north, and some seasonal wild food gathering.<sup>7</sup> From 1982, raiding by Darfuri groups (themselves suffering from a severe famine) escalated and was harnessed by the Sudanese government as part of its growing counter-insurgency against the Sudan People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) insurrection in the southern region. By the 1990s, the borderland was an epicentre of counter-insurgency warfare, which worsened after the SPLA split in 1991 when many local militias were created across the region.<sup>8</sup> By the mid-1990s, the SPLA in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal occupied rural areas (particularly in the east) and built up its own markets and local administration.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of the population in the region fled. Many residents used their experience of seasonal migration in Darfuri and Kordofani farmlands, or of manual labour in Khartoum, to take families into exile. This broke families apart—many young men fled to SPLA areas to avoid being killed in the north as suspected southern rebels, while women and the elderly mostly moved northwards for protection and aid.<sup>10</sup> Displacement in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s was not a one-way or one-off movement north. People—particularly the young—moved repeatedly to escape violence, evade food crises and seek opportunities for marriage and family assistance. Displacement was heavily manipulated by armed factions on all sides as desperate populations became an exploitable labour pool and a lure for humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup>

Raiding, mass mobilization and displacement fundamentally changed the local geography and economy. Homes, herds and farms—particularly those located near the train line and government posts—were devastated and violence pushed people into migration northwards or into rural SPLA strongholds, leaving farms and villages to turn back into *roor* (wild lands). Those who stayed in the SPLA-controlled rural areas turned to farming and fishing, augmented by wild foods, to survive.<sup>12</sup>

7 Luka Biong Deng, 'Livelihood diversification and civil war: Dinka communities in Sudan's civil war', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 4/3 (2010): 385.

8 Biong Deng, 'Livelihood diversification', 383–384.

9 Interview with Garang, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

10 UN Emergency Unit, 'Update of displaced persons in South Darfur and in South Kordofan', 947/6/44-46, Durham: The Sudan Archives at Durham, Durham University, 16 June 1992.

11 UN Emergency Unit, 'Updated of displaced persons'; also see: Mark Duffield et al., 'Sudan: Unintended Consequences of Humanitarian Assistance—Field Evaluation Study', Dublin: Trinity College, University of Dublin, 2000.

12 Biong Deng, 'Livelihood diversification', 385–387.

The violence in the region mostly ended in 2002 and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal was stable for several years after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.<sup>13</sup> Around half a million people returned to Southern Sudan, with the poorest travelling with assistance from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in huge convoys from across Darfur and Sudan during 2010–2011. Returnees from Sudan, alongside families resettling from the SPLA-controlled rural areas, again reshaped the geography and economy of the region. They built new settlements and reclaimed overgrown farmlands, particularly along reworked road systems or in close proximity to SPLA-held markets and military bases, hoping for the arrival of services and access to work and trade.<sup>14</sup>

The post-2002 reconstruction was deeply fragile and organized around SPLA wartime systems that exerted significant control over resettlement and economic organisation. Rapid repopulation put people under huge stress, particularly women and men born in northern Sudan who were relearning the skills needed to prosper in this demanding economy. Financial resources were necessary to re-establish homes, clear and restore forested farmland, and invest in new livelihoods. With so many people seeking cash resources, pressure on market systems increased. The resulting food insecurity and malnutrition meant that by 2008 humanitarian agencies were reopening aid programmes that had been closed in 2004.<sup>15</sup>

This was a fragile peace. After 2005, South Sudan and Sudan faced off in a series of border confrontations along the contested Kiir River and in the disputed Abyei region. At the same time, the SPLA regional government was under intense pressure to deal with massive unemployment, disputes over settlement sites and land rights, and growing public frustration. Military recruitment was a useful way to deal with these multiple pressures—mobilizing (mostly unemployed or underemployed) men to protect their new lands, and then subsequently from 2013 to protect their president.<sup>16</sup> Since 2014, many families have lost male relatives to military recruitment in the Upper Nile and Equatoria regions.

People were still working to recover and rebuild when they were hit by an economic crisis precipitated by the government shutdown of the oilfields in mid-2012. Since 2012, years of inflation, underinvestment and a series of floods and droughts have undermined the fortunes of the region. This was worsened by the collapse of the South Sudanese currency in 2015. In April 2017, around 290,000 people were at risk of starvation. This has forced hundreds of thousands of people to move to refugee camps in Darfur, reawakening their memories of the regional famines in 1988 and 1998. Mayen, a court chief in Apada,

<sup>13</sup> John Ryle, 'Disaster in Darfur', *New York Review of Books*, New York: The New York Review of Books, 12 August 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Cherry Leonardi and Martina Santschi, 'Dividing Communities in South Sudan and Northern Uganda', *Contested Borderlands*, London: Rift Valley Institute, 2016; and Peter Adwok Nyaba, 'Report on the Trade Consultancy Conducted in Northern Bahr el Ghazal', London: Save the Children Fund, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Maxwell et al. 'A Synthesis', 27.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communications with the authors since 2012.

remembers his former northern Sudanese boss saying, ‘Don’t go to Southern Sudan. It is an area controlled by famine.’<sup>17</sup>

The renewal of emergency food aid since 2017 is a symptom of these systemic shifts and its necessity is a result of the evolution of this militarized political economy.<sup>18</sup> Residents of the borderland are rarely dependent on food aid. In reality, it is used as an additional tool in balancing the significant risks associated with their own cultivation—based on a single growing season—with their involvement in this volatile market economy. The region has a high level of household agricultural production but home harvests last for a limited period and are frequently sold for immediate cash.

During the lean season, which occurs in the long dry period immediately before planting takes place, the borderland is extremely market dependent.<sup>19</sup> Societal stress is most visible during the late dry season (February to June) in the region, when food supplies run low. Living close to food markets has been an important means of managing food-related risk since the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

Residents of the borderland understand this recent economic history and its problems. In the words of an elderly man in Wadweil cattle camp, ‘Things ended up in the market.’<sup>21</sup> As Marco, a tailor in Warawar market also emphasizes: ‘The lives of people here are completely in the market.’<sup>22</sup> There is still little external understanding of how these risks and strategies work in practice, and how people survive in this complex and challenging political economy.<sup>23</sup>

17 Interview with a chief, Apada village court, 8 December 2018.

18 Thomas, ‘The Aftermath’.

19 In July 2017, for example, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization reports that the former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal state was dependent on market cereals for 76 per cent of consumption; cited in Thomas, ‘Setting People on the Move’, 10.

20 Biong Deng, ‘Livelihood diversification’, 391.

21 Interview with elder at cattle camp, Maker near Wadweil, 12 December 2018.

22 Interview with a cattle camp worker, Maker near Wadweil, 12 December 2018; and interview with Marco, tailor, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

23 Susanne Jaspars, ‘The State, Inequality, and the Political Economy of Long-Term Food Aid in Sudan,’ *African Affairs* 117/469 (2018): 608.

### 3. Coping with Uncertainty

Due to the legacy of war and displacement, the reconstruction of communities and family economies in the borderland remains fragmentary and inconsistent. Residents rely on their ability to diversify their (generally limited) investments to weather and evade repeated environmental, political and personal shocks. This commonly involves rapidly shifting and unpredictable cash profits and requires fast-paced debt management, which draws people into the market economy.<sup>24</sup>

Margins are often small. Abuk, who lived in rural southern Darfur in the 1990s, works at a rural trade point and tries to make around SSP 400–500 (approximately USD 3.00–3.80) a day.<sup>25</sup> She does this either from buying, roasting and reselling groundnuts in small SSP 50 (less than USD .50) packets for passing traders and workers, or as a hired day labourer on a farm during cultivation season. SSP 500 buys around half a *malou* of sorghum, which lasts her family of five for one day.<sup>26</sup>

Angor, also a returnee, was an alcohol brewer in the Damazin farm schemes in what is now Blue Nile state in Sudan. She now runs a tea stall in Maper market, working on daily credit. She borrows half a kilo of sugar, buys SSP 70 of charcoal and a jerry can of water for SSP 20, and rents the tea equipment and chairs for SSP 100 a day; she also pays SSP 150 a day to lease the shelter under which she sets up her shop.<sup>27</sup> Some women market traders have built up more lucrative business but these have higher theft risks. Bakhita used to hawk bedsheets in a town market but now buys a 40-litre jerrycan of diesel for SSP 6,500 (this used to cost SSP 3,000 in 2015) and decants it into litre plastic bottles. She sells one litre for SSP 200 and pays SSP 30 a week for security to check her stall at night.<sup>28</sup>

The margins for returnee women in rural areas are even smaller. Many women sell their remaining utensils and bedding, brought with them from the north, to get capital for trading. As many other women do, Achirin makes a profit by buying a bundle of *kudra* (edible leaves) that costs SSP 1,400 from the market in town, which she breaks into small

<sup>24</sup> This diversification is still under-studied.

