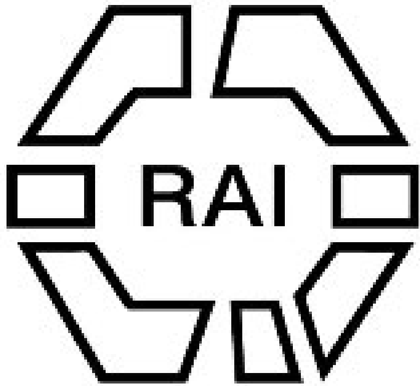

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work of culture: an anthropological perspective. In A. Clarke and E. Parsons (eds) *Culture, kinship and genes: towards a cross-cultural genetics.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press Ltd.

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to which this discovery was put which impacted so dramatically on recent history, so it might yet be with Watson and Crick's discovery of the double helix. In itself the discovery was simply the answer to a puzzle. However, the recent record on converting neutral knowledge into benign application is not a good one. Invariably new discoveries and the technologies they spawn, have been pressed into the service of power, domination and commercial self-interest. Where genetics and the new reproductive technologies are concerned the genie is out of the bottle. The ethical, social and legal debates that have been prompted by issues such as genetic screening and testing, genetic counselling, pregenetic diagnostic testing and gamete collection, storage and use are ready testament to the breadth and complexity of the issues. What I have drawn attention to here however goes beyond these specific issues and draws attention to the capacity for ideas to 'travel' in ways that have 'implications for whole areas of social life' (Strathern 1997:42). The particular route I have suggested in this essay opens up when ideas of DNA, genomes, gene pools and populations cross over into popular ideas about culture and ethnicity. One important consequence is the illusion of enhanced prediction and control grounded in essentialized identities and relationships. With this novel means to essentialization comes the possibility of reworking ethnic identities as imagined genetic communities, that is, communities in which the language, concepts and techniques of modern genetic medicine play their part in shaping identity, its boundaries and what is believed to lie beyond. Such thinking distracts attention from the potential of genomics to emphasize the extent of shared characteristics and invites soft practices of selection and exclusion which could easily pave the way for the hard eugenics which so badly scarred the twentieth century and might yet scar the twenty-first. □

Nuer ethnicity militarized

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Ever since leadership struggles within the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) split the movement into two warring factions in 1991, rural Nuer (*Nei ti naath*) and Dinka (*Jieng*) communities in the South have been grappling with an expanding regional subculture of ethnicized violence. These two groups have supplied the bulk of the guerrilla forces that have been fighting since 1983 to overthrow a northern-dominated, national state government in Khartoum increasingly guided by Islamist political agendas and ideals. Since 1991, however, these people's homelands have also provided the major battlefield for escalating military confrontations among South Sudanese themselves (Johnson 1998, Human Rights Watch 1999, Nyaba 1997, Jok & Hutchinson 1999). These struggles have coalesced around two main figures: Dr John Garang, a Dinka and long-standing Commander-in-Chief of the SPLA, and Dr Riek Machar, a Nuer, who formed the break-away 'SPLA-Nasir' faction following his botched coup attempt against Garang in August 1991. Initially, the 'two doctors' divided over the question of whether or not the SPLA should abandon its declared aim of creating a 'united, democratic, secular Sudan' in favour of 'self-determination' or 'political independence' for the South. It was not long, however, before questions of 'nationalism' gave way to a more basic drive for self-preservation. Both Garang and Machar eventually reached for the 'ethnic' card. What followed were years of increasingly anarchic south-on-south violence that have since destroyed hundreds of Dinka and Nuer communities throughout the Western Upper Nile, Bahr-el-Ghazal and Jonglei Provinces. This tragic turn of events has made prospects for peace in Sudan more elusive than ever.

After months of intense south-on-south fighting in late 1991, mostly targeting the civilian population along ethnic lines, this military situation began to stalemate in late 1992. Garang's, predominantly Dinka, 'SPLA-Mainstream' (or 'SPLA-Torit') forces controlled most of the Bahr-el-Ghazal and Equatoria, while Machar's, predominantly Nuer, 'SPLA-Nasir' forces held most of the countryside in the Upper Nile. Outbreaks of inter-ethnic violence, however, continued unabated though 1999. While individual southern military commanders struggled to establish their own fields of military and economic dominance, the Sudanese Army concentrated its attacks on Garang's positions in the northern Bahr-al-Ghazal and Eastern Equatoria with devastating consequences for the civilian population.

The central government in Khartoum, of course, rejoiced over the collapse of SPLA unity and proceeded to fan the flames of conflict between rival southern military leaders. These efforts formed part of a broader governmental strategy aimed both at developing a proxy war against John Garang and the SPLA and at reasserting control over the vast oil wealth of the south – and especially, the abundant deposits located in Nuer and Dinka regions of the Western Upper Nile Province. As early as 1986, the Sudanese Army began supplying northern Baggara 'Arab' groups with AK-47 rifles and bullets and encouraging them to raid Nuer and Dinka civilians located deep within the Western Upper Nile and the Northern Bahr-al-Ghazal. These government-sponsored militias were trained in counter-insurgency methods to attack the subsistence base and lives of southern civilians who might offer support to SPLA guerrillas. It was thus during these Baggara militia attacks that Nuer and Dinka women and children were consciously targeted not only for enslavement but for direct military attack. And yet, despite the tremendous losses of life and multiple displacements of Nuer and Dinka civilians as a direct result of Baggara raiding between 1986 and 1991, the Government of Sudan failed to gain sufficient military control over southern oil deposits to permit commercial exploitation until after the explosion of south-on-south violence sparked off by the 1991 splitting of the SPLA.

