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## Conflict Research Programme

# Violence, Crime and Gender in South Sudan: Reflections from the Field on Militias and Gangs

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# About the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme is a four-year research programme hosted by LSE IDEAS and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Our goal is to understand and analyse the nature of contemporary conflict and to identify international interventions that 'work' in the sense of reducing violence or contributing more broadly to the security of individuals and communities who experience conflict.

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## Summary

This research paper reflects on the myriad ways in which militarised and criminalised forms of authority in South Sudan, specifically militias and gangs interpret norms around gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV). It is founded on extended local fieldwork conducted throughout the first half of 2019 across four field locations, including: Wau Town in Western Bahr el Ghazal State; Yirol East in Lakes State; Ganyiel in Unity State; and the Juba Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites on the base of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in the capital city. It contemplates the complex position of the primarily male youth who comprise the basis of both gangs and militias, considering the ways that these groups transcend, resist and reinforce the patriarchal gender norms that underpin the otherwise high levels of GBV that have been witnessed in the country, especially since the start of the civil war on 15th December 2013. It shows that, even where parochialism is resisted, the perceptions and practices of these groups when it comes to gender and GBV strengthen traditional gender roles that equate women with wives and child-bearers and treat them as commodities in the country's political marketplace. The result is that, despite changes to women's roles and responsibilities as a result of the constant flux generated by protracted conflict, the secondary status of marginalised groups, such as women, has been systematically reinforced.

## Policy Implications

Excluded from the recent Revitalized-Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), the community-embedded armed groups considered in this research paper are now a major source of potential instability. Understanding why these groups resort to violence and crime, including GBV, as well as how they search for a sense of inclusion, can prove incredibly valuable in actually transforming conflict beyond the remit of the peace deal. Indeed, more attention to the ways in which informal, non-state forms of public authority perpetuate structures of violence and discrimination can help develop ensure that policies actually translate into new norms and practices, whether in relation to gender and GBV, or in relation to ending conflict and violence more generally. While more detailed research is needed, as this paper shows, there is a need to find new and creative ways of addressing the absence of opportunities and avenues for belonging that provide the members of community-embedded armed groups with a sense of inclusion and an alternative avenue for accessing resources that still emphasises their desire for independence from otherwise exclusionary structures. Although this point has been reiterated through previous research, there is a critical need to work much more directly with those actually implicated in violence and crime and ensuring that non-state forms of public authority, including militias and gangs are integrated into interventions that seek to transform both conflict and gender in fragile, conflict-affected environments like South Sudan. Many of the members of community-embedded armed groups interviewed for this research had not been engaged in external actors. This is essential for ensuring ownership over norms of non-violence, including those prohibiting GBV and encouraging gender equality.

## Acronyms

ARCSS: Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CSRV: Conflict-related sexual violence

GBV: Gender-based violence

PoC: Protection of Civilian

R-ARCSS: Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

SPLA: Sudan People's Liberation Army

SPLA-IO: Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition

SSPDF: South Sudan People's Defense Forces

UNMISS: United Nations Mission in South Sudan

## I. Research Introduction

International efforts that seek to prevent violence and build peace in fragile, war-torn environments often focus on the formal groups vying for authority at the centre. Yet, as is well-known, there are an assortment of informal structures of power that govern political and social life and that are responsible for activities as varied as generating revenue and controlling behaviour, including the use and non-use of violence.<sup>1</sup> Nowhere is this more true than in South Sudan where the state has been a distant reality in the lives of much of the population, particularly in the country's variegated peripheries where it is, at times, resisted as something invasive and alien when it comes to community life.<sup>2</sup> These informal structures of power or what are typically referred to as 'public authority' encompass a wide array of actors from customary chiefs, to spiritual leaders, to the numerous community-embedded armed groups that frequently find themselves outside the state's formal reach.<sup>3</sup> They exist alongside and, at times, contend with more formal state forces in ways that challenge conventional notions of the state's monopoly on violence, forcing policymakers to contemplate how, and with whom to engage to promote peace.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, for the purposes of this research paper, different forms of public authority, whether "constructive" or "corrosive"<sup>5</sup> possess their own moral codes that can either transcend, resist or reinforce norms that facilitate violence and discrimination.<sup>6</sup> This includes norms related to gender equality and different forms of GBV. Accordingly, the paper presented here provides some initial reflections on how militarised and criminalised forms of non-state public authority, specifically rural militias and urban gangs,

understand gender relations and interpret norms around gender equality and the prevention of GBV. It looks at what have been referred to elsewhere as community-embedded armed groups, which incorporate anything from youth gangs, to vigilante groups, to rural militias, to communal fighters.<sup>7</sup> Still, they frequently share particular characteristics, encompassing mostly young males from local communities who defend local interests, situated between their participation in the group and community life.<sup>8</sup>

Emphasising gender and GBV within the context of these more violent forms of non-state public authority could provide a useful lens through which to understand the motivations for violent behavior more generally, while at the same time supplementing the work on conflict and community-based armed groups in South Sudan with a much-needed gender perspective. As other research has highlighted, the ways in which communities understand violence against women and other marginalised groups can provide important insights into the principles and practices that influence the functioning of groups that exist beyond the state.<sup>9</sup> What's more, excluded from the recent R-ARCSS on 12 September 2018, these community-embedded armed groups are now a major source of potential instability. Understanding why these groups resort to violence and crime, including GBV, as well as how they search for a sense of inclusion, can prove incredibly valuable in actually transforming conflict.

Along those lines, the initial findings of the paper are in many ways consistent with other research on gendered and sexualised violence in conflict-affected settings. More specifically, the research supplements existing work, showing

1 See, Lund, C. (2006). Twilight institutions: Public authority and local politics in Africa. *Development and Change* 37(4): 685-705.

2 See, Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks* No. 66.

3 See, Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*; Ibreck, R., & Pendle, N. (2016). Customary Protection? Chief's courts as public authority in UN Protection of Civilian sites in South Sudan. *JRSP Paper 34*.

4 See, de Waal, A, Sarkar, A, Detzer, S and Spatz, S. (2020). A theory of change for violent political marketplaces. *CRP Memo*.

5 Meagher, K. (2012). The strength of weak states? Non-state security forces and hybrid governance in Africa." *Development and Change* 43(5): 1073.1101; cited in, Ibreck, R., & Pendle, N. (2016). Customary Protection? Chief's courts as public authority in UN Protection of Civilian sites in South Sudan. *JRSP Paper 34*.

6 See, Danish Refugee Council. (2017). Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State; Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

7 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

8 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

9 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

how understandings and rules on gender and GBV, as well as the use of GBV serve a number of functions in crisis, laying the foundations for newly configured societal relations, as well as reinforcing existing ones – often to the detriment of the rights of women and girls.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the ways in which rural militias and urban gangs interpret and regulate gender and GBV oftentimes violently underpin the secondary position of women and girls and perceptions of females as commodities in South Sudan's political marketplace, which has become increasingly relevant in the context of economic decline. At the same time, their understandings of gender and the use of GBV seem to resist some of the more deeply entrenched norms that continue to govern relations between the sexes, especially as it relates to pre-marital sex. Their interactions with the opposite sex, the exercise of GBV and rules developed to govern both gender relations as well as gendered and sexualised violence appear to reflect the need for young men to gain independence from community and political structures. It also reveals their desire to reduce their reliance on both customary leaders and elites for the resources and endorsement that they need to reach ideals of responsible adulthood and masculinity.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, the practices rural militias and urban gangs exhibit with respect to gender and GBV are indicative of the continued adherence of the primarily male youth who comprise militias and gangs to the norms associated with family and home life elucidated in previous research on South Sudan.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, it also demonstrates the desire of militia and gang members to establish their own sense of identity. Violence and vigilantism in that sense can be seen as an expression of that identity and the need to access resources in a setting marked by protracted conflict and economic decline. As discussed in

more depth below, the male youth who make up rural militias and urban gangs are trapped between the structural realities of perpetual violence and the day-to-day uncertainties of life in conflict. This is not dissimilar to women and girls who end up “caught in the middle”<sup>13</sup> of the constant change engendered by war and the preservation of highly conservative and patriarchal values, both of which have continuously reinforced their subordination to collective interests.

## II. Methodology

This research paper seeks to understand the “subjective experiences”<sup>14</sup> and understandings of those both implicated in and impacted by the country's ongoing violence and fragility, including rising criminality in urban centres and increasing insecurity in rural areas. The methodology was grounded in ethnographic case studies where rural militias and urban gangs functioned as comparative cases within the four field locations where research was carried out. The four field locations were: Wau Town in Western Bahr el Ghazal State, Yirol in Lakes State, Ganyiel in Unity State and the Juba Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites on the base of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in the capital city. Overall the research involved around 175 participants, 36 in-depth individual interviews and 23 focus-group discussions, all of which contributed to a much more contextualised understanding of armed and criminalised forms of public authority in the country and concepts of gender and GBV therein.