<sup>25</sup> Currency rates are approximate and reflect rates as of December 2018, when this study was completed; see: <https://www.mataf.net/en/currency/converter-SSP-USD?m1=10000.00>

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Abuk, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018; and interview with Anyeth and Maria, groundnut sellers, Ariath market, 10 December 2018. A *malou* (*malwa* in Sudanese Arabic) is unit of measure that is about 3.1 kg. It is usually portioned out using a USAID four-litre vegetable oil tin.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Angor, tea maker, Maper market, 9 December 2018. Angor's husband was taken into the military in Aweil and he lost contact with her.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Bakhita, a fuel trader, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

bundles for resale at a small rural market. From her profits, she selects one of her children to go to school.<sup>29</sup>

Josephine, who returned to the borderland via the IOM repatriations from Khartoum, had previously worked as a migrant worker in the agricultural schemes in Gedaref. She also brewed alcohol and washed clothes for farmworkers. She married there for a bride-wealth of sorghum and goats. In Maper market, she started trading in firewood and gathered wild fruits, guided by her elderly mother. The trip to Maluil Akoong, where the wild fruits grow, takes six hours on foot each way and is a three-day round trip. She sells small portions of the wild fruits she collects as snacks for SSP 20 each. Josephine also works as a hired day labourer on farms during cultivation season. Her husband is a soldier in the *Mathiang Anyoor* (brown caterpillar) battalion, recruited in 2012 (see Military Economies below). In theory, he earns SSP 2,000 a month but rarely sends her more than SSP 1,000 every few months.<sup>30</sup>

Women often explain that they rely on one another's knowledge and skills to diversify their own personal economies. As Martha, who lives in a small semi-rural settlement, explains, 'We are teaching one another. The young women teach us, the old women, about life in town, and we teach them how to live—or the strategy of survival—in the forest. ... For young women like them, the only opportunity available, even if narrow, is working in the market.'<sup>31</sup>

Men similarly divide their investments between agricultural production and market trade. Deng, an elderly man, sells palm leaf doors for SSP 300 in Ariath market.<sup>32</sup> During the summer when his own farm is dry, Garang also trades at the same market, selling long poles that he collects in forests for *luaks* (cattle byres) at SSP 100 and short poles for housing for SSP 50.<sup>33</sup> Marko, who is in his eighties, begs or sometimes buys old woven plastic sacks from market traders, which he then strips and weaves into ropes—a skill learnt as a boy in a cattle camp. He makes two ropes a day and sells each for SSP 50.<sup>34</sup>

Tong, an eighteen-year-old youth working in Nyamlel market, has been priced out of the wheelbarrow rental market (he used to sell his transport labour to shopkeepers). With few new ones entering the market, a wheelbarrow is now SSP 200 a day to rent. He is now working as a shop assistant for around SSP 300 a day.<sup>35</sup>

29 Interview with Achirin, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018; interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

30 Interview with Josephine, market trader, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

31 Interview with Martha, elderly woman in a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

32 Interview with Deng, elderly man trading in Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

33 Interview with Garang, middle-aged man trading in Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

34 Interview with Marko, elderly man making ropes, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

35 Interview with Tong, market worker, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

The market economy and local ecology are fundamentally inseparable. This is due in part to reliance on wild food and forest products from the *roor*, including fishing, dung collecting (used as fertilizer) and riverside brick making (clay deposits can be found here). Seasonal fishing also provides enough market income for self-sustenance. Garang, an elderly man at a fishing camp near Ariath, sells small fish to passing bicycle traders for SSP 200, or big ones for SSP 400–500. He says: ‘If I have caught a fish and sold it for SSP 500, I will buy one *malou* with SSP 200 and send it to my children in the house, and then buy another *malou* for myself and spend the remaining SSP 100 on tea, and then wait for another lucky day.’<sup>36</sup>

The intensive collection of wild resources is putting these resources under pressure. Older fisherfolk—including Garang, who fished for survival during the civil wars of the 1980s and 1990s—observe that there are fewer fish in the river. Many women note the depletion of wild fruit and edible trees, particularly from the autumn to spring dry season.<sup>37</sup>

### Savings, investment and risk

Larger businesses incur bigger risks and costs. Thiep runs a sunbaked brick making business in the *murram* (clay-heavy laterite) open mine in Maper. He sells 1,000 bricks for SSP 2,000 (or SSP 1,500 in hard times).<sup>38</sup> Aweil city council charges Thiep SSP 1,500 for a letter of approval and a further SSP 3,000 for an annual license to run his business. He subcontracts men and women to make 1,000 bricks for a 50 per cent cut of profit but rains can destroy their work. Since 2017, people have been leaving for the north or are otherwise unable to afford to rebuild their houses, thus reducing their capacity to purchase bricks.

Some people are able to access more substantial loans, particularly northern traders. After a long career in the military and security services in Sudan, Hassan trades second-hand clothes at the Kiir border post, where a dress costs SSP 500 and sandals SSP 300.<sup>39</sup> He owes a truck driver SSP 16,000 for transporting his goods from Daein to Kiir and is slowly paying it back. Abuk, an eighteen-year-old woman, asked her father to sell a goat and sent the proceeds to her maternal uncle in Juba, who bought her a bundle of second-hand clothes for SSP 40,000. She walks with these clothes to sell them at a series of market days across Aweil North state and the Aweil-side counties of Lol state. After her uncle was

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Garang, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Also noted by Martina Santschi, ‘A Fragmented State: The political economy of humanitarian assistance in former Northern Bahr el Ghazal State’, Juba: Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility, March 2017, 21.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Thiep, bricklayer, Maper open *murram* mine, 8 December 2018. In 2009, Thiep could sell 1,000 bricks for SSP 100 but ‘that 100 pounds was better than 2,000 pounds of today’.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Hassan, Darfuri second-hand clothes trader, Kiir, 11 December 2018.

killed during the conflict in 2015 and her father, also a soldier, was injured—his salary of SSP 1,300 now comes irregularly—Abuk’s profits are vital for the family.<sup>40</sup>

This precarious economy requires careful investment and management of cash, which is vulnerable to inflation and theft.<sup>41</sup> Most people manage their cash reserves by investing in ‘precautionary savings’.<sup>42</sup> This is a deeply stressful process: as Marco, a tailor in a border village, emphasizes, ‘People are living by courage.’<sup>43</sup>

Thiep, the brick maker (*kamin*), takes the profits of his business and buys bundles of firewood, storing them at his home compound as savings for the rainy season, when he cannot make his sun-dried bricks. He then sells the bundles of firewood to pay for his council license for the next bricklaying season.<sup>44</sup> Hassan, the Darfuri trader at Kiir, buys wood and grass mats and stores them to resell on his way back to Omdurman, in Babanusa and Daein, where demand is high.<sup>45</sup> Garang and Mou, along with the other fisherfolk at the camp near Ariath, store sorghum at home until the price rises with the dry season. They then sell it and buy a goat or cow as insurance against future crop failure. Some use their sorghum earnings as a means to save for nets and hooks if aid agencies do not provide these for free, and for taxes; at Ariath, fisherfolk are charged SSP 1,500 for a licence.<sup>46</sup> Angon, who fishes the Kiir River, does not know where the licence fees go but explains that after having paid the tax many people fish all year round to make the most of the expense.

With all these demands on their finances, many people are simply unable to save, which is a point Angon emphasizes:

Save money for what? We are only struggling with food in order to avoid displacement to the north. ... Whenever you get money, you spend it on food for the family, because when rain comes this market will close and the Arabs will go away with their goods and you will not find grain again. And if you don’t have enough grain, you can only supplement it with wild fruits and leaves.<sup>47</sup>

There are other ways to borrow for investment but the rates of money lenders are extremely high. In Aweil town, traders charge a 617 per cent annual interest rate on a small loan of SSP 1,000, demanding SSP 1,500 back within a month.<sup>48</sup> Martha and a group of women who meet at the local church in the scrubland on the edge of Maper, an Aweil

40 Interview with Abuk, young woman trading second-hand clothes, Nyamlel market, 12 December 2018.

41 There are also risks associated with holding food stocks, including pests and theft; see: Biong Deng, ‘Livelihood diversification’, 392.

42 Biong Deng, ‘Livelihood diversification’, 392.

43 Interview with Marco, tailor, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

44 Interview with Thiep, bricklayer, Maper open *murram* mine, 8 December 2018.

45 Interview with Hassan, Darfuri second-hand clothes trader at Kiir, 11 December 2018.

46 Interview with group of elderly fishermen, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

47 Interview with Angon, fisherman, Kiir River, 11 December 2018.

48 Interview with Arek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

suburb, have been running an investment group since 2013 in which women apply for funds and then return the capital after a month. Each woman contributes SSP 100 a week to fund one loan of SSP 1,000, for instance for vegetable trading, or to buy groundnuts to roast and sell.<sup>49</sup> Martha notes that they aim to lend 'to women who are the most vulnerable, those whose conditions have worsened, to help them out'.<sup>50</sup> The group requests an interest of SSP 300—equivalent to a 360 per cent non-compound rate—over the month, which is then added to the pot. If the woman's project collapses, they do not pay anything back.

There are huge risks to all economic investments, not least the demands on physical strength and health. Agricultural investment is noted as high risk. This is particularly the case because of pests and rains but also because there is no guarantee of making a marketable surplus that can be turned in to cash.<sup>51</sup> This is partly due to the challenges in reclaiming wild land for production. There are few people who have the capital, undisputed land rights, access to fertilizing herds and physical capacity to make reclaiming large-scale farmland viable.