As the military stalemate between rival SPLA factions dragged on, Machar's faction grew steadily weaker, owing to internal power struggles and recurrent defections to the sides of both Garang and the Sudanese government.

The growing instability of Machar's command was reflected in, among other things, a series of political 'make-overs' in which 'SPLA-Nasir' was transformed into 'SPLA-United' in 1993 and then, into the Southern Sudan Independence Movement/Army (SSIM/A) in 1994. Finding himself without access to the international frontier and thus, without means of resupplying his troops in the Upper Nile, Machar was drawn deeper and deeper into the government's net. What apparently began as early as 1992 as a secret alliance with the Sudanese Army aimed at securing additional arms for his fight against Garang was eventually transformed into a full-fledged 'Peace Agreement' with the National Islamic Front (NIF) government in 1997. The infamous 'April 1997 Peace Agreement' committed Machar (and other southern signatures) to grafting his remaining SSIM/A forces onto the national army as the 'Southern Sudan Defense Forces' (SSDF) for the purpose of coordinating future assaults on Garang and the 'SPLA-Mainstream'. The agreement also committed Machar to accepting 'Islam and custom' as the overarching principles to which all national legislation must conform. In exchange for what many South Sudanese viewed as little more than unconditional surrender to the National Islamic Front government, Machar was offered a weakly worded, governmental promise that South Sudanese 'rights of self-determination' would be recognized through a southern-wide referendum to be held after an 'interim period' of four – or more – years. This agreement, however, brought anything but peace to Nuer regions nominally under Machar's control. By mid-1998, ordinary Nuer villagers had become alarmed at the increasingly transparent intentions of the central government to exploit the unbounded 'interim period' specified in the 'April 1997 Peace Agreement' for the strategic deployment of northern troops in formerly 'liberated' Nuer regions and, more disturbingly, for the rapid extraction of previously untapped southern oil deposits in the Western Upper Nile. Both governmental objectives were being pursued by instigating political rivalries and armed confrontations among allied Nuer and Dinka SSDF commanders (cf. Human Rights Watch 1999 & 2000).

As I write these lines, the immediate life circumstances for most rural Nuer and Dinka civilians in the South continued to spiral downwards through early 2000, as a deeply fragmented and increasingly predatory southern military elite confronts the possibility of permanently losing control over the estimated 1.2 billion barrels of proven oil reserves in the Western Upper Nile to a consortium of international companies, spear-headed by that Canadian giant, Talisman (Human Rights Watch 1999). Aided by an estimated 20,000 imported Chinese labourers, the Sudanese government completed construction of a 1,110-km oil pipeline in December 1998. The pipeline, which has an initial carrying capacity of 150,000 bbl/d to be expanded to 250,000 bbl/d by 2001, began pumping southern crude from 'Unity field' in the Western Upper Nile Province to newly constructed oil refineries and export terminals in the North during September 1999. More ominous still, the Government of Sudan has already began channelling the anticipated profits from this 1.6 billion dollar oil development scheme into the domestic construction of sophisticated weapons factories in order to bolster its 18-year-long assault on South Sudanese civilian populations and other politically marginalized groups in Sudan (cf. Human Rights Watch 1999 & 2000).

Whatever currents of optimism flow through the hearts of Nuer and Dinka civilian populations at present issue primarily from recent steps taken by leading Dinka and Nuer chiefs to end the vicious cycle of south-on-south violence sparked off by the 1991 splitting of the SPLA. Breaking free of the seven-year-long stranglehold on inter-ethnic communication imposed by the paranoia of

rival southern military groups, scores of prominent Dinka and Nuer chiefs gathered together, first, in Lokichokkio, Kenya, in June 1998 and, later again, in Wunlit, Bahr-el-Ghazal, during February-March 1999 in order to negotiate a mutually binding, grassroots peace agreement aimed at ending, as one chief put it: 'this nasty little war that the educated [southern military elite] makes us fight!' With financial and logistical supported garnered by the New Sudan Council of Churches from a wide variety of international humanitarian and religious institutions, these peace workshops (both of which I attended) succeeded in greatly reducing tensions between Nuer and Dinka communities running along the turbulent Western Upper Nile/Eastern Bahr-el-Ghazal divide. They also pressured opposed southern military leaders into investigating and restraining the cattle-raiding activities of some of their most abusive field commanders. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether or not this civilian drive for regional peace and reconciliation will triumph over intensifying government efforts to foment further mistrust and violence among southern military leaders and warlords in order to regain control over the vast oil wealth of the South. Beginning in April 1998, the central government began moving northern troops into the Western Upper Nile and proceeded to undermine Machar's military command by funding the military exploits of a rogue Nuer warlord by the name of Paulino Matiep Nhial. Beginning in June 1998 and continuing through the time of writing, Commander Paulino Matiep Nhial has taken the lead in driving Nuer civilian populations out of southern regions of the Western Upper Nile with the aim of clearing a path for extending the oil pipeline from the provincial capital, Bentiu, to Adok, a Nuer community lying on the White Nile approximately 120 kilometres further south (cf. Human Rights Watch 2000 for details). If nothing else, the government's lunge for southern oil deposits had motivated renewed contact and cooperation between SPLA and SSDF field commanders on the ground by 1999, despite the continuing unwillingness or inability of John Garang and Riek Machar to compromise their personal ambitions for the greater good and unity of the South. In November 1999, there was a major realignment of Nuer forces during which nearly all abandoned the government's side and formed an anti-government force, the Upper Nile Provisional Military Command Council (UNPMCC), which operates independently of Garang's SPLA. Of the estimated 70,500 Nuer civilians displaced from the Western Upper Nile between June 1998 and December 1999 as a result of continuing conflicts between the government and various southern factions over the oil fields, many eventually sought refuge among the Bahr al Ghazal Dinka, who received them well owing to the renewed spirit of cooperation and non-violence generated by the success of the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference.