The field locations and groups were chosen for a variety of reasons. While gangs have been present in South Sudan since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, their numbers are said to have proliferated following the onslaught of the war on 15 December 2013. In Wau Town, these groups have a long history where they had become

10 See, Baines, E. (2014). Forced marriage as a political project: sexual rules and relations in the Lord's Resistance Army. *Journal of Peace Research* 51(3): 405-417; Mackenzie, M. (2010). Securitizing sex? Towards a theory of the utility of wartime sexual violence. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12(2): 202-221.

11 See, Leonardi, C. (2007). 'Liberation' or Capture: Youth in between 'hakuma', and 'home' during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391-412.

12 See, Leonardi, C. (2007). 'Liberation' or Capture: Youth in between 'hakuma', and 'home' during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391-412.

13 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan*.

14 Huser, C. (2014). Micro-Level Insights into Context Analysis in Unity State: Interpretations of the Experience of Violence. *Context Analysis*: 2-36.

an increasingly “sinister and criminal figure” in the post-CPA and post-2011 independence periods.<sup>15</sup> Prior to the beginning of the conflict, there was considerable controversy surrounding the groups since the courts were seen as being too lenient on them on account of the proliferation of human rights frameworks advocating for the rights of juveniles and other marginalised groups. It was also said that some of these groups were implicated with the governing elite.<sup>16</sup> Although the PoC sites are new to the war that started in 2013, many of the gangs who operate there are not. Still the size of the PoC sites, including those in Juba means that they resemble something of an urban environment in their own right, and as such, have become ripe environments for gangs, even where they have their origins in post-2005 and post-2011 South Sudan and the return of many youth from the diaspora.

Rural militias, specifically the *gelweng* in Lakes State and the *gojam* in Unity State were selected for similar reasons. Elites at both the local and the national level have a long history of mobilising and exploiting agro-pastoralist youth. The 2013 conflict has been no different with both the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), now South Sudan People’s Defense Forces (SSPDF) and the SPLA-In Opposition (IO) drawing support from these groups to fight their battles. This has led to the further erosion of conventional codes of conduct during warfare, including with respect to the targeting of women and other marginalised groups. Both the *gelweng* and the *gojam* have allegedly been involved in GBV during localised and national conflicts since 2013, especially in the borderlands between Yirol and Panyjiar where conventional restraints on violence have limited purchase. Although violence between the *gelweng* and *gojam* in the area predates 2013, the mobilisation of pastoralist youth connected to the national conflict reified inter-ethnic divides and tensions with SPLA-supported groups of *gelweng* raided Panyjiar during both the 2014 and 2015 government offensives on southern Unity State.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, reprisal attacks persisted, which were

oftentimes justified on the basis of recovering cattle and atoning for losses incurred in 2014 and 2015.

### III. Background

Despite the promises that South Sudan’s transition to independence on 9 July 2011 initially provided, the country was never able to deliver on the dividends that peace and independence should have produced after the end of the 22 year-long civil war with the Khartoum government in north Sudan. Even after 2011 chronic insecurity, localised violence and acute underdevelopment prevailed. The systematic exclusion and fractionalisation born out of the second Sudanese civil war between 1983 and 2005 and the intra-Southern divisions that it created also endured. That is until everything fell apart on 15 December 2013 when fighting broke out between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar, reflecting wider divides within the SPLA and ruling party. The splits between communities that existed as a result of the 1983-2005 period served as a ready basis for the mobilisation of groups against each other under the auspices of the national conflict. In reality, the war resembled something much closer to the classical interpretation of the confluence of political and private motivations for violence in civil war<sup>18</sup> as local grievances quickly formed the foundations of the national conflict outside of the capital, Juba with sub-national and local tensions coming to shape important frontlines in the overall conflict.

The crisis that followed has had immeasurable consequences, particularly for the civilian population who have been subjected to horrific violations, which in addition to directly targeting the livelihoods and coping mechanisms of citizens, treated people as expendable on the country’s political and military battlefields. Millions of people have been driven from their homes in search of protection elsewhere, frequently more than once. 1.6 million people still remain internally

15 Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks No. 66*, p. 59.

16 Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks No. 66*.

17 Craze, J., Tubiana, J., & Gramizzi, C. (2016). A State of Disunity: Conflict Dynamics in Unity State, South Sudan, 2013-15. *Small Arms Survey*.

18 Kalyvas, S.N. (2003). The ontology of “political violence”: Action and identity in civil wars. *Perspectives on Politics* 1(3): 475-494.



displaced,<sup>19</sup> around 200,000 of whom continue to seek safety shelter on the bases of the UN mission in what are referred to as the PoC sites.<sup>20</sup> Close to 400,000 people are estimated to have died as a result of the war and thousands of civilians are thought to have been subjected to acts of conflict-related sexual violence (CSRV), including rape, gang rape and abduction.<sup>21</sup> Female bodies have been employed as a reward for participating in fighting, with the UN saying that sexual abductions are "...encouraged by commanders through their promises that the soldiers could take women and girls as "wives" for compensation."<sup>22</sup> Women and girls are not the only ones who have been treated as transactions in the conflict, either. Young men and male youth have been prized almost solely for the role they play in warring. Similar to the civil war with north Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s, the current conflict has seen youth mobilised by elites to fight on their behalf. At the same time, they have also been stripped of livelihoods and educational opportunities and denied the chance to reach ideals of responsible adulthood and marriage.<sup>23</sup> As one report noted, "[y]oung people have been both the greatest perpetrators and victims in this war, instrumentalised by political and military leaders to fight while also deprived of a future, of livelihoods, marriage and of establishing themselves as meaningful members of society."<sup>24</sup>

As has been the case in South Sudan for decades, the conflict has been characterised by consistent violations of commitments to finally bring an end to violence. Various ceasefires and agreements were signed after 15 December 2013 only to be broken hours and days later. When the first iteration of the ARCSS was signed on 17 August 2015, conflict continued, spreading to previously peaceful parts of the country, including to the south and west of the country to places, such as Wau. The agreement finally met its demise on 8 July 2016 when fighting once again erupted

between forces loyal to President Kiir and forces loyal to Vice President Machar in the presidential palace, which acted as a painful reminder of the enduring divisions that have marked both South Sudan's birth, as well as its short history. Attempts to revive the agreement throughout 2017 and 2018 culminated in the R-ARCSS signed on 12 September 2018 and the eventual formation of the transitional government on 22 February 2020. That being said, akin to both the post-CPA and post-independence period, violence and insecurity did not end with the peace deal, nor did it end with the more recent establishment of the transitional government. Localised conflicts that had become more politicised as a result of the national war that began in 2013 have carried on.

Accordingly, even if the R-ARCSS and formation of the transitional government provide the opportunity for contemplating a new future for the country, there are a number of challenges that are inherent to the logic of governance over political and even social life that could encumber the prospects for transforming conflict and violence. Politics continues to be based on what, in essence, is a militarised form of monetised deal-making in the political marketplace,<sup>25</sup> which has not only thwarted the development of a state-citizen contract, but also prevented the state itself from delivering on the dividends that any of South Sudan's numerous peace agreements should have supplied. Citizens are left with few mechanisms for sustainably accessing the resources needed for their survival. To be sure, successive administrations that have ruled over the south have done so through coercion and violence. These more structural forms of violence enacted by the state in South Sudan now sit alongside the unpredictability of everyday life, that has only become increasingly uncertain as time has gone on. As de Waal makes clear, "South Sudan's political turbulence is akin to the

19 IOM DTM. (2020). South Sudan: East Africa and the Horn of Africa. Available at: <https://dtm.iom.int/south-sudan>.

20 UNMISS. (2020). UNMISS Protection of Civilian (POC) Sites Update No. 273. Available at: <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/unmiss-protection-civilian-poc-sites-update-no-273-20-april-2020>.

21 Checchi, F. et al. (2018). Estimates of crisis-attributable mortality in South Sudan, December 2013-April 2018: A statistical analysis. Health in Humanitarian Crises Center. Available at: <https://crises.lshtm.ac.uk/2018/09/26/south-sudan-2/>; Amnesty International. (2017). Do not remain silent: Survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan call for justice and reparations. *Index Number: AFR 65/6469/2017*. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/6469/2017/en/>.

22 UN Human Rights Council. 2019. Report of the Commission of Human Rights in South Sudan." *A/HRC/40/69*.

23 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). Dynamics of youth and violence: *Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State*.

