A photograph of a group of people sitting under a large, open-sided structure with a thatched roof made of dried grass and wooden poles. The structure is situated in a rural, outdoor setting with trees and other buildings in the background. A man is sitting on a chair on the right, looking towards the group. The overall scene suggests a community gathering or a meeting in a rural South Sudanese village.

**POLITICS, POWER
AND CHIEFSHIP IN
FAMINE AND WAR**
A STUDY OF THE
FORMER NORTHERN
BAHR EL-GHAZAL
STATE, SOUTH SUDAN

RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE
SOUTH SUDAN CUSTOMARY AUTHORITIES
.....

Politics, power and chiefship in famine and war

A study of the former Northern Bahr
el-Ghazal state, South Sudan

NICKI KINDERSLEY



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COVER: A chiefs' meeting in Maluakon in Aweil East, South Sudan.

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South Sudan states are according to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005)

Map 1. (above) South Sudan

Map 2. (below) Former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal state

Summary

.....

This report investigates how customary authorities on South Sudan's border with southern Darfur have managed repeated wars and famines since the 1960s, both for the communities that they claim to represent and for their own survival and benefit. It sets out chiefs' and elders' experience of negotiating successive states, rebel movements and local militias during times of famine, flight and fighting in the former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal state. The report puts more recent military recruitments, refugee movements, famine management, political divisions and militia rebellions in this area in this deeper historical context.

The study—conducted through extensive interviews and meetings in Juba and across Lol State, Aweil State, and Aweil East State in August 2017—finds that chiefs and other customary authorities are a fundamental part of the political-military structures of power in South Sudan.¹ Though chiefs have exerted mediatory and judicial powers for often extremely vulnerable populations, their role also holds the authority to mobilize their community in times of war. Many chiefs have not always used these powers for the common good during the region's long history of exploitation, violence and hunger.

¹ This report also draws on research from the previous civil war period, collected in the Rift Valley Institute's Sudan Open Archive (www.sudanarchive.net), the Sudan Archive at Durham University (Durham) and from files related to the first civil war period held at the National Archive of South Sudan (Juba).

Timeline

.....

c. 1850s–1900s	Networks of slave trading and raiding established across the region
1920s–1940s	Chiefships organized and formalized under British Condominium rule
c. 1963–1972	First civil war in Southern Sudan; Anyanya rebel factions operative across Northern Bahr el-Ghazal; chiefs and local intellectuals targeted in retaliatory government violence by troops and local government-sponsored <i>Haras Watani</i> militia
c. late 1960s	Awan Anei Tong, the father of Paul Malong Awan, and a relative of Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol both killed in Anyanya violence
1972	Addis Ababa peace agreement; return of Abdel Bagi to court presidency at Madhol; dispute between Abdel Bagi and Paramount Chief Malong Yor
c. 1981–1982	Drought in Darfur; increasing Rizeigat raids into Northern Bahr el-Ghazal for food and animals
c. 1982	Anyanya 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 the Second Sudanese 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 Anyanya 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 onwards	<i> Murahaleen </i> raids continue in dry seasons along the Wau to Darfur train line
1994	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) national convention establishes the Civil Authority of New Sudan (CANS) to formalize the civil-military administration
1994–1998	Renewed raids from Darfur; mass abductions continue
1995	Christian Solidarity International (CSI) begin slave redemption exercises
1997–1998	Famine in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal

1999	Wunlit peace conference (held in the village of Wunlit in eastern Tonji County in Bahr el-Ghazal state)
April 2000	Dinka–Misseriya treaty
2000	Peace markets established at border towns of Warawar, Manyiel and Majok Yinthiou
2002	Machakos Protocol signed, signaling the start of serious peace negotiations
2002	The Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children (CEAWC) founded in Khartoum
2005	Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ends the Second Sudanese 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 Sudanese 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, <i>Mathiang Anyoor</i> (the brown caterpillar)
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
December 2013	Intra-SPLA clashes in Juba escalate into civil war; Paul Malong’s <i>Mathiang Anyoor</i> involved in violence, including

	against civilians, and in further pro-government assaults against rebel forces in Upper Nile and Jonglei states into 2014
April 2014	President Salva Kiir Mayardit appoints Paul Malong as chief of general staff of the SPLA
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
Early 2017	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	Agany Abdel Bagi declares a new rebel group, South Sudan Patriotic Army, and attacks government posts near Waguet and Malek Gumel
December 2018	Committee negotiates Paul Malong’s release from house arrest in Juba; Malong travels to Nairobi
January 2018	Paul Malong declares a rebellion
March 2018	Paul Malong travels to Khartoum

1. Introduction

.....

*'We the chiefs have been with the people and the war has caught us all.'*²

South Sudan's present civil war has spread across the country. Cycles of brutal government offensives and retaliatory violence in greater Upper Nile, the Equatorias and Western Bahr el-Ghazal have exacerbated the country's economic collapse and already severe food shortages and sent millions of residents fleeing across its borders. The civil war has set its citizens against one another. A tribal logic to the conflict has been entrenched by this collapse, atrocities and the exclusivist, inflammatory rhetoric of both government and rebel elites. While all communities in South Sudan have been victims of this conflict, for many this is a war fought by a predominantly Dinka government against its minority populations for control of South Sudan.

Northern Bahr el-Ghazal is a region relatively untouched by this current violence. The region has escaped the worst excesses of the current conflict, in part because it is a supposed heartland of South Sudan's current ruling political-military elites, many of whom are from the various Dinka sections spread along the Sudan–South Sudan border, from the Central African Republic to Abyei. While Northern Bahr el-Ghazal is quiet, it is also deeply affected by and embedded in the current war, subject to the same economic collapse, famine, population flight, social fragmentation and extensive military recruitment. Years of drought and hyperinflation have destroyed the highly populated region's economy and livelihood: In April 2017, around 290,000 people were at risk of starvation.³ During the first half of 2017, nearly 160,000 people fled into Sudan, with many moving from Northern Bahr el-Ghazal into refugee camps and towns in southern Darfur.⁴ Many families have lost men to often coercive military recruitment and the battlefields in Upper Nile and Equatoria.

It is important to understand how Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's customary authorities have tried to manage this crisis. The region's chiefs and *gol* leaders (heads of clan-like extended families) have long experience of this type of destruction. Most residents have memories of the hardship of repeated famines (especially in 1986–1988 and 1997–1998); of *murahaleen* (Darfur-origin militias)

² Interview with sub-chief, Aweil suburb, 21 August 2017.

³ Associated Press, "Sliding into catastrophe": South Sudan famine could spread', *Fox News World*, 11 April 2017. Accessed 18 October 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/04/11/sliding-into-catastrophe-south-sudan-famine-could-spread.html>.

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Sudan*, Issue 17, 17–30 July 2017, 3.

armed raiding, kidnap, mass murder and rape beginning from the early 1980s;⁵ of Sudan and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) military administrations, recruitment and violent expropriation during the 1990s; and of family flight to refugee camps and exploitative labour across the border into Darfur and Kordofan. Many residents—including chiefs and other clan authorities—have now lived through, fought in and fled from three civil wars. They also have worked in generations of various militias, rebel and state armies, and civil-military administrations. By situating the current work of these customary authorities in this historical context of repeated wars, famines, flight and violent government, a deeper understanding emerges of present-day local management of conflict and famine-induced displacement in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal.

This recent history challenges a common external idea—including among the international community—that South Sudan's customary authorities (which generally means chiefs) are a more accountable, legitimate and locally rooted authority than its local government, and that they are an indigenous form of civil society working in the face of South Sudan's heavily militarized political forces.⁶ Yet customary authorities have an ambivalent role and history. In Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, many chiefly families are known both for mediating the impact of violent military predation on their communities and for their involvement in military and rebel regimes, recruitment, expropriation, raiding and labour exploitation. These family histories often stretch back to the First Sudanese Civil War in the 1960s, which is within living memory for many residents and chiefs themselves.

By exploring the ambivalence of these particular histories, it is apparent that customary authorities are not automatically a neutral or benign social force. Chiefs act as local brokers and mobilizers, which is often a difficult or dangerous position but nonetheless one that affords significant opportunity for personal benefit.⁷ Chiefs are generally understood (and understand themselves) as a go-between or bridge between the state and its people,⁸ acting as intermediaries between familial governance (of *gols* and *wuts* [cattle camps]) and state force—both civil and military. In South Sudan's brief and relatively recent colonial history, chiefs empowered themselves as interpreters, traders, spiritual leaders and warlords,⁹ roles which many of them continue to play at present. The powers of customary authority allow them to act against exploitation and local abuses, while at the same time

5 Andrew N. M. Mawson, 'Il Murahaleen Raids on the Dinka, 1985–89', *Disasters* 15/2 (1991): 137–49.

Accessed 18 October 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7717.1991.tb00443.x>.

6 Martina Santschi, 'Findings around Conflict Sensitivity and Food Aid in Northern Bahr El-Ghazal', Juba, South Sudan: Conflict Sensitivity Resource Centre, August 2017. Accessed 24 August 2017, <https://www.southsudanpeaceportal.com/repository/findings-around-conflict-sensitivity-food-aid-northern-bahr-el-ghazal/>.

For discussion around chiefs as a form of civil society, also see: 'Instruments in both peace and war: South Sudanese discuss civil society actors and their role', Juba Lectures Series 2016, London: Rift Valley Institute, 2016. Accessed 7 December 2016, <http://riftvalley.net/publication/instruments-both-peace-and-war>.

7 Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of Chiefship, Community and State*, Eastern Africa Series, Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2013, 79, 140, 192.

8 Interview with executive chief, Aweil suburb, 21 August 2017.

9 See Leonardi, *Dealing with Government in South Sudan*, 39; Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Peace or Truce*, revised ed., African Issues, Kampala, Uganda: Fountain publishers, 2011, 65–67.

to manage labour, community resources, migration routes and political-military connections in their own interests.

As such, customary authorities are embedded in South Sudan's systems of militarized economies and governments, and individual chiefs are political-military entrepreneurs in this context. Chiefs thus form a significant part of the country's local political elite. In the borderlands of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal in particular, powerful chiefly families currently still have significant mobilizing powers, financial interests and stakes within both South Sudan's and Sudan's governments, militia and military forces.

2. Customary authorities in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's wars

.....

The roles of customary authorities in wars, famines and displacement in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal are rooted in the recent past. The trade and raiding for slaves in the mid to late 1800s decisively shaped the region's contemporary governance and society. As traders raided and conscripted residents into their private fiefdoms and armies, they restructured the local political and economic landscape through forced labour and displacement.¹⁰ Some Dinka leaders found military and political power as trading and warlord chiefs through these slave economies and growing administrations.¹¹

British colonial rule built on rather than subverted these ideas and local power dynamics through violent pacification campaigns, forced labour and taxation, and collaboration with these mediatory (termed 'customary') authorities. Despite emerging state borders, these Northern Bahr el-Ghazal customary authorities continued to build on generations of intermarriage, raiding and the negotiation of grazing rights and routes, including mutual aid in times of famine and flight, with their counterparts in Baggara clans in Darfur and Kordofan, who themselves had been increasingly associated with the Sudanese state administration since the 1920s.¹² These relatively recent histories underpin the local logics and workings of present-day governance.¹³

For most current residents of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, this history of violent wars and personalized governments is well known. Most people in positions of present-day leadership or family authority grew up or were young adults during the First Sudanese Civil War in the 1960s and early 1970s, in which many of the chiefs and other customary authorities of the region were directly involved. Many of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's current chiefly leaders gained their authority and experience during this first civil war.