As of the time of writing, the '1997 Peace Agreement' is a dead issue. Alleging repeated government violations of both the terms and spirit of that agreement, Machar resigned from the Sudanese government in February 2000 and eventually returned via Nairobi to the Western Upper Nile, where he is struggling to salvage his former political prominence vis-a-vis an increasingly powerful UNPMCC.

My concern in this paper is with the rapid polarization and militarization of Nuer/Dinka ethnic identities during the 1991-1999 period. Specifically, I want to discuss some of the historical conditions that led to the abrupt, post-1991, abandonment of ethical restraints on Nuer/Dinka violence previously respected by both sets of combatants. In the process, I want to show how growing numbers of Nuer men and women began to reject what I call a 'performative' concept of ethnicity in favour of a more 'primordialist' concept rooted in procreative metaphors of shared blood. This war-time shift of perspective, I argue, contributed not only to a dramatic escalation in the viciousness of Nuer/Dinka warfare after the SPLA split but, more uniquely, to a reformulation of the relationship between gender and ethnicity in Nuer eyes.

The shifting ethics of Nuer/Dinka warfare

Before this war and, indeed, up until the collapse of SPLA unity in 1991, Nuer and Dinka fighters did not intentionally kill women, children or elderly persons during violent confrontations among themselves. The purposeful slaying of a child, woman or elderly person was universally perceived not only as cowardly and reprehensible but, more importantly, as a direct affront against God as the ultimate guardian of human morality. Such acts were expected to provoke manifestations of divine anger in the form of severe illness, sudden death and/or other misfortunes visited on either the slayer or some member of his immediate family. Acts of homicide within each ethnic group, moreover, were governed by a complex set of cultural ethics and spiritual taboos aimed at ensuring the immediate identification and purification of the slayer and at the payment of bloodwealth cattle compensation to the family of the deceased. Regional codes of warfare ethics also precluded the burning of houses and the destruction of crops during Nuer/Dinka inter-community confrontations. Cattle, of course, were fair game. And it was not uncommon for past generations of raiders to carry off young women and children to be absorbed as full members of their families.

The gradual unravelling of these ethical restraints on intra- and inter-ethnic warfare during the course of this war represents the gravest threat to the future viability of rural Nuer and Dinka communities in the South today. While the main reason for this escalation in the killing of Nuer and Dinka women and children stems from the broader military objectives of the central government aimed at reasserting control over southern oil deposits, it also marks a major turning point in the relationship between southern military leaders and their civilian constituencies. Although often portrayed in pro-government propaganda tracts as the release of 'ancient tribal hatreds' which have been supposedly simmering for years, the causes of this surge in Nuer/Dinka violence were more fluid and complex. First of all, processes of 'identity' creation – whether defined in terms of 'ethnic', 'regional', 'racial', 'religious' or 'national' affiliations (to name only those most pertinent to Sudan's unresolved civil war) – are always historically contingent and socially contested. As Liisa Malkki (1992: 37, 1995) expressed this idea: 'Identity is always mobile and processual, partly self-construction, partly categorization by others, partly a condition, a status, a label, a weapon, a shield, a fund of memories … a creolized aggregate'. Second, Nuer and Dinka communities have never been organized into neatly circumscribed 'tribes'. Rather, members of both groups have held overlapping and sometimes competing identities and loyalties to a wide spectrum of named social units, including patrilineal clusters, regional court systems, town groupings, temporary confederacies, and large, flexible networks of cross-cutting kinship ties. Both groups have also intermarried heavily for generations and continue to recognize their common ancestry through a variety of oral traditions and shared cultural practices. During the early 19th century, breakaway Nuer groups began migrating out of their original homelands on the west bank of the White Nile eastwards into Dinka and Anyuak occupied lands. By the end of that century, these Nuer groups had reached the Ethiopian frontier, effectively tripling their original land base and assimilating tens of thousands of Dinka residents, captives and immigrants in their wake. As one contemporary Nuer man laughingly summed up the results of

Commander Salva Kiir (with beard and uniform) together with Nuer and Dinka chiefs at Wunlit, March 1999.

this long-standing assimilation trend: 'There are no [real] Nuer. We are all Dinka!'