These structural and familial inequalities are dependent on past and present abilities to diversify: as Luka Biong notes, 'The higher the risk and the more assets available, the more households will diversify.'<sup>52</sup> This ability to diversify, however, depends on location, experience and knowledge, as well as having some form of capital, liquefiable asset or access to familial credit and labour, or social or political connections. Households who lack many of these assets are less able take risks and weather unexpected events.

The practical challenges of agricultural investment are compounded by the comparatively high risk of little to no return. In particular, as is commonly noted by interviewees, rainfall seems to be becoming much more unpredictable and extreme. In 2018, for example, there were insufficient early rains for a first round of staged planting—at Alel, first plantings dried in the field—and then heavy late rains, which caused flash flooding and destroyed lowland farm projects.<sup>53</sup> Some residents are responding by further diversifying their agriculture but this requires extensive time and travel between highland and lowland farm plots, and careful management of seeds and timings.

Some of the most fertile areas, such as the land around the Majok border post, are also places that continue to be notorious for robbery and assault, especially for female farmers.<sup>54</sup> Many people have become exhausted and have stopped cultivating entirely.<sup>55</sup>

49 Interview with a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

50 Interview with Martha, elderly woman in a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

51 Interview with Arek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

52 Biong Deng, 'Livelihood diversification', 381.

53 Interview with Peter, trader, Nyamlel cattle market, 12 December 2018.

54 Interview with two young men, one working as a motorbike mechanic, Majok, 14 December 2018.

55 Santschi, 'A Fragmented State', 19–20.

Women who have been widowed or are otherwise heading families cannot risk the health and futures of their children on self-production. As Arek, an Aweil town resident, indicates, ‘I find it better to live in town and gamble life here.’<sup>56</sup>

## The importance of aid

Food aid is an entrenched part of this market.<sup>57</sup> People emphasize its importance over the last few years. As Angon notes, ‘We were saved by the humanitarian organization this year in spring. Otherwise people could have starved to death here.’<sup>58</sup> Cash injections, for instance into *sandouk* (collective saving) projects, and food donations are gratefully received and noted. NGO workshop attendance expenses are seen by some, for instance by community police members in Apada, as an irregular but important form of pay.<sup>59</sup> Food aid—unpredictable in its timing, quantity and distribution—does not generally appear in family budgeting and planning.

Among those interviewed, there is constant discussion of how this allocation and distribution is manipulated. As Alek, a tea seller in Apada market, says, ‘People go around shouting, saying Apada is hungry, Aweil is hungry. And if aid comes later, it ends up somewhere, we do not know.’<sup>60</sup> Aid arrives and disappears into family pockets or is sold on the open market.<sup>61</sup> Urban women, already seen as comparatively wealthy, are accused of benefitting unfairly from livelihood workshops. In one complaint about a self-employment project, a rural market trader claims that:

The women who attended that workshop were later donated chairs and other tea making equipment. These women did not later accept to work in the market as required by the organization but they instead rented [the chairs and equipment] out to us expensively—and we were part of that research but left out of the aid.<sup>62</sup>

Other livelihood projects appear to have shut down or are being run on locally incomprehensible schedules. For example, a vegetable growing project in Apada, in which women were given seeds and assistance to open up wetland vegetable plots, has stopped running. This happened not for lack of interest and profit but because there is significant cost and risk in this project, not least because women working in the wetland areas are at risk of deadly snake bites.<sup>63</sup>

56 Interview with Arek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

57 See Jaspars, ‘The State’.

58 Interview with Angon, fisherman, Kiir River, 11 December 2018.

59 Interview with village police officers, Apada, 8 December 2018.

60 Interview with Alek, market tea maker, Apada, 8 December 2018.

61 Interview with elderly female trader, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

62 Interview with middle-aged female market worker, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

63 Interview with Alek, market tea maker, Apada, 8 December 2018.

## 4. Migration, Flight and Risk

In January 2019, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there are around 130,000 South Sudanese refugees living across the border in southern Darfur and about 290,000 in Khartoum. The area of south-east Darfur that is directly across the border from the Aweil East trade road to Meiram has the highest rate of arrivals. This generally coincides with the dry season.<sup>64</sup>

In the words of Athian, a farmer, ‘Those who had never gone through such suffering in their lives could not withstand this crisis and they then decided to go north, even if they knew it was not good there.’<sup>65</sup> It is generally believed that departing residents are predominantly widows with children, or people returning from urban displacement who did not know how or what to cultivate.<sup>66</sup> The majority of people are not fleeing to the safety of refugee camps but instead are resorting to long-term livelihood strategies and employment options.

Some of this movement is seasonal. For example, there is a tradition (at least four generations old) of young men from the borderland travelling north to earn cash, which they use to buy clothes, bicycles and motorbikes, or deploy as bride-wealth for marriage and other investment capital.<sup>67</sup> Martin, a farmer from Warawar, is a good example of this system of seasonal economic migration. In 2008 and 2009, he worked in Muglad—a town in West Kordofan state in Sudan—as a waiter and shopkeeper. After leaving, he returned home with his savings and invested them in a shop and on his farm. Martin emphasizes the importance of being ‘independent for your own [and] not to be after someone else’s time’, adding, ‘that is why I was looking for my own, to make my own business’.<sup>68</sup>

Most migrant male employment in Sudan is manual; for example, bricklaying, cultivation, threshing, bakery, construction, domestic work and laundry.<sup>69</sup> Women’s options focus on laundry, market trade, cooking, domestic work, making tea and brewing beer. These cross-border opportunities are long-standing and well known. They are also racially coded and socially stigmatized.

Most people going north seek seasonal work on farms in Darfur. Athian, the farmer, estimates that digging over and planting out one *feddan* (a 60 m x 70 m, or 0.42 ha plot) would earn a worker between 80–100 Sudanese Pounds (SP) but the rate has gone up this year

64 UNHCR Sudan population dashboard: Refugees from South Sudan, 31 January 2019. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68120>

65 Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018.

66 Interview with village police officers, Apada, 8 December 2018.

67 Interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

68 Interview with Martin, young farmer, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

69 Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018.

to around SP 160–250. Threshing can bring in about SP 800 but this is hard, physically taxing work. He explains that, at best, he could dig and plant a *feddan* in four days. A fit and experienced person can generally manage to dig and plant six or seven *feddans* in a month.<sup>70</sup> Transport on the road north, from the Kiir border post to Kario refugee camp in east Darfur currently costs around SP 800–1,000, depending on the negotiation skills of the person seeking transport.<sup>71</sup>

Many men interviewed for this study have friends who have travelled onwards to Egypt or ran small businesses across the Sudan–Chad border (that is, until the recent deterioration of the security situation).<sup>72</sup>

## Risks and stresses

The risks and stresses of migrant work and resettlement have become greater since the secession of South Sudan in 2011. Living conditions and security are generally agreed to have worsened in both Darfur and Khartoum. In particular, interviewees state that there are now more difficulties in opening and running businesses in the face of racial prejudice and thefts. Several men report non-payment of agricultural wages with no redress. As Athian, the farmer, complains, ‘You can’t open a case against [your boss] because we are vulnerable everywhere in Darfur. You will not have any rights wherever you go in Darfur. [The bosses] live in the villages and have guns. The people in the courts solving cases are their relatives.’<sup>73</sup>

A number of people make the point that this situation essentially amounts to slavery. Several young men also report that when returning home with Christmas presents and cash, they had their money, goods and shoes stolen by armed bandits on the border.<sup>74</sup> Despite these risks, it is generally agreed that it is better to be impoverished but have food in Darfur, than impoverished and malnourished in South Sudan.<sup>75</sup>

Women—alone or with their children and mothers—are also moving northwards.<sup>76</sup> Those who are choosing to head north are well aware of the challenges of this semi-permanent

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018; interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018; interview with two young men, one working as a motorbike mechanic, Majok, 14 December 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with two young men, one working as a motorbike mechanic, at Majok, 14 December 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018; interview with Angon, fisherman, Kiir River, 11 December 2018; interview with group of young men, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

<sup>76</sup> Some border residents think that fewer women are moving currently, compared with the bad times of 2016. Interview with a money transfer agent, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

migration. Women who have returned back to the south from Khartoum emphasize the problems with conditions and opportunities in the city.<sup>77</sup>

Women face serious risks of exploitation and harm during the journey and once they reach the north. Many experience thefts, imprisonment, extortion and sexual assaults. Alek, a businesswoman in Aweil, heard of women whose young children have been coerced or kidnapped and forced into domestic labour or work with cattle.<sup>78</sup> This is sometimes justified as being payment for transport north, which traps women into working in the same household or nearby. Despite these risks, Susan—a member of the church cooperative investment group—says that, ‘When you are hungry, you put your safety in the hands of God and take the risk of passing across the border.’<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Abuk, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Susan, young woman in a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

## 5. Mutual Support Systems

This increasing marketization of the borderland economy has produced two main outcomes. First, it has undermined the social security of old kinship systems. Second, it highlights social stratification and growing societal inequalities. While the ability of people to develop highly diversified livelihood strategies (including selling their own labour, growing crops and selling a surplus) helps them minimize immediate risks and survive some shocks, it also traps them in a cycle of small margins and market reliance.