The first civil war in Southern Sudan evolved from localized banditry and rebellions sparked by the violent, extractive and repressive practices of the newly independent government of Sudan from 1956. During 1963–1966 in particular, insurrection spread across the southern regions, encouraged by government

10 Edward Thomas, 'The Kafia Kingi Enclave: People, politics and history in the north-south boundary zone of western Sudan', *Contested Borderlands*, London: Rift Valley Institute, 2010, 37–43. For a deeper history, see: Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, 'Western Bahr El Ghazal and Darfur: The Legacy of a Link', Greensboro, North Carolina: North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, c. 1988, 939/3/1–19, Sudan Archive, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom.

11 Martina Santschi, 'Encountering and "capturing" *hakuma*: Negotiating statehood and authority in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State, South Sudan', PhD dissertation, University of Bern, 2014, 38–41.

12 Damazo Dut Majak, 'The Malual Dinka-Baggara Border Conflict and the Impact on National Integration in the Sudan', paper presented at Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa, the Northeast African Studies conference 1989, Michigan State University, Michigan, 27–29 April 1989, 1–5, 939/3/59–71, Sudan Archive, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom. Also see: Jérôme Tubiana, Victor Tanner and Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, 'Traditional authorities' peacemaking role in Darfur', Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 2012.

13 Thomas, 'The Kafia Kingi Enclave', 43.

forces' tit-for-tat retaliations, including against civilians. By 1965, the state was fortified inside garrison towns, while rebel groups—collectively known as the Anyanya (snake venom), although hardly a unified force—lived off the rural population, who were subject to abuses and attack by both sides. Residents, including clan and chiefly authorities, were split between the protection of the towns or deep countryside, or flight to the north, creating a network of customary authorities and a pattern of survival that has continued throughout the Second Sudanese Civil War to the present.

Chiefs' roles in community survival through famine and war

*'I remained to resist this disaster.'*¹⁴

To survive during the Anyanya war, local chiefs and *gol* leaders used techniques of wartime self-support and mutual protection that are still practised today.¹⁵ As a senior Aweil chief notes:

When we were chiefs in the village—if there were clashes, hunger—we would ask people what will help this person to survive? The chief himself has to find out [how to get help] for people without close relatives to help. We took this from our grandfathers before the time of government. The people who took care of everything in those days were the *beny biith* [spear masters].¹⁶ ... Chiefs [were] selected by the British, including my grandfather. Before the British, my family was *beny biith*, too.¹⁷

Another chief, from Wanyjok, elaborates the role of chiefs in times of scarcity:

Whenever the hunger comes and wants to kill, and you have seen that there is someone in your community who is about to starve and his close kin have something, the chief will summon him [or her] and take something from him to give to the close relative to survive. And later on, when [the starving person] get his [or her] own things, we will call him and say, 'As you have got something now, give back to your brother what you owe him.' We do this in order to take care of the vulnerable, and this is the system we are using as chiefs. ... There are *gol* leaders and sub-chiefs [who] are the people involved to divide the food ration for civilians. It is their duty, so that they first identify the

¹⁴ Interview with elderly paramount chief, Nyamlel, 19 August 2017.

¹⁵ Luka Biong Deng, 'Social Capital and Civil War: The Dinka Communities in Sudan's Civil War', *African Affairs* 109/435 (1 April 2010): 240. Accessed 8 February 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adq001>.

¹⁶ These were, and sometimes still are, socio-spiritual authorities.

¹⁷ Interview with executive chief from Aweil, Juba, 16 August 2017.

most vulnerable in their communities and give assistance in case the food is less; and if [the food] is abundant, then they will give everyone their share.¹⁸

This tradition of mutual support partly informed the direct assistance and involvement of some chiefly families in the Anyanya mobilization, which fuelled retaliatory government violence against chiefs and other southern leadership and intelligentsia from 1963 onwards. An executive chief explains this dynamic:

When the [Sudanese government] heard later that bulls were contributed to the Anyanya, they would come to the village and kill the chief. A chief who heard the news before he got killed could run to hide. They caught Chief Aturjong Anyuon of Gok Machar at home and killed him, accusing him of supporting the Anyanya. ... Then they proceeded to Lou and found Chief Aguer Geng Atem, the chief of the Lou Aguer Geng community, and killed him. They also went and killed Mel Tong in the Ajuong Malong area, together with his son, who was studying in Rumbek secondary school. Then they came to our community and they killed the father of this [current chief] Malou Tong Tong. Malou was left [on his own as] a very small boy. There the chiefs got scared and ran into hiding, and they talked to community elders to take responsibility for collecting bulls for the Anyanya while they were in hiding. Young men were also contributed to the Anyanya to be taken to the training and fight.¹⁹

Not everyone supported the Anyanya, however. Many chiefs and customary court members stayed near towns and worked closely with government offices, often because they had business interests there or because they felt responsible for looking after (and mitigating abuses against) civilians living in government territory.²⁰ Two prominent chiefs of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal switched sides during the conflict, one from government to Anyanya, and the other vice versa.²¹

Regardless of the sides they supported, the war was a useful instrument for many chiefly authorities. Many chiefs within government territory were involved in the constitution and management of local defence militias, commonly known as the *Haras Watani* [the national guard].²² As with Anyanya allied chiefs, their connections could be put to use in personal battles for power or in inter-clan cattle raiding. As this chief explains, 'People would be accused of being Anyanya and would be arrested overnight.

18 Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok area, 25 August 2017.

19 Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017.

20 These included Akot Atiek, son of the famous Atiek Akot, at Wadweil, Riiny Lual at Yaat, Atur Jong at Gok Machar (the ancestor of Dau Aturjong) and Kuac Kuac at Udhum.

21 Interview with elderly paramount chief, Nyamlel, 19 August 2017.

22 Correspondence from Santino Deng Tong, liaison officer for peace, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, to Minister of Interior Major Farouk Osman Hamadalla, 13 January 1970, Ministry of Southern Affairs (MSA) 15.A.2, National Archive of South Sudan, Juba, South Sudan.

23 Interview with elderly paramount chief, Nyamlel, 19 August 2017. That people moved between rebel and militia bands is noted by Samuel Aru Bol, then president of the Sudan African National Union (SANU, banned at the time). Correspondence from Samuel Aru Bol to President Omar al-Bashir, 28 August 1970, MSA 15.A.2 97, National Archive of South Sudan, Juba, South Sudan.

And this caused people to run [into the bush]. Or if you're accused of letting your son go to the Anyanya [you had to flee].'²³

Many chiefs in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal begin their explanations of current local dynamics of war and survival in the Anyanya period, in which they also recount the dramatic individual odysseys of key contemporary political figures, including: Paul Malong Awan Anei, former chief of staff of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA); Malong Yor, a prominent pro-SPLA paramount chief in Aweil East; and Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol, a court president from Aweil East and recurrent anti-SPLA militia leader. Three different examples of these kind of accounts are as follows:

Akol Akol was the chief of [Abdel Bagi's] community, together with Paul Malong's father, Awan Anei Tong. [They] were sent from town into the villages by the Arabs [the Sudanese government], after the Arabs killed and scattered all the chiefs in the villages, to collect taxes for them. ... Awan Anei Tong of Maluakon was killed. ... It was the [government] who sent him to the village to collect taxes for them. He was afraid to refuse to go and collect taxes, so he came to the village and stayed there. ... While he was in the village, the Anyanya rebels came and asked, 'Why do you collect taxes for the Arabs?' And they shot him dead. ... He was killed together with Akol Akol, the elder brother to Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol.²⁴

Abdel Bagi actually goes back to the 1960s. ... Abdel Bagi came [into power] when one of his relatives was killed and chopped up by the Anyanya I forces. ... The father of the former chief of staff was killed on the same day. Abdel Bagi went ... and reached those guys who killed his relative and his friend. He shot them all and he switched sides. He went to the government.²⁵

[Then] Abdel Bagi had the militia, which was based in this village of Madhol. They could move together with government forces to areas outside to fight the Anyanya soldiers, kill people, raid animals and come back here. ... After he had joined the government army, he arrested my father [Paramount Chief Malong Yor] and accused him of being an Anyanya supporter and locked him up in prison. I was a young man that time. ... After the 1972 peace agreement, Abdel Bagi then returned to the land of Malong Yor here to be the court president.²⁶

These Anyanya era wartime logic and practices are informed by older histories of warlord–chief collaboration and resistance,

24 Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017.

25 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 21 August 2017.

26 Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017. This is corroborated by material in the National Archive of South Sudan, including a report by Santino Deng, liaison officer for peace, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, who notes that Abdel Bagi was using local police posts independently of government control during the war, running his own militia and conducting inter-clan cattle raids. See: MSA 15.A.2 123, n.d., c. 1970, National Archive of South Sudan, Juba, South Sudan.

exploitation and protection during the precolonial and colonial period, and have continued to the present day.

Self-defence, protection and flight: Chiefs in the wars of the 1980s

Despite the Addis Ababa Agreement that brought peace in 1972, raiding and banditry continued over the ensuing decade, which eventually saw the collapse of the regional administration and then the peace agreement itself. Many frustrated former Anyanya veterans were barely demobilized. They were left unemployed and unrecognized. In Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, conflict started well before the Bor mutiny in 1983, which is often taken as the official start of the Second Sudanese Civil War.

Relations between Dinka groups and their Baggara neighbours to the north were handled relatively successfully by customary authorities from the 1940s to around 1976.²⁷ The early 1980s, however, brought severe drought in western Sudan, affecting herds and harvests. The Baggara, especially the Rizeigat clans on the Darfur borderlands, began selling cattle on the border for grain and raiding into Northern Bahr el-Ghazal for animals to sell. They also began to develop a gun trade network from Chad.²⁸ Economic destitution made the Baggara tribes of Kordofan and Darfur—the Misseriya and the Rizeigat—ripe for exploitation in a new conflict, particularly after the famine of 1984–1985.²⁹

Their increasing raids fuelled continued small-scale conflicts and the grievances of the Anyanya 'leftovers'.³⁰ By 1982, groups calling themselves Anyanya II were active in Tonj, Rumbek and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal.³¹ In Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, Anyanya II leadership included Kawac Makuei, a former Anyanya fighter, and Paul Malong Awan. A current chief describes his participation in this (administrative) cross-border conflict:

We had Paul Malong, there was the late Malual Nguam, the late Kawac Makuei, the late Manyok Bol and the late Piol Dau, Dau Aturjong, Akot Deng Akot. ... My job was, I was chair of the traders' association. My main job was to collect and give what is needed from the traders and the people in the village to the soldiers. ... [Darfuris] came riding horses and carrying guns to kill people and we did not have guns to fight them. They abducted children and raped women when we had no guns to protect them. They took away our cattle and we had no guns to resist

27 Sikainga, 'Western Bahr El Ghazal and Darfur', 14.

28 Mawson, 'Il Murahaleen Raids', 140.

29 Mark Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', draft report, 26 May 1996, 51, 94/7/45–93, Sudan Archive, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom. It is important not to demonize Baggara communities during this period; for example, see: John Ryle and Kwaja Yai Kuol, 'Displaced Southern Sudanese in Northern Sudan with Special Reference to Southern Darfur and Kordofan', London: Save the Children Fund, February 1989, 19–20; and Julie Flint, 'Beyond "Janjaweed": Understanding the Militias of Darfur, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2009. Accessed 27 March 2015, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.168.4626&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

30 This is the term that is commonly used by the southern regional administration and the Sudan government for demobilization between 1972 and 1974.