In complex historical situations such as these, the crucial questions to ask are: In whose image and whose interest have these ethnic labels been most recently forged? And when and why did these two groups' politicized sense of their own identity become threaded through with pressures for their menfolk to take up arms? And when and why did this militarization process begin to pit the 'ethnic soldiers' of each group against one another's entire populations? Discussing processes of militarization more generally, Cynthia Enloe has argued that: '[m]ilitarization occurs because some people's fears are allowed to be heard . . .while other people's fears are trivialized and silenced' (1995: 26). Following her lead, it will be important to understand the complex and paradoxical ways that women have been implicated in the polarization and militarization of Nuer and Dinka ethnic identities during this war.

Evolving Nuer concepts of ethnicity

One key to understanding the tragic developments begins with an appreciation of contemporary differences in Nuer and Dinka understandings of the socio-physical bases of their ethnic identities. For reasons that no doubt date back to the early 19th century, Nuer today regard themselves as more 'hospitable' to the assimilation of 'ethnic' outsiders than their Dinka neighbors. Throughout their famous 19th century expansion eastwards across the White Nile into Dinka and Anyuak-occupied lands (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Kelly 1985; Gough 1971), individual Nuer men competed with one another for positions of political leadership and independence by gathering around themselves as many co-resident Dinka clients and supporters as possible. The 'enduring loyalty' of these clusters of co-resident Dinka was secured, primarily, through the generous provision of Nuer cattle and Nuer wives. What underwrote the dramatic expansion of Nuer communities during the 19th century, in other words, was the rapidity and completeness with which they made ethnic outsiders feel like insiders.

Accordingly, what made someone 'Nuer' in their eyes was primarily how that person behaved. Language skills, a love of cattle, co-residence, community participation and moral conformity were all central in ways that biological parentage was not. In other words, past and present generations of Nuer tended to view ethnic unities and distinctions in more 'performative' terms.

Contemporary Dinka, in contrast, tended to stress the overwhelming importance of 'human blood lines' in determining who was and who was not a 'Dinka'. The 'primordialist' thrust of contemporary Dinka concepts of their ethnic affinity makes eminent 'sense' when viewed in light of their 19th century experiences. Many Dinka men and women came under heavy pressure during that period to jettison their *Jieng* identity and to become *Naath*. And thus, one way Dinka groups could defend themselves against the sticky grasp of their Nuer neighbors was to reaffirm the fundamental insolubility of their ethnic identity through an elaboration of blood-based metaphors of procreative descent. Whereas it remained common practice during the 1980s, for example, for descendants of immigrant Dinka to be accepted as 'Nuer' government chiefs, the reverse scenario rarely, if ever, occurred. This was because most Dinka considered *Jieng* to be born, not made. Although some Dinka communities – particularly those inhabiting the Bahr-al-Ghazal – appear to have been more assimilative than others, the 1991 splitting of the SPLA resulted in a decade of division that played right into the hands of oversimplified government propaganda campaigns aimed at reifying 'tribal' differences between Nuer and Dinka and at muting more fluid and flexible ethnic identifications between these two groups.

Contemporary Nuer, in contrast, tended to treat their ethnic identity more like an 'honorific title' which is conferred together with the social approval of other community members. And thus, just as Nuer believed that anyone could potentially become 'a real person' or 'a true human being' (*raam mi raan)* by conforming to certain behavioural norms so, too, a person could be stripped of this status for major transgressions of those same norms. I recall a case during the early 1980s, for instance, in which a Nuer man, who had been born and raised by Nuer parents, scandalized the extended community by making an especially shocking rape attempt. Most people's immediate gut reaction was: 'No Nuer would do such a thing! That man must be a Dinka!'

A Nuer armed guard

What appears to be happening since the 1991 SPLA split, however, is a gradual sealing off of this formerly permeable inter-ethnic divide, a trend that has had especially disastrous consequences for the most vulnerable segments of society. Whereas during previous periods of inter-ethnic turmoil younger women and children were more likely to be kidnapped than slain by Nuer and Dinka fighters, the reverse was true during the 1991-1999 period. Militarized segments on both sides of this ethnic divide attempted to justify their intensifying viciousness as 'retaliation' for abominations earlier experienced. However, there is more behind the conscious targeting of unarmed women and children for elimination than a rhetoric of revenge. People's concepts of ethnicity themselves have been mutating in ways that bode ill for the future. Nuer fighters, in particular, appear to have adopted a more 'primordialist,' if not 'racialist,' way of thinking about their ethnic 'essence' in recent years. And it is precisely this kind of thinking that can so easily be twisted into military justifications for the intentional killing of unarmed women and children residing among these ethnic groups.

Guns and the military

Nevertheless, it is important to realize that local ethical codes of intra- and of inter-ethnic warfare began unravelling long before the 1991 splitting of the SPLA. Throughout the first eight years of this war, southern military leaders consciously sought to undercut the significance of ethnic differences among their new recruits. This was done not only to arrest the possibility of ethnic conflicts within their ranks and to engender greater feeling of southern unity and nationalism but, also, to ensure an effective chain of command. Since South Sudanese were forcibly drafted by the national army as well as by the SPLA, members of the same ethnic group were often forced to confront one another on the battlefield. Consequently, it was necessary for SPLA regional commanders to make sure that their troops unhesitatively carried out their orders, even when those orders required them to kill members of their own ethnic groups. This in turn necessitated the dismantling – or, at least, situational suspension – of earlier restraints on intra-ethnic violence, which were also a fundamental element of the ethical codes of warfare respected by both Nuer and Dinka at the start of this war.