One result of this is that people increasingly cannot afford, or do not have the time, to invest in the mutual networks of kinship social security. Mutual support and collective welfare, organized through extended family and clan structures, is an institution sustained not simply by moral accountability. It is a system that is fundamentally integrated into the economy and, accordingly, requires regular physical investment.

This safety net—thought of as fundamental to society in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal—is increasingly under pressure, with people unable to invest in mutual support in traditional ways. With labour increasingly commodified, and young male labour largely captured by military work, there are few people who are able to mobilize the labour needed for collective farming. Martha, who lives in Maper, explains:

That time, there was enough for the people, and you could help your neighbour when you knew that you had food in your house. But now, no one has food in their house. And people will not accept to go and work without pay when their children don't have food to eat. Everyone struggles to find food for their family. But that time long ago, people could go out to help because they had food in the house, milk in the house, and people were free.<sup>80</sup>

Martha also notes that cash and the rapidity of the wage labour market have transformed how cooperative and reciprocal assistance works: 'Nowadays all work requires payment. But if you try to do it all yourself, then you can't do enough of it [because it's too much for one person].'<sup>81</sup>

This collapsing system of reciprocal social security is particularly evident for those who left the region semi-permanently or permanently during the civil war in the 1980s and 1990s, especially for families from the borderland areas that were most affected by raiding and famines in 1986–1988 and 1997–1998. People who lived out the war in Khartoum, or who worked the agricultural schemes in north-east Sudan, most commonly complain of this rupture. Santino, who worked for the Sudan police during the wars and returned to

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Martha, elderly woman in a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Martha, elderly woman in a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

South Sudan in 2010, explains how he and his wife returned ‘with nothing but our bare hands’—having lost their foothold in the social security networks of the former village of their family.<sup>82</sup> Men and women such as Santino and his wife, who came back with the IOM repatriations, are more likely to be forced to liquidate the assets they acquired in the north (for example, bedding, cooking utensils and tea making stalls) to survive the first few years of resettlement.<sup>83</sup>

The line of inequality between those who have returned, and those who stayed, can be overdrawn. Some communities that did not experience extensive raiding—including families who lived through the war in southern Darfur or other regional towns—managed to keep ‘some few cattle that escaped the loot’<sup>84</sup> by taking them south and east into SPLA strongholds.<sup>85</sup> Alek, the businesswoman in Aweil, elaborates: ‘Those whose cattle were not raided remained rich—and are still rich. And are the ones in the villages today. But those whose cattle were stolen are the most vulnerable now. They don’t have anything at all.’<sup>86</sup>

People returning to areas in the north-west that were extensively raided have had to work hard to restore a pastoralist economy. A man at Ariath—an SAF-held military post and wartime market—explains that ‘everything here was looted and people had to go Awan and Apuk Giir to buy goats and cattle’.<sup>87</sup>

Some returnees have been able to rebuild their family livelihoods more quickly than others due to the skills and experience they acquired in exile. Others have been able to do so because they had worked for international NGOs or the UN during the war—lucrative positions that paid in US dollars. Families who have regained their wealth—whether through aid agency, government or military work—therefore have the investable resources that are needed to successfully navigate the post-2005 regional economy.<sup>88</sup> Access to cash and investment resources allows individuals and families to pursue claims to former clan lands in courts or to buy government allocated plots. In addition, access to such resources provides a financial basis for forging good marriages. These are also the individuals who can buy or otherwise gain access to the few tractors that are available in the region, allowing them to open much larger wild spaces for cultivation.

Across the region, families who have weathered (or profited from) the last few generations of successive crises and shifts can continue to invest in marital social security networks

82 Interview with Santino, police officer at the village police post, Apada, 8 December 2018.

83 Interview with a chief, Apada village court, 8 December 2018; interview with Abuk, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018.

84 Interview with Garang, middle-aged man trading in Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

85 Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

86 Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018. Also noted in interview with Santino, a member of the village police post, Apada, 8 December 2018; and interview with Abuk, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018.

87 Interview with Garang, middle-aged man trading in Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

88 Interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

and private education for their children. Many people are reliant on richer relatives, who share food and provide funding for education. The collapsing economy has created huge stress on these networks of mutual support. For example, local courts regularly hear disputes over child support, marital abandonment and other family inequities.

## Cash saving schemes

Women-run collective saving schemes continue to function but many women note that cash saving groups are hard to maintain when inflation spikes or when there are so many immediate pressures on the accumulated cash reserves. Many women drop out of regular groups.<sup>89</sup> As Arek, a small businesswoman in Aweil, notes, 'It depends on the number of participants and the trust.'<sup>90</sup> She runs a group where members (ten in total) pay in SSP 300 a week and each one takes home the weekly total on a rotational basis.

Depreciation in the value of cash has made smaller versions of this scheme seem pointless to many women. Similarly, goat and cattle prices (and thus their savings value) are shifting quickly. Peter at Nyamlel cattle market observes that if there is low demand, high taxes or a few northern traders are in town, then prices can fall to SSP 30,000 for a small heifer (with a sales tax of SSP 500), which might not cover one year of food for a family.<sup>91</sup> Collective investments are valuable but they do not provide guaranteed returns in an unpredictable and inflationary cash market.

Receipt of small cash sums (remittances) from family working elsewhere in South Sudan have collapsed as salaries have depreciated and gone unpaid. This is also the case for people with family in Khartoum because exchange rates in Sudan have also worsened.<sup>92</sup> Many families across the region have a member in the far diaspora, including in the United States, Australia or Canada. In the Bahr el-Ghazal borderlands, however, residents are generally the last stop in the remittance chain, and family members in Juba and Aweil, who send the money on, often take a cut of the total amount.<sup>93</sup>

The vast majority of money sent to Aweil and the surrounding area is from soldiers stationed across South Sudan. Without this flow, money transfer agencies note that they would have to fold.<sup>94</sup> Most transfers are only around SSP 1,000–2,000 and the amount and frequency, which peaks before farming season as family reinvest in agricultural production, has declined as the overall economic climate has worsened.<sup>95</sup> This is putting further strain on the ability of local people to invest in shared projects and mutual support.

89 Interview with Achirin, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018.

90 Interview with Arek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

91 Interview with Peter, trader, Nyamlel cattle market, 12 December 2018.

92 Interview with Along, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018.

93 There is also a 5 per cent fee for money transfers common to all local agents.

94 Interview with David, money transfer agent, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

95 Interview with David, money transfer agent, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

Several people state that they understand why the very few wealthy individuals in the region must prioritize their immediate family in extremely demanding times. As clans and villages have fragmented and as personal reserves have been repeatedly tapped, however, there are signs of eroding trust in social systems. For example, the system of *kuei*—whereby cattle are given to others for safe keeping—is now less common.<sup>96</sup> Also, many more court cases are being brought to challenge family members who have not followed societal standards for sharing food and resources in times of hardship.<sup>97</sup> To several locals, including an elder at a cattle camp in near Wadweil, it feels like social connections are weakening: ‘A poor man is staying as a poor man, and the rich stay as rich. ... So, the rich are friends to the rich and the poor to the poor. We are living parallel like that.’<sup>98</sup>

This societal stress has been exacerbated by collapsing government and military salaries, which previously supported polygamous family economies. Susan, a young member of a church collective investment society, explains how this works: ‘Many men have truly failed their responsibilities but some men have married more wives, and now have no good jobs to help them care for these many wives. And as a result, he concentrates on one wife and leaves the rest to struggle on their own. ... He tends to concentrate on the youngest wife, who he fears may divorce him because she is still young.’<sup>99</sup> Bona, in Majok, explains that he ‘married three wives when I was having more resources, and three or four sacks [of sorghum] are not enough to feed them.’<sup>100</sup>

The shocks of the last six years have placed comparatively more strain on social relations and mutual support among the poorest and least connected borderland residents. Women whose own parents or extended family are impoverished, dead or otherwise missing are often least able to expend the resources or time on fighting for social recognition and support from their kinship network.<sup>101</sup>

Increasing connectivity through mobile phones and satellite networks does not necessarily mean there is increasing real social connectivity.<sup>102</sup> Abuk, living in a former IOM resettlement site, was previously a beer brewer in Soba in Khartoum. Her husband, a bricklayer, put Abuk and their children on an IOM bus eight years ago and told her he would follow her. She heard that he came to Juba two years ago but when she obtained

96 Biong Deng, ‘Livelihood diversification’, 394.

97 Santschi, ‘A Fragmented State’, 21.

98 Interview with a cattle camp worker, Maker near Wadweil, 12 December 2018.

99 Interview with Susan, young woman in a church group, outskirts of Maper, 9 December 2018.

100 Interview with Bona, elderly soldier, Majok, 14 December 2018.

101 Interview with Abuk, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018. Abuk is putting her seventeen-year-old son through school on her market income, and is waiting for her husband to reappear in the village for a family event so that she can take him to court over unpaid child support.