31 Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 51.

32 Interview with chief in a Juba court, Juba, 15 August 2017.

them from raiding. And so we decided to go to acquire guns and come back with power in order to protect our cattle.³²

This inter-community raiding and retaliation worked for Sudan's preferred ways of managing its difficult peripheries and exploiting their frontier economies. The Sudanese government under President Omar al-Bashir fuelled the Baggara tribal militia (known as *murahaleen*) against the Anyanya II and continued the long-standing policy of devolving responsibility for security in Darfur. These strategies provided a useful way of dividing otherwise powerful cross-border tribal authorities and turning some people towards the government.

As the war escalated, it also provided significant opportunities for the Sudan government and its commercial allies to undertake 'an assault on the subsistence economy'³³ of Bahr el-Ghazal through the expropriation of Dinka cattle herds and the creation of a poor and desperate labour reserve as a result of mass displacement. A senior chief recollects the stark choices they faced:

When the Dinka saw that their cattle were raided, houses burnt and food looted, they were left with no choice. You can tell those who were still young and strong in your own home to join the Anyanya, and then you, the father who is elderly, with your wives and the smaller children, moved north to seek refuge. Some people resisted and stayed in the villages to cultivate and hid from the *murahaleen* attacks. And two years later the [SPLA] forces arrived and fought to drive back *murahaleen* in to towns.³⁴

The rise of the Sudan People's Liberation Army

As a result of this worsening situation in the early 1980s, many of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's customary authorities took up arms. Among their number was the former Anyanya fighter and paramount chief of Madhol, Malong Yor, who (despite already being comparatively old) travelled to Ethiopia with his son Lual Malong for training in the SPLA camps established after the mutiny in 1983. Paramount Chief Malong Yor explains:

The destruction of Madhol started in 1982, until 1983 and up to 1989. They could move through Madhol [in Aweil East] to Ajak [in Aweil South] raiding cattle, kidnapping children, killing men and women, and setting houses on fire. ... I decided to go because the villages were destroyed by the Arabs, so I was

³³ Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 50.

³⁴ Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017

³⁵ Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

fleeing the destruction and killing. Cattle were raided, children abducted and the elderly killed and houses burned. Even very small kids who could not walk were to be thrown into the fire. After [military] graduation [in Ethiopia], I travelled through Rumbek to come here.³⁵

As with Anyanya II fighters, including Paul Malong, many of the first commanders of the SPLA in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal were members of chiefly families. The first SPLA brigades to arrive in 1984 were led by Lual Riiny, the son of the famous old paramount chief, Riiny Lual.³⁶ By the end of 1984, the group African Rights estimates that the SPLA had mobilized around 10,000 new recruits across greater Bahr el-Ghazal.³⁷ This number did not include Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's community self-protection units, commonly referred to either as home guards or *gel weng* (cattle guards), largely organized by local chiefs from around 1983.³⁸

By 1985, the SPLA were entrenched across greater Bahr el-Ghazal. Yirol was captured that year; Wau was besieged on three sides.³⁹ In response, *murahaleen* groups reorganized with the Sudan government's assistance, which increased arms supplies and encouraged militia organization by local anti-SPLA powers.⁴⁰ This escalation saw major attacks by *murahaleen* in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal in early 1986, with reports of more than 600 people killed in one assault at Malek Alel, which also included the death of Lual Riiny, the son of Chief Riiny Lual, and the reported kidnap of more than 700 women and children.⁴¹ By mid-1986, the SPLA deployed further troops to the area that saw continuing retaliatory raids and confrontations over the next few years. This escalation of SPLA action likely contributed to the horrific massacre of displaced Dinka people at Daein in Darfur during 27–28 March 1987, when more than 1,000 Dinka people were burnt or beaten to death by the town's Rizeigat and other residents.⁴²

By the end of 1987, the Sudan government's use of militias to protect the train line to Wau had created 'six miles of scorched earth' on either side.⁴³ Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's residents also suffered mass murder and brutality, including Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) reprisal killings after SPLA attacks, which reportedly involved gassing and mass shootings of dozens of locals.⁴⁴ For its part, the SPLA was accused of failing to protect local populations.⁴⁵ Though some chiefs were involved in SPLA militias, others portrayed their position at this time as powerless:

36 Interview with former SPLA soldier, Aweil market, 21 August 2017.

37 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan: A Critique of Humanitarianism*, London: African Rights, July 1997, 88.

38 Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017; interview with elderly paramount chief in Nyamlel, 19 August 2017.

39 Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 51.

40 Ushari Ahmed Mahmud and Suleyman Ali Baldo, *El Diein Massacre: Slavery in the Sudan. Human Rights Abuses in the Sudan 1987*, London: Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association, 1987, 26.

41 Mahmud and Baldo, *El Diein Massacre*, 26–27. This is echoed in an interview with an executive chief from Abiem, interviewed in Juba, 17 August 2017.

42 Mahmud and Baldo, *El Diein Massacre*, 7.

43 Thomas, 'The Kafia Kingi Enclave', 96.

44 Raymond Bonner, 'A Reporter at Large: Famine', *The New Yorker*, 13 March 1989, 71/8/61–76, Sudan Archive, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom.

45 Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 88.

The chiefs had nothing to do because they had no power. They only thing they did was, they told people—especially those who were strong—to wait and see if the Arabs were coming. They could run back to the village and inform people to run and evacuate the village. And also, if there were cattle and goats, they would have to be driven away because they were their major target. When they came to the village and did not find the animals, they would move back north. [This] was the only security placed at the roads to pass the information—and these people had no guns but moved with bare hands. When anybody heard that the *murahaleen* had organized themselves to come and raid and informed the chief about it, the chief would go to the village and inform everyone to evacuate, as the *murahaleen* are on the way.⁴⁶

My friend El Hadi, in the market, [who is] from Darfur, would also provide me with information on when raids would come. So people could leave the roads and escape.⁴⁷

46 Interview with chief in a Juba court, Juba, 15 August 2017.

47 Interview with elderly paramount chief, Nyamlel, 19 August 2017.

48 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 88, footnote 31.

49 Bonner, 'A Reporter at Large: Famine', 64.

50 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 99; and David Keen, 'The Functions of Famine in Southwestern Sudan: Implications for Relief', 1989, 59, 307/6/59–65, Sudan Archive, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom.

51 Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 52; Gerald van Osch, 'Mid-Mission Report of MSF-Mission Awel, Sudan', Geneva: *Medécins Sans Frontières*, 28 April 1989, 17/4/AID/8, Middle East Documentation Unit, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom.

52 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

The 1987–1988 famine and flight to the north: Chiefly networks from Aweil to Khartoum

By 1986, as people were forced from their homes, the violence precipitated a growing famine, which was exacerbated by the previous (1985) arrival of large numbers of SPLA forces, locally termed 'the human locusts'.⁴⁸ By February 1986, around 500,000 people were displaced within Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. Waves of brutal raids continued through to 1988, sending many families into Darfur and onwards to the north. In mid-1987, reports claim approximately 100 people were dying every day.⁴⁹ In the summer of 1988, death rates in Meiram and Abyei, on these roads north, reached 1 per cent per day—the highest ever recorded at that time.⁵⁰ Around 30,000 people starved to death in the garrison towns of South Kordofan alone; informed estimates indicate that 250,000 people might have starved to death.⁵¹ A resident explains:

Nyamlel, Marial Bai, Gok Machar—these are the death zones. The dead zones. So you know if you stay over there, you know that ... you might not reach next year. If you are not shot, you are killed [by famine].⁵²

Present-day chiefs note that despite their powerlessness during raids, they played a significant role in the management and

mitigation of food scarcity, as this deputy paramount chief indicates:

The hunger was killing and we, the chiefs, could check out to find who among the people had some little food in his store, [even] with his brother starving. We could call and tell him that you must share that little foodstuff you have in your granary with your brother and his family, so that they do not starve to death. ... If someone has the net he used for fishing in the river, he will also divide the fish caught to the families he can, so that people at least find something to eat.⁵³

Another resident elaborates:

During wartime, it was the chiefs who collected *dura* [grain]. So they could collect foods from those civilians who had time, who could cultivate. After collecting, then they would give the food collected to the soldiers. ... Things were extremely worse. So we accepted to offer ourselves to cultivate. So that we can feed our liberation forces and the students, as well. Business[people] were also taking part, because they had little money, so they could go to town to buy medicines, and bring so that our wounded soldiers could get treatment. That's how we lived during this time.⁵⁴

Many of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's residents fled northwards. The massacre at Daein and fighting around Safaha closed westerly routes north in mid-1987, forcing people through the central route, along the railway line through Meiram to Muglad, into Misseriya territory.⁵⁵ People died along the railway and the roads. A team of observers who reached Meiram in 1988 saw 'desperately weak and emaciated Dinka of all ages, naked and many with wounds and injuries'; nobody was counting the arrivals, and counting the deaths was not allowed by local officials.⁵⁶ By the 1990s, there were an estimated two million displaced people from Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains in cities in Sudan, the majority in Khartoum.⁵⁷

Families and clans organized around emergency representatives and authorities who had fled with them or were resident in Darfur, Kordofan and Khartoum.⁵⁸ They drew on members of chiefly families across Sudan, as well as *gol* members already working as labourers in the north. For example, Acien Acien Yor, of Korok, a powerful and now elderly paramount chief in Aweil, was already in Khartoum for medical treatment. Riiny Lual of Ayat,

53 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.

54 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

55 Mawson, 'Il Murahaleen Raids', 143.

56 Roland Sewell, 'Report on Visit of Oxfam and SCF Representatives to El Meiram—South Kordofan, 4–8 September 1988', Oxford: Oxfam, 9 September 1988, 17/3/REF/22, Middle East Documentation Unit, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom.

57 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 152.

58 Interview with former politician from Aweil, Juba, 15 August 2017. He worked in the South Darfur refugee camps during this period.

59 Ryle and Yai Kuol, 'Displaced Southern Sudanese', 24.

from Marial Bai, designated his own representatives in camps and way stations across South Kordofan and South Darfur, with clan sections particularly represented at Adila camp.⁵⁹ One executive chief explains:

The total number of people who moved to the north was greater than [those who] remained here. When the humanitarian organizations come to assist this displaced population from the south, then it was us—the chiefs like Riiny Lual, Acien Acien, myself, Malou Tong and other chiefs—who could gather together and go to meet these organizations, to negotiate with them about the food assistance to save lives.⁶⁰

These representatives were vital to coordinating the arrival and survival of new displaced people to Khartoum and other northern towns. They also formed an information network, as these two chiefs indicate:

I had been a businessman and when war broke out, I relocated to Khartoum and from there, I was appointed as a chief to represent the chief at home. I went to Khartoum in 1987 and was appointed as a chief the same year. ... The people I was serving were people coming from six different chiefs in Gogrial. In 1993, we started the project of collecting our abducted children, together with the chief named James Aguer Alic. James Aguer Alic is from Aweil in Nyamlel. ... It was the chiefs in the villages who gave us the number of children kidnapped from them. For example, a chief from Gogrial could say this number of children were kidnapped from me, or another chief, and also Aweil like this, as well.⁶¹

When they were in Khartoum, they could send us the information about the movement of *Murahaleen* to here. They had the secret of informing us that the *Murahaleen* are on the way and would attack you in the next few days.⁶²

The SPLA and military chiefship

From the start, the war in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal was not a conventional confrontation between two standing armies: The SPLA and even the SAF were the sum of their various militia parts, some local and some factions from further afield. The SPLA consolidated its hold over Northern Bahr el-Ghazal between 1987 and

⁶⁰ Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017.