During the late 1980s, for example, Riek Machar, who was at that time reigning SPLA Zonal Commander of the Western Upper Nile, endeavored to convince Nuer civilians as well as rank-and-file recruits that acts of inter-Nuer homicide carried out in the context of a 'government war' were devoid of the social and spiritual risks associated with acts of intra-ethnic homicide generated by more localized fighting and feuding. There was no need, he argued, for a slayer to purify himself of the 'embittered' blood of the slain. Nor was there any possibility of the family of the slain seeking bloodwealth cattle compensation from the slayer's family. In essence, the SPLA leadership was arguing that the overarching political context of the present war should take precedence over the personal identities and social inter-relations of the combatants in people's assessments of the social and spiritual ramifications of intra-ethnic homicide (see Hutchinson 1998 for a fuller discussion of these issues).

Furthermore, as guns burned deeper and deeper into regional patterns of warfare, many Nuer began to wonder whether the spiritual and social consequences of intra-ethnic gun slayings were the same as those realized with spears. Whereas the power of a spear, they reasoned, issues directly from the bones and sinews of a person who hurls it, that of a gun is eerily internal to it. And thus, additional elements of 'social distance' and 'attenuated responsibility' were added to the psychological arsenal of SPLA recruits. Unlike individually-crafted spears, moreover, the source of a bullet lodged deep in someone's body was far more difficult to trace. Often a fighter would not know whether or not he has killed someone. And thus, acts of intra- and inter-ethnic homicide became increasingly 'depersonalized' and 'secularized' in Nuer eyes (cf. Hutchinson 1996 & 1998 for details).

The traumatic shift from spears to guns as the dominant weapon of Nuer and Dinka warfare during the early years of this war was aggravated by recourse to novel military tactics, such as surprise, night-time attacks, the burning of houses and the intentional destruction of local food supplies. Nevertheless, it was not until after the collapse of SPLA unity in 1991 that the killing of unarmed women and children became 'standard practice' between Nuer and Dinka combatants. God, it seems, was no longer watching.

From mobile assets to military targets

In many ways, women and girls were less firmly rooted than were men in the ethnic identities of Nuer and Dinka at the start of this war. This was because women and girls could potentially confer any ethnic identity on their children, depending upon who married them. Both groups are exogamic in the sense that women and girls may only be married by men who are, by definition, 'strangers' or 'outsiders'. Both groups also share a strong bias toward patrilineality since children generally take on the lineage affiliations and ethnic identities of their fathers rather than of their mother's people. Third and finally, wives in both groups tend to take up residence in their husband's homes after marriage. For all of these reasons, most Dinka and Nuer before the war took the attitude that 'A woman has no [fixed] "cattle camp"'. She could be married by several men during her life-time and bear heirs for all of them. Similarly, people stated that: 'A girl belongs to everyone' – meaning she is a potential marriage partner for all unrelated men.

Women's more ambiguous position at the crossroads of ethnic unities and distinctions afforded them a certain degree of protection and mobility at the start of this war. They were the points through which adversarial relations between men could be potentially defused and transformed into relations of affinity through marriage. And for

this reason, women and children were perceived by both groups as illegitimate targets during periods of inter- and intra-ethnic violence. There was, in fact, an elaborate ethical code among Nuer that treated women and girls as 'points of safe refuge' for fleeing or wounded men. Before the widespread dissemination of guns by the SPLA, Nuer women often accompanied their husbands, brothers and sons into battle in order to protect them and carry away the wounded. A woman could protect a man who had fallen in battle by throwing herself over him confident that the advancing warriors from the other side, whether Nuer or Dinka, would not dislodge her in order to 'finish off' the man beneath her. Similarly, any Nuer or Dinka warrior who retreated to someone's cattle byre or house was not pursued by his opponents. These rules were firm and respected, since any breech of them would have caused the original conflict to spin rapidly out of control. Consequently, Nuer and Dinka men alike regarded the slaying of a women, child or elderly person during major inter-ethnic confrontations as, by definition, 'accidental'.

The gendered division of tasks in both groups was one in which only men bore arms. Women and children, in contrast, were treated more as mobile assets and, as such, were sometimes kidnapped during major inter-ethnic confrontations. However, they were not intentionally slain. But following the widespread introduction of guns and of novel fighting techniques targeting entire cattle camps and civilian villages by the SPLA, unarmed Nuer and Dinka women and children were thrown willy-nilly onto the front lines. The SPLA did not promote the taking of war captives. Their limited food supplies and mobility requirements militated against this. And thus, in an area of recurrent starvation caused by the intentional destruction of the 'enemy's' support base among local civilian populations, women and children were gradually recast by rival southern military factions as legitimate targets of ethnic annihilation.

As Garang and Machar squared off, their troops, sometimes under orders and sometimes on their own initiative, began to slit the throats or otherwise slaughter women and children encountered during their cattle camp raids. And the spiral of Nuer/Dinka 'vengeance' attacks soon spun out of control.

