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'I Kept My Gun': Displacement's Impact on Reshaping Social Distinction During Return

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Scholarship prompted by 40 years of mass repatriations has highlighted that repatriations and returns are shaped by social navigation and renegotiation of 'home'. This article argues that the original experience of displacement itself, and the interconnected social rupture or continuity, moderates this negotiation and has consequences for social distinction, class reproduction, and political emplacement as refugees return. Specifically, the article considers the diverse social implications of both refugee camp education and wartime militarization, and the mediation of their social consequences by the specificities of histories of initial displacement. We do this by exploring the first 10 years of socio-political struggles of men born in Southern Sudan in the 1980s who lived in Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) in the 1990s and who returned to Southern Sudan after the 2005 peace agreement. The article contrasts experiences of those who were born in Greater Gogrial and Greater Bor as a way to take account of different histories of displacement.

Keywords: return, home, South Sudan, refugee, education, social class

Introduction

United Nations (UN) actors and international aid workers are currently struggling to work out how to return 'home' the more than 3 million South Sudanese who have fled their homes because of armed conflict since December 2013 (OCHA 2019; UNHCR 2020). At the same time, these actors remain largely neglectful of the social priorities of those returning that include not just immediate survival but also the aspiration to favourably embed themselves in social hierarchies. South Sudanese are not simply returning 'home', but they are employing strategies to navigate the changing or continuous social structures and class distinctions

brought about by periods of conflict and displacement that often took place decades before. Focusing on returns to South Sudan after the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, we explore the complexities of social strategies used to embed or challenge inequalities. Significantly we focus on the contingency of these social strategies on people's the initial experience of displacement.

Since the 1970s, the UN and aid organizations have funded repatriation schemes, and from the 1980s the United Nations' support to repatriate populations became formalized (Allen 1994, 1996). Returning people 'home' became the preferred solution for dealing with those who have fled from conflict (Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018). South Sudan has been a particularly important example for the development of global practice on repatriation and returning home after conflict-induced exile. Repatriations to South Sudan in the 1970s after the wars of the 1960s were one of the earliest occurrences of internationally aided mass return (Akol 1994; Kindersley 2017). Kindersley's research has demonstrated how these mass-repatriation projects developed and entrenched problematic wartime ideas of the state and of population control, both making societies legible and enforcing rural and urban distinctions (Kindersley 2017). This experience of mass-return also prompted South Sudanese to creatively reformulate the way they responded to the state (Kindersley 2017).

In 2005, there was a further episode of large-scale, internationally backed return to South Sudan. In 2005, the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) signed a peace agreement that ended their 22-year war. During these decades of war, millions of Sudanese had fled into exile including to refugee camps such as Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. Almost immediately after the 2005 agreement, the UN initiated a large-scale programme of repatriation to bring those in exile back to Sudan. While many did this without the direct support of internationally funded repatriation programmes, the scale and politics of repatriation programmes set a broad agenda that was focused on returning to Sudan. Kindersley has also highlighted the continuities between these post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement programmes of return and Sudan's long histories of population control and movement (Kindersley 2017). The assumption again was that people should return 'home' to rural, ethnic, chief-governed areas, ignoring histories of urbanization, inter-marriage and different notions of citizenship and belonging (Allen and Morsink 1994).

Since 2018, South Sudanese have again faced a further international push to get them to return to South Sudan and to their 'homes'. After conflict erupted in Juba in December 2013 and as the conflict evolved over the coming years, millions of South Sudanese fled to the UN Protection of Civilians sites, to other settlements in South Sudan and across international borders. Over 2 million have crossed international borders in search of safety (UNHCR 2020). After the June 2018 peace deal between the warring parties and the September 2018 revitalized peace agreement, UNHCR and the UN Mission in South Sudan quickly started to discuss (with diverging opinions on timelines) returning South Sudanese home. The default was still to assume mass returns was the solution.

Scholars have long highlighted that returning 'home' is a problematic concept (Allen 1996; Kibreab 1996; Jansen and Löfving 2009; Grabska 2014; Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018). It assumes that there was a clear idea of 'home' before displacement and it ignores the reconstitution of the self and community during periods of exile (Yngvesson 2000; Yngvesson and Coutin 2006; Grabska 2014). Home is not just a physical space, but also a social, cultural and political space that, therefore, evolves and is contested (Hammond 2004). People's own ideas of what 'home' is to them changes (Sou and Webber 2019). Plus, people's 'place in the world' after war and repatriation may continue to be violently challenged by political parties (Jansen and Löfving 2009). Scholars have been eager to highlight that policies of return also ignore the potential social ruptures and political transformations at 'home' during times of war (Jansen and Löfving 2009: 14). When people flee to exile, 'home' is not just left behind in another place but also in another time (Jansen and Löfving 2009: 15). Therefore, the process of returning home can involve much uncertainty and ambiguity (Alwis 2004). It requires those returning to engage in a process of becoming that links individuals' identities to both social obligations and networks of support, and that involves reconstructing social norms, expectations and understandings of status (Jansen and Löfving 2009; Grabska and Fanjoy 2015). Crucially, the repatriation process itself can also play a transformative social role.

In her 2014 book titled *Gender, Home and Identity*, Grabska provided a rich ethnographic study of gendered experiences of displacement, return and emplacement among the ethnographically well-known Nuer in South Sudan. She argues that returning men and women navigate the complex social relations with those who stayed behind through gender and generational norms. In her discussion of people returning from Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) to Leer (South Sudan), she highlights that return is not about going back, but is about new space and new home, with a reconciliation of cultural differences. She highlights the variety of people's settling-in strategies, with education, marital status, and access to resources all making a difference.