⁶¹ Interview with chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017. This independent tracing work is noted in Tsedale Mariam Yilma, Ayoum Adol Mawien and Radda Bamen, 'Assessment of vulnerable children of Bahr el Ghazal', Nairobi: UNICEF and Operation Lifeline Sudan, 1998.

⁶² Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.

⁶³ Douglas H. Johnson, *South Sudan: A New History for a New Nation*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2016, 142; Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 52.

⁶⁵ Amnesty International, 'The Tears of Orphans: No Future without Human Rights', New York: Amnesty International USA, 1995, 32.

1988, with a 1987 truce between the Anyanya II groups and the former SPLA helping to establish rebel control of most rural areas, setting up what was effectively a *cordon sanitaire* across the Bahr el-Arab River by 1988, and crucially re-establishing trading and pasture agreements with northern tribal counterparts.⁶³ Between 1989 and 1991, the SPLA expanded their control into Kafia Kingi to the west, and towards Wau.⁶⁴ Although raiding continued along the train line from 1992,⁶⁵ it seemed that ‘in some cases [Aweil, Terekeka] army garrisons appear to have reached an understanding with the surrounding SPLA units to minimize hostilities’.⁶⁶

As in the Anyanya war, the region’s chiefs were co-opted directly into the conflict—for their own power, out of necessity, out of conviction or for self-protection. Chiefs were given military rank and generally required to join the military and undergo training.⁶⁷ The Makuac Kuol family, whose British-made chiefship stretched in the past from Wanyjok and Baac to Mangartong and Wunlang, is a good example. Chief Kuol Makuac Kuol joined the Anyanya ‘as a soldier and a chief’; his brother and successor, Peter Makuac, was also in the Anyanya, and they went together to Bilpam to train in the SPLA before returning to Wanyjok in the mid-1980s, as ‘representatives of the people’.⁶⁸ Malong Yor and his family similarly continued their work in the SPLA. Malong Yor and his son, who is now paramount chief, returned from SPLA military training in 1985, graduating in the Tuek Tuek division:

The whole of Ajuong community was under the SPLA and under the authority of Malongdit.⁶⁹ So we had never had any problem with the SPLA but have been under them. ... There were so many commanders but I particularly worked much with Daniel Awet Akot and the late Kawac Makuei. After this, then Paul Malong came and served here as a commander until peace came.⁷⁰

Paul Malong also comes from a chiefly family. His grandfather, Anei Anei, was a British paramount chief of the Wun-Anei community for the Pacheny clan and the chiefship has passed to his brother, Atak Awan Anei.⁷¹ Other chiefs were appointed directly by the SPLA. For example, one man was appointed to represent people in the villages around Wadweil to the SPLA base at Wunyiik so as to ensure their survival.⁷² Some established chiefs had *bazingire* [chiefs’ guards], some of whom were given guns by the SPLA but most chiefs ‘had no protection; [it was] only law that gives [them] respect’.⁷³

66 Ryle and Yai Kuol, ‘Displaced Southern Sudanese’, 9.
 67 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 70.
 68 Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.
 69 ‘dit’ is a Dinka honorific added to the end of names. It roughly translates as ‘the great’.
 70 Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.
 71 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.
 72 Interview with executive chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.
 73 Interview with executive chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.
 74 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 89–90. Interview with local civil servant and son of paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.
 75 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 91.

By the early 1990s, SPLA chiefs and the local authority needed to manage liberated areas. The South Sudan Relief Agency (SSRA) was formed as part of the SPLA's civil-military administration (CMA) in November 1984 and organized itself in 1986–1987 primarily to administrate supplies to the army and manipulate relief aid accordingly.⁷⁴ SSRA officials were all soldiers and retained their military rank.⁷⁵ Lual Malong, former SPLA and now paramount chief, notes, 'Our entire lives were in the hands of our civilian population until the international humanitarian organizations arrived in 1986. So when these organizations arrived, they took over the duty of providing food to all of us, together with our civilians.'⁷⁶

In Malong's area, the commissioner for Abiem—now the area making up Aweil East State—was Victor Akok. As this paramount chief explains, 'He came as a commissioner for the whole of Abiem, with its headquarters in Wanyjok. From there, the problems of the community were put in his hands. If soldiers needed anything, they could inform him, and it was he, the commissioner, who talked to the civilians.'⁷⁷

The superior attitude of many SPLA forces to local residents, their ability to act essentially with impunity in such a violent context and their reliance on local resources to survive encouraged widespread abuses.⁷⁸ A chief elaborates:

A private soldier might sometimes act on his own. Maybe sometimes slaughter another man's goat or meet a civilian on the way and rob them of their items. These are the people that undermined us. And these are the people [against whom] we could go to the barracks to open cases against them. ... We stayed quiet and afraid when a soldier found us alone and even let him go with whatever he took, after which we would follow him to the barracks and report what he did to his commander.⁷⁹

As SPLA military and civilian administration increased, chiefs' powers were undermined but not erased. Customary authorities working within SPLA-held areas worked with local SSRA and CMA soldier-administrators to keep order, resolve disputes and attempt to manage the expropriation of the SPLA's hungry forces. Long-serving soldiers who came from chiefly families or who were appointed as chiefs by regional commanders—including Dau Aturjong, Tong Atak, Gong Awier and others⁸⁰—were very useful:

The chief would write a letter to the division and the division would release that soldier to us to come to the court and answer

⁷⁶ Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

⁷⁷ Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

⁷⁸ African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 84.

⁷⁹ Interview with deputy paramount chief, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.

⁸⁰ Interview with local civil servant and son of paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.

⁸¹ Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.

his charges, so that his case is decided. That is how I still do it now and whenever I write a letter to the division, the division has never refused to release to me the wanted soldier. Like the current division under General Santino Deng Wol. We have so many cases that we look into that involve his soldiers.⁸¹

The 1994 Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) national convention somewhat changed this dynamic. The convention established the Civil Authority of New Sudan (CANS) in the place of the CMA, aiming to demilitarize its government. As a local civil servant explains, 'If you choose to go to CANS as a soldier [you have to] leave your military orders behind. So local leaders gained momentum.'⁸²

The SPLA's demands were given a civic gloss—for instance, through the formalization of head tax and bull tax, taken in cattle, grain and cash. For the most part, however, CANS's shoestring administrative apparatus varied across the south and essentially depended on local personalities and networks, including workers in refugee camps and aid agencies. Many of the men and women in this extended civil administrative network in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal were members of chiefly families; for example, Deng Deng Akuei, now the new governor of Aweil East State, who established and ran a refugee camp at Babanusa with Concern. Deng Deng Akuei worked with Kuel Aguer Kuel (also a former governor of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal) trying to organize the safe passage of people to the north in the 1990s. Both of these men have links to families associated with customary authority: Kuel Aguer is a member of the family of Chief Mathok Diing Wol, of the Pachiermeath clan in the Atok Thou Reec Diing area.⁸³

Chiefly authority in the wars of the 1990s

With the SPLA's 1991 split and escalating intra-southern wars into the mid-1990s, the Sudan government reformulated and re-armed cooperative militias in southern Darfur and Abyei.⁸⁴ A renewed wave of attacks from the north came in 1998, a year called '*mapada*' [wholly covered] in the former counties of Aweil North and Aweil West. Marial Bai in Ayat was attacked three times between November 1997 and April 1998.⁸⁵ In early 1998, Nyamlel town was attacked twice and captured briefly by government supported militias: 'They stayed for eight days, which were

⁸² Interview with local civil servant and son of paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.

⁸³ James Kuol Garang Garang, *Administrative Evolution of Northern Bahr El Ghazal State, 1983–2013*, Kampala, Uganda: A M Printing & Publishing, 2013, 23.

⁸⁴ Bradbury, 'Wau Case Study', 53.

⁸⁵ Yilma, Mawien and Bamen, 'Assessment of vulnerable children', 4.

⁸⁶ Interview with deputy paramount chief, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.

⁸⁷ Yilma, Mawien and Bamen, 'Assessment of vulnerable children', 3.

⁸⁸ Interview with CSI-SPLA worker, Juba, 15 August 2017.

like eight years.⁸⁶ The occupation extended from the Kiir River to Wadweil, and from Ariath to Nyin Boli.

By mid-1998, Operation Lifeline Sudan had reorganized and redirected emergency relief to the region.⁸⁷ Again, chiefs, sub-chiefs and *gol* leaders were, in the words of one CANS worker, ‘applying kinship’ to the distribution, working out who needed help and negotiating the amount contributed to the SPLA. Chiefs worked with SSRA officers (who were, in many cases, relatives) to do this.⁸⁸ As two deputy chiefs recall:

Food aid those days, during the war of the SPLA time, used to drop down by aeroplane. After this [SPLA Commander Paul] Malongdit would be called and given his ration for his people, and I would also come and take my share for my [civilian] people. I would call my sub-chiefs and *gol* leaders and tell them, ‘Here is our food share. So take and distribute it to the civilians.’⁸⁹

When the humanitarian organizations arrived here, they began assistance and provided very little food assistance. It was not enough. When that assistance arrived, the chief would be called to go to the distribution point. He would have his ration for his community under him, and after he received that ration, the chief would ask those people under his authority to sit down and he would count them. He would give a cup to every family until he made sure that none of the households under him were missed and all of them had equal shares. If the food ration was big, they divided it the same way. And if small, the same, so that people had equal shares. That is how we lived.⁹⁰

This linking of customary authorities to the SPLA and aid agency famine relief and aid administration depended on, and reinforced, their roles and skills as arbitrators and community representatives. This is also the case for chiefs who remained or moved to work within government-held territories.