24 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). Dynamics of youth and violence: *Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State*, p. 5.

25 de Waal, A. (2014). When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: The brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan. *African Affairs* 113: 349.

chaotic structure of a stream of water from a tap: unpredictable from moment to moment, but retaining its basic structure over time.”<sup>26</sup> Once more, marginalised groups, including women and youth bear the brunt of both day-to-day uncertainty and the kinds of structural discrimination that have existed for decades. Women’s secondary status has been systematically reinforced by the conflict and its effects. The same goes for youth, who despite being excluded from the political and military establishment are exploited to perpetrate violence on that establishment’s behalf.<sup>27</sup>

### **i. Gender, Youth and Violence in South Sudan’s Political Marketplace**

As other research on South Sudan has shown, GBV, including CSRV is often rooted in the structural violence that women and girls experience in their daily lives, particularly with respect to patrilineal, bridewealth based marriage practices, which commodify female bodies and treat them as property both at home and on the frontlines of the country’s many conflicts.<sup>28</sup> The act of paying for women ends up justifying their ill-treatment and entitles males to the sexual services of their female counterparts.<sup>29</sup> As past anthropological work amongst the western Dinka has shown, women’s resistance to the sexual demands of her husband, or “refusing the hut” are not taken seriously and can be (mis)construed as a woman trying to retain some modicum of propriety.<sup>30</sup> This can, and oftentimes does, contribute to societal perceptions of acts of GBV, such as marital rape, as a lesser abuse. As is well-known, bridewealth

can also act as an important driver for intimate partner violence, which as research done by civil society has shown, “can be viewed as an exercise of prerogative rather than an offence.”<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding the realities of protracted conflict and displacement, residence is still mostly patrilocal, with women marrying outside of their natal kin and settling with the family of their husbands.<sup>32</sup> Because women leave their own families in order to join the compound lineages of their husbands, males are oftentimes deemed as being worthier of support since they will care for their families long after their female counterparts have left. This generates a superiority dynamic that has been cemented over time.<sup>33</sup> It also secures women’s agency firmly to that of her husband and his family, rendering many married women dependent on support from their husband and his family— support that has been shown to not always be forthcoming.<sup>34</sup> For many women (and girls) there are few ways out.<sup>35</sup> Even after a woman’s husband has died, levirate or ghost marriage dictates that widowed women will be allocated to a male relative of her dead husband.<sup>36</sup>

Many of these issues have been exacerbated, rather than mitigated by the influence of violence and conflict in recent years. In an environment that has long denied women access to resources, women’s agency, including authority over their own bodies and lives, has become increasingly restricted by the material circumstances associated with South Sudan’s violent political marketplace.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, as de Waal argues, the

26 de Waal, A. (2014). When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: The brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan. *African Affairs* 113: 349.

27 See, Leonardi, C. (2007). ‘Liberation’ or Capture: Youth in between ‘hakuma’, and ‘home’ during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391–412.

28 See, Luedke, A., & Logan, H. (2018). That thing of human rights: Discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan’s current civil war. *Disasters* 42 (SI): S99-S118.

29 Huser, C. (2018). *Conflict and Gender Study – South Sudan – Addressing Root Causes Programme*. Accord.

30 Jok, J.M. (1999). Militarism, gender and reproductive suffering: The case of abortion in Western Dinka. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 69(2): 194-212.

31 SIHA Network. (2012). *Falling Through the Cracks: Reflections on Customary Law and the Imprisonment of Women in South Sudan*, p. 36.

32 See, Jok, J.M. (1999). Militarism, gender and reproductive suffering: The case of abortion in Western Dinka. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 69(2): 209.

33 See, SIHA Network. (2019). Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan.

34 SIHA Network. (2012). *Falling Through the Cracks: Reflections on Customary Law and the Imprisonment of Women in South Sudan*.

35 SIHA Network. (2012). *Falling Through the Cracks: Reflections on Customary Law and the Imprisonment of Women in South Sudan*.

36 Jok, J.M. (1999). Militarism, gender and reproductive suffering: The case of abortion in Western Dinka. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 69(2): 209; SIHA Network. (2012). *Falling Through the Cracks: Reflections on Customary Law and the Imprisonment of Women in South Sudan*.

37 Luedke, A., & Logan, H. (2018). That thing of human rights: Discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan’s current civil war. *Disasters* 42 (SI): S99-S118.

logic of the political marketplace reduces social connections and individuals to commodities.<sup>38</sup> This includes women and girls who continue to be treated as property that can be exchanged like any other good in local political economies, where acts of gendered and sexualised violence function much like any other spoil of war. It is, therefore, unsurprising that CSRV, including rape, gang rape, abduction and sexual slavery have all been chronic features of South Sudan's conflict since it started over six years ago.<sup>39</sup> This is nothing new either. Prior to the country's independence in 2011 women's bodies served as a form of compensation for participating in military operations. For instance, Pinaud shows how commanders used the payment of bridewealth to generate loyalties within the SPLA during the last civil war with north Sudan between 1983 and 2005.<sup>40</sup> As argued in a blog article,<sup>41</sup> the practices of using female bodies as rewards has continued into the current war. More specifically, the SPLA (now SSPDF) and other parties to the conflict, alongside loosely aligned militias, are said to have been given the license to loot and pillage with CSRV conceived of as an acceptable form of compensation for those involved in the country's violence and instability.<sup>42</sup> In the context of economic collapse where the maintenance of the political marketplace has become increasingly precarious, this sort of licensing becomes an essential resource that military and political elites can dispense to their subordinates.

Along those lines, the patrilocal, bridewealth-based marriage practices detailed above simply underpin the absence of authority that women and girls have over their own bodies, which has been intensified by the effects of the conflict. Bride-wealth has long acted as a justification for early

child, early and forced marriages. However, with the influence of conflict-induced economic crisis setting in as early as 2014, along with increasingly extreme levels of food insecurity, families and communities have become increasingly reliant on the income gained from marrying off their daughters. Throughout the course of the field research, key informants also spoke about women and girls being exposed to sexual exploitation and abuse in order to make ends meet, with an escalating number of females, including under-age girls apparently entering "lodges" (local brothels) to engage in sex work.<sup>43</sup> As pointed out by Justice Africa and other civil society actors in South Sudan, this kind of survival sex is a more institutionalised version of the mistreatment that women and girls experience as a result of norms and practices that reduce them to commodities whether on the battlefield, at home, or in their communities.<sup>44</sup>

Although conflict has triggered a degree of role change for women, this role change is probably better conceived of as an augmented level of responsibility. In the face of widespread physical insecurity, women have become almost entirely responsible for providing for their families with men made idle by displacement, sharp economic downturns and conflict. A group of women leaders living the Wau PoC site say: "*...nowadays things are changing. Women and men are working... it is because of the economic situation and the conflict.*"<sup>45</sup> While this has theoretically offered an important opportunity for South Sudanese women and girls to finally achieve much-needed economic independence, in reality, the need to support their families has caused females to engage in risky coping mechanisms, further binding their agency to their capacity to meet their

38 de Waal, A. (2014). When kleptocracy becomes insolvent: The brute causes of the civil war in South Sudan. *African Affairs* 113: 347–369.

39 Amnesty International. (2017). Do not remain silent: Survivors of sexual violence in South Sudan call for justice and reparations. Index Number: *AFR 65/6469/2017*. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr65/6469/2017/en/>.

40 Pinaud, C. (2014). South Sudan: Civil War, Predation and the Making of a Military Aristocracy. *African Affairs* 113(451): 192–211.

41 Luedke, A. (2019). The commodification of women and girls in South Sudan: Increased risks and continued violence. *LSE-CRP Blogs*, 4 April 2019. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/04/04/the-commodification-of-women-and-girls-in-south-sudan-increased-risks-and-continued-violence/>.

42 See, UN Human Rights Council. 2019. Report of the Commission of Human Rights in South Sudan." *A/HRC/40/69*.

43 Luedke, A. (2019). The commodification of women and girls in South Sudan: Increased risks and continued violence. *LSE-CRP Blogs*, 4 April 2019. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/04/04/the-commodification-of-women-and-girls-in-south-sudan-increased-risks-and-continued-violence/>.

44 Justice Africa. (2016). Violence begets violence: Justice and accountability for sexual and gender-based offences in South Sudan. *Draft Report by Justice Africa in partnership with CEPO and SSWLA*: 1-76.

45 FGD. (13 February 2019). Women Leaders. *Wau PoC Site*.

basic needs.<sup>46</sup> Since the necessity for women to engage in risky coping mechanisms has regularly been based on the potential insecurities faced by their male counterparts, the permissibility of GBV compared to other abuses is in many ways continuously reinforced.