This article builds on but further develops this previous scholarship on 'home'. Firstly, the article unusually focuses on the impact of histories of initial displacement and their impact on people's strategies of return (even when return happens decades later). The article does this by using a comparative ethnography across geographic areas with different histories of displacement. The article specifically contrasts the socio-political struggles of two groups of Dinka-speaking men—one group from Greater Gogrial (Bahr el Ghazal) who arrived in Kakuma in the late 1990s and one from Greater Bor (Greater Upper Nile) who arrived in Kakuma in the early- to mid-1990s. The research focused on those born in the 1980s who lived in Kakuma Refugee Camp in the 1990s and 2000s, and who returned to Southern Sudan after the 2005 CPA. In common, these two groups of young men all accessed formal education in Kakuma and could not access it previously. Both Gogrial and Bor were also homelands of the SPLA leadership. Therefore, throughout these decades and into present times, these young men from Bor and Gogrial often had links to the military, the SPLA leadership and the elite

class in South Sudan. Despite these similar contexts, the two groups are distinguished by having significantly different histories of displacement. Different wartime dynamics and experiences resulted in significantly different patterns of displacement and routes to Kakuma. There was also variety in the extent to which these communities experienced social rupture and, therefore, the social strategies available to those returning.

Secondly, the article seeks to add more depth to the discussion of changes to social norms and to class distinctions at 'home' and during the events that lead to displacement. We borrow from the work of Bourdieu and see social stratification and distinction, such as class differences, as constructed structure in that they include both actor perceptions of objective realities and objective realities that are themselves socially constructed (Swartz 1997: 146). For Bourdieu, culture, tastes, and lifestyle are all part of a social-class framework, and different social habits serve as markers of class difference (Bourdieu 1984). The social world is accumulated history (Bourdieu 1985: 35), and periods of war and displacement may bring social change and rupture (Taylor 2013; Adam *et al.* 2017). In periods of rupture, it is not simply that people move between classes, but that the social structures and rules of the game change. The SPLA-GoS war involved shifting processes of class formation among southern Sudanese elites, including the creation of a dominant class linked to the SPLA (Pinaud 2014). At the same time, social structures are relatively conservative and are constantly reproduced by those with the most capital—economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. Social habits come to appear natural and mask the power structures and inequalities within them (Bourdieu 1985). The experiences of displacement and return discussed here highlight the continuity as well as changes in class structures and social hierarchies.

Therefore, the article explores how social structures and class distinctions change to a different extent in different communities after different episodes of displacement and during different periods of war, and how this in turn impacts returns. 'I kept my gun'—the quotation in the title of this article is from an interview in 2010 in Juba with a man who was born in Greater Bor, had been educated in Kakuma and was then about to start studying at the University of Juba. He acquired the gun when he was briefly moving with the SPLA during his flight from Bor in 1991. While he was in Kakuma, his brother (who was an SPLA soldier) kept the gun. His social strategies on return were explicitly embedded in the period of initial displacement, and involved a complex navigation of the social distinctions of education and militarization. In Bor, the scale of killing and devastation, and the scale of movement either towards refugee camps or as recruits into the SPLA, brought significant social rupture. In Bor, the very structures of social stratification were challenged by this mass education in refugee camps, and militarized strategies (such as the symbolic keeping of guns) were often used to preserve social hierarchies. In contrast, various authority figures in Gogrial and a relatively static population were able to entrench and protect various social structures including the elite status conferred by education. We explore if and how these contrasting experiences of

wartime rupture significantly altered people's strategies of return. Therefore, the article also corrects the assumption that exile and war are necessarily a point of total social rupture. Importantly, exile can result in reproductive social processes as well as transformative social processes.

The article is based on ethnographic and qualitative research in South Sudan by the authors between 2010 and 2018. Over these 8 years, our research was often not focused on the themes in this article but these themes still regularly became prominent in interviews and observations, and we have drawn upon these larger, personal archives of fieldnotes to develop this article. In addition to this long-term ethnographic work, 40 qualitative interviews were carried out in 2017 and 2018 in Greater Gogrial, Juba, and Greater Bor with Dinka-speaking men who had come from Gogrial or Bor, were born in the 1980s and returned from Kakuma after the CPA. These interviews discussed life history narratives as well as broader questions about interviewees observations and analysis. Based on work in South Sudan, Kindersley has highlighted the problematic industry of standardized refugee life stories that have been collected by aid agencies and presented as an emancipatory 'voice' for marginalized people (Kindersley 2015). The life histories collected in our research vary from this life story industry both in their purpose and also in the positionality of us, as interviewers and authors.

For both the authors, this research draws upon and is in conversation with our own negotiation of social status in both Greater Bor and Greater Gogrial. In feminist fashion, we see this proximity to our research as both inevitable and useful. Both authors were born in the 1980s. One author was born in Greater Bor and lived in Kakuma for over a decade before he returned to Southern Sudan after the CPA. After the CPA, he lived in Greater Gogrial and Juba. He chose not to live in Greater Bor until 2018 when requirements of his employment took him back to Bor Town. His own struggles to find work despite being educated have shaped his perceptions of this research. Furthermore, his lack of military experience while living in a significant military family have also helped him shape questions about the role of militarization. The other author was born in the United Kingdom and lived and researched in Greater Gogrial from 2009 until 2013. She has researched there intermittently since, as well as in other parts of South Sudan. She taught at a school in Gogrial and started her ethnographic observations during the month-long 2010 election period when all of the schools closed and her South Sudanese colleagues became election officials. Since she first arrived in Gogrial, she has been involved in a complex, ambiguous negotiation of her own emplacement and social position. As many of those returning from Kakuma spoke the best English in Gogrial, some of her closest friends and colleagues in Gogrial were those who returned. During her time in South Sudan, she has taught in schools and universities and, therefore, is invested in education being seen as useful.

By conducting interviews about a decade after mass-returns were at their height, the article moves away from focusing on the short-term renegotiation of social belonging and status at the moment of return. Instead, this article explores the renegotiations of returns from a longer-term perspective.

People from Gogrial and Bor did not only flee to Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) but also travelled to Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and further afield. The article focuses on one site of displacement where young men had similar experiences of exile in order to focus on the difference made to their returns by the different histories of displacement and wartime experiences of their home areas. However, this focus necessarily limits the article from being able to give an account of other experiences of exile to and from other places.