Other powers: Government chiefs and private militias

By the 1990s, the families of chiefs and *gol* leaders were scattered and divided between government and rebel-held territory across Sudan and Southern Sudan. The same extended families often had representatives working with the SPLA—in government-held towns, in refugee camps and in Khartoum, and often also in

⁸⁹ Interview with deputy paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

⁹⁰ Interview with deputy paramount chief, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.

anti-SPLA southern defence militias. While this caused familial and personal tensions, most people also understand this as part of the demands of surviving this period. Talking about when the war broke out, this executive chief explains:

I decided to move to town. ... My own uncle, a brother to my father, was killed about issues of Anyanya. He was accused of supporting the Anyanya rebels, and this was in 1966 when they killed him, and at that time I was initiated into adulthood [*gar-nhom*, scarified]. So if I stayed in the village and the government soldiers came to the village later, they might kill me, like they did to my uncle. And that is why I moved to town. When I came to town, I found our people being arrested and accused of being rebels. ... It became our role to go and have them released. We would go and negotiate their release from the prison in the military barracks.⁹¹

A chief working in the SAF garrison town of Wadweil—a railway post that was a stopping point for raiding militias until 2000—elaborates:

When there were people suspected as SPLA intelligence and arrested here, if such people claimed that they hail from the community under Dut Majak, they could ask Dut Majak to come to town and see these people. If Dut Majak recognized them and said they are my community members, they would be released. ... The forces in Wadweil could not live here throughout but were constantly changed, so Dut Majak could not have good relation with every force. He might have good relations with some forces, and have bad relations with others, so the delegates in Wadweil could act on his behalf if Wadweil was occupied by forces that were working against him, and he would then stay in the village until he heard that these forces had changed. If the new forces had a good relationship with him, he would again start coming to town and resume his job of negotiating for the release of the arrested community members. And he was working with the SPLA in the village while outside Wadweil. ... It is dangerous but it is leadership, because in those days [having a position of] leadership killed people. So once you are appointed to be a leader, it is then between death and the living.⁹² In such circumstances, collaborating with either with the SPLA or the SAF generated morally ambivalent actions and outcomes, and corresponding reputations. A prominent example of this is the Aweil East court leader, Abdel Bagi (mentioned above for his pro-government militia organization

⁹¹ Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 16 August 2017.

⁹² Interview with deputy paramount chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.

⁹³ Interview with executive chief, Ariath, 17 August 2017.

during the Anyanya period). Abdel Bagi is now a very old man in Khartoum, and his sons and extended family stretch across Sudan and South Sudan, several of whom are interviewed for this study. They are involved variously in new militias, the SAF, the SPLA, both the Sudan and South Sudan governments, mosques and security services. Abdel Bagi's elderly brother maintains the family's court presidency in Madhol.⁹³

In the mid-1980s, Abdel Bagi and some of his sons reorganized a personal militia based across the border at Meiram, with the support of Abdel Bagi's contacts in the Sudanese government, as this paramount chief explains:

He forcefully conscripted young men, gathered them and took them to Aweil for training, and brought them back later as his forces, and camped them close to government forces, which were here with us in Madhol. The government army base was there [pointing to the north of the market], and this place here was a police post, and his militias were based there [pointing to the south of the market towards Amar-Jal]. ... They were also mobilized to fight the Anyanya II, so that they could not capture the country. They were made to understand that Anyanya II are criminals who wanted to destroy the country, and they were mobilized to fight in defence of their land. So our Dinka men accepted Abdel Bagi to recruit their children into his militia in order to protect them. ... During the time of the SPLA, many people were in Khartoum already, plus others who came to Khartoum later when war and hunger started. So he went and conscripted young men who were there, took them to El Obeid for training and brought them back here to fight after they were trained and armed.⁹⁴

This militia was nicknamed *ee laac ku beric* (piss and go), as it made short raids into Aweil East for cattle, loot and abductions.⁹⁵ Many of Abdel Bagi's militia members walked on foot for these raids:⁹⁶ Militia booty was 'a coping mechanism, even a badge of honour for some poor communities'.⁹⁷ As this chief recounts:

We had no power and because of this, a man who has not enough courage, who has a weak heart, would run to a man who has the power to shelter and protect him in order to live and survive well. ... Abdel Bagi had nothing else good he did. ... He could delegate someone who knows the areas well to lead the *murahaleen* into the villages to raid. ... If you joined him,

94 Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

95 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

96 Interview with executive chief, Ariath, 17 August 2017.

97 Flint, 'Beyond "Janjaweed"', 13.

98 Interview with chief in a Juba court, Juba, 15 August 2017.

99 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

he would award you with a [military] rank ... and also give you food.⁹⁸

It is clear that this is a complex and morally ambivalent history. Some chiefs' court members in Aweil East, particularly around his old militia base at Deric, remember Abdel Bagi as a 'way of protection'.⁹⁹ With their own sons as militia leaders under Abdel Bagi, they could draw on this power as a form of local protection and self-support. Similarly, chiefs who were based in Khartoum through the war remember drawing on Abdel Bagi's powers as a powerful militia-backed chief with elite Sudanese connections, who worked to protect and support the Dinka community there: 'We united with leaders in Khartoum, so we could ask the government to give us land. ... We the chiefs—with Acien Acien Yor, Abdel Bagi, Mathong Diing Wol, Arop Kuot and Riiny Lual—negotiated with Save the Children and the government alike.¹⁰⁰

100 Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 16 August 2017.

3. Armies, labour and slavery: Chiefship in the wartime economy

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Farms, migrant labour and slavery

Northern Bahr el-Ghazal is part of seasonal migrant labour networks established for at least two centuries. This includes farming, herding and building work, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan and Khartoum. These networks overlap and are intertwined with histories of military recruitment, slave labour and forced conscription since the precolonial era. As conditions worsened in 1985–1986, many people—including chiefs—turned to their old personal connections from previous seasonal work. From the early 1980s to the early 2000s, 20 years of conflict, displacement and exploitation in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal built a specific cross-border wartime economy, stretching into Darfur and Abyei. Many people survived through conscription and seasonal labour, the two main forms of wartime indenture. The old seasonal routes north, via Safaha and Meiram, became an increasingly one-way emigration.¹⁰¹

While the region had long been a useful migrant labour pool for Sudan's various governments, the famine and destruction created a desperate market. This coincided with the rise of the *Ingaz* (salvation) regime under President Omar al-Bashir in 1989 and the state's renewed focus on creating mass mechanized agricultural schemes, especially across Kordofan.¹⁰²

By 1988, aid agencies that were able to access camps in southern Darfur were recording falling numbers of displaced Dinka people in the seven official settlements because of people moving to work on farms or trying to reach Khartoum. With a registered camp population of 16,000 people, a Save the Children study estimated that around 40,000 to 50,000 people were in forms of servitude and indentured labour across rural southern Darfur: Collecting grass, brick laying, in domestic servitude and digging latrines.¹⁰³ People also worked on farms without payment, except for food and water.¹⁰⁴

As many reports note at the time, this was no coincidence since local authorities, militia leaders and commercial farmers

101 Ryle and Yai Kuol, 'Displaced Southern Sudanese', 12.

102 Johnson, *South Sudan*, 159; African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 153.

103 Ryle and Yai Kuol, 'Displaced Southern Sudanese', 16–17; Mahmud and Baldo, *El Daein Massacre*, 9.

104 Ryle and Yai Kuol, 'Displaced Southern Sudanese', 97.

(sometimes the same people) were in part responsible for the mass displacement in the first place.¹⁰⁵ Different armed groups controlled the routes north, financing and arming themselves from the guns, ammunition and cattle trade run through Daein.¹⁰⁶ Those who gained or seized land obtained ‘a labour force under military supervision’.¹⁰⁷ Relief aid was inadequate and generally blocked; refugee camps were controlled as *dar es salaams* [peace villages] outside the town of Meiram in Kordofan, and outside the towns of Darfur.¹⁰⁸ Servitude was often the only option in this context.

The chiefs and sultans of the north–south borderlands

Several individuals, such as Akec Ja’ali, Dokia Khabasha and Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol, became intermediaries on the Darfur–Bahr el-Ghazal borderland, combining roles of customary authority, militia leader and investor.¹⁰⁹ This executive chief summarizes, ‘Working on the border—wealth is like chiefship. It is between life and death, and you cannot predict the outcome.’¹¹⁰

These men were known for their ambivalent personal and ethnic loyalties. People even locally dispute whether they can claim to be Dinka. Akec Ja’ali, by most accounts, was a Dinka man from Pariath who apparently adopted a Rizeigat name and clan after years of work and marriage in southern Darfur. Abdel Bagi, while self-identifying as Dinka, parlayed his Islamic faith into powerful connections with both Khartoum elites, and Darfur and Kordofan customary authorities. Dokia Khabasha was the son of a Baggara man and a Dinka woman from the Pajien clan.¹¹¹

Each individual is an example, however, of the complex relationship between long interconnected Dinka and Baggara communities in peace and war. Contemporary reports on violence and exploitation in the region often note stories of protection, safety and assistance offered from old Darfuri friends, relatives and bystanders.¹¹² This trader explains, ‘So if we meet in the front line, we fight. If peace comes, later we come together as brothers.’¹¹³

Generations of cross-border marriage, trade and migration make this perspective commonplace across the Northern Bahr el-Ghazal borders. Their notoriety aside, it is this common heritage that allowed these particular individuals to position themselves as interpreters or mediators in the borderland wartime economy. During this period, cartels of military officers and traders spread through greater Bahr el-Ghazal for the import of food and medicine,

105 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 161; Mahmud and Baldo, *El Diein Massacre*, 9.

106 Mahmud and Baldo, *El Diein Massacre*, 9.

107 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 157.

108 See the traumatic accounts of camps in Meiram in Bonner, ‘A Reporter at Large: Famine’.

109 Jok Madut Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, 49.

110 Interview with executive chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.

111 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

112 Ryle and Yai Kuol, ‘Displaced Southern Sudanese’, 20; Mahmud and Baldo, *El Diein Massacre*, 39.

113 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

as well as the exploitation of local and looted resources.¹¹⁴ As a contemporary report notes:

As middlemen between the displaced and government officials, commercial farmers, aid agencies and so on, sultans [the Darfur term for the word ‘chiefs’] occupy an influential position. They play the role of labour, credit and aid brokers on behalf of the displaced and, by controlling access to such things, they are able to wield authority. At the same time, the practice of informing on potential Dinka rivals among the displaced, especially that threat of denouncing them to state security as SPLA sympathizers, strengthens their position. This authority creates a guarded atmosphere of dependence and intimidation that exists in displaced settlements in the transition zone.¹¹⁵

Their local authorities both facilitated raids and, according to most reports, mitigated the human impact of them, at least for clans and populations under their purview. As Jok Madut notes in 2001:

When I visited Warawar in the summers of 1998 and 1999, people spoke about Abdel Bagi with mixed sentiments. Some said that his presence in the North is good for the Dinka because he keeps track of Baggara movements and on the eve of a raid, he sends one of his men to inform the Dinka so that preparations can be made against the raiding force.¹¹⁶

People willing to take significant personal risk (at a time when all actions were possibly fatal), and who had personal capital and connections to these intermediary authorities, were able to continue to trade, including from the north into SPLA territory:

I used to cross to Daein to go and buy tea and sugar and transport them by donkey to Gok Machar for resale. ... So, it was risky but we had Akec Ja’ali helping us on the other side. ... [People such as Akec] managed to be rich in the war because there was no alternative. So people try to trade, no matter, even if there was war. So, it is part of their life.¹¹⁷

The figure of Abdel Bagi illustrates how specific individuals can exercise customary authority for a variety of communal and personal ends, as a form of political-military chiefship that has long been part of the political landscape in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. His career is illustrative. In Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, from the 1960s to the present, he has established himself as a self-interested ‘middleman’,¹¹⁸ as a landholding investor in the war economy in

114 Bradbury, ‘Wau Case Study’, 58.

115 Ryle and Yai Kuol, ‘Displaced Southern Sudanese’, 96.

116 Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan*, 50.