With women taking on the lion's share of the burden for providing for their households, males are presumed to have relinquished their traditional responsibilities as providers and protectors, a shift in masculine identity that has been said to be acute.<sup>47</sup> The targeting of livelihoods and ensuing displacement brought about by the conflict has caused many men to become dependent on external aid or the assistance of their relatives in order to sustain themselves and their families. As has been documented in other research on South Sudan, this has contributed to feelings of emasculation amongst male populations who can no longer live up to their conventional gender roles.<sup>48</sup> Care duties, including cooking, cleaning and procuring food are activities traditionally reserved for women and men chance being chastised for being feminine for carrying out the tasks associated with their wives. Yet, this means that the burden on women as breadwinners is even larger.<sup>49</sup> The result has apparently given rise to an increase in conflict between men and women at the household level. Participants attributed this to men's declining ability to provide for their families and women's enhanced desire for increased autonomy. As one female chief noted: *"if a woman sees that the man cannot take care, she asks for a divorce...the cases are increasing."*<sup>50</sup> They also attributed it to external assistance being directed towards women and girls, which has merely aggravated the feelings of idleness and exclusion amongst males. Another chief that was part of the same focus group

discussion states how: *"...women are weak and not resilient. When humanitarian organisations come in...and what they do is priority registration for women...men are being left behind and this happens all the time."* The powerlessness that can result can, and seemingly has, led some men to channel their frustrations through violence both in inter-personal relations, as well as externally as they try and re-establish control and rectify their loss of identity through violence, including GBV.<sup>51</sup>

Then there are the other social changes that have evolved out of the decades of conflict in the country, including the erosion of more conventional forms of moral authority. For many of the participants interviewed in the research, these changes were ascribed to the spread of liberal human rights principles in the post-CPA and post-independence periods by external actors, particularly those rights which allowed for increased choice amongst marginalised groups, such as women and juveniles.<sup>52</sup> As earlier research in South Sudan has highlighted, concepts of human rights, especially the rights of women and children, have developed a negative association and are seen as foreign and inherently antithetical to local customs on the ground.<sup>53</sup> This is particularly accurate for older generations for whom *"human rights and absolute freedom"*<sup>54</sup> were to blame for transgressions of gender and age-specific expectations. Those who were viewed as being in breach of traditional norms were identified as having disgraced the community.<sup>55</sup> To avoid this, disciplinary action was, and still is, sometimes viewed as necessary for getting young men and women to comply with their conventional gender and age-related roles.<sup>56</sup> Chiefs in one of the Juba PoC sites talked about how: *"after independence, they [the government]...haven't set and defined 'freedom.' They just set freedom where you do*

46 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan.*

47 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). Congestion in the Malakal Protection of Civilian (POC) Site, South Sudan. *A Report by Danish Refugee Council.*

48 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). Congestion in the Malakal Protection of Civilian (POC) Site, South Sudan. *A Report by Danish Refugee Council*; see also, Justice Africa. (2016). Violence begets violence: Justice and accountability for sexual and gender-based offences in South Sudan. *Draft Report by Justice Africa in partnership with CEPO and SSWLA: 1-76.*

49 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan.*

50 FGD. (13 February 2019). Chiefs. *Wau Town, South Sudan.*

51 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan.*

52 See, Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks No. 66.*

53 Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks No. 66.*

54 FGD. (13 February 2019). Chiefs. *Wau Town, South Sudan.*

55 See, Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks No. 66.*

56 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan.*

*what you want to, but they should have defined it. Now it is open and a child can drink and smoke and go to lodges [brothels].*<sup>57</sup> Liberal human rights frameworks were considered to be an impediment to meting out punishments geared not only at controlling individual behavior, but also at preventing violence. This is an aspect of custom that is both against and in alignment to the more universal goals of conflict mitigation and violence reduction, including GBV. The same group of chiefs: *“why do white people pretend they don’t have culture? The white man will tell you that it is the right of a woman to sleep with a man if she wants...for us, our culture doesn’t say that and if we leave it the way the white man wants then people will fight...our shelters are burned.”*<sup>58</sup>

Importantly, for the purposes of this research paper, it is not just women and girls who are discriminated against and reduced to transactions in South Sudan’s political marketplace.<sup>59</sup> Male youth are valued almost solely for the role that they play in violence and defense, reducing their worth to the pursuit of factional interests that are often not their own. Much like women, they fall outside of political structures, which in addition to being almost squarely male, continue to dominate opportunities for upward mobility.<sup>60</sup> They also fall outside community structures that continue to be concerned with regulating the behavior of young people.<sup>61</sup> As Westendorf makes apparent in her analysis of female participation in the 2005 CPA, this exclusion is not an accident but an intentional strategy that acts to fortify existing power structures that restrict the potential for more inclusive systems encompassing the interests of marginalised groups.<sup>62</sup> Again, this is nothing new. As she puts forth, “the conflicts among South Sudanese that animated the Second Sudanese

war, the marginalisation of certain groups... from state structures continued to animate the interactions between groups and the society and the new state of South Sudan after the war.”<sup>63</sup> It should be noted that the position of female youth in those structures is even more precarious. Unlike their male counterparts, female youth are frequently denied the chance to be youth altogether. Although connoting a social group, the term “youth” in South Sudan signifies a category that has come to be understood as being almost entirely male.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, for girls, the division between childhood and adulthood is more so defined by marriage,<sup>65</sup> with care duties and child, early and forced marriages preventing many female youth the opportunity to experience the period of actually being “youth.”

As it is in many parts of the world, marriage and child rearing are often the dividing line between youthhood and adulthood. Although child, early and forced marriages make marriage a sad but premature reality for females, for males it is much different. Economic decline connected to the conflict, coupled with the aforementioned targeting of livelihoods during warring, including the extensive raiding of livestock has left many young males without the resources that they need to marry – something that is true for both rural and urban youth.<sup>66</sup> As alluded to in the introduction, lacking the prospect of marriage and unable to reach ideals of both responsible adulthood and masculinity, some male youths have opted to join militias or gangs, expressing themselves through violence and vigilantism. Participating in violence, whether in the form of criminality as is the case with gangs, or in raiding or revenge attacks as is the case with rural militias, can be a way for youth to access resources, while also reducing their

57 FGD. (28 May 2019). Chiefs. *Juba PoC Site, South Sudan.*

58 FGD. (28 May 2019). Chiefs. *Juba PoC Site, South Sudan.*

59 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan.*

60 See, Leonardi, C. (2007). ‘Liberation’ or Capture: Youth in between ‘hakuma’, and ‘home’ during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391–412.

61 See, Leonardi, C. (2007). ‘Liberation’ or Capture: Youth in between ‘hakuma’, and ‘home’ during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391–412.

62 Westendorf, J.K. (2018). Peace negotiations in the political marketplace: The implications of women’s exclusion in the Sudan-South Sudan peace process. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72(5): 433-454.

63 Westendorf, J.K. (2018). Peace negotiations in the political marketplace: The implications of women’s exclusion in the Sudan-South Sudan peace process. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72(5): 433-454.

64 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State.*

65 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State.*

66 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State.*

dependency on community structures, such as elders for things like marriage, especially as these community structures exclude them.<sup>67</sup>

While many of the accounts of South Sudan have painted a picture of a predatory state that has contributed to fractionalisation and the almost complete collapse of order on the ground,<sup>68</sup> as other research has shown, the neo-patrimonial position of elite-driven politics is reductionist, denying agency to local actors who can and do find ways to both navigate, resist and usurp both formal and informal systems that are exclusionary and exploitative.<sup>69</sup> The young men (and sometimes women) who comprise militias and gangs are no different. While their actions are, at times, driven by factors connected to elite politics, their violent practices, organisation and every-day functioning is not limited to the diktats of customary or statutory leaders and represents both an adherence and opposition to the control that customary chiefs and political elites have tried to exert over them for years. As reflected in past scholarship on South Sudan, for the largely male youth who make up the basis of community-embedded armed groups, this has manifested itself in continued support to the norms associated with family and home life,<sup>70</sup> as well as a desire to establish an identity of their own.<sup>71</sup> Young men, in particular, are frustrated not only with the failure of elites to share the spoils of war they so often perpetrate on their behalf, but also with the wider failure of the political and military establishment to deliver on the dividends connected to successive, but often failed attempts at peace and state making.<sup>72</sup>