102 See: Mareike Schomerus and Anouk Rigterink, ‘“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* 4/1 (2015).

his new phone number, he changed it. Abuk eventually made the time to travel to petition her husband's family at Wut Akuak but her uncle-in-law, who should hear her complaint, ran away from her.<sup>103</sup>

Alek, a businesswoman, explains this situation in terms of the structural marketization of the economy: 'The change from agricultural economy to market economy in town, and also the worsening economic crisis, has changed the relationship between wives and their husbands.'<sup>104</sup> As is the case with many women, however, Alek is also frustrated with older systems of male control over household finances:

He [her husband] cannot tell me the exact amount he makes out in his business. I do not know. He never discloses it to me. I do not see the quantity of wood he has cut to sell to be able to at least estimate his income. He goes out early in the morning, stays away the whole day and returns in the evening and I cannot know what he made in the day. I am putting five children in school.<sup>105</sup>

For some women, this estrangement is expedient. Bakhita is a relatively prosperous market trader, whose husband is a *Mathiang Anyoor* soldier in Yambio. Five years ago, she decided not to contact him again:

The changing society has come. Because long ago, a woman was at home to do domestic work. But now, there is work. A woman can go and sell things in the market to get help. And the man cannot ask the woman why she is not doing this [housework] because she's getting her own things [with her own money].<sup>106</sup>

Bakhita supports three of her five young children in school and invests her market income in goats and chickens. Few women (including Bakhita) want to break up their family in this manner, particularly if their husband simply cannot find sufficient paid work.<sup>107</sup> Many men, however, complain that their wives have cut them out of the family economy altogether. For example, a soldier in Ariath says that his wife 'does not talk to me. She will insult me on the spot but she sends her son some money. ... She says that she does not need me. ... She now supports her children.'<sup>108</sup>

Abuk, the teenage woman running her own second-hand clothes business around market days in the region, negotiated with her father to allow her to do this work rather than to marry. She told him, if she did not like the man that he married her to then, 'I will just run away. Then all these problems will remain around your neck but I won't be there [to bring

103 Interview with Abuk, market trader, Apada, 8 December 2018.

104 Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

105 Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

106 Interview with Bakhita, fuel trader, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

107 Interview with Along, a market trader in Apada, 8 December 2018.

108 Interview with elderly soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

in any income].<sup>109</sup> Abuk is also highly aware of the social judgements that are placed on her work. She says: ‘Some people, they believe that if a girl has gone to market, to sell something or to make a business, they say that the daughter of this village is a prostitute now.’ In addition, Abuk makes a clear class distinction between herself and ‘those rich girls’: ‘I know that my father and mother do not have anything but their fathers, they are rich, so those girls think that each and everything at home is theirs.’

Women and men in the borderland are conscious that waged and market labour is undermining and stratifying societies and social networks. At the same time, they also see this individualizing economy as much more reliable than collective agricultural production, old gendered systems of familial financial order and reliance on kin solidarity. Some women are tying themselves permanently to market economies and refusing collective agricultural labour, essentially breaking from old production systems. As Gariang, from Ariath, explains:

These are women who refused to come to the village to cultivate. If a husband has gone and never sends money back home and the woman has no job to do to feed the children, the family of her husband would ask her to relocate to the village so that she can cultivate and they will then help to supplement what she has produced. And if she refused to come to the village to cultivate, then it is the reason she is not supported when she comes to ask for food.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Abuk, young woman trading second-hand clothes, Nyamlel market, 12 December 2018. Until otherwise specified, the quotes that follow are also from this interviewee.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Garang, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

## 6. Shifting Inequalities and Vulnerabilities

The complex inequalities in the region have resulted in an increasing stratification of society. The dynamics of class production, however, are understudied in South Sudan. Dominant political economy analyses tend to amalgamate this social stratification into a system of corrupt and predatory elites versus the ruralized and peri-urban poor.<sup>111</sup> This sets up a false binary separation and glosses over real structural change.

The immediate demands of survival in an increasingly cash-based economy have pushed most people living in the borderland into a balancing act between self-production, strategic investments and various forms of waged work. Most men and women are involved primarily in farm labour in the agricultural season. Younger men may also seek precarious but more lucrative migrant farming and manual work in Darfur and, further north, in Khartoum.

People often base their employment strategies on former contacts made through previous experiences of migrant labour. In Darfur, Mou had found regular work as a brick maker during the war. He recounts how:

I worked in brick laying in town for a man called Adam but when the rainy season came, I would move with my family to the farm to cultivate... [Adam] had given me free land. Adam could also give me [seeds], and when harvest came, I would return the sack of grain I owed him and I then return to town to work in brick making.<sup>112</sup>

Other men note that they had contacts among chiefs in Gareida, in South Darfur, who would give them free plots of land ‘with the expectation of having cheap workers nearby’.<sup>113</sup> This type of paid agricultural work is also organized by smallholders in the former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal region. Martin, who has cleared a few hectares of his former clan land near Warawar using capital he made from brick-making in Darfur, hires workers on the basis that, if cultivation succeeds, they share the profit.<sup>114</sup> Young men are similarly employed by local residents or Darfuri investors on a salaried basis to make charcoal. This provides the initial investment to hire axes, buy food for the duration of the work and rent transport to bring the charcoal sacks from the forest.<sup>115</sup>

This wage economy is fundamentally structured by the inequalities detailed above. With extensive farmlands lost to *roor* during the conflict, and good agricultural space already

<sup>111</sup> As noted by Maxwell et al., ‘A Synthesis’, 21.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Mou, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Garang, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Martin, young farmer, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

under significant pressure by returning migrants, the monetization of land rights and agricultural production is undermining clan rights and individual access.

For Manyang and Yuot, two young men from the Gok area, there is not enough ready cash to rent a cultivatable plot: 'It is people with money who own [land] and divide up their farms and rent it to those who want to cultivate. If you want to cultivate on empty land, someone would come and say, this is my land. You have to rent it if you want to cultivate.' They explain that if someone wants to secure their claim, they have to have cash and they have to go through the process of government land registration, and then 'you would own it for good'.<sup>116</sup>

People who can make successful claims to former clan lands, and register them, have opened up large-scale farms across the borderland.<sup>117</sup> UN and NGO workers, as well as military, security and government personnel, provide the dollarized cash to push through family claims to clan land and underwrite the opening up of farmland on a large scale. One of these workers sold some of his cattle, he explains, to hire a tractor from a wealthy military commander (himself a major local agriculturalist) to open up a big farm to 'cultivate with money'.<sup>118</sup>

Military and security officials, in particular, have managed to lay claim to some of the most fertile and best drained areas, through their family connections or government positions.<sup>119</sup> These wealthy men and their immediate families are also more likely to have larger herds, which can be driven through farmlands for fertilization.<sup>120</sup> Wealthy farmholders also engage in stockpiling of harvests, selling them at greater profit during the dry season, often to international agencies as humanitarian aid.<sup>121</sup> This further increases food prices.<sup>122</sup>

These agricultural inequalities are creating increasingly divergent fortunes for wealthy families and their poorer kin and clans. Reliance on labouring for wealthier family members is part of a wider reworking of kinship networks within systems of landlordism and profit

<sup>116</sup> Interview with a group of young men, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Their rights are still frequently disputed but their claims stand regardless. See: Naomi Pendle, 'Contesting the militarization of the places where they met: the landscapes of the western Nuer and Dinka (South Sudan)', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11/1 (2017): 75.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Francis, trader, Nyamlel cattle market, 12 December 2018.

<sup>119</sup> Leonardi and Santschi, 'Dividing Communities', 124.

<sup>120</sup> Fertilizing farmland is expensive for families who do not have a stake in a clan herd. A cattle camp leader requests around SSP 7,000, local and imported alcohol, a bull, and several kilos of sugar and tea leaves in order to drive the cattle camp through a farmer's land to fertilize it. The money is divided between the heads of the camp (who represent the clans owning the cattle) and the camp's spiritual authority, the *beny biith*. The farmowner also has to pay the drummer and flag carrier, who move ahead of the relocating cattle camp. These expenses are greater in autumn, when the herds are large, and lower in other seasons, when herds have separated into smaller clan cattle camps.

<sup>121</sup> A risk noted by Santschi, 'A Fragmented State', 19.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Angor, tea maker, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

across the region. The vast majority of people interviewed work as seasonal labourers on these farms (known locally by the names of the prominent political family or UNMISS staff member who owns them). Some workers do this in addition to cultivating their own family farms. Others supplement their wage with market work.