More important for my purposes, the purposeful killing of women and children necessitated a major reformulation of the presumed socio-physical roots of ethnic affiliations, particularly for Nuer combatants. The rationale for killing a Dinka child entailed an assumption, whether implicit or explicit, that the child would mature into a 'Dinka' child. That child's ethnic identity, in other words, was presumed to be fixed at birth. The idea that such a Dinka child could potentially become a 'Nuer' or vice versa was thus lost in the fury of 'revenge attacks'.

Like military movements worldwide, the SPLA had also sought to inculcate in its recruit an ideology of 'hyper-masculinity', equated with demonstrations of aggressiveness, competitiveness and the censure of emotional expression. The training of new military recruits glorified the raw 'masculine' power of guns. Recruits were told that they only thing that had separated the South from the political reins of power in the past was a lack of guns. Backed by the power of the gun, anything was possible – a theme clearly reflected in the 'graduation song' allegedly taught to all SPLA trainees prior to the 1991 split upon the conferral of their first rifles:

Even your father, give him a bullet!
Even your mother, giver her a bullet!
Your gun is your food, your gun is your wife.

Similarly, the SPLA's emphasis on male-to-male bonding was such that relationships with women and the family were increasingly de-emphasized and displaced. For example, I heard several reports of a disturbing incident that occurred during the mid-1990s in which a beautiful young girl, who had been carried off by ex-SPLA soldiers loyal to the Dinka warlord, Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, became the source of a heated argument. Three different soldiers all wanted to claim her as their consort. After summoning the three men and the girl and hearing their respective arguments, the Commander allegedly settled the dispute once and for all. Pulling out his revolver he reportedly shot the girl between the eyes and declared that no woman would be permitted to cause dissension in his ranks. The three soldiers allegedly shrugged off the incident. But the logic of the Commander was clear: the girl's life meant nothing in the context of troop solidarity and discipline.

A growing sense of 'entitlement' to the domestic and sexual services of related and unrelated women also pervaded this hyper-masculinized and militarized world view. Just as Dinka and Nuer men saw themselves as responsible for maintaining 'the war front', so, too, women, they reasoned, should be active in keeping up 'the reproductive front'. Pressures for women to disregard the 'weaning taboo' (which prohibits their having sexual relations during lactation) steadily mounted, as husbands and lovers on short, unpredictable military leaves returned home determined to conceive another child. Similarly, women are feeling pressured by husbands and in-laws to reduce the 'fallow period' between pregnancies by weaning their infants earlier. Whereas before this war infants were usually suckled for 18 months or more, many Dinka and Nuer men now argue that a period of nine months is enough. And because most Nuer and Dinka women do not feel free to refuse their husbands or lovers sexual access on demand for fear of a beating, they are increasingly forced to make choices that no woman should have to make. 'How can I take the risk of another pregnancy and childbirth when I can't even feed the children I already have?'. 'Should I attempt to abort, knowing how many other women have died or become infertile in the process?' 'How would my husband and his family react if they discovered I aborted "their" child?' 'Who will care for my children, if I die?' 'Will God punish me for these thoughts?' Dr Jok Madut Jok portrayed the agony of these reproductive dilemmas among contemporary Dinka women of the Bahr-al-Ghazal in his publication (Jok 1999) – a portrayal that rings true to my own experience of similar trends among Nuer women of the Western Upper Nile. These are not communities that have accumulated generations of knowledge or experience in medicinally or physically provoking abortions. It is thus not surprising that the frequency of maternal deaths attributed to 'excessive bleeding' has been rising in both regions during the course of this war.

To these feminine hardships must be added the ever-present dangers of rape and of the forceful commandeering of scarce household resources by gun-toting men. Nearly every Nuer and Dinka woman has experienced threatening demands by armed men for the immediate provision of cooked or stored food, porterage services and/or sexual access. Satisfying these unpredictable and, often, recurrent demands severely limited the energies and resources these women were able to devote to their children.

Nevertheless, women were more than passive victims of these militarizing trends. Many Nuer and Dinka women actively reinforced this 'militarized mentality' by encouraging their brothers, husbands and sons to join the military or to participate as civilians in collective cattle raids and 'vengeance attacks' on neighboring ethnic groups. For example, during a 1996 field trip to the Western Upper Nile, I learned of a bitter debate raging between two rival

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women, named Rebecca Nyanciew and Elizabeth Nyawana Lam. These women were, respectively, the elected heads of the Women's Union for the Bul and Leek Nuer. The issue these two women squared off on was whether or not Nuer military forces should resort to the killing of Dinka women and children during their cattle raids. Rebecca was allegedly an outspoken advocate of 'an eye for an eye'. Dinka soldiers had killed Nuer children so Nuer soldiers should do the same. Elizabeth vehemently objected. No woman with breasts and a womb for bearing children, she argued, should support the killing of women and children under any circumstances, regardless of whatever atrocities Dinka soldiers had committed in the past.

This debate, which radiated outwards through local military units and the wider civilian population, took a dramatic turn during the following year. Rebecca was arrested, beaten and jailed for her alleged role in 'fanning' (*kuothe*) the flames of intra-ethnic violence between Bul and Leek Nuer communities during the mid-1990s (discussed below). Elizabeth was pivotal in this outcome. Rebecca, who reportedly lost a pregnancy as a result of the beating, was later 'pardoned', released and brought to Khartoum under orders from Commander Machar.