#### IV. Case Study 1. Rural Militias

Rural militias are an apt illustration of exactly these dynamics. Ever since the war with the Khartoum government in the north in the 1980s and 1990s, the number of southern militias proliferated rapidly, which was particularly accurate of the period following the dissolution of the SPLA in 1991. Following Machar's split with the late SPLA founder, John Garang, Nuer cattle camp youth were mobilised under the auspices of the 'White Army' to attack Bor Town slaughtering Dinka populations in what became one of the most emblematic events of intra-South violence in the war between 1983 and 2005. More than that, the incident precipitated the reification of inter and intra ethnic divisions in the south. It also gave rise to the more overt militarisation of loosely organised groups of agro-pastoralist youth who had long identified on the basis of clan and sub-clan affiliation rather than ethnicity *as such*. In juxtaposition to the White Army, the Dinka-based *titweng* or *gelweng* was established to defend against Nuer attacks on community assets, including livestock<sup>73</sup> and support military operations. While different than the sort of cohesive militia units that might come to mind, characterised, instead, by constantly shifting constellations of actors and objectives, since the 1990s both groups have come to play important roles in various conflicts, at times fighting alongside more formal forces. The *gelweng*, for instance, are said to have participated in the 2015 government offensive against Panyjjar in southern Unity State, raiding cattle to take back to Yirol in Lakes State. The White Army, or what have come to be mostly known as the *gojam* in southern Unity State have also been drawn into the conflict with the government and their allied militias, which has merely compounded the "rapid polarisation and militarisation...ethnic identities" that started after 1991.<sup>74</sup>

67 See, Leonardi, C. (2007). 'Liberation' or Capture: Youth in between 'hakuma', and 'home' during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391–412; SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan*.

68 Kindersley, N. (2019). Rule of whose law? The geography of authority in Juba, South Sudan. *J. of Modern African Studies* 57(1): 61-83.

69 Kindersley, N. (2019). Rule of whose law? The geography of authority in Juba, South Sudan. *J. of Modern African Studies* 57(1): 61-83.

70 Leonardi, C. (2007). 'Liberation' or Capture: Youth in between 'hakuma', and 'home' during Civil War and Its Aftermath in Southern Sudan. *African Affairs* 106(424): 391–412.

71 See, SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan*.

72 See, Sommers, M. and Schwartz, S. (2011). Dowry and division: Youth and state building in South Sudan. USIP Special Report 295.

73 Young, J. (2016). Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan's Civil War. *HSBA Working Paper* 41.

74 Hutchinson, S.E. (2000). Nuer ethnicity militarized. *Anthropology Today*: p. 8

In Unity State, the genesis of the White Army have been different than in the eastern Nuerlands in places like Akobo.<sup>75</sup> Much like their counterparts in areas of Jonglei and Upper Nile States, however, they too have developed through different stages of conflict, sometimes demonstrating considerable operational mobility in both national and localised conflicts and other times retreating back to everyday life in the cattle camps.<sup>76</sup> In the context of the conflict that started in December 2013, both seem to have been motivated at one level to avenge for the killings of their Nuer comrades in Juba when fighting initially broke out in the capital city.<sup>77</sup> On another level, they seem driven to protect and defend their clan affiliates much more locally from encroachment by other groups – an imperative for survival. That being said, for those in Unity State their position is oftentimes much more defensive, fending off advances from the SPLA (now SSPDF) and government-supported groups of armed youth. This could, in part, account for why the western Nuer in Unity State eventually re-designated themselves the ‘*gojam*’, which was a nickname for a former bodyguard in the SPLA,<sup>78</sup> but has also been said to signify a powerful gun that does not jam in fighting, and more broadly, a new iteration of the White Army whose purpose is to contend with the central government in Juba after the end of 2013. As a group of *gojam* members remarked: “*we are a group who are defending and we are the cattle keepers and we are civilian youth...we don’t have uniform...we have guns...choosing the meaning of ‘gojam’ it is a type of AK-47, which is very strong...previous generation was white*

*army, now we are gojam.*”<sup>79</sup> At the start of the war, they mobilised themselves to fight government forces, successfully defeating what was left of them in Bentiu and Leer in 2014.<sup>80</sup> They were also one of the last bastions of defense in Panyjar in the southern-most part of Unity State in 2015 and have arguably been largely responsible for the area remaining under the firm territorial control of the SPLA-IO since then (although the extreme topographic isolation of the area has also assisted).<sup>81</sup> Even so, they never fully integrated into the armed opposition. As revealed through research undertaken by Justice Africa in 2016, the *gojam* felt resentment towards the formal forces of the SPLA-IO who never helped them recover cattle stolen in the course of the government offensive that swept through the area in 2015, particularly those that were raided by SPLA supported elements of the *gelweng* in neighbouring Lakes State.<sup>82</sup>

The *gelweng* have long supported the military components of the SPLA, including through the provision of cattle to help sustain the more formal forces.<sup>83</sup> By and large, they were a response to the insecurity faced by Nuer ethnic militias, but they quickly turned into something much closer to a proxy force as the SPLA under Garang’s leadership forced pastoralist youth to abandon age-set systems.<sup>84</sup> After the end of the previous civil war in 2005, some *gelweng* were assimilated into the civilian administration and at some point set up as community police.<sup>85</sup> Select members have also served as a recruitment base into more specialised ethnic forces, such as the Döt

75 See, Justice Africa. (2018). ‘They left us with spears and came back with guns’: Armed youth, cattle raiding and community (in) security in Southern Unity State, South Sudan. *A Report by Justice Africa and the Assistance Mission for Africa*: 1-34.

76 See, Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

77 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

78 Craze, J., Tubiana, J., & Gramizzi, C. (2016). A State of Disunity: Conflict Dynamics in Unity State, South Sudan, 2013-15. *Small Arms Survey*.

79 FGD. (13 May 2019). Gojam. Panyjar, South Sudan.

80 Craze, J., Tubiana, J., & Gramizzi, C. (2016). A State of Disunity: Conflict Dynamics in Unity State, South Sudan, 2013-15. *Small Arms Survey*.

81 See, Justice Africa. (2018). ‘They left us with spears and came back with guns’: Armed youth, cattle raiding and community (in) security in Southern Unity State, South Sudan. *A Report by Justice Africa and the Assistance Mission for Africa*: 1-34.

82 Justice Africa. (2018). ‘They left us with spears and came back with guns’: Armed youth, cattle raiding and community (in)security in Southern Unity State, South Sudan. *A Report by Justice Africa and the Assistance Mission for Africa*: 1-34.

83 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

84 Pendle, N. (2015). “They are now community police”: Negotiating the boundaries and nature of the Government in South Sudan through the identity of militarized cattle keepers. *Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22(3): 410-434.

85 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

ku Beny, which according to other research, has consolidated the role of Dinka pastoralists in the actual security services.<sup>86</sup> Yet, for the most part the *gelweng* do not fall under the direct leadership of a military commander, at least on a day-to-day basis where they continue to correspond to the typical “cattle guard.”<sup>87</sup> In fact, in interviews members would ordinarily refer to themselves variously as the “eyes of the community” connoting the fact that they remained outside the reach of the state apparatus. A group of *gelweng* in Yirol: “[w]e are the ones who are responsible for protecting cattle in the cattle camp.”<sup>88</sup> Another group of *gelweng*: “the reason we are called *gelweng*, we used to stay far from the government, so we are like government and we make security on our side where there is no side and now you will protect your own cows. Everyone likes cows and people come and pick.”<sup>89</sup> As Pendle makes clear through her research, as ‘protectors’ or ‘guardians’ of the cattle, they have received investments from elites who have kept their wealth in the form of cattle herds in South Sudan’s remote cattle camps.<sup>90</sup> Defense of these herds has informed an important element of their roles in the post-CPA period.<sup>91</sup> However, it does not stop there. As touched upon already, similar to the *gogam*, the *gelweng* have been mobilised as proxies in both offensive and defensive operations after 2013, and arguably much more so than the *gojam*. In Lakes State, as well as elsewhere in the country, including the Bhar-el Ghazal region, they have been supported by the SPLA then SSPDF to conduct de facto military campaigns against the opposition and surrounding communities, as has been the case in the Jur River area around Wau.