This work is remunerated according to plot size. Joseph, who has a fifth share in his large family farm south of Aweil town (funded by a brother in UNMISS), divides out 15 ft x 10 ft (approximately 4.5 m x 3 m) plots, which are cleared for SSP 300, planted for SSP 200 and weeded for SSP 150. In Wadweil, the same area is paid at SSP 200 for cultivation and a whole *feddan* can be farmed for a total sum of SSP 6,000 over the season.<sup>123</sup> Most workers aim to make between SSP 300 to SSP 900 a day, depending on their hours. As market prices of food shift over the cultivation period, these workers note that they find it hard to know the real time value of what they earn.<sup>124</sup>

Some young men who remained in the region during the wars, or were raised in SPLA-held rural areas and educated in cattle camps, also have the option of paid cattle herding work. As a cattle camp member explains:

This started after peace in 2005. ... Before the war began, there was nobody who could accumulate and build his own cattle camp. But when these generals returned home after peace, they had access to money and they bought large private herds. They employ young men to look after them because [that man] has no children to look after his cattle. He has taken all his children to school and he is busy working. He will call a poor man's son and say, look after my cattle and I will pay you a cow after a year. Or look after my cattle and I will be paying money.<sup>125</sup>

These relationships are vulnerable to abuses of power. For example, military leaders may take soldiers to their farms or cattle camps for work and either not pay them, or say that they are compensated through their state salaries, which are infrequent and have depreciated in value.<sup>126</sup>

For many people, this work nonetheless provides access to a cash income. Both Manyang and Yuot work on the land of their wealthy relatives for cash, and their kinship provides them some protection against the possibility of being unpaid or underpaid.<sup>127</sup> In contrast, women who work on neighbouring farms, and who have no relationship to the local owner, have little recourse if they are unpaid. If the farmer cannot or does not pay, a young female day labourer says, 'You can ask him to pay you in grain. And if not, you cannot fight him. You have to wait.'<sup>128</sup>

123 Interview with elderly cattle camp worker, Maker near Wadweil, 12 December 2018.

124 Interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

125 Interview with elder at a cattle camp, Maker near Wadweil, 12 December 2018.

126 Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

127 Interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

128 Interview with Josephine, trader, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

This is part of a local, and generally unheard, analysis of manipulation and exploitation in the current political economy.<sup>129</sup> As several young men explain, the fragmentation of societal, moral and practical bonds caused by this changing economy has allowed men who have gained access to wealth and opportunities to seek their own aggrandizement.<sup>130</sup> Many people discuss the shifting definition of unfreedom and servitude in this changing economy.<sup>131</sup> They describe this system as *loony* (slavery), which includes volunteering themselves (*rot juar*, or *juer-rot*) as soldiers or teachers for minimal returns and high risks.<sup>132</sup> Being *alony* (a slave or servant) is the opposite of freedom. People in this borderland region even joke that *alony* has been modernized to *ajiro*—an employee.

<sup>129</sup> Daniel Akech Thiong, 'How the politics of fear generated chaos in South Sudan', *African Affairs* 117/469 (2018): 622; also see: Jessie Luna, 'The chain of exploitation: intersectional inequalities, capital accumulation, and resistance in Burkina Faso's cotton sector', *The Journal of Peasant Studies* published online (2018). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03066150.2018.1499623?journalCode=fjps20>

<sup>130</sup> Interview with two young men, one working as a motorbike mechanic, Majok, 14 December 2018.

<sup>131</sup> For similar sentiments in another context, see: Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele, 'A "Despicable Shambles": Labour, Property and Status in Faya-Largeau, Northern Chad', *Africa* 86/1 (2016): 137.

<sup>132</sup> Escaping forms of *loony* is difficult both because of the necessity of survival within this monetized economy and because of the legacies of collective morality. People will not recommend individuals for further jobs, vote for them in community elections or regard them as a good person if they do not work, for instance, as a volunteer teacher, even if they cannot afford to do so. As such, borderland residents emphasize, young men and women are morally and economically forced into volunteer work, as teachers or in military service, and then trapped in this political economy.

## 7. Governance in the Borderlands

This study examines the former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal borderland political economy from the perspective of its economic landscape. By focusing on the structural shifts and challenges of agricultural production, marketization, commodification and migrant work, it is possible to more effectively conceptualize how power is exerted. The actual authority of the militarized government in the region is rooted in its ability to manage and manipulate opportunities for waged work or education, control outward migration and harvest profits from this economic system while restricting the ability of the vast majority of the people in the region to critique or challenge this system.

The structural roots of militarized governance in the borderland relies on a clear structuring of ‘the possible field of action’.<sup>133</sup> This means deciding on the location of markets; taking cuts of rents and salaries; controlling migration through border management and controlling educational advancement and well-paid employment opportunities. This amounts to the practice of authoritarianism—reducing the powers of people to resist, creating competition and breaking social solidarities.

### Militarized systems

The government and military systems that exist in the borderland are built on foundations laid in the conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s. As the SPLA took control of rural areas across the region, it restructured its predatory relationships with the remaining population, creating military-run administrative systems after the establishment of the Civil Authority of New Sudan (CANS) in 1997. CANS soldier-administrators formalized systems of taxation, which were collected in the form of cattle, fish, grain and sometimes cash.

Malek, who fished throughout the war to support his family, was appointed by the local SPLA administration to be spokesperson for fisherfolk on his section of the Lol river. He says, ‘They would beat you if you were not consistent with the amount of fish you collected.’<sup>134</sup> In 2000, the SPLA forged agreements with Misseriya militias and sultans from Sudan, which further increased border trade and tax revenues. For many residents, the various taxes and other government demands made at present are a continuation of this system.

Many soldier-administrators have continued their careers in the government, security services and military offices. These are organized around former SPLA bases, the home villages of key commanders and in the offices aid agencies sited in these administrative

<sup>133</sup> Kasper Hoffmann and Judith Verweijen, ‘Rebel rule: A governmentality perspective’, *African Affairs* published online (2018): 2, quoting Michel Foucault, ‘The subject and power’, *Critical Inquiry* 8/4 (Summer, 1982): 777–795.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Malek, elderly fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

hubs. Career advancement is still governed by wartime hierarchies and systems associated with SPLM party officials, administrators and enlistment officers.

The massive expansion of the South Sudan civil service and military payroll over the post-2005 period was organized within these wartime administrative structures and county systems—essentially an effort to make redistribution a dividend of the end of war. This created a salaried governmental and military class in South Sudanese regions but no real changes in local inequalities.<sup>135</sup>

The idea and practice—now more limited and fraught—of government stipends as the core form of social security and welfare continues. This is most evident within the overextended ranks of the armed forces. While it is widely recognized that payrolls are endemically corrupt, and massively overinflated with dead or fake service personnel, these vast salary budgets are considered a fundamental social service. Disabled, the over sixty-year-old and otherwise unemployed soldiers still receive salaries on a sporadic and diminishing basis from military posts dotted across the borderland, including Wathok, Pantit, Mangar Akot and Malualoich. Some of these are referred to locally as military retirement villages, in addition to being checkpoints.

Salaries of a few thousand SSP, often less than promised, are handed out from the main base at Wunyiik via local commanders and division registers, or through police and security payrolls.<sup>136</sup> Police posts across the region are operated by large numbers of former CANS personnel and ex-SPLA pensioners.<sup>137</sup> Older soldiers with fewer or less reliable familial and political connections may slip down or off this payroll. This also happens to ex-service personnel, who are seen as making enough income from other sources, including private businesses, to support themselves. Martin, who runs the pharmacy at the Kiir border post, was an SPLA medic from 1984 onward but his salary stopped when payroll officers saw that he was already making enough money from his business.<sup>138</sup>

The collapse of government finances—particularly apparent since the currency collapse in 2015—has put this system under extreme stress. This has been compounded by the problems of recruitment (often managed informally) to pro-government militias, which are now grouped under the *Mathiang Anyoor* battalion.<sup>139</sup>

Older SPLA officers, who have been employed to manage these recruits in the Upper Nile and Equatoria regions, complain that the men who have been recruited in this way have often not been registered correctly and are poorly integrated in to their units. As Deng, a soldier in Ariath, comments, ‘I don’t understand myself how they know their soldiers.’<sup>140</sup>

135 Edward Thomas, ‘Patterns of growth and inequality in Sudan, 1977–2017’, Durham Middle East Papers, Durham: University of Durham, 2017, 36.

136 Interview with elderly soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

137 Interview with police officers, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

138 Interview with Martin, pharmacist, Kiir River post, 11 December 2018.

139 Interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

140 Interview with Deng, young soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

Returning or injured soldiers also explain that they have been taken off the payroll, after being paid SSP 1,000 a month while fighting in Bentiu.<sup>141</sup> Soldiers who still have access to barracks and the offices of their commanders complain that the military welfare system has disappeared into personal pockets. Previous emergency funds, including those that provided for the sick children of soldiers, also have been suspended.<sup>142</sup>

In the civil service, there have been massive cuts to the cash amounts transferred from central government to Northern Bahr el-Ghazal state since 2012. The subdivision of states in 2015—initially into 28 new entities—further fragmented local government coffers.<sup>143</sup> Salaries are now paid in part and sporadically. A deputy police captain explains that his salary is technically SSP 1,800 a month but the government taxes this at around SSP 600, so he thinks he will get around SSP 1,200 when he is eventually paid.<sup>144</sup>

Local revenues from customs, taxes, market levies, fees and roadblocks are now vital and heavily contested. They are generally seen as corrupt and (at best) opaque.<sup>145</sup> These taxes are maintained at the limits of what local residents and businesses can afford. Animal sales across the region are taxed for both the buyer and seller, and money transfer agencies have been asked to pay higher and higher taxes and licence fees.<sup>146</sup> At Warawar, for instance, one agency was forced to shut after the local council asked for SSP 18,000. It eventually reopened after staff negotiated a licence fee of SSP 12,000 and a monthly tax of SSP 2,000.<sup>147</sup>

## Border regulation

One major source of revenue in the region are the roads that run to the border, particularly the main routes through Kiir Adem to eastern Darfur, and from Warawar and Majok Yithiau in the east towards Meiram and southern Kordofan. Both of these roads have technically been closed by the Sudan and South Sudan governments since early 2017. Traders who want to cross the border now have to travel through the forest at night. One Sudanese truck driver explains: ‘You have to drive through the forest until you realize that you have crossed into South Sudan, and this is when you would get on to the main road to move on. The same applies when returning back, as they would ask you what you had

<sup>141</sup> Interview with elderly soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Deng, young soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Santschi, ‘A Fragmented State’, 9.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with police officers, Ariath, 8 December 2018.