Women were also capable of banding together to restrain eruptions of inter-community violence, especially those in which local military units were not directly involved. For example, there was a series of mixed spear/gun battles that erupted between the Bul and Leek Nuer in late 1995 which were successfully quelled by Elizabeth Nyawana Lam, in her capacity as the elected head of the Leek Nuer Women's Union. Elizabeth Nyawana had already earned a reputation for extraordinary courage by that time for having been trained and having actively served in the SPLA fights against 'the Arabs' during the early years of this war. She was also a well-known peace-maker. She successfully ended this particular confrontation by ordering all the Bul and Leek Nuer women who ran to the battle scene together with their menfolk to return home immediately. Before the outbreak of the current civil war, it was standard practice, as I explained, for western Nuer women to accompany the brothers, husbands and sons to the battlefield, where they took responsibility for retrieving spears and, more importantly, for protecting and carrying away the wounded. Without the assurance of these feminine protections for the dead and wounded, Nuer fighters on both sides of the battle line decided to withdraw as well.

Although these feminine support systems have been increasingly undermined by the widespread dissemination of guns, Nuer women, at least, have retained considerable influence over patterns of inter-community violence through their well-recognized abilities 'to shame' their husbands, brothers and sons into either participating or not in specific military campaigns. As one young Nuer woman explained:

> Men say that 'women are women' but men do a lot of listening to us! Women are good at persuasion; we can convince men in a quiet way. Men pretend not to be listening but it [the woman's message] is already recorded!

Understanding the complex and paradoxical ways women have been implicated in these regional processes of militarization opens up novel possibilities for 'rolling back' these same processes. That, at least, is my hope. Perhaps it would be possible to convince individual southern field commanders that observing former ethical restraints on the killing of women and children, even if pursued unilaterally, would be politically and military advantageous in the long run. For example, there was a series of major clashes during 1997 and 1998 between the Murle and Lou Nuer. At one point, a group of Murle raiders slit the throats of several Nuer children they came across. Although Murle raiders often kidnaped small numbers of Nuer children in the past, the intentional killing of women and children had never before occurred during confrontations between these two ethnic groups. Incensed by this blatant transgression of established fighting norms, Lou Nuer organized a counter raid. Although Lou Nuer raiders openly discussed the possibility of killing Murle women and children, they decided not to respond in kind. After successfully driving off the defenders of their Murle target, the Lou Nuer men grabbed sticks and beat the Murle women and youth who had been left behind. The women were reportedly told that 'next time' they would be killed unless their menfolk stopped killing Nuer women and children during their cattle raids. This strategy proved remarkably effective. Under pressure from these women, the Murle initiated peace negotiations with the Lou Nuer and, shortly thereafter, returned nearly two dozen Nuer children carried off in earlier cattle raids.

Conclusions

As local codes of inter- and intra-ethnic warfare have twisted and collapsed beneath the weight of AK-47 rifles and the heavy blows of rival southern military leaders, ordinary Nuer and Dinka men and women have been forced to reassess the social bases of their personal and collective security. And of the many thorny issues requiring rethinking, one of the most fundamental and far-reaching concerns the nature, significance and scope of their ethnic affiliations. On the one hand, this war has witnessed the violent rise of 'ethno-nationalist' ideologies on previously unimaginable scales within both ethnic groups. On the other hand, whatever sense of ethnic unity these groups have fostered in the context of continuing political rivalries between John Garang and Riek Machar has been repeatedly shattered from within. Breakaway warlords intent on carving out their own domains of military dominance have fractured and destroyed countless local communities.

While the former fluidity of Nuer and Dinka ethnic identities can be traced back to the early 1800s and beyond, contemporary Nuer men and women, in particular, appear to be moving away from a 'performative' concept of their ethnic oneness to a more closed and fixed 'primordialist' concept based on procreative metaphors of shared human blood. This perspectival drift has contributed, I have argued, not only to a deepening of the Nuer/Dinka divide but, more tragically, to a reformulation of women's and children's former status as immune from intentional attacks.

Women's more fluid and ambiguous position at the margins of ethnic unities and distinctions has thus been turned against them during the course of this war. What was formerly a source of both social protection and individual mobility for women became a dual liability. From a perspective internal to Nuer social networks, Nuer women continue to be regarded as less fully 'persons', less complete 'human beings' than are their militarily active menfolk. If anything, women's status as independent agents in men's eyes has declined in the context of militarized glorifications of the raw 'masculine' power of guns. The irony is that, despite the 'hyper-masculinized' military subculture, Nuer men – like their Dinka counterparts – have become less and less capable of fulfilling their most important social role as the protectors of their immediate families, homesteads and herds. This failure has provoked what might be called a 'crisis of masculinity' – a crisis that manifests itself in rising rates of domestic violence and sexual abuse against women. As the primary agents of cultural and individual continuity, women have come under heavy pressure to conceive and

procreate, even in situations that threaten their physical well-being and their nurturing responsibilities toward their children. And thus, women's involvement in the civil war effort and, in particular, their roles in keeping up 'the procreative front' has often been brutally turned against them.