Having introduced the context of the SPLA war and Kakuma Refugee Camp, the article starts by describing the contrasting experiences of displacement and exile between Greater Bor and Greater Gogrial, and the consequences for social rupture. The article then focuses on two significant changes that resulted from specific details of displacement and that impacted young men's ability to renegotiate their social status: firstly, their education in Kakuma; secondly, the militarization of South Sudanese society.

Firstly, this research highlights that the impact of education on social status and class distinction during return depended on initial experiences of conflict and displacement, the extent to which displacement itself was a social strategy and the related social rupture of communities. In relation to education, the benefits were not purely or even primarily economic. As Bourdieu highlighted, education can become something which has value in itself and that has 'symbolic profits' (Bourdieu 1985: 733). The 'symbolic profits' of education in South Sudan have long been questioned and changed dramatically in the 1990s. Education in Kakuma potentially offered access to an elite social status. In Gogrial, education in Kakuma was only accessible to an elite and this allowed an elite military class to continue to use education as a way to maintain the elite positions of their families. This mimics patterns elsewhere in Africa when education became available (Lloyd 1964). In contrast, in Greater Bor, mass displacement resulted in new, mass access to education in refugee camps, and significant social rupture in the necessary relationship between education and the elite class. Therefore, the symbolic value of education varied between Gogrial and Bor because of the prevalence of education and the consequential lack of symbolic scarcity in Bor. Importantly, the difference was not simply due to a lack of SPLA connections as those from Bor also had numerous connections to the SPLA elites.

Secondly, one of the most important changes in Greater Gogrial and Greater Bor through the war was the militarization of society and politics (Hutchinson and Jok 1999). The decades of war and the SPLA's prominence in the CPA made it clear that social status and distinction could be gained through military service and association with the SPLA. A militarized class continued that had superior symbolic capital (via their liberation efforts) and economic capital (through new army salaries). The 2005 peace agreement did not end the militarization of leadership, power, and the class structure in South Sudan. Much literature has been concerned with how soldiers reintegrated into civilian life (Kingma 1997; Porto *et al*. 2007; Tegenbos and Vlassenroot 2018). For South Sudanese coming from Kakuma, their challenge was instead to integrate into a militarized society as civilians. This article notices the attempts by those coming from refugee camps,

who have been civilians through the war, to establish ex-combatant-like social habits and associated symbolic capital. This article notices how these strategies differed between Bor and Gogrial, and how those in Gogrial were able to use participation in the 2010 election to establish their service to the SPLA.

A Context of War, Camps, and Education

In 1983, Kerubino Kuanyin Bol (from Greater Gogrial), who was then commander of the 105-battalion of the Sudan Armed Forced (SAF), mutinied in Bor. John Garang (from Greater Bor) was sent by SAF to supress Kerubino's mutiny. However, instead of supressing it, he joined it. Salva Kiir, also from Greater Gogrial, was among those initial commanders who defected from SAF. After the initial mutiny, these rebel commanders and others who joined them set up their bases in the safety of southwestern Ethiopia and named their new movement the SPLA. Refugee camps emerged along-side these SPLA camps, and refugee services became a useful tool for the SPLA to recruit and expand its forces. Across SPLA-held areas from the late 1980s, there was a widescale recruitment of young and adolescent boys, most of whom were sent to Ethiopia on foot. A large portion of these refugee camps were young men under the age of fifteen (Zink 2017). For example, in December 1987, in Pignudo Camp, 63 per cent of the population were between 6 and 15. Only 2 per cent were girls (Nilén 1996). These boys had been promised education in Ethiopia. At the same time, they were also trained by the SPLA as a reserve army. They became known as the *jiec amer* (the Red Army). The international community working in the refugee camps could do little to interrupt these trainings as the SPLA and allied Ethiopian government forbid international workers from staying in the camps. The *jiec amer* became a significant part of the SPLA's military plans.

The SPLA narratives around the *jiec amer* linked education to the SPLA's war efforts. Historically, formal, school-based education in Southern Sudan had had ambiguous implications for social status and symbolic capital. By the 1920s, missionaries had established schools in Southern Sudan and the Anglo-Egyptian Government of Sudan started to recognize the benefits of educating a small cadre of Southern administrative assistants for government service (Sanderson and Sanderson 1981). Yet, many South Sudanese accounts of early school education in Southern Sudan include people attempting to flee from school enrolment and schools were mainly frequented by the socially less powerful (such as brothers with less skill in animal husbandry). However, the social significance of education slowly changed and at different rates in different places. The Sudan government had intentionally limited the number of Southerners' educated (Sanderson *et al.* 1981: 166). Therefore, education created a significant social distinction. This distinction gained value partly because of its association with the power of government (Leonardi 2013). As there were only a few schools, education usually necessitated travel away from home which also brought new forms of knowledge and power.

The SPLA further entrenched the economic and social value of education. At its beginning, the SPLA championed a developmentalist approach that promised an eventual economic liberation to South Sudanese including through education (Thomas 2015). Education has often been used by revolutionary movements in both violent and non-violent liberation struggles (Pherali 2016; Pherali and Tuner 2018). Liberation movements have sometimes presented education as an opportunity for collective liberation (Pherali and Tuner 2018). The movement of children to Ethiopian refugee camps was presented as an opportunity for education and the start of the enacting of this promise of liberation. Therefore, these refugee sites became an opportunity for education and associated social distinction. These children were still a relative elite and their schooling entailed significant travel. It, therefore, built on the long histories of the social meaning of education in Southern Sudan including physical and social separation from the home.