<sup>145</sup> Santschi, ‘A Fragmented State’, 11.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Garang, middle-aged man trading in Ariath market, 10 December 2018. Garang, who was selling a goat, notes that the current Ariath tax on goat sales is SSP 130 for the buyer and SSP 120 for the seller; a cow is SSP 250 tax for the seller and SSP 270 for the buyer.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with money transfer agent, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

taken to South Sudan.<sup>148</sup> If caught, the truck and goods are confiscated and usually taken to the local barracks. The driver and their passengers are detained.<sup>149</sup>

The entrenched illegality and impunity of the system has allowed officials and soldiers who operate military posts to levy heavy taxes and fines, and to seize goods and cash with little option for redress. The impact of this is felt particularly heavily on the Meiram road from Warawar and Majok. Traders detail how taxes on this section of road can total SSP 25,000–150,000, depending on the goods being transported.<sup>150</sup> Travellers are also taxed at successive checkpoints—from Ariath town to the Kiir border post—amounting to about SSP 1,500 in 2017. The journey from Kiir to Daein town, in Sudan, costs another SP 500.<sup>151</sup>

The Meiram route is seen as being difficult to negotiate. Meiram is heavily fortified by military, militia and other security forces, and the price of consumer goods and food there is currently high. If trucks are caught smuggling goods southwards from Meiram town, the security and local government officials confiscate everything. Several Sudanese traders and truck drivers now use the comparatively risky Amiet road through Abyei, although there are six heavily taxed checkpoints between Amiet market and Warawar (as opposed to two between Meiram and Warawar).<sup>152</sup> These taxes have also pushed northern cattle traders towards the Amiet market.<sup>153</sup>

Away from known checkpoints, many traders and South Sudanese migrants complain of militia extortion, robbery and violence.<sup>154</sup> Some travellers also believe that the attacks against them are perpetrated by local Rizeigat residents, not by government forces, as they understand that the pro-government militia, known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) ‘only collect taxes at the last exit point in the border near Kiir’.<sup>155</sup>

In contrast, other traders who work the roads believe them to be RSF militia personnel, or say that they are rogue Sudanese security and military personnel.<sup>156</sup> A worker recently returned from Khartoum had his Ethiopian-origin shoes stolen by a group of armed and uniformed men who spoke both Arabic and Dinka. The men claimed that he was carrying

148 Interview with Dheif, truck driver, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

149 Interview with Marco, tailor, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

150 Interview with Ahmed, trader, Warawar, 13 December 2018; and interview with Dheif, truck driver, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

151 Interview with Athian, farmer, outside Kiir, 10 December 2018.

152 Interview with Ahmed, trader, Warawar market, 13 December 2018; and interview with Dheif, truck driver, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

153 Interview with Marco, tailor, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

154 Interview with Deng, young soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

155 Interview with Deng, migrant farm labourer, Ariath, 10 Dec 2018.

156 Interview with Marco, tailor, Warawar market, 13 December 2018; interview with Dheif, truck driver, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

military shoes to a militia and demanded SP 500. Truck passengers often pool travel money to stop armed men from checking their bags.<sup>157</sup>

While traders often experience exploitation and physical danger on the border, explicit controls are placed on the movement of women and children. Women are only formally allowed to leave Warawar town for the north for medical treatment or other emergencies, for which they require a letter of permission from the Peace Committee; this costs SSP 2,500)<sup>158</sup> Elsewhere, women need a letter of permission to travel from their local chief, which may cost around SSP 5,000.<sup>159</sup> Mary, a tea maker, explains that without this, ‘You can move with your children and pretend you are going to Kiir but after reaching the border post between south and north, you wouldn’t be allowed to proceed ahead with your children.’<sup>160</sup>

The SPLA and other local authorities are understood to be actively detaining women and children who attempt to cross the border because they fear the depletion of the local population, and are working to preserve family order and the next South Sudanese generation. Mary states:

The reason is that children do not belong to the mother, and these children were brought from north to vote for separation in the referendum and to increase the country’s population. If the border is open and free movement is allowed, people will go—and the population will go down. The population has already decreased in these eight years.<sup>161</sup>

## Controlling educational opportunities

Controlling the movement of people and labour, as well opportunities for education and personal advancement, is fundamental to governance in the borderland. While there are very few routes into salaried employment in this borderland, education continues to be a way to climb up the increasingly stratified socio-economic ladder—often leading to roles within the governing apparatus. Managing access to good quality schooling, higher education and jobs is a key tool in the management and manipulation of young people by regional authorities.

There are deep inequalities in educational provision. In Aweil town, where people generally have access to state primary and secondary schooling, pupil registration fees vary from SSP 500 to SSP 1,000 per term.<sup>162</sup> In comparison, in Ariath village, registration is

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Joseph, young migrant worker, Kiir border post, 11 December 2018.

<sup>158</sup> The border post will authorize a crossing with a stamp for a further SSP 1,000. Interview with Martin, young farmer, Warawar, 13 December 2018.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with two young men, one working as a motorbike mechanic, Majok, 14 December 2018.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Mary, tea maker, Apada market, 8 December 2018.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Mary, tea make, Apada market, 8 December 2018.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

SSP 200 and SSP 100 for each exam.<sup>163</sup> Local private primary schools in Aweil suburbs cost about SSP 2,500 for registration, and a term of tuition is SSP 4,000.<sup>164</sup> Poor families are generally forced to send only one or two children to school per year. Some decide to invest in one child who is performing particularly well.<sup>165</sup> Across the borderland, families invest heavily in education, despite the various financial and food crises. As Garang from Ariath says, ‘You would sell even your one and only cow for your son to go to school.’<sup>166</sup>

Parents are generally quite realistic about the quality of this cheap education: ‘There are private schools for the rich families’ kids. ... We take our kids to those schools only to pass time but they are not getting a real education, and we do not have money to afford those big private schools.’<sup>167</sup> The public schooling system across the region relies heavily on volunteer teachers, who are often unemployed secondary school or university graduates. There has been a massive attrition of qualified teachers, who are able to shift into NGO or other skilled work. In mid-December 2018, the salaries of state school teachers in Lol state had not been paid since August 2018.<sup>168</sup>

Volunteer teachers, most of whom are men, explain that they depend on family resources to weather the gaps between incentives payments from IMPACT, an EU-funded initiative that pays the equivalent of USD 40 a month to each primary school teacher. In practice, these volunteers receive SSP 18,450 (about USD 80) every three months. Before the IMPACT programme, the families of schoolchildren would contribute one *malou* of sorghum each to the school for the volunteer teachers but now that there is external funding this process has stopped.<sup>169</sup> Most parents hope that their children will graduate secondary school and be hired into lucrative, stable and respectable NGO or UN work or find opportunities within a future government bureaucracy.<sup>170</sup> People are, however, acutely aware that the educational system is a fundamental constraint on shifting the structural economic inequalities in the region.<sup>171</sup>

Many residents believe that the underfunding of the educational system is the fault of the wealthy families in the region, who send their children to good schools in Juba, Kampala or Nairobi. A teacher in a private primary school in Nyamlel says, ‘There is no equality at all. And this will remain like that—because if those children are getting better education,

163 Interview with Garang, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

164 Interview with Thiep, bricklayer, Maper open *murram* mine, 8 December 2018.

165 Interview with Mary, tea maker, Apada market, 8 December 2018.

166 Interview with Garang, fisherman, Lol River near Ariath, 10 December 2018.

167 Interview with Alek, young businesswoman, Aweil town, 9 December 2018.

168 Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

169 Interview with Mark, former Mathiang Anyoor soldier and volunteer teacher, Ariath, 10 December 2018; and interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

170 Interview with Mark, former Mathiang Anyoor soldier and volunteer teacher, Ariath, 10 December 2018; and interview with group of private school teachers, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

171 Interview with Hassan, Darfuri second-hand clothes trader, Kiir, 11 December 2018.

and when they come back later with that quality education, they will again be the leaders, and they rule over these children of the common person, on the ground here.<sup>172</sup> The construction of elite schools under the names of the most powerful figures in the region—for example, the Paul Malong Foundation boarding school—is noted as being a tool in the reproduction of power in the hands of wealthy families.<sup>173</sup>

Several teachers note that this educational provision is part of a system of population control. They see it as designed to keep poor families trapped in a precarious economy that pushes people into military recruitments and cheap labour. As one primary school teacher in a regional town comments, ‘Some of the boys are herding the cattle of these big men, these generals, while their children are in the town there, learning.’<sup>174</sup>

172 Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

173 Interview with group of private school teachers, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

174 Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

## 8. Military Economies

With few educational or employment options and little investment capital, many young men are trapped in a pool of cheap and precarious labour. While armed work is risky, it is one of few available career options available in the borderland. Young men often accept poorly or unpaid work on the edges of the military–security apparatus in the hope of later being fully inducted into the system.<sup>175</sup> The restriction of access with the promise of future advancement sustains this system of casual recruitment. It also creates a competitive and pliant labour pool.