With respect to Nuer/Dinka violence, women's position on the margins of ethnic difference has been overshadowed by an externally imposed perception of ethnic rigidity. In the eyes of both Nuer and Dinka assailants, unarmed women and children belonging to the opposite ethnic group have been progressively redefined from mobile assets to targets of ethnic annihilation. The vast majority of civil war victims have been defenseless women and children – an historical trend that, tragically, mirrors late twentieth century patterns of militarized violence throughout the world. This article has underscored the importance of a 'primordialist' turn in Nuer notions of ethnicity – propelled in large part by northern military strategies of 'divide and rule' – as pivotal in the emergence of this globalized trend in South Sudan. Let us hope that the atmosphere of inter-ethnic trust created by the 1999 Wunlit Peace Conference will continue to reawaken Nuer and Dinka men and women to the historical fluidity and contemporary permeability of their ethnic identities for the greater good of the South. □

Home and away

'Childhood', 'youth' and young people

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1. See, for example, 'The wild West End', *Mail on Sunday*, 26.5.91; 'Homeless truths', *Sunday Telegraph*, 27.12.92; 'How to sweep these beggars from our streets', *Daily Mail*, 30.5.94, and 'The abandoned generation', *The Guardian*, 1.6.94.

2. See, for instance, 'Police link with Thailand to end trips for child sex', *The Times, 5.3.94*; 'Child sex Britons freed with bribes', *Evening Standard*, 7.3.94; 'Thais' uphill battle against sex slavery', *The Guardian*, 4.2.95; 'Girls, girls, girls', *Guardian*, 10.7.95.

3. It should be noted that each of these concerns found its counterpart in parallel anxieties about young people living on the streets of cities in the developing world and 'working' the streets in Western countries, making this an

Introduction

In this article we discuss the representation of young people 'in trouble', and in particular the ways in which the categories 'childhood' and 'youth' are applied in this context. These are essentially Western social categories related to age and notions of social majority, and as such they are culturally and temporally specific. Nonetheless, such notions are dominant in international discourse about young people the world over. On these terms, to talk of young people as children is to conceptually place them in a (cherished) category to which certain well-defined expectations and entitlements apply, whereas to position young people beyond childhood, but short of adulthood, is to assign them to a more ambiguous phase.

The significance of this distinction was brought home to us in the course of research into child prostitution in Thailand (see Montgomery, 1997) and youth homelessness in Britain (see Hall, 1998). At the time that we both began fieldwork, in the early 1990s, the British media were giving voice to a considerable anxiety about young people, both at home and abroad. At home, the phenomenon of growing numbers of young people sleeping rough on the streets of the nation's cities was an all too familiar news item.[1] Similarly, the British (and Western) media were regularly reporting on the plight of child prostitutes in Thailand.[2] These two – a worrying social problem at home and an (exotic) evil abroad – were described and discussed in a variety of ways by different agencies and commentators.[3] Other headlines predominate today, but neither of these issues has gone away; public discussion continues as to how we should react and respond.

It can be revealing to examine the ways in which the categories childhood and youth are employed in such debates, then and now. To use one rather than the other to describe the young people under consideration is to invoke a particular set of associations, and this can be done to strategic effect: to prompt sympathy, or to call such sympathy into question. This 'tactical' use of terminology can be seen at work in a range of contemporary debates about young people. What we want to suggest here is that there is also a discernible patterning to the use of these terms as they are applied to young people whose plight is either distant or local. Whether or not young people who are homeless or involved in prostitution are portrayed as children can depend, to some extent, on whether they are at 'home' or 'away'. This distinction can be seen in the conventional phrasing we have adopted above – 'child prostitutes' and 'the young homeless'. Our question is: why '*child* prostitutes' in Thailand, but not, for example, 'street *children*' in Britain?

This question not only reveals divisions in Western perceptions and representations of young people at home and abroad, but also maps onto a boundary in the existing academic division of labour, distinguishing a long-standing tradition of youth research in British sociology and a growing interest in the lives of children overseas as a subdiscipline of social anthropology. In our own writing, and despite shared fieldwork interests in issues of agency, social exclusion and the social construction of identity as these relate to young people, we have found it difficult to straddle and talk across this academic divide. We return to this point at the end of the article.

Victims and delinquents

The distinction we have drawn attention to is one between childhood and youth. Whatever the reality of the lives of individual children, childhood figures in our imaginations as an idealized otherness, the purity and innocence of which is to be celebrated and protected.[4] Accordingly, to the extent that they are recognized as children, young people whose lives and circumstances are impoverished or difficult tend to be understood as innocents and victims. However, not all young people are viewed in this way. In Britain as elsewhere in the West today, many young people in their mid-teenage years, whilst not admitted to an unequivocal adult status, are nonetheless seen as having left childhood behind them. These young people are thus between childhood (with powerlessness) and adulthood (with agency), and here the notion of 'youth' serves to define a third, intermediate social and cultural category. Where young people in difficult circumstances (the young homeless in Britain, for example) are seen as belonging to this third category – not yet adults but no longer children – public response to their situation can be less than sympathetic. Young people thus defined may be seen as troublesome rather than simply in trouble, at fault rather than at risk.[5]

Such a division between childhood and youth is conspicuously absent in the way in which Western commentators report on and represent young people in trouble away from home. Young people in trouble overseas – in developing countries – be they infants or teenagers, are usually presented, simply enough, as children; even and especially those in trouble. Images of childhood predominate in overseas aid campaigns in a way which admits of no possibility for an equivocal response; childhood is