For Garang, educating his own constituency also carried the promise of being able to cement his authority by creating an educated, governing elite who had loyalties to him. Bourdieu has shown that education can be a process that is unacknowledged social function is to objectively justify social hierarchies (Bourdieu and Passerson 1970; Bourdieu 1989). Garang himself, his commanders and soldiers invested in the education of their followers, sons, and nephews from the outset. Throughout this period, education retained its association with the benefit of being able to earn money. Yet, it also gained symbolic meaning through its entanglement with Garang's vision of the New Sudan. As one former *jiec amer* explained,

> 'At first, the SPLA policy makers decided to take children to school in Ethiopia in preparation for when the New Sudan would the win against the GOS. They should have already trained civil servants. Secondly, the SPLA also believed that, should the war drag on, then they will have a new educated generation that can continue the war of liberation' (Interviewee A, 2017).

In 1991, the trajectory of the SPLA dramatically changed with the fall of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia. The nascent Ethiopian war cut the supply lines to the refugee camps and, when fighting reached Gambella, humanitarian workers left (Johnson 1996: 175). By May 1991, the leadership of the camp took the decision to return to South Sudan. The UN assumed that refugees leaving these camps would return 'home' and that they had a role in supporting their journeys. The SPLA were accused of manipulating returnee movements to ensure that food was provided that could also feed their forces (Johnson 1996: 178). The *jiec amer* and others leaving Ethiopia went in different directions as they entered Sudan. Those who has travelled south were then affected by further defections from Garang and the capture of the southern town of Kapoeta by SAF. These *jiec amer* continued to flee south to Kenya. Kakuma Refugee Camp was first opened in 1992 to deal with those who had left the Ethiopian Refugee Camps a year before. Of the 23,000 South Sudanese who initially fled to Kakuma, 13,000 were unaccompanied minors (Arafat 2000: 37). Many of these had been in the *jiec amer*.

Different Routes to Kakuma for Those Born in the 1980s

Despite the SPLA-GoS war, many people remained in Greater Bor into the 1990s. After the 1983 Bor mutiny and the formation of the SPLA, SAF quickly took back control of Bor Town. Despite this government garrison, the surrounding rural areas remained in the control of the SPLA. During the 1980s, the SPLA recruited many of the able-bodied men in Greater Bor, leaving a population dominated by women and children.

In the context of the SPLA's dilemmas after the 1991 fall of the Ethiopian regime, SPLA leaders Riek Machar and Lam Akol rebelled from Garang's leadership. Riek Machar had a strong base of support in Nuer speaking areas to the north of Greater Bor. Some fragments of the SPLA, including parts of the *jiec amer*, followed Riek in his defection. Yet, he also sought to mobilize other Nuer through ethnic discourses about the unfair treatment of Nuer in the SPLA. In this context, unprecedented, large-scale armed raids were carried out into Bor. As many of the men from Greater Bor were serving away from home in the SPLA, the defence by those in Bor was inadequate. Women and children were killed in their hundreds. Those who survived fled with their whole surviving families in an unprecedented scale and in various directions.

Therefore, in 1991, almost the entire surviving population of Bor fled (Zink 2017: 11; Play, childhood, and playthings 2009: 5). This need to flee from Bor was a common experience across class, wealth and connection to the SPLA. Many who were connected or married to those in the SPLA did flee to SPLA barracks. Yet, this subjected them to the violence of the ongoing war and the constant movements of SPLA forces. Over the following years and through a variety of routes, many families of Bor made their way to Kakuma. As one woman described,

> 'The displacement that happened in 1991 uprooted the civil population all at once. So, it was not something that was planned because people left in fear. You could find families running to different directions and if they meet on the way, well and good, and if they don't, they continue to different parts' (Interviewee B, 2018).

Importantly, this flight from Bor was not planned and was not part of people's strategies to cement or remake social structures and hierarchies. It was not a strategy to cement class distinction. Instead, people from Bor ended up in Kakuma as part of a desperate attempt to find a place of safety and people from Bor reached Kakuma irrespective of gender and social class. Most who arrived in the early 1990s would remain in Kakuma for at least another decade and a half. They would live through the growth of Kakuma from an empty space of dusty tents to a flourishing urban centre with one of the largest markets in Kenya outside of Nairobi. This massive movement to an urban, UN governed space brought massive social rupture (Grabska 2014).

One of the major socio-political shifts between life in Greater Bor and life in Kakuma was new universal access to education. The UNHCR opened schools in Kakuma as early as 1992. In the early years, there was a clear connection between

SPLA authority and oversight of the schools and the *jiec amer* who were the students (Mareng 2010). Initially, there was tension over the curriculum and language of instruction to be used in schools, but the UNHCR enforced the teaching and examination in the Kenya system. Students disputed the quality of education they received in Kakuma (Mareng 2010). Yet, access to free education was revolutionary, even miraculous (Mareng 2010; Grabska 2014). It was also a major social rupture that challenged the SPLA elite's use of education to create social distinction.

By the late 1990s, those in Kakuma had started to call for their siblings and relatives at home to join them in the camp for the purposes of education. Families were collectively deciding to send their children to Kakuma to receive services and especially education.

Thon's story illustrates such a decision:

> 'I left my village in 2001 after my cousin returned from Kakuma and told me about school in Kakuma. He told me how important it was that we should go to study. My cousin was among the first people to established Kakuma. When he came back, he convinced our families. Since there were no schools in the village and continuous conflict, my family agreed. We were fifteen in number. To get to Kakuma, we used convoys of vehicles that used to bring goods from Kenya' (Interviewee C, 2017).