Even with these differences, the two groups display a number of similarities. Just as it was in the 1990s, elites on either side of the divide within the SPLA since 2013 have used violence and patronage as a way to secure the allegiances of pastoralist youth in both Dinka and Nuer areas. Promises of access to resources has been used as a basis for mobilising youth, yet, for that same reason, their loyalties remain incredibly fluid with their rationale for violence being one of material reward and necessity, rather than political affiliation.<sup>92</sup> To the extent that the armed youth who comprise groups, such as the *gojam* or *gelweng* express any sense of loyalty, it is oftentimes in relation to protecting their cattle and their community where allegiance is demonstrated with respect to the ‘county’ at best, as opposed to the country. As other research has shown, pastoralist youth have long been marginalised from the formal aspects of the ‘state.’<sup>93</sup> During fieldwork it was clear that the government extracted from pastoralist communities in different ways, whether through exacting taxes, or through mobilising them to protect the peripheries in highly contested borderlands, including the area between Panyjjar and Yirol East. The youth who participate in the likes of the *gojam* and the *gelweng* rarely resemble more formal militias outside of fighting and have little in the way of consistent sense of commitment to the battles being fought by elites both at the national and the state level.<sup>94</sup>

For elites who can exploit local grievances and ensure steady access to livestock, as well as arms and ammunition, those elites will be able to temporarily bid for their loyalty.<sup>95</sup> However, again, this is fleeting and it is this very dynamic

86 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

87 Pendle, N. (2015). “They are now community police”: Negotiating the boundaries and nature of the Government in South Sudan through the identity of militarized cattle keepers. *Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22(3): 410-434.

88 FGD. (2 Mach 2019). *Gelweng. Yirol, South Sudan.*

89 FGD. (3 March 2019). *Gelweng. Yirol, South Sudan.*

90 Pendle, N. (2015). “They are now community police”: Negotiating the boundaries and nature of the Government in South Sudan through the identity of militarized cattle keepers. *Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22(3): 410-434.

91 Pendle, N. (2015). “They are now community police”: Negotiating the boundaries and nature of the Government in South Sudan through the identity of militarized cattle keepers. *Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22(3): 410-434.

92 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

93 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

94 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2).

95 Wild, H., Jok, M.J. and Patel, R. (2018). The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3(2); Young, J. (2016). Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan’s Civil War. *HSBA Working Paper* 41.



that makes rural armed male youth such a threat to the formal state. Armed by the government or other parties to the conflict as wars have evolved in South Sudan, control over these groups remains minimal at best. This reality has been apparent time and again as militaries on either side of the conflict have tried to subsequently disarm those who they armed in the first instance, contributing to violent confrontations. Palpable demonstrations of this took place shortly after the CPA was signed in 2005 and marked the beginning of a series of violent disarmament campaigns that only acted to inflame intra-South grievances and violence, but also saw the violent resistance of armed youth to taking away one of the few means they have for both protection and accessing resources. Since the war started at the end of 2013, both the SPLA, now SSPDF, and the SPLA-IO have tried often unsuccessfully to disarm their allied youth militias and exert control over them. As articulated in the preceding section, even if community-embedded armed groups, such as the *gogam* and *gelweng* have been instrumentalised by elites, they are not passive subjects of patronage. They are agents whose participation in violence and violent repertoires, including GBV, as well as interactions can be viewed as part of an effort to reduce their reliance on structures that have both exploited and excluded them.

During periods of mobilisation both the *gojam* and the *gelweng* approximate something of an informal and ad hoc military or army with a relatively flat hierarchal structure,<sup>96</sup> which has not always made either particularly amenable to showing restraint on the battlefield, at least outside of the local norms that govern behaviour and violence. Most of the time they look akin to a loosely configured group of armed male youth who share both generational and location-specific traits, with life revolving around cattle-keeping.<sup>97</sup> A group of *gojam* says how: “[o]ur military unit is called *gojam* and led by leaders in various *Payams*.

*We are protecting our cattle from the enemy.*”<sup>98</sup> Another group of *gojam*: “we are untrained armed youth...we have a responsibility to protect cows and the community. We are local defense.”<sup>99</sup> Herein lies one of the reasons for their otherwise loose affiliations and lack of fealty to elites. As Pendle has underlined, the loyalties of many male youth remain firmly with the groups that they share cattle camps with and the communities where they reside.<sup>100</sup> They are socialised and initiated into their roles as community defenders at a young age.<sup>101</sup> It is during this period in which the gendered roles of men and women are learned. For the most part, women’s worth in the cattle camp is equated with the value that they can command in terms of bridewealth and the roles that they play as wives and child bearers. Conversely, but not all that dissimilar, men’s worth is intrinsically linked to community defense and their ability to carry out violence in support of their communities. These gender norms are strictly reinforced. The very idea of women participating in the *gojam* or *gelweng* as fighters was scoffed at during research. Even where participants recognised the role that women could play in both reconnaissance missions and in providing support, the question would often be met with retorts, including: “...they don’t go on cattle raids. They don’t know how to run,”<sup>102</sup> “they don’t fight... they bring water.”<sup>103</sup>

Life in the cattle camps where members of the *gojam* and *gelweng* reside violently buttresses conventional gendered roles, as well as the patriarchal norms and practices that support them. Women’s rights are not conceived of as something that can be legitimately claimed but were viewed instead as the obligations that females held to their households and the broader cattle camp in terms of gathering and preparing food, fetching water, collecting dung, milking cattle and cleaning. Although GBV inside cattle camps is customarily prohibited, there are cases that do occur, which are resolved by traditional chiefs. As is well-known, customary court

96 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

97 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

98 FGD. (14 May 2019). *Gojam. Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

99 FGD. (12 May 2019). *Gojam. Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

100 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

101 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

102 FGD. (13 May 2019). *Gojam. Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

103 FGD. (3 March 2019). *Gelweng. Yirrol, South Sudan*.

decisions rarely reflect the individual needs and desires of survivors and are oftentimes aimed at restoring the social equilibrium in a system that is primarily based on the payment of bridewealth (and, as such, the commodification of women and girls). Along those lines, the importance of bridewealth economies lies at the heart of how much of how communities' function and operate. The exchange of livestock for marriage not only binds families into compound lineages, but also marks an important transition into adulthood for pastoralist youth who rely on cattle to get married and have children. Citing the same group of *gojam* members above: *"our food security is our cows and this is what brings about children... We are happy to have cows. Each and everyone is qualified to get married and take wives and make children."*<sup>104</sup> Once more, the payment of bridewealth not only commodifies women and girls, but also acts as an important reason for their abuse. *"your wife, you paid for her and if she is not performing, then you have the right to beat her because you paid a lot of resources... we cant get our cows back and that is why you keep beating until she listens."*<sup>105</sup> This creates cycles of violence for female populations who are oftentimes subjected to child, early and forced marriages, domestic abuse and marital rape throughout the course of their lifetime. It also engenders cycles of violence in communities where attacks against women are viewed as an assault on a family's livelihoods. Indeed, it is exactly because GBV represents an affront to familial and communal livelihoods that makes rape and other related offenses such effective weapons on South Sudan's frontlines. However, as already referenced in relation to the functioning of the country's political marketplace, it also further reduces women and girls to transactions.

Both Dinka and Nuer pastoralists possess codes of conduct, or rules of warfare that are meant to apply during both localised and national conflicts,

including protections for vulnerable groups, such as women.<sup>106</sup> As has been made clear in previous research, violence against women was not only forbidden, but was seen as morally reprehensible and could result in death or other ill-fortune, conceived of as a provocation to God.<sup>107</sup> Both members of the *gojam* and the *gelweng* made reference to these codes of conducts throughout the course of the research, however, they also recognised that violence in the distant peripheries where most fighting takes place, is unregulated. As one group of *gojam* stated in reference to acts of rape committed in the border areas between Unity and Lakes States: *"[t]hat one is a different territory... that is a minor thing to be reported. No one will know what you did."*<sup>108</sup> In other research, where any restraint has been shown, this has evidently been in relation to rape as opposed to the abduction and taking of wives.<sup>109</sup> A member of the *gelweng*: *"when you don't have anything and you are hungry, you may abduct someone so you can get something from her [assumed to mean sex]."*<sup>110</sup> This is not necessarily unexpected. As mentioned in the above section, commanders and elites responsible for mobilising groups of armed youth in the national conflict have used the promises of taking wives as an incentive for participating in fighting.<sup>111</sup> This has normalised abduction, sexual slavery and other acts of CSRV and the reduction of women and girls to transactions in South Sudan's political marketplace. As mentioned in another section, the exchange of women and girls whether at home or the frontlines, has also become an increasingly important resource that can be provided to pastoralists in exchange for their participation in fighting.

104 FGD. (12 May 2019). Gojam. *Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

105 FGD. (13 May 2019). Gojam. *Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

106 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*; Hutchinson, S.E. (2000). Nuer ethnicity militarized. *Anthropology Today*: 6-13.

107 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*; Hutchinson, S.E. (2000). Nuer ethnicity militarized. *Anthropology Today*: 6-13.