117 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

118 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

Box 1. The story of Akec Ja'ali, as told by a trader from Aweil town

[If a southerner fled to South Darfur State during the war,] there's no other way that he would find a job unless he goes to Akec's house first, and then if Akec knows some people there who need workers, you go and work for him. So he finds himself like the intermediary here, bargaining for the others.

When you find that he's making money because he's the one who's getting a lot of workers coming from the south, so he has so many women, and those guys, they come and cultivate for him. And he has people who take care of cattle for him, so the camps become richer and richer. During the raids between north and south, this was something organized by the government in Khartoum to break the backbone of the movement in the south and to take all the cattle from them. It was a campaign. So, anyone who doesn't have money, doesn't have cattle, they tell them, 'You go to the south. When you come back, you will be rich.' So all these guys who want to get out of poverty, they will decide that if you go to the south, good things will happen. If you die, that's it. If you come back, you will come back with cattle, and cattle was money. ...

But even during the war, if you have your cousin who's in the north, you find that sometimes they say, 'No, don't attack them. This is our cousin, on the other side.' Or they tell you to move away [from an area that is targeted]. Or they tell somebody, tomorrow, or after three days, we are heading to this place, this place, this place and this place. You make sure that you move away from that area. ...

If the family of an abducted person goes to Akec and he truly hails from Pariath, and explains the whole situation to Akec, and he knows where his son is, Akec will go and free that child. So Akec ends up being an intermediary between two communities. He cannot sit back and watch his community being abused. And he cannot stand by, not supporting the other side. ... When a chief [finds that a woman in his community is] kidnapped or abused, the chief will go to Akec and explain the whole thing. So what Akec does is to assess the power of that family who have carried out this act; those who have abused this family. If it's a family that may appear stronger than him, he only helps the chief. But if it is a family weaker than him, this is when Akec would go and respond.*

* Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

Meiram, as part of the Sudan government militia forces and as an established customary court leader in both Madhol and Khartoum known for the fairness and customary accuracy of his arbitration, which even his personal enemies, including the family of Malong Yor, acknowledge.

Many Dinka chiefs were—and still are—shareholders in the hibiscus, millet and *dura* farms around Meiram during the Second Sudanese Civil War, including Abdel Bagi.¹¹⁹ There, ‘he was making use of his Ajuong community’,¹²⁰ collecting destitute displaced families onto the farm. This executive chief notes, ‘Because he was very much considered by the Arabs, he was very much involved in looting the humanitarian food aid and he even assisted us sometimes. He used the looted food to feed the farm workers.’¹²¹

Abdel Bagi made significant profit from this desperate labour force and his connections to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) war efforts, including his access to the train line south. Aweil residents describe his organization of what is locally called ‘*abu fik*’ (we will push it): ‘Abdel Bagi has been using young men. He could put his goods on trains, arrest people and force them to push that train to bring his goods to the towns of Malual, Mabior and up to Ariath. So people were collected in [Meiram] town, forcefully.’¹²² He also profited from his mobilization of young men from his home areas in Aweil East as a militia raiding force, as he had done in the previous civil wars of the 1960s. He recruited heavily in Khartoum, from displaced communities whose young men were both destitute and faced multiple risks: From targeting by Sudan’s national security apparatus as suspected SPLA, and from frequent forced recruitment into the Popular Defence Forces (PDF). This sub-chief explains:

It started in 1998. That is when it started. It was comprised of those who used to rob civilians while they were members of the SPLA, and whenever they were beaten and punished by the SPLA for their misconduct, they then surrendered and joined [Abdel Bagi] Ayii. They then went and come back as militias, and they knew where people ran to with the few remnants of cattle and goats, and they raided them all.¹²³

Many chiefs who were working in Khartoum and Aweil East throughout the war note, however, that Abdel Bagi—as with similar figures, including Akec Ja’ali—‘was also useful’.¹²⁴

119 Interview with executive chief from Tiit-Cök, Juba, 16 August 2017.

120 Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017.

121 Interview with executive chief from Abiem, Juba, 17 August 2017.

122 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017. Some trains were driven by manual force rather than by engines.

123 Sub-chief, group meeting, Ariath, 19 August 2017.

124 Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

His militias provided help to people passing, yes. When his militias were in Meiram, the road did not continue to be as insecure as before that. They smuggled people to have a safe passage home, and that information is true. Even Abdel Bagi himself used to help us when we were in Khartoum. ... If he found that civilians like us were being harassed by Arabs in Khartoum, he would intervene and even fight them to help us. ... He was doing two parallel things. ... Most of his sons rebelled and joined the SPLA. His sons called Agany, [a second] Agany, Akol and Piol had gone and were in the bush with the SPLA. Even Piol, Akol and one Agany were killed in battle.¹²⁵

His militias strongly stood with us, and they gave safe passage to those moving in the border. ... Everyone could go to his community to gather and bring information. Abdel Bagi was a true *Haras Watani* [the national guard, now a common term for a traitor] but he is a Dinka.¹²⁶

In the politics of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, Sultan Abdel Bagi and men similar to him are (still) considered customary authorities in spite of the moral ambivalence of their activities. To fully apprehend the nature of customary authority in the region, it is necessary to recognize these chiefly families as fundamentally interwoven with the wartime economy and military governance structures. These men and their brothers are still chiefs; Abdel Bagi's brother currently remains court president in Madhol, and his brothers, sons and nephews are members of the SPLA, the police and the SAF, and hold posts in both the Sudan and South Sudan governments. Abdel Bagi's cousin, Ayii Bol, was coordinator of the refugee camp at Muglad, with Deng Deng, now governor of the new Aweil East State.¹²⁷ In addition, Abdel Bagi's son, Agany Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol, is now leading a militia from Meiram and continues to carry out small attacks on the Northern Bahr el-Ghazal border.

Many Aweil chiefs and residents also include SPLA figures, such as Paul Malong Awan, who rose as an SPLA commander in his home area of Maluakon in around 1992, in their description of these political-military-customary entrepreneurs:

He can be counted among these men because he is doing something personal! ... So Paul Malong was not working for the people when he was in the bush [at Pariath] but he was doing something for himself. There's one commander called Dut Aluak. [laughter] So, I give you an example of a commander called Dut

¹²⁵ Interview with executive chief from Wanyjok, Juba, 17 August 2017.

¹²⁶ Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

¹²⁷ Interview with Governor Deng Deng Akuei, Juba, 16 August 2017.

Aluak. Dut went and captured money in the war. But he didn't give that money to Paul. So Paul Malong ordered his beating—that Dut Aluak should be beaten to death. But people later contributed 120 cows to give to Paul Malong in order to free that guy. This is during the 1994 war in Nyamlel. This is what he can do to them.¹²⁸

The SPLA in the borderland economy, 1994–2010

The SPLA military administration was also heavily involved in this war economy. By the mid-1990s, SPLA units were conducting raids across the border, and their roadblocks seized traders' goods and took significant bribes and payments for pass documents.¹²⁹ The peace markets established in Warawar, Manyiel and Majok Yinthiou in 2000 after the Wunlit peace conference in 1999 and the Dinka–Misseriya treaty in April 2000 created both relative stability and significant opportunity for SPLA taxation and financial returns.¹³⁰

The most controversial aspect of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's war economy in this period, though, are the processes of paid slave redemption. This was a necessity for many families whose members had been kidnapped or coerced into forced labour along the borderlands and in Kordofan and Darfur as the war escalated.¹³¹ A contemporary report estimates that around 10,000 people were taken in the late 1980s, mostly into smallholder farm labour.¹³² Abductions continued, especially during the 1995–1996 raids across Northern Bahr el-Ghazal.¹³³

From the early 1990s, many people, including the networks of customary authorities stretching from Aweil to Khartoum, were working to try to get family members and children out. Messages about kidnapped children and relatives were passed through SPLA and Abdel Bagi militia-held routes to Meiram and northwards.¹³⁴ 'Local people were working with the *murahaleen*, and people collaborated with us, and helped us open a case. There were revenge killings for this.'¹³⁵ Chiefs in Darfur and Khartoum formed committees that negotiated and usually paid comparatively small amounts of money to free abductees; this included Chief James Aguer Alic, who had connections with the SPLA's Civil Authority of New Sudan (CANS).¹³⁶ Chiefs resident in Khartoum were also involved, including Cier Moror, Lek Malong Yor, Yel Aguer Geng, Dier Arou Luac, Mahol Lang, Chol Bol Chol, Nyuol Arop Kuot, Akoon

128 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

129 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.

130 Peter Adwok Nyaba, 'Report of the Trade Consultancy Conducted in Northern Bahr El Ghazal', Nairobi: Save the Children Fund, 1 July 2002, Sudan Open Archive, Rift Valley Institute, London.

131 Sewell, 'Report on Visit', 4.

132 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 352.

133 African Rights, *Food and Power in Sudan*, 351–52; Ryle and Yai Kuol, 'Displaced Southern Sudanese', 32.

134 Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

135 Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

136 Interview with executive chief from Manykor, Juba, 15 August 2017.

137 Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

Riiny Lual and Luka Longar, who were connected to the Khartoum customary courts of Abdel Bagi and Acien Acien Yor.¹³⁷

This slave redemption process became a controversial source of income by the mid-1990s, most notably because of interventions by Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and other evangelical anti-slavery organizations.¹³⁸ CSI first visited Nyamlel in May 1995, two months after a Popular Defence Force attack on the town.¹³⁹ This force returned multiple times over the following few years. CSI representatives picked up on the rescue organizations run through local agreements 'between Dinka chiefs and heads of some Rezegat [*sic*] clans in southern Darfur'.¹⁴⁰

This agreement allowed the Rezegat nomads to have the right to graze their cattle along the river Lol and its tributaries during the dry season, and to trade in the Manyiel market about 10 miles along the river Lol to the west from Nyamlel [*sic*]. In return, the Rezegat parties to the agreement were expected to facilitate the return of slaves to their families for a price of 5 cows per slave (this agreed price has subsequently been reduced to 2–3 head of cattle per slave). ... [Since October 1995, CSI and the Canadian organization Crossroads have given] the local civil authorities enough resources to free over 700 slaves, including 294 on this visit.¹⁴¹

Although CSI claims there is no inflation, the price of around USD 100 per slave is significantly more than chiefs had previously negotiated.¹⁴² This financial intervention (paid consistently in US dollars in cash) was facilitated and managed by CANS authorities. A CSI visit in 1997 was greeted by the SPLA commissioner for Aweil West and his colleagues, including the deputy commissioner, Joseph Akok, and Angelo Marac, coordinator for relief and supplies with Nyamlel's South Sudan Relief Agency (SSRA) since 1991, and a CSI local coordinator, in partnership with Aguer Alic.¹⁴³ They also met with the then SPLA commander for the Manyiel area, Akot Deng Akot and received messages of support from overall regional commander, Paul Malong Awan.¹⁴⁴

Many of the chiefs and military officers involved in this work found significant financial benefit in this process.¹⁴⁵ There are also credible reports that groups engaged in organizing abductions and deceptions for material gain.¹⁴⁶ As a 2001 report notes, however, 'There is substantial distrust, corruption and profiteering among various local parties portrayed as working in cooperation'.¹⁴⁷ Entrepreneurial political-military counterparts from Darfur included

138 Nyaba, 'Report of the Trade Consultancy', 7.

139 Caroline Cox and John Eibner, 'Draft Preliminary Report: Slavery in Sudan', Surrey: Christian Solidarity International, 14 October 1997, 1.