In contrast to Greater Bor and to many others in Kakuma, those who came to Kakuma from Greater Gogrial experienced Kakuma as part of the continuity and entrenching of social hierarchies, not their rupture. This chimed with experiences elsewhere in South Sudan (Grabska 2014). In Greater Gogrial, there had never been a moment when everyone left; many people remained in the same homes and villages throughout the wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Greater Gogrial had also been deeply affected by wartime violence. Kerubino had challenged Garang's leadership in the late 1980s and ended up in SPLA detention until 1992. After his escape from detention, he rebelled against Garang's leadership of the SPLA. By mid-August 1993, he had started moving his mainly Nuer forces from the administrative centre of Bentiu (in Greater Upper Nile) to Greater Gogrial. He eventually set up a base in the SAF garrison town of Gogrial. From here he carried out raids into rural Gogrial both to seek food and forced recruits. Kerubino forcefully recruited young men, making them particularly vulnerable to the consequences of war. Therefore, young men had a particular incentive to seek refuge elsewhere. This created a context of extreme insecurity and hunger, that culminated in the 1998 famine. Kerubino was killed in fighting in 1999, but by 2000 the SPLA itself was making preparations to capture the town of Gogrial. The SPLA captured Gogrial and SAF then recaptured it in a series of extremely bloody battles between April and June 2002 (Cormack 2014: 215).

However, in Gogrial, wartime flight was usually within Gogrial itself and people often fled to safety within a couple of days walk of where they started and within spaces that they already knew. Flight inside Gogrial also largely involved movement away from towns such as Gogrial and Wau that brought the dangers of government armies. Therefore, people found safety not in more urban refugee

camps but in more rural villages. Some chiefs were able to recreate quasi-urban areas in order to attract trade and populations (Anei and Pendle 2018). Yet, this careful navigation of spatial authority only reinforced the authority of the chiefs and rural ideas of social status, and perpetuated social norms and stratifications.

At the same time, by the 1990s, there was a flow of young men from Greater Gogrial to Kakuma. Many of these travelled because of family or SPLA decisions to provide specific young men with access to education (Epstein 2012). Commanders in the SPLA from Gogrial realized that Kakuma could provide education to their relatives. Both to avoid forced recruitment by Kerubino and to access education, young men from Gogrial tried to find ways to move the large distances to Kakuma (Epstein 2012).

For commanders, sending sons to Kakuma became a strategy to preserve their own and their families' social status through education. Education was becoming more valued and commanders could use their existing capital through their military authority to gain education for their nephews. In practice, to reach Kakuma from Gogrial was almost impossible without the support of someone in the SPLA. In moments of conflict, young men would flee to humanitarian hubs and famine feeding centres for protection. From here, they might gain access to humanitarian transport to Kakuma. However, those selected to access this transport were often primarily those selected by the SPLA's relief wing and, therefore, often at the request of someone in the SPLA. SPLA commanders were eager to use their authority to ensure some of their nephews and close relatives could access education in Kakuma. Education was a means for commanders to prolong their social distinction (in Bourdieu's terms), as well as economic security, through the education of young men who had a kinship-based social obligation to them.

The socially crucial consequence was that education in Gogrial had a foreseeable promise of providing symbolic (and possibly economic) capital. Most of those who went from Greater Gogrial were travelling as part of future aspirations and visions that were shared by their families and especially those with political might in their families. Education was still imagined as giving an individual and their family privileged social distinction including through its association with access to government. While education in Kakuma was free at the point of delivery, access to Kakuma itself was carefully socially regulated in Gogrial in a way that it could not be for those from Bor.

From Greater Gogrial, those who had accessed humanitarian transportation would often be taken to Uganda. There they would walk to the Uganda-Kenya border towns such as Malaba where the UNHCR in Kakuma were conducting border monitoring trips to intervene if there were refugees. So, from here, boys and young men from Gogrial would be transported to Kakuma. Others managed to get direct humanitarian flights to Loki. In Kakuma, those from Greater Bor nicknamed those coming from Greater Gogrial in the late 1990s the 'Malaba Boys'.

In Kakuma these 'Malaba Boys' lived in Kakuma as unaccompanied minors without parents and often without siblings. They were approaching their teenage years by the time they reached Kakuma and were roughly age-mates to the

children who had fled from Bor in the early 1990s. The Malaba Boys and those from Bor were often classmates in the schools in Kakuma or friends in football teams. Many 'Malaba Boys' benefited from the day-to-day comforts and support of Dinka Bor families that they got to know through school and clubs. In return, the Dinka Bor teenagers often enjoyed the spaces of the 'Malaba boys' that did not have parental supervision.

Repatriation and Returning to Southern Sudan

By the late 1990s, as the SPLA captured control of more areas in the Equatorias, it became possible for some in Kakuma to return to these areas to find and live with relatives. The 2005 SPLA-GoS peace agreement brought new questions about the possibility of peace and the future of those living in Kakuma. Initially, for many South Sudanese, it still seemed incredulous that the peace agreement would actually be implemented. Even if the CPA brought a temporary cessation in hostilities, people assumed that there would be a return to war. Therefore, few returns happened instantly after the CPA. At the same time, in 2006, the governments of Kenya and Sudan, as well as the UNHCR, signed an agreement to carry out a regional repatriation operation. The new Government of Southern Sudan was also eager to encourage returns and increase its population to shape its implementation of the CPA. The CPA outlined a road map including a census (held in 2008) and elections (held in 2010), before a referendum on Southern independence in 2011. South Sudanese voted in favour of Southern succession and, in July 2011, South Sudan became a new country.

By the end of 2012, the UNHCR had assisted 335,000 refugees from across the region to return to South Sudan (UNHCR 2014). Along-side these repatriation efforts, more people relocated from Kakuma to South Sudan by their own means and in their own time. Strategies of splitting return among family members were also used (Hovil 2010; Grabska 2014). Because of the social and economic importance of schooling to those in Kakuma, many remained in Kakuma to finish their formal education and to ensure they had a certificate to testify to their education.

Even though many returned without direct support from UNHCR, the repatriation programme did influence people's perceptions about their future in Kakuma. Repatriation programmes were a clear expression of intention from Kenya, Sudan and UNHCR that people in Kakuma should go to South Sudan and this brought new uncertainties to the future of life for South Sudanese in Kakuma. The UNHCR selected Bor as a repatriation way-station. As Tuttle described, in that post CPA period, 'it was a place where almost the entire population had recently arrived' (Tuttle 2018: 5).