The former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal borderland is at the heart of the South Sudanese government system of military recruitment. Some residents in the region say that they are proud of their role in the defence of President Kiir and his government—against challengers who would destroy the country—during the latest conflict. Others note, however, that the vast majority of the men who are on the front lines of the wars are also its poorest residents. With so many young men killed in the recent conflicts—compounding the losses of families already struggling with deaths and disablements from the 1980s and 1990s—there is a palpable anger at the lack of other options for future generations. People emphasize that hardly any politicians in the region talk about education provision. Instead, as one man puts it, they simply ‘glorify war as work’.<sup>176</sup>

### *The Mathiang Anyoor*

Recruitments to the various military reserves under SPLA command between 2012 and 2016—collectively known as the *Mathiang Anyoor*—has provided an important opportunity for many unskilled and urbanized young men in the region. Tong, the market wheelbarrow worker, says, ‘When you are angry as a result of economic crisis, you will choose between joining the military or going north.’<sup>177</sup>

Military work offers the possibility of respect, a voice in the community, and the possibility of wealth and family prosperity.<sup>178</sup> For most young men, who have little chance of finding a job, there is little point in completing the secondary school curriculum. Most young men who join the militias are secondary school graduates who cannot find a job.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> See Rebecca Tapscott, ‘Policing men: militarised masculinity, youth livelihoods, and security in conflict-affected northern Uganda’, *Disasters* 42/1 (2017): 119.

<sup>176</sup> Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Tong, teenage market worker, Ariath, 10 December 2018.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with elder at a cattle camp, Maker near Wadweil, 12 December 2018; and interview with male youth leaders, Apada, 8 December 2018.

For some young men, there is likely to have been an element of revisionism in their accounts to justify their choices in what is generally considered a pointless and immoral war with the Nuer. Many recruits who were interviewed say that they believe they joined the army to defend the country or that they joined the better paid, better trained and less dangerous National Security Services.<sup>180</sup> Some recruits note the financial coercion involved—they were paid a lump sum to join—and further indicate that those who left the training camps have been pursued and imprisoned over the debt.<sup>181</sup>

In addition to the economic drivers to join the militias, *ex-Mathiang Anyoor* soldiers state that the recent recruitment practice is coercive and built on false promises and lies. The original 2012 motivation for joining—to defend the border with Sudan—has been replaced with a more opaque and morally dubious war in Upper Nile and the Equatorias. Many young men have been killed or otherwise disappeared.<sup>182</sup>

Mark, a volunteer teacher and former *Mathiang Anyoor*, tells his own recruitment:

There was a call that students from Aweil who had completed primary eight to secondary school are needed in Juba to be employed. After we arrived there, we were surprised to find that it was all military work. ... Basically, they did not tell us the job we were offered to go and do in Juba. If they had told us, we would not have gone.<sup>183</sup>

Many people are deeply traumatized and angry about the loss of so many young men in the conflict.<sup>184</sup> Complaints are also widespread that widows are not being compensated equally. As a consequence, some women have been forced into begging or sex work. Many of the women who take the risky journey in to Sudan are widows of *Mathiang Anyoor* soldiers.<sup>185</sup>

## Other armed work

While SPLA recruitment has ended, young men remain at risk of forced military conscription. As a woman in Maper market explains, ‘Security is bad on the road and young men are always the targets. They can be tortured or forced to work without pay by men with

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Mark, former *Mathiang Anyoor* soldier and volunteer teacher, Ariath, 10 December 2018.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with private primary school teacher, Nyamlel, 12 December 2018.

<sup>182</sup> Santschi, ‘A Fragmented State’, 22.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Mark, former *Mathiang Anyoor* soldier and volunteer teacher, Ariath, 10 December 2018.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with chief, Maper village court, 8 December 2018.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with group of women, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

guns on the border.<sup>186</sup> Captured youth are thought to be forced to work in the militias operating across southern Darfur.<sup>187</sup>

These militias are also a possible last resort for frustrated young men seeking work. As a local SPLA officer notes, when ‘the salary delays for five to six months, and soldiers are hungry—when you see that, you would choose whether to go north with your children or join any militia.’<sup>188</sup> A minority of *Mathiang Anyoor* soldiers joined the South Sudan Patriotic Forces—locally referred to as *Dut Baai* (save the homeland)—led until January 2019 by Agany Abdel Bagi Ayii, an Aweil East local and member of a long-standing militia-running family, operating from Meiram.<sup>189</sup>

There are also reports of young migrant workers being recruited to various military factions and training camps at Abu Matariq and other sites across southern Darfur.<sup>190</sup> These recruiters work on the roads and in the Kario refugee camp, promising to pay in dollars. One young worker was approached on his way north:

When a young man failed to find work and isn’t able to buy himself the best clothes he wants and life becomes miserable, he would accept to join them, as another option, to try his luck. ... They would call you and say can you join us and go back to the south to fight and overthrow the government in power and you will become free at last.<sup>191</sup>

This explanation captures an important feeling among young men: that scratching a living in a militia is also a way of demonstrating their frustrations with the current system.<sup>192</sup>

186 Interview with Ankor, tea maker, Maper market, 9 December 2018; this is also noted in an interview with two young men, one working as a motorbike mechanic, Majok, 14 December 2018.

187 Interview with female market worker, Maper market, 9 December 2018.

188 Interview with elderly soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018; this is also noted in an interview with male hairdresser, Warawar market, 13 December 2018.

189 Interview with elderly soldier, Ariath market, 10 December 2018.

190 Interview with migrant worker in Darfur, Ariath Market, 10 December 2018.

191 Interview with Joseph, young migrant worker, Kiir border post, 11 December 2018.

192 See Louisa Lombard, ‘The threat of rebellion: claiming entitled personhood in Central Africa’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22/3 (2016).

## 9. Conclusion

Residents in this South Sudan borderland are fully aware of the regional history of economic change, which has resulted in the commodification of labour and the construction of a powerfully exploitative conflict economy. This study refocuses analysis of South Sudan's political economy on the perspectives of people living in one of the country's peripheral regions. The ideas presented in this report are all part of popular discourse in the borderland. The study outlines fundamental changes that have occurred affecting governance, livelihoods and the social systems of care and support that sustain people.

Taking a borderland perspective enables better understanding of the deep interdependencies and structural interconnections between Sudan and South Sudan, and wider regional economic systems. The processes of marketization and commodification underpin the regional political marketplaces in the borderland. People in the region are increasingly trapped in situations of precarity, debt and indenture, while political-military leaders and institutions exploit and manipulate this borderland economy to their advantage. This is not creating a simple binary societal order of the elite and the local poor. Rather, these fundamental economic changes are developing stratified class systems and undermining mutual support and social security in complex and concerning ways.

This study challenges the idea of promoting resilience in this context. In the borderland, resilience through strategies of diversification and the management of small margins pushes people into situations of bare subsistence and survival, and implies that this is the best that can be hoped for.<sup>193</sup> Instead, this study argues that a rigorous analysis of the South Sudan political economy, which is closely informed by local experience, is vital to discussions of peacebuilding and reconstruction. Military work, security sector employment and the existing governance structures must be seen within this precarious, exploitative and commodified economy. Understanding how this political order is rooting and replicating itself is vital for realistic governance reform.

Paying greater attention to these local vernacular understandings of political orders and economic unfreedoms might allow for a collective discussion of theories of change—one that is based on the insights and experiences of the residents who live in this borderland. At present, there are few civic avenues available for borderland residents to communicate their critiques of the system. Without such opportunities, taking up arms can be a way of venting frustration. How else can these marginalized men and women be taken seriously?<sup>194</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Kevin Grove and David Chandler, 'Introduction: resilience and the Anthropocene: the stakes of "renaturalising" politics', *Resilience* 5/2 (2017): 86.

<sup>194</sup> As asked by Lombard, 'The threat of rebellion', 566.

## Glossary of Acronyms, Words and Phrases

<i>ajiro</i>	(Sudanese Arabic) employee
<i>alony</i>	(Dinka) a slave or servant
CANS	Civil Authority of New Sudan
<i>Dut Baai</i>	(Dinka) Protect / Save the Homeland, informal title for the militia led until January 2019 by Agany Abdel Bagi Ayii around Meiram
<i>feddan</i>	(Sudanese Arabic) a 60 m x 70 m, or 0.42 hectare plot
IOM	International Organization for Migration
<i>kudra</i>	(South Sudanese Arabic) edible leaves
<i>kuei</i>	(Dinka) a system of giving cattle to others for safekeeping
<i>loony</i>	(Dinka) slavery
<i>malou</i>	(South Sudanese Arabic) unit of measure that is about 3.1 kg
<i>Mathiang Anyoor</i>	(Dinka) brown caterpillar; a militia now semi-integrated into the SPLA
<i>murram</i>	Clay- and iron oxide-rich laterite rock
<i>roor</i>	(Dinka) wild lands
<i>rot-juar, juer-rot</i>	(Dinka) volunteering
<i>toic</i>	(Dinka) grazing land
SAF	Sudan Armed Forces
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

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