140 Cox and Eibner, 'Slavery in Sudan', 1.

141 Cox and Eibner, 'Slavery in Sudan', 1.

142 Cox and Eibner, 'Slavery in Sudan', 2.

143 Cox and Eibner, 'Slavery in Sudan', 5. Two of these men were interviewed for this study.

144 Cox and Eibner, 'Slavery in Sudan', 6.

145 UNICEF and Operation Lifeline Sudan, 'Workshop on Abductions, Slavery and Peacebuilding', Landmark Hotel, Juba, UNICEF and Operation Lifeline Sudan, 16–18 June 1999.

146 Marv Koop, 'Grass Roots Regional Assessments, Government Controlled Areas of Sudan', Khartoum: IGAD Partners Forum Working Group, May 2001, 50, Sudan Open Archive, Rift Valley Institute, London.

147 Koop, 'Grass Roots Regional Assessments', 49.

men such as Dokia Khabasha, mentioned above, who also abducted people during raids. Dokia reportedly was involved in the Nyamlel arrangements for CSI emancipations, organizing with local chiefs and the SPLA to bring children from families in the north and Nyamlel's surrounding villages (regardless of whether they were enslaved or not) for resale:

There were children collected, freed and brought to the south. ... So later on, if the donors have prepared the money for these Arabs, and they left, then Paul Malong would go to these Arabs. After he—after he collected that money—he would pay these people a small amount of money so that they go and bring other children. ... To tell the truth, it's not kids who were brought from the north. They collected them here. ... [Malong was] faking everything and getting money out of it.¹⁴⁸

An SPLA soldier based in Nyamlel at the time explains that Dokia eventually overstepped, continuing to organize raids on the territory while also making these peace deals:

Later on, the army agreed that Dokia, whether the son of our sister or not, must be killed. So a committee sat down and he was punished. He was sentenced to death. ... He's a very terrible person. If you shoot him, a bullet could not penetrate him. A bullet could not penetrate him at all. We tied his hands and his legs. We shot him but the bullet could not penetrate. So he was at last given to the civilians. ... So because he had been abducting many children and he killed many people, civilians were mobilizing. Others came with axes, others with *pangas* [machetes], so they started cutting him. ... They were demanding that, if you don't want to shoot him, give him to us. So we gave him to them and they killed him.¹⁴⁹

In 2002, as the Machakos Protocol signaled the beginning of the end of major hostilities, the Sudan government allowed the founding of the Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children (CEAWC).¹⁵⁰ Several hundred woman and children who had been abducted or otherwise sought to return from camps and farms in South Darfur were given safe passage, on the Meiram road, which was re-opened in 2004. This was organized by local chiefs involved in CEAWC. Safe passage via Meiram was apparently assisted by Abdel Bagi's son, Agany Abdel Bagi, by then a militia leader, and by Malong's SPLA forces sent to Grinti, on the border.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with the political advisor for Lol State, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

¹⁵¹ Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

The definition of customary authorities, namely chiefs and sultans, and the various roles they inhabit in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's contemporary history, is ambivalent—often by necessity. Many men widely referred to as chiefs and sultans drew—and continue to draw—their local authority from their position as intermediaries in this often violent and militarized context, which required them to exploit opportunities through what might be described as political-military entrepreneurship. Their military, financial and political powers and connections are a prerequisite for their position as local arbitrators. Local communities needed (and continue to need) political leadership with the capacity to act in this violent arena. The most established of Aweil's chiefly families, including those of Malong Yor, Acien Acien and Awan Anei Tong (the father of Paul Malong), derive their legitimacy from generations of connections in and experiences of this arena as political, military (and economic) entrepreneurs. They exercise their judicial and cultural authority on this basis.

Chiefs in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal have long acted as intermediaries in the region's history of violent exploitation, internal migration and wars but not always benevolently or in pursuit of peace—let alone as neutral or moral actors. Context is vital to understanding the roles of these men in war and famine, which sees the blurring of military and civil authority, and of civilians and combatants, within the wider community. A common reflection in Aweil is that the war was *mapada*, something that pervaded everywhere and encompassed everything, so 'we are guilty, all of us'.¹⁵² Above all, 'The truth is painful!' [laughter]¹⁵³

152 Interview with former politician, Juba, 15 August 2017.

153 Interview with traders, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

4. Customary authorities in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal today

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All of the histories presented here are contemporary. Their protagonists, networks, economic and military systems, and understanding of governance, as well as their attendant brutalities and traumas, are still directly involved in and impact on events, processes and daily lives at present. Customary authorities and chiefly families have been co-opted into—and have made themselves indispensable to—military administrations and economies from which they have also gained material benefit across the Darfur and South Sudan borderlands since the British period and particularly during the Anyanya and SPLA wars.

It is essential to understand how these recent histories inform and shape the current wars and crises in South Sudan. Northern Bahr el-Ghazal figures prominently in accounts of the violence and ethnic massacres in Juba in December 2013, most obviously in the figure of then Governor of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, Paul Malong Awan, who was significantly responsible for the recruitment and organization of the *Mathiang Anyoor*, an irregular militia recruited from the greater Bahr el-Ghazal region in previous years.¹⁵⁴ Despite its current notoriety, this militia organization is not exceptional. Rather, it is part of the long-standing practices of militarized governance and economy established in the region during previous wars, which continued after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and the secession of South Sudan in 2011. In this latter period, the mass returns of displaced Aweil residents have formed a desperate pool of surplus labour and the SPLA's civil-military administration has evolved only superficially into a Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)-dominated local government. Faced with a similar array of resources to satisfy community demands while pursuing personal opportunities, a familiar class of chiefs continues to exercise customary authority.

154 'Timeline Formation of the "Mathiang Anyoor" in South Sudan', Radio Tamazuj, 9 September 2015; African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, *Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan*, 15 October 2014.

Rebuilding the South, 2006–2012

From 2006 to 2012 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) tracked around 500,000 people returning to Northern Bahr el-Ghazal alone, from an estimated total number of two million

returnees to all South Sudan's (formerly) ten states.¹⁵⁵ Most of these people returned along the same roads upon which they had left, with the same chiefs and *gol* leaders working to coordinate aid and transport, some of whom were appointed in northern Sudan as proxies in these extended networks of customary authority. Clan representatives and chiefs reconstructed villages, some of which were entirely new. A sub-chief explains:

I took over this chiefship in the year of 1974, soon after the Anyanya signed the peace with the government and moved into towns. I stayed here as a chief until I moved to Khartoum, and continued to be a chief there. And when I came back, I brought the people to Aweil and continue as their chief. When I arrived with them in Aweil, it was the government who took us and put us here in the [new] village called Apada. ... I was there [in Khartoum] together with Riiny Lual, who was a senior chief to me. ... From there, I remained as a senior chief and in case of any problems, I had to write a request to the humanitarian organizations—be it the Islamic relief organization, the human rights ones or Catholic Relief. That is how I was helping people, until the time when a man called Kiir Mayar [the president], together with Paul Malong Awan, sent buses to relocate us back to Aweil.¹⁵⁶

Courts were reconstituted from returning and local authorities, and inundated with cases disputing bride-wealth payments or challenging unpaid debts, mediating marriages organized in exile and settling disputes over old family lands. Chiefs had also proliferated among the communities scattered across Sudan during the war and their number grew again as new *payams* (sub-counties) were created as a result of local government reconstruction after the CPA.¹⁵⁷ The new *payams* absorbed the former Civil Authority of New Sudan (CANS) administration, along with elderly or untrained demobilized soldiers. There was not much difference in administration, however: 'Maybe the name has changed but the system is the same'.¹⁵⁸ Many of the executive directors and county directors have stayed in their posts up to the present time.¹⁵⁹

The dominant wartime SPLA commander of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, Paul Malong, became governor under the CPA. During this period, he reportedly also consolidated his control over cross-border revenues (in particular, at the Warawar and Majok Yinthiou border posts), which enabled him to financially control the SPLA across the state. As in previous colonial and postcolonial administrations, Malong also reportedly set about manipulating

155 International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'Returnee Area of Return Data 2007–2013', Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 30 October 2013, database. 156 Interview with a sub-chief, Aweil suburb, 21 August 2017. 157 Simon, 'Waiting for Pay-Day: Anthropological Research on Local-Level Governance Structures in South Sudan', London: Save the Children, 2007, 2. Accessed on 16 August 2017, <https://www.southsudanpeaceportal.com/repository/waiting-pay-day-anthropological-research-local-level-governance-structures-south-sudan/>. 158 Interview with local civil servant and son of paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017. 159 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.

chiefships across the region, particularly in his home area of Aweil East, to ensure their loyalty and utility.¹⁶⁰ Malong's governorship saw many established chiefs sacked or forcibly retired, including the son of Malong Yor, Garang Makuliny, the former Anyanya and SPLA paramount chief and rival to Abdel Bagi in Madhol. Garang was replaced by paramount chief Malong Yor's more useful former SPLA brother and later refused to be reinstated by Paul Malong.¹⁶¹

These sackings peaked in the run-up to the 2010 election campaign, as Malong removed chiefs who he believed supported the independent non-SPLM candidate, Dau Aturjong, another former SPLA commander in the region.¹⁶² Communities also removed long-standing chiefs through elections or reappointments, often in favour of younger and military connected men with government or NGO experience, who had knowledge of the language and networks of this new militarized SPLA government.¹⁶³

During the same period, half a million returnees created a mass labour surplus. In 2005 and 2006, many of the returning men (especially those from Khartoum) had joined Abdel Bagi's militia in the north, which was at that time affiliated with Paulino Matip as the South Sudan Defence Force, in order to be brought home and demobilized under the CPA. Some young men, particularly members of Abdel Bagi's *gol* and clan, did manage to secure some retraining or positions in the police and wildlife services this way.¹⁶⁴ As in the early 1980s, however, there were few options for unemployed men in post-CPA Northern Bahr el-Ghazal.

When the agreement came, many people had migrated and searched for jobs in factories in the north. Others worked for the government in the north but when the CPA came they lost their jobs in the north and they could not find jobs in the south. And when they failed to get jobs here, it was only the military service that was the only job available in the south. ... This is what caused them to join the military in huge numbers.¹⁶⁵

At the time, continued military recruitment was seen as a benevolent measure by many in government service. The significant risk of renewed war with Sudan over the disputed borderland—clashes at Majok Yinthiou in 2008 and repeated crises in Abyei in 2010 and 2011—justified the expansion of the Northern Bahr el-Ghazal army. It is difficult to assess whether this recruitment was forced (there are some stories of abduction) since military service was the 'only job going'.¹⁶⁶

160 Interview with deputy paramount chief, Wadweil, 24 August 2017.

161 Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.

162 Interview with local civil servant and son of paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.

163 Interview with sub-chief from Madhol, Juba, 16 August 2017.

164 Interview with the political advisor for Lol State, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017. This is similar to Tom el Nur's National Forces for Peace militia around Wau; see Thomas, 'The Kafia Kingi Enclave', 126–127.