Emphasizing the Distinction of Education

Education provides people with opportunities to gain economic but also 'symbolic profits' (Bourdieu 1985: 733). Irrespective of their actual education levels or ability

to gain employment, many South Sudanese who returned from Kakuma to South Sudan automatically gained symbolic profits and social recognition through their education. As one chief explained in the home coming of his son from Kakuma.

> 'When he [the chief's son] returned, I welcome him first by killing a goat. Then I killed a bull for the whole community because he had come back as a grown, educated man. Therefore, the whole community was happy, and people danced and feasted' (Interviewee D, 2017).

Education potentially brought economic opportunities both through work for the government and for the various NGOs. For example, World Vision International employed more people in Greater Gogrial than the state government in the post-CPA period. These NGOs often made employment conditional on specific formal education qualifications in English such as those gained in Kakuma. Many of those returning from Kakuma also enrolled as teachers to at least gain a minimal salary.

An official in the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure (MoPI) in Juba explained:

> 'The education I acquired in Kakuma helped me and therefore I am here in this building (MoPI) as a government employee. Furthermore, it exposed us to different worlds such as meeting people of different countries. For example, I learned some languages such as Kiswahili' (Interviewee E, 2017).

The social status gained by education was far from limited to its economic value and education carried significant symbolic capital. This value did not necessarily rely on specific skills or even specific certificates especially among communities that were illiterate and did not have knowledge of the specificities of certain educational qualifications. In Bourdieu's work in France, the content of education mattered as a way to perpetuate social habits, but in South Sudan education had been rare, including among the most powerful, which reduced the significance of the content of education. Instead, being educated carried a symbolic value that conveyed experience of foreign places and connections to government at a time of social change when education was increasingly associated with power.

Education in Kakuma was also linked to the political purposes of the SPLA and its claims to aspire to political and economic liberation. As one man explained, 'Kakuma in general has laid the foundation of South Sudan especially in term of literacy. Many of professors gained their basic education in Kakuma. For example, many of us were taken oversees from Kakuma and now those people have come back as doctors, engineers or academics. So Kakuma has help us a lot' (Interviewee F, 2017).

Literature on returnees has documented attempts by returnees to reduce social distinctions with those who stayed. At the same time, those coming from Kakuma did not always minimize their distinction in certain social settings as they wanted to highlight the symbolic and economic capital they had gained through education. Those returning from Kakuma portrayed their education through various

cultural practices. This included the clothes they wore. It also included displays of knowledge through their daily habits surrounding food and hygiene.

One example arose when a friend, Deng, attempted to assert his newly acquired knowledge of privacy. In early 2010, Deng returned to a rural area of Greater Gogrial after a decade in Kakuma. In Kakuma, he had completed his secondary education with high marks in his Kenyan exams. After coming back, Deng had quickly secured a job and salary with an NGO based thirty minutes from his family's home. Early on, he had used his NGO salary to buy four wooden poles from a local trader. He had also managed to acquire some plastic sheeting from Wau. His intention was to use these to construct a simple closed off and private space at the edge of his families' small farm so that he could use this as a bathroom. His home, like the other homes in the village, did not already have a private bathroom. There was a forest not too far away. Yet, for showering, you would never carry water from the borehole all the way into the forest.

The bathroom would be a visible indicator to the village of his knowledge of other ways of urban life that he imagined would provide him with social status and respect from his peers. His taste for privacy carried clear symbolic capital. The culture of the bathroom was symbolic of a broader knowledge of foreign and government life.

However, Deng's father refused the building of the bathroom. 'Why would you need to hide anything from me?', his father had rhetorically asserted as he mocked the need for privacy when showering.

At the time, Deng was using his education to create social distinction and the opportunity to hide things from his father on a daily basis. His father spoke Dinka and some Arabic. Deng often opted to speak to his cousin (who had also been in Kakuma) in Kiswahili when they were at home and within the hearing of their father. They often used Kiswahili to discuss secret meetings with girls that Deng explicitly wanted to conceal from his father. Kiswahili was a way to hide information. At the same time, the use of Kiswahili at home, and in easy hearing of his father and family, also allowed him to perform his difference and social distinction from his father.

However, for Deng's father, the building of a bathroom was too much. It violated common practice which his father presented as crucial to identity and belonging in Greater Gogrial. In this way, the bathroom challenged the social habits, structures and hierarchies that cemented his father's authority and social distinction as an elder (even if uneducated and untravelled). The very social habits that defined social hierarchies were being contested. However, Deng had quickly decided not to argue with his father. He gave the poles and plastic sheets to his cousin who was married and so ran his own home.

The Distinction Between the Social Distinction of Education

At the same time, the social significance of education varied between Greater Bor and Greater Gogrial after 2005. Many men from Greater Bor gained a formal education. The large number of men from Bor who had joined the *jiec amer* and

the almost total displacement of Bor in the 1990s meant that it became common place to have lived in Kakuma and to have accessed education there. In the 1990s, there were also programmes of resettlement from Kakuma. This created a large diaspora from Bor who lived in the USA and Canada, and who had access to even higher levels of education. Therefore, in Bor, symbolic scarcity was not so extensive and the economic opportunities of education were reduced. Many of the young men who were educated in Kakuma remained job-less when they went back to Bor. Therefore, the new scale of education brought new social structures in which the educated were no longer a distinct elite. As this widespread education marked a social rupture, many young men took opportunities to further challenge the social system.

In Gogrial, the experience of education in Kakuma marked a social continuity and not distinction. This can be distinguished from the experience in Bor in two ways. Firstly, as discussed above, many of the young men who went from Gogrial to Kakuma were selected to go to Kakuma by their families and through their relatives in the SPLA in order to access education. Their exile to Kakuma contained the expectation of return and that this return would include returning with a new type of knowledge, social status and access to the sphere of government. Their travel to Kakuma had often been part of their families' planned trajectory for how they would serve the family and gain authority. In this way, there was an established social imaginary that recognized the economic and symbolic importance of education. Their return to Gogrial after Kakuma marked a social continuity and not rupture.