108 FGD. (13 May 2019). Gojam. *Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

109 Pendle, N. (2018). Chapter 5. Community-embedded armed groups. In ICRC *The roots of restraint in War*.

110 FGD. (5 March 2019). Gelweng. *Yirol, South Sudan*.

111 UN Human Rights Council. 2019. Report of the Commission of Human Rights in South Sudan." *A/HRC/40/69*.

## V. Case Study 2. Urban Gangs

Urban gangs are similar in many respects to the rural militias described here and are born out of the same problems of fractionalisation, as well as state and economic disorder. As other research on South Sudan has pointed out, many of these gangs can be understood as part of the broader shifts that have occurred in the context of failed state and nation building projects and the collapse of community structures.<sup>112</sup> The gangs or what are colloquially referred to as “nigga groups” in many ways comprise a social and economic community akin to a cattle camp, and like both the *gojam* or the *gelweng*, the groups provide members with a sense of belonging and empowerment that is often inculcated through adolescence and youth.<sup>113</sup> It should be noted that the term “nigga” does not have the same racialised connotations as does in the West, but as another report asserted, simply designates a social group that comes together with their own set of values and seeks to connect to a culture outside of South Sudan – that culture regularly being connected to hip hop in North America.<sup>114</sup> This is reflected in some of the gang names, as well as the individual names that members take on, which tend to make reference to hip hop icons. Indeed, the members rarely see themselves as ‘niggas,’ which for the most part marks societal views of these groups as having adopted styles of dress, attitudes and musical tastes that go against the grain of conventional, local values.<sup>115</sup> Therein lies one of the main commonalities between the groups. That is, the fact that they are viewed derogatorily as a threat to traditional norms.<sup>116</sup> This is not necessarily because the gangs are comprised of criminals. While some groups are criminal, targeting the urban poor, including internally displaced persons in places like the PoC sites,

this is not true across the board.<sup>117</sup>

Again, these groups are nothing new to South Sudan and had become a growing menace in a number of urban centres in the post-CPA and post-independence periods.<sup>118</sup> Youth returning to South Sudan after 2005 were coming back from places like Khartoum and Cairo and other peri-urban environments, such as the large refugee camps in Kenya where they were exposed to different cultures, including hip hop culture.<sup>119</sup> The groups did not all form within South Sudan and had been shaped by refugee experiences in the diaspora where South Sudanese youth would come together to network, particularly in Khartoum and Cairo. This is not to say that all youth gangs consist of returnees,<sup>120</sup> yet it is really after 2005 that gangs had been a significant source of contention. As discussed in another section, the justice system was seen as being too sympathetic to members of the gangs, which was ascribed to the proliferation of liberal human rights frameworks by the international actors who streamed into South Sudan following the 2005 CPA.<sup>121</sup> At the same time, like rural militias, the groups were also said to be implicated with political, business and security elites – an accusation that continues to be lodged with respect to their relationship to the security forces in some locations. After a crackdown on gangs in 2009, authorities had reportedly found that many members were receiving arms from officials.<sup>122</sup> Today, the same sort of dynamic has been alleged to occur in Wau Town, with the supposed provision of protection to the groups in exchange for remuneration. Much in the same way that cattle camp youth are open to manipulation by politicians, so too are urban youth and youth gangs who can be coopted by more powerful actors pursuing their own factional interests.

112 LSE. (2010). *Southern Sudan at odds with itself: Dynamics of conflict and predicaments of peace*.

113 See, Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State*.

114 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State*.

115 Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). *Local justice in Southern Sudan. Peaceworks No. 66*.

116 Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). *Local justice in Southern Sudan. Peaceworks No. 66*; Sommers, M. and Schwartz, S. (2011). *Dowry and division: Youth and state building in South Sudan. USIP Special Report 295*.

117 McCrone, F. (2016). *Justice displaced: Field notes on criminality and insecurity in South Sudan's UN Protection of Civilian Sites*. A report by Justice Africa written and compiled by Flora McCrone.

118 Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). *Local justice in Southern Sudan. Peaceworks No. 66*.

119 See, Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State*.

120 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). *Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State*.

121 See, Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). *Local justice in Southern Sudan. Peaceworks No. 66*.

122 Sommers, M. and Schwartz, S. (2011). *Dowry and division: Youth and state building in South Sudan. USIP Special Report 295*.

Even so, the reasons that many youths give for joining gangs rarely have anything to do with connections to political and military elites. Akin to the gogam and the *gelweng*, when these affiliations materialise, it seems more so to be a matter of opportunity, with loyalties lying with their peers and the sense of community that they derive from being in the group. This is one of the defining features of the gangs interviewed in both Wau and Juba. Unlike militias, gangs seemingly organise across axes of conflict, including ethnic and clan lines. In the Juba PoC sites, for example, the groups often represented different Nuer clans who in the national conflict have been marred in violent competition. They also apparently collaborate with their counterparts outside the PoC sites who come from different ethnic groups altogether. One of the gangs interviewed in the Juba PoC sites indicated that when the civil war broke out in December 2013, Dinka members had rescued Nuer members and taken them to the UNMISS base for protection. Comparable dynamics were apparent in Wau where Fertit, Dinka and Luo would all apparently organise under the umbrella of a single gang. Although there is a certain territoriality to the way that the groups mobilise. Participants from gangs, as well as other key informants understood this mixed organisation on the basis that members identified primarily as “youth” as opposed to part of the conflict that has otherwise seen their lives upended. As one former member explained: “... *most of them are mixed. They are not having something like tribalism for them the important thing is the group. The group is best.*”<sup>123</sup> A current member says that the reason has to do with mixing with other ethnic groups: “*for us [it is] to introduce ourselves to other ethnic groups and try and fight tribalism and this is this way, but we are all under the umbrella of the group.*”<sup>124</sup>

An enhanced sense of responsibility was another key reason for engaging in gangs. A member of one of the groups interviewed in Wau Town said that the group had started in 2012 as a way to feel pride and responsibility: “*for me it is about responsibility...we have portfolios in the group like chairperson and secretary and treasurer and*

*this is how I become a responsible man and this is a good thing that helps us take responsibility in our future life.*”<sup>125</sup> This desire for increased responsibility has its basis in the structure of most of the groups and is an important part of how members try to achieve ideals of responsible adulthood through non-traditional means. Even where the groups differed, most of those interviewed across both Wau Town and the Juba PoC sites retained a boss at the top in a mob-like structure, a deputy boss and different ministers who carried out functions that corresponded to other formal administrations. The ‘Minister of Defense,’ for instance, was said to be responsible for negotiating with competing groups, the ‘Minister of Finance’ would take care of the fiscal affairs of the group and so on. Many members would be required to pay a membership fee ordinarily in the form of a monthly contribution that tended to range between 2,000 and 3,000 South Sudanese Pounds, equivalent to seven to 10 US Dollars at the time of the research in 2019. The purpose of these funds ranged from assisting other members in paying for school fees, as well as helping both male and female members in the case of an unwanted pregnancy by paying compensation to the girl’s family. A point should be made along these lines. Although in some cases, unwanted pregnancies were the result of negligence, in other cases, male gang members wanting to get married but lacking the economic resources to do so, viewed pregnancy as a way to hold onto their girlfriends. From a sexual and reproductive health perspective, this means that increasing access to contraception is not always the answer, which may lie more so in understanding youth struggles and desires.

The contributions were also used to finance the parties that groups hold, which are one of their chief activities and a way for gangs to differentiate themselves from other groups, as well as a form of entertainment and networking. During these parties, members are said to dress up to demonstrate the unique character of their particular group and in some instances perform ‘dances’ as a way to distinguish themselves from the other groups in attendance. The parties were

123 KII. (18 February 2019). Former Gang Member. Wau Town.

124 FGD. (15 February 2019). Gang Members. Wau Town.

125 FGD. (15 February 2019). Gang Members. Wau Town.

also a way for male members to interact with females, which was another strong rationale for joining groups. One member in Wau Town: *“when I came to Wau, I was introduced to the group and I saw what they are doing. One of the main things that makes me want to join is the ladies. It enables me to talk to them.”*<sup>126</sup> This was reflected in other research on youth in Rubkona, Unity State where parties in the Bentiu PoC site were said to be a way for groups to connect with girls.<sup>127</sup> Yet, it is also indicative of the ways in which gang activity both contravenes and resists the strict traditionalism of South Sudanese society, which for the most part regulates sex and relationships outside of marriage. At the same time, these parties are also sites of conflict with other groups, and as such, have been said to be sites of violence, including purported cases of GBV. And while most groups did have some level of regulations against the use of sexual violence, these rules were predominantly oriented inwards to the treatment of female members, opening up the possible use of GBV to females associated with different groups.