165 Interview with sub-chief from Madhol, Juba, 16 August 2017.

166 Interview with sub-chief from Madhol, Juba, 16 August 2017; see Koop, 'Grass Roots Regional Assessments', 7.

Many of these recruits became the *Mathiang Anyoor*, deployed to Juba after Paul Malong was promoted to chief of general staff of the SPLA in mid-2013. As an Aweil Dinka militia, the *Mathiang Anyoor* must be understood in the broader context described above. That is,

When you come to *Mathiang Anyoor*—[laughter]—when you come to that point, it's the same thing as insurance. This man [Malong] needs his own army. So what he has to do, he has to build his own army, for insurance for himself and his friends. When anything goes wrong, he can resort to them. And it happened [in December 2013]. ... They resort to who? They resort to *Mathiang Anyoor*. ... If you talk now, if you go to a place like Gok Machar, Marial Bai, Nyamlel [or elsewhere]. We don't have young guys now, like this guy [points to Joseph Diing, young co-researcher]. ... Everyone's gone. And everyone is dead.¹⁶⁷

The current civil wars and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's chiefs today

*'It is not easy to overcome the legacy of war.'*¹⁶⁸

Despite being fought elsewhere, the current conflict that began in December 2013 has drawn on Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's war economy and military governance system. It has also involved many of the same commanders and chiefs, who were rooted in the past two civil wars.

As in these previous conflicts, the current war has wrought disaster in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal. Much of the local government has collapsed and authority in villages now rests on many of the old CANS administrators and chiefs,¹⁶⁹ in coordination with (until December 2017) the 3rd (Lion) Battalion commander, Santino Deng Wol, still the Aweil-origin head of the SPLA in the region.¹⁷⁰ As one sub-chief puts it: 'If one of the chiefs stands up today to go to the government office to demand assistance, the rest of the chiefs would think that the chief is mad.'¹⁷¹ Military powers again have taken precedence over civil ones and there is an implicit return to civil-military authority.¹⁷² As one chief observes of his own personal loyalties, 'If we had problems with them, we could not be in our chiefship positions today.'¹⁷³

The economic crisis entrenched by the violence and political breakdown is at the heart of the food security crisis.¹⁷⁴ The

¹⁶⁷ Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017. Similar accounts and comments are given by many chiefs and other observers across Juba and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal.
¹⁶⁸ Sub-chief in group discussion, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.
¹⁶⁹ Interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.
¹⁷⁰ Interview with deputy paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.
¹⁷¹ Sub-chief in group discussion, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.
¹⁷² Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017.
¹⁷³ Interview with deputy paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.
¹⁷⁴ Santschi, 'Findings around Conflict Sensitivity', 1.

subdivision of Northern Bahr el-Ghazal into states, and the new states' subdivision into more counties, has placed strain on local government networks, created contested borders and sparked competition between chiefs to secure the paramount chiefships in new counties.¹⁷⁵ Food aid is being misdirected or allocated via disputed customary authorities, fostering further conflict.¹⁷⁶

Once again, as in previous eras, many people who could not afford food during the droughts, particularly in February and March 2016 and 2017, have moved across the border to Darfur and Kordofan.¹⁷⁷ Others have returned to their previous jobs and towns in Sudan, particularly in Khartoum, and many also report renewed abuse.¹⁷⁸

The people who left for the north, running away from hunger, when they reached Darfur they could be taken to farms and forced to work for nothing. A person is forced to work and given only food to eat but no payment for the labour on the farm. They tell [the displaced people], 'You ran away from your country in search for food, not money' [so they will not pay you]. ... History is now repeating itself.¹⁷⁹

Several Aweil residents note the nickname for these displaced people in southern Darfur as *Malesh Omer* (sorry Omer), a reference to President Omar al-Bashir. They return to the north, perceived to be surrendering, only a few years after South Sudan's independence.¹⁸⁰ This renewed flight has revived networks of chiefly families and community representatives from Aweil to Khartoum. A current key representative in the Dinka displaced network is Ibrahim Wel, based in Kerior refugee camp in South Darfur, who liaises with local government and NGOs based on his long residence in the region.

He became the intermediary who actually looks out for people. When those guys are not paid, people will come to complain. They just go to the authority. ... They know him and they trust him. So that time he became famous, you know. Everybody who goes there will go straight to Ibrahim Wel. And he became like a chief, a Dinka chief, in the area now.¹⁸¹

The crisis in the government and the SPLA has sparked small mutinies across Northern Bahr el-Ghazal since 2013. These include the faction led by Dau Aturjong, former regional commander and opponent of Paul Malong in the 2010 elections. More recently, since around 2016, this also includes a faction led by Abdel Bagi's

175 Interview with the political advisor for Lol State, Nyamlel, 24 August 2017.

176 Santschi, 'Findings around Conflict Sensitivity', 2.

177 Interview with executive chief, Ariath, 19 August 2017; interview with sub-chief, Aweil suburb, 21 August 2017. In March 2017, a sack of sorghum grain cost around SSP 9,000 to SSP 10,000 (about USD 50–60). By August 2017, this had dropped to SSP 5,000 (about USD 30). Exchange rates are approximate and are based on personal observations and conversations with local residents over this period.

178 Interview with paramount chief, Wanyjok, 25 August 2017; interview with paramount chief, Madhol, 26 August 2017.

179 Interview with executive chief, Ariath, 19 August 2017. This was echoed by several other chiefs and former aid workers during research.

180 Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

181 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

son, Agany Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol, who is (again) a rebel leader based in Meiram and in charge of what is now called the South Sudan Patriotic Army.¹⁸² For many locals, this is a Abdel Bagi familial trait. A trader from Aweil remarks that Abdel Bagi:

is so old, to the extent that he cannot put on his own shoes, but he is still doing that [militia]! [laughter] ... The conditions that were forcing people to flee to the north have even forced people to join him. Like now. People who are now fleeing, they choose to go and join him. ... He will go and not let people stay without a job, so you will have to mobilize.¹⁸³

Across Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, residents directly link the current crisis and collapse of South Sudan's government to the unresolved issues of these long wars. Chiefs describe this as 'the same crisis'. Cattle and food is taken by the army, the famine is resurgent and their sons are dying in far-flung places for no clear reason other than the profit of a minority.¹⁸⁴ They are aware and frequently critical of the ethno-regional framing of the current civil war, along with the Dinka ethno-nationalist propaganda and incitement spread at the old *Mathiang Anyoor* training camp at Pantit and by elite Dinka politicians.¹⁸⁵ 'These people, they have nothing good to fight about.'¹⁸⁶

182 'New rebel group formed in Northern Bahr El Ghazal State', *Sudan Tribune*, 10 May 2016.

183 Interview with trader, Aweil town, 20 August 2017.

184 Interview with sub-chief from Ajuong, Juba, 17 August 2017.

185 Interview with chief from Awan Rieu, Gogrial, Juba, 17 August 2017.

186 Interview with sub-chief from Ajuong, Juba, 17 August 2017.

5. Conclusion

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The controversial history of cross-border chiefship in war complicates international actors' current interest in customary authorities as possible positive agents in peacebuilding and reconciliation. In complex and mobile populations on Northern Bahr el-Ghazal's fertile borderlands, repeated conflicts, predation and recruitment since the precolonial and colonial periods have formed and shaped political-military chiefly families. These individuals and their extended kinship networks are useful forms of customary authority, closely tied to the heavily militarized governments of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army alike.

These customary authorities, and the politicians, traders and military officers with whom they negotiate (and to whom they are often related), are tied into a wartime economy that has deep roots and established logics that determine the parameters and patterns of the actions of individual chiefs. As part of a militarized political and economic elite network that stretches between Khartoum and Juba, chiefs have both sustained society by maintaining mutual support and social security, and used their communities for their personal and familial advancement, during conflict and disaster.

Contextualizing the current crisis in South Sudan in this local history is vital for understanding current political practices, elite machinations, military dynamics, economic change, social security and livelihoods. As local residents note in peace consultations in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal in 2001, 'Any solution to the crisis will of necessity have to address its underlying causes, such as the dispensation of power and the national emblems of identity, as well as the structures and institutions that propagate them.'¹⁸⁷ This remains the case in contemporary South Sudan. Men and women of all backgrounds, chiefs or otherwise, call for a search for common aspirations for South Sudan. Consistent with past demands to break out of previous cycles of conflict, their call addresses the need for civic education, greater popular engagement in decision-making, and social and food security. This call also includes efforts to address the cultural and psychological damage of generations of war.

187 Paul Murphy, 'Even the Meeting Trees Are Perishing: A Perspective and Recommendations Made by People Living in Opposition Controlled Areas of Sudan on Building and Achieving Peace', Nairobi: IGAD Partner's Forum, August 2001, Sudan Open Archive, Rift Valley Institute, London.

Glossary of acronyms, words and phrases

Anyanya	(<i>Madi</i>) snake venom; factional rebel group in the First Sudanese Civil War (c. 1963–1972)
Anyanya II	Rebel group factions formed mainly of disaffected Anyanya former fighters during the 1972–1983 period, engaged in localized raids from around 1976
<i>beny biith</i>	(<i>Dinka</i>) spear masters; sometimes socio-spiritual authorities
CANS	Civil Authority of New Sudan
CEAWC	Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children
CMA	civil-military administration of the SPLA
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2005
CSI	Christian Solidarity International
<i>dura</i>	(<i>Sudanese Arabic</i>) sorghum grain
<i>gel weng</i>	(<i>Dinka</i>) cattle guards; community-based self-protection units in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, mostly organized by local chiefs from around 1983
<i>gol</i>	(<i>Dinka</i>) heads of clan-like extended families in Dinka tribal sections
<i>Haras Watani</i>	(<i>Sudanese Arabic</i>) national guard; a locally recruited militia during the First Sudanese Civil War
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority of Development; based in Djibouti
IOM	International Organization for Migration

<i>mapada</i>	(<i>Dinka</i>) wholly covered; reference to comprehensive nature of the famine and violence in 1998
<i>Mathiang Anyoor</i>	(<i>Dinka</i>) the brown caterpillar; personal militia formed by Paul Malong Awan around 2012–2013, recruited from the Aweil area
MSA	Ministry of Southern Affairs (Khartoum, Sudan, circa 1968–1971)
<i>murahaleen</i>	(<i>Sudanese Arabic</i>) Darfur-origin militias organized from the early 1980s
<i>payam</i>	(<i>Sudanese Arabic</i>) sub-county; second lowest administrative division, below counties
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SPLA	Sudan People’s Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People’s Liberation Movement
SSRA	South Sudan Relief Agency

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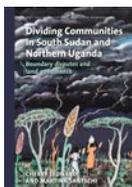
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South Sudan's civil war has spread across the country, fuelling economic collapse and food shortages, and sending millions of residents fleeing across its borders. Although the former Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State has escaped the worst excesses of the current conflict—in part because it is a supposed heartland of South Sudan's ruling political-military elites—it is also deeply affected by, and embedded in, the current war *Politics, power and chiefship in famine and war* investigates how customary authorities on South Sudan's border with southern Darfur have managed repeated wars and famines since the 1960s, both for the communities that they claim to represent and for their own survival and benefit. It sets out chiefs' and elders' experience of negotiating successive states, rebel movements and local militias during times of famine, flight and fighting, concluding that chiefs and other customary authorities are a fundamental part of the political-military structures of power in South Sudan.



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