Secondly, as those from Gogrial were usually only able to access Kakuma with support from someone in the SPLA, those initially educated in Kakuma were small in number. Therefore, on their return to Greater Gogrial, they were an elite, following previous patterns of the educated class. Many were quickly recruited into NGO and government jobs, as well as being teachers. Their scarcity echoed previous understandings of the social role of education in the construction of an elite that could interact with foreign and local powers.

Tastes, Militarization, and Liberation

After the CPA, association with the military was a way to establish symbolic and economic capital, as well as being a necessary condition for public authority. A militarized elite class had formed (Pinaud 2014), but all SPLA soldiers gained economic and cultural capital through their SPLA connection. The SPLA's signing of the CPA in 2005 provided a way to claim that their two-decade-long military struggle had brought beneficial consequences. The new South Sudan government emphasized that South Sudan's heroes were its soldiers and there was symbolic capital in being associated with the SPLA and the military. Furthermore, the SPLA and later other militia were given government salaries meaning that military figures also had economic capital. As those with power and social status in South Sudan after the CPA were those with military credentials, South Sudan continued to have militarized social structures and hierarchies of

power. Much literature has highlighted the difficulty of combatants when they demobilize. However, for those who returned from Kakuma Refugee Camp after the CPA and who had not served in the SPLA, the social danger was that they had not been militarized and that they could not claim association with the SPLA. Young men who came back from Kakuma were publicly mocked when they showed fear at gunfire.

As a Dinka elder, who had remained in South Sudan throughout the war, described:

> 'In addition, the proliferation of guns itself presented some serious challenges among returnees. Many of them had grown up without seeing or hearing guns' atrocities. So, when they hear or see that their neighbour or relatives have been shot-dead, they pack and leave without looking back' (Interviewee G 2017).

Among the Dinka Bor, living in Kakuma did not necessarily imply exclusion from military service. Many in the *jiec amer* had fought for the SPLA as well as gaining their education in Kakuma. They had both education and military service to support their social status on return. However, many of the young men born in the 1980s, who had fled to Kakuma with their families, had been too young for SPLA recruitment before reaching Kakuma. Some had spent time on SPLA barracks and had even taken up arms after their flight from Bor. However, those who made it to Kakuma had rarely served for long in the SPLA. At the same time, many of these young men had brothers in the SPLA. As large numbers of the early leadership of the SPLA were from Bor, many of these young men also had uncles who held senior SPLA ranks.

To establish their own social status and militarized symbolic capital after Kakuma, many young men tried to highlight their military prowess even when (or especially when) they lacked military experience. They felt the need to invest in this symbolic nature even when they had close family connections to the elite class. Some people's stories of their return from Kakuma, such as the quotation in the titled, highlighted not their reuniting with their families, but instead their restored access to their gun. These stories were from people who had no actual experience of military service or combat. Yet, they still wanted to highlight their ownership and attachment to their gun. As one man described, now he was not under UN government (i.e. he was not in Kakuma), he could sleep with this gun beneath his pillow. The mention of guns that had been owned prior to time in Kakuma were also narrated to demonstrate to people that they had had wartime experience. They explicitly remade and retold these histories of displacement to establish their social position in this militarized context.

Some of those who fled from Greater Bor fled to exile in Khartoum and not in Kakuma. Kindersley has highlighted how the post-CPA era saw the emergence of suspicion about the political disloyalty to the SPLA of communities who had lived in Khartoum (Kindersley 2016). 'Since many returned southwards from 2006 to 2015, ex-IDPs have had a further designation in South Sudan, as 'sell-outs', wartime cowards, and 'jellaba', a common slur against northern Sudanese elites

historically used against exploitative traders' (Kindersley 2016: 18). Fleeing north and their spatial distance from the SPLA gave the perception of their lack of involvement in the SPLA. For those who went to Khartoum, it was assumed that they could not have fought for the SPLA (even though this was not always true).

Because *jiec amer* were among those educated in Kakuma, knowing that someone had lived in Kakuma left ambiguity about their history in terms of personal wartime service and connected military symbolic capital. Therefore, men coming back from Kakuma to South Sudan were eager to socially distinguish themselves from those coming from Khartoum. Many men born in the 1980s and returning from Kakuma after the CPA intentionally used opportunities to distinguish themselves from those returning from Khartoum. They did not explicitly claim to have served in the SPLA (a claim that could have been falsified) but they did claim association with Kakuma where SPLA association was more ambiguous.

Those returning from Kakuma constructed various social stereotypes to try to distinguish themselves from those returning from Khartoum. Toilet paper and the lack of it became a regular complaint among Dinka Bor students in Juba who had lived in Kakuma, for example. They complained to each other about how those in their homes from Khartoum refused to spend money buying it. They also mocked them for not being able to use cutlery, further perpetuating stereotypes. They constructed and asserted their distinct preferences which highlighted their history in Kakuma and their claim to the social status associated with this. These disputes over preferences and tastes masked social distinctions that had deep social connections to the constructed divisions between the SPLA and those in Khartoum, and the distinctions that the militarization of society had created.

In Greater Gogrial, the militarized nature of society and the implications for social status varied from Bor. During the 1980s and 1990s, some of the most respected militarized figures had not joined the SPLA but had remained in their home communities as part of the *titweng*—cattle guard (Pendle 2015). These *titweng* claimed legitimacy through their wartime defence of the home communities and cattle. The divisions between Southern forces in the 1990s also militarized whole communities (Hutchinson and Jok 1999).

After the CPA, there was a social wrestle between the *titweng* and those who claimed social status through school-based education. For example, *titweng* often withheld their support from local government authorities if they failed to display their military competence and relied on claims to education. At community meetings, it was the *titweng*, and not those returning from Kakuma and who had more formal education, that were given the most important seats and opportunities to talk.