This is perhaps one of the starker contrasts with rural militias in that gangs incorporate some degree of female membership. The number of girls joining groups was actually said to be on the rise with some gangs creating sub-groups for their female counterparts, which is likely partly attributable to the greater need to associate within peer groups to overcome the trauma of war. As a group of female gang members in one of the Juba PoC sites remarked: *“it is good for us to be members of Risk Gang Group. It helps us share ideas and challenges. Life in the PoC is very hard. You cannot live a happy life if you live alone. It is better to associate...and be able to share your problems.”*<sup>128</sup> While much assistance is targeted towards female populations, this aid can sometimes ignore the needs of adolescent females.<sup>129</sup> For some of the female gang members interviewed, they felt that they were not seen, compounding feelings of distress. The same group of female members responded as

follows when asked about their interaction with humanitarian partners: *“[we don’t have] much interaction with them. They see us [girls] like shadows. If we are trained, we will be able to avoid some of the bad things happening here in the PoC.”*<sup>130</sup>

Punishment for acts of GBV for the groups ranged from a warning to immediate dismissal. While there are codes of conduct and rules for some groups, some of which apparently encompass prohibitions on violence, based on the initial findings, these do not seem to be explicit on GBV. At the same time, there have been accounts of gang rape perpetrated at some of the parties and male members engaging in verbal and sometimes physical harassment of girls outside the group, especially those associated with rival gangs.<sup>131</sup> Outside of the use or potential use of GBV by members of gangs, the structures of the gangs often reiterated the same gender norms that discriminate against women and girls in South Sudanese society. This is in spite of the fact that the ability of groups to organise across lines of conflict represents a form of resistance to the parochialism in South Sudan. During the parties, girls are often made to cook and clean and invite other females, which has changed little with their growing numbers – *“...their responsibility is to cook when there is a party...now their numbers of increased...[but] they are still cooking and doing the same things even though they have larger numbers,”*<sup>132</sup> said one gang member. Outside of parties, female members are expected to provide male members with moral support. Although male members are encouraged to date outside the gang, in some of the cases heard during the research, girls’ ability to date outside the gang was restricted and could even result in removal. As McCrone highlighted in her reflections on gang violence in the PoC sites, “[t]hrough the customary norms around marriage and marital sex were apparently less important to ‘nigga’ team members, the tendency towards treating women as a commodity prevailed.”<sup>133</sup>

126 KII. (16 February 2019). Gang Member. *Wau Town*.

127 Danish Refugee Council. (2017). Dynamics of youth and violence: Findings from Rubkona County, Unity State.

128 FGD. (31 May 2019). Gang Members. *Juba PoC*.

129 Plan International. (2018). *Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from South Sudan*.

130 FGD. (31 May 2019). Gang Members. *Juba PoC*.

131 See also, Sommers, M. and Schwartz, S. (2011). Dowry and division: Youth and state building in South Sudan. *USIP Special Report 295*.

132 FGD. (15 February 2019). Gang Members. *Wau Town*.

133 McCrone, F. (2016). *Justice displaced: Field notes on criminality and insecurity in South Sudan’s UN Protection of Civilian Sites*. A report by Justice Africa written and compiled by Flora McCrone, p. 55.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

With that, the ways in which both rural militias and urban gangs interpret and regulate gender and GBV, as well as in some cases, perpetrate it, seem to mostly reinforce traditional gender roles that equate women with wives and child-bearers and treat them as commodities. Whether in the endemic levels of gendered and sexualised violence and the inequalities that underscore such violence, or in the propensity of male youth to engage in crime in urban centres or localised conflicts in rural settings, there needs to be a more attention to the ways in which informal, non-state forms of public authority perpetuate structures of violence and discrimination.<sup>134</sup> As other research on South Sudan has already put forth, interventions that want to promote gender equality and an end to GBV need to be cognizant of the realities of patrilineal bridewealth-based marriage practices that inform the functioning of local political economies.<sup>135</sup> Without this, there is a considerable risk of a backlash against the rights that external actors are trying to encourage in the first place. Actors promoting human rights, including the rights of women and girls have for the most part assumed that education-based approaches will translate automatically into new norms and practices.<sup>136</sup> However, this significantly underestimates the reach of patrilocal, bridewealth-based systems<sup>137</sup> and the commodification of women and girls that has been systematically reinforced through the effects of conflict. As evidenced in the final discussion on gangs, even where groups of mostly male youth have been able to transcend tribalism, they have not been able to rise above perceptions of females as commodities. The research presented here is just a preliminary step towards greater understanding; however, more detailed research

is needed to be able to fully contemplate how to dismantle the structures that marginalise women and girls, including those promulgated by non-state forms of public authority.

Many of these conclusions also apply to conflict and violence reduction more generally. The failure to take into consideration the local contextual factors that give rise to violent behaviour, whether insecurity in rural areas or criminality in urban areas, are likely to be met with little success. As other research has made clear, the long history of violence in South Sudan demonstrates the consequences of ignoring local dynamics, including dynamics related to exclusion/inclusion.<sup>138</sup> This is unfortunate considering the ability of these more localised manifestations of instability to jeopardise national-level settlements, including the 2018 R-ARCSS, which similar to the CPA has negated the more informal groups discussed in this paper, namely militias and gangs. This means trying to find new and creative ways of addressing the absence of opportunities and avenues of belonging that provide the mostly male youth who make up militias and gangs with a sense of inclusion and an alternative avenue for venting their frustrations outside of violence. It also entails working much more directly with those actually implicated in violence and crime and ensuring that non-state forms of public authority, including militias and gangs are integrated into interventions seeking to build peace and transform conflict. This is critical for ensuring a sense of ownership over norms of non-violence, including those norms prohibiting GBV.

For the most part, those interviewed for the research, including both rural militias and urban gangs had not been engaged by external actors. When asked if they had any interaction with humanitarian partners, members of youth gangs

134 SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan*.

135 Luedke, A., & Logan, H. (2018). That thing of human rights: Discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan's current civil war. *Disasters* 42 (SI): S99-S118; SIHA Network. (2019). *Caught in the middle: Gender inequality and rampant SGBV in Wau, South Sudan*.

136 See, Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks* No. 66; See also, Luedke, A., & Logan, H. (2018). That thing of human rights: Discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan's current civil war. *Disasters* 42 (SI): S99-S118.

137 See, Leonardi, C., Moro, L. N., Santschi, M., & Isser, D.H. (2010). Local justice in Southern Sudan. *Peaceworks* No. 66, p. 84; Cited in, Luedke, A., & Logan, H. (2018). That thing of human rights: Discourse, emergency assistance, and sexual violence in South Sudan's current civil war. *Disasters* 42 (SI): S99-S118.

138 Westendorf, J.K. (2018). Peace negotiations in the political marketplace: The implications of women's exclusion in the Sudan-South Sudan peace process. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 72(5): 433-454.

stated: *"no, we have never had any interaction with the internationals, but we would be willing if people came. Those organisations, they are training youth...but they look at us like outlaws and criminals, but we are willing to attend any training."*<sup>139</sup> Where members of militias or gangs had been engaged by external actors, it had often been through trainings on peacebuilding offered by local civil society activists who are more attuned to the realities on the ground. In some rarer instances where militias had been engaged by outside entities, this had often been on rules of combat and targeted the upper echelons of a command structure that does not really exist. A group of *gojam* leaders reflecting on these trainings said: *"some officers are targeted to be trained so they can preach to others...We need inclusivity not just officers. The entire soldiers need to be trained. More on gender and more on human rights."*<sup>140</sup> In the same way that there is no guarantee that trainings on human rights will translate into everyday practice, there is no promise that information filters down from leaders to the average cattle camp youth in remote parts of the country where they are often mobilised for violence, limiting the potential solutions to sources of instability.<sup>141</sup> This does not mean that trainings are misguided. Another group of *gojam* members: *"These are good topics that we have learned because they help us from doing crimes and to treat people fairly and to know your roles and responsibilities...[but] they also need to engage youth in the cattle camp and women in the cattle camp, including the prophets so that everybody will be accountable."*<sup>142</sup> It means re-thinking the actors that are engaged in violence prevention, creating targeted and localised responses developed in collaboration with a wider range of stakeholders, which should encompass those responsible for said violence.

139 FGD. (15 February 2019). Gang Members. *Wau Town*.

140 FGD. (12 May 2019). Sector Commanders, Gojam. *Panyjjar, South Sudan*.

141 Hutchinson, S., & Pendle, N.R. (2015). Violence, legitimacy, and prophecy: Nuer struggles with uncertainty in South Sudan. *American Ethnologist*.

142 FGD. (14 May 2019). Gojam. *Payjjar, South Sudan*.

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