At the same time, Gogrial provided more opportunities for the educated youth to claim status based on community contributions. The educated youth in Gogrial could get jobs and had the economic capital to afford to buy ammunition and supplies for their armed brothers. In this way, they acquired their claim to be part of the militarized context; they exchanged their economic capital for militarized symbolic capital.

Furthermore, the 2010 elections provided a timely opportunity to for those in Gogrial to link their education to the symbolic capital gained by serving the SPLA. The 2005 CPA had committed to holding national elections in 2010 before a referendum on Southern independence in 2011. On a national scale, these elections were important for various reasons. Firstly, politicians discussed them as a test to prove the South's ability to conduct the referendum and be independent. Secondly, they were an explicit step in the road-map of the CPA and their failure would provide Khartoum with an excuse to not hold the referendum. Thirdly, in terms of internal Southern politics, they were a trial to see if the SPLA/M would dominate the political arena through militarized means or whether they would allow space for non-violent competition. Across the country, various anti-government armed groups in the few years after the elections justified their revolt by highlighting the manipulation of the elections by the SPLA.

While the elections did have national political meaning, they also had local implications for social structures and the place of those returning from Kakuma and other sites of education in exile. The elections required there to be polling stations in remote, rural villages across South Sudan. At the same time, the election officials who manned these polling stations needed to be formally educated and literate in order to navigate the procedures and norms required for the elections to be internationally accepted. In Greater Gogrial, the scarcity of educated, rural residing young men meant that large proportions of those who had returned from Kakuma were employed to man these polling stations. This contrasted with Bor where educated people were in abundance. In Gogrial, in these appointments as election officials, these educated 'sons of the village' were able to display their education's ability to give them access to the things of government and to the authority of official things. The elections were a very visible display of their social distinction and symbolic capital gained through education.

The procedural details of the 2010 election also allowed the election officials to be seen as serving the SPLA. The polling stations were filled with paper, pens, written instructions and plastic ballot boxes. The 2010 elections required a cross to be marked in the box adjacent to the preferred candidates. During the elections, voters were not only expected to vote for presidential candidates for the government of Sudan and Government of South Sudan, but also for candidates for a variety of parliamentary and sub-national posts based on different electoral systems. Ballot papers were long and complicated, and people were required to write their preference. The majority of the population in Greater Gogrial was still illiterate and these ballot papers were an incomprehensible enigma. Therefore, the usual practice was for the election official to accompany the voter to the table to help him understand the ballot paper and to mark it for him. SPLA loyalty (especially in public) was assumed and so the election officials did not usually perceive that there was a need to have a conversation about which candidate to choose. Therefore, election officials marked the ballot papers of the region for the SPLA. In Warrap State overall, Salva Kiir won 99.61% of the vote (EU 2010) and the election officials made this possible.

The Malaba Boy's assistance in the 2010 elections was interpreted by them and others as a service to the SPLA. Almost all of these young men had not served as soldiers in the war. However, through their role as election officials they both served the SPLA and furthered the purpose of the war in moving towards a referendum on Southern independence. The Malaba Boys could now be associated with government and liberation; their education brought them symbolic capital not only through education itself but also through SPLA service in the 2010 election. The election provided an opportunity for these young men to use their education to set themselves apart as an elite in the post-war, militarized social hierarchies.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the post-CPA experiences highlight to us the diversity of social strategies young men use as they return home to establish their status and class distinction, and that these strategies and social struggles are mediated by the initial experience of displacement. The realities and diversity of experiences of displacement and wartime experiences mean that neither social rupture nor continuity are certainties. Scholarship that has followed the work of Bourdieu has long highlighted the conservative nature of some social habits. While Bor clearly experienced extreme social rupture, social disruption in Gogrial, despite war, displacement and the growing links between education and power, was limited by the strategies of those with pre-existing capital (including that gained through SPLA service). This included strategies such as sending nephews to Kakuma. It also included strategies such as preserving adherence to custom as a social habit. In contrast, the mass education of those in Bor brought by opportunities in exile challenged the social structures and the ability of education to create class distinction. Even those with close connections to the SPLA elite struggled to use their education to assert symbolic or economic capital. As places and social structures experienced different levels of social rupture, the strategies and challenges of returning and building social status significantly varied and included tastes and social habits, as much as economic might. Power and class structures in South Sudan have been militarized during decades of war. Yet, the realities of these changes are mediated in complex ways by other social ruptures and continuities, such as the changes in educational opportunities or the procedural details of a national election. Strategies ranged from marking electoral ballots to reclaiming ownership of guns from decades before. Those returning from exile after war provide a moment of collision with different social habits. As this article shows, this provides a particularly useful space for research on class, social inequalities, social change and social continuity.

In 2018, after the warring parties in South Sudan signed a deal, the UN, humanitarians and warring parties again quickly positioned themselves to assist repatriation. Humanitarian and UN preparations for return started before fighting had stopped and while people were still leaving South Sudan. The international community remained eager to fix the problem by returning people home. The 2020

escalation of COVID-19 further invigorated efforts to get people to return home either with the assumption that home would be the safest place or as international actors perceived their responsibilities would diminish once people were home.

The article highlights the need for UN and humanitarian actors to correct the common fallacy that assumes the social ease of returning home and that ignores the historical contingencies that shape the social strategies available to people that are told to 'return'. Assuming that forced displacement equates to total social rupture, in some circumstances, will be as misconceived as assumptions that 'home' is unchanged. Humanitarians need to pay attention to these longer-term temporalities of class struggles and social shifts in order to make sense of people's behaviour and to understand how their policies interact with these longer-term struggles for social security and significance. As the title's quotation illustrates, as people return, they will not only draw upon education but also personal histories of displacement that link them to other interconnected claims of social distinction, such as militarized symbols. When the UN and humanitarian agencies demand returns, they are quickly forced into narratives that the country is at peace and safe. This can leave invisible the real social struggles that people face to establish authority at 'home'.

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