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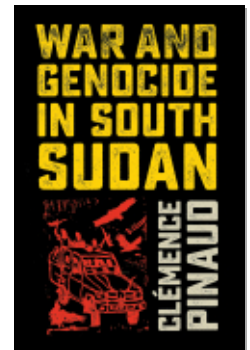
8. The Second Phase of the Genocide in Unity State: 2014-15

Published by

War and Genocide in South Sudan.

Cornell University Press, 2021.

Project MUSE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.82190>.



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THE SECOND PHASE OF THE GENOCIDE IN UNITY STATE

2014–15

Oil-rich Unity state was the only Nuer-majority state in the country. It was also the home state of Riek Machar, born in Leer. As such, it saw most of the fiercest fighting and violence until the end of 2015. By the end of 2015, over 140,000 civilians had fled to the UNMISS POC of Bentiu.¹ Mass displacement was the result of two gruesome military campaigns against Nuer civilians in 2014 and 2015. These campaigns, during which the most shocking acts of violence equaled those of the December 2013 Juba massacre, were the result of a transference of violence against the Nuer from the capital onto the countryside. The state coordinated multiple actors to carry out these attacks. Even if perpetrators were increasingly Nuer, their violence fulfilled the goals of a Dinka supremacist agenda, and their rhetoric referred to that ideology. Salva Kiir's faction merely made use of the perpetrators' own immediate goals of resource accumulation and group ascension. The perpetrators' class interests took precedence over Nuer ethnicity. The two military campaigns in Unity state formed the second phase of the genocide.

The First Military Campaign of 2014: The SPLA and JEM

The first government military campaign against the civilians of Unity state started in early 2014. After the SPLA splintered in Bentiu on December 17, 2013, in reaction to the Juba massacre, fighting quickly engulfed Bentiu, Unity's capital.² The SPLA—including Mathiang Anyoor troops brought in through Bahr



FIGURE 8.1. SPLA chief of staff General Paul Malong in the foreground, with General Marial Chanuong in the background wearing military berets at a peace agreement signing ceremony in Juba, South Sudan, on August 26, 2015. Photo by Jason Patinkin.

El Ghazal and the Darfuri rebel group JEM, going by the local name of “Toro-Boro”—chased and targeted Nuer civilians on grounds of their ethnicity.³ As a result, civilians fled to the UN POC or to where the IO troops had established some presence (in Guit, Koch, Leer, or Mayendit). This propelled the start of the first military campaign against civilians in Unity state.

From Bentiu, government troops and JEM went south too in January and February 2014.⁴ “When the Toro Boro came last time, they put women in the tukul and set them on fire,” explained a man from Ding-Ding, in Rubkona county. They also hung people from the trees.⁵ The SPLA gained control of much of the territory except in Panyijaar and parts of Mayendit.⁶ That is when the government appointed county commissioners instrumental in the second military campaign, as I explain later.⁷

Throughout the months of January–April 2014, government and JEM troops burned houses (*tukuls*) and killed civilians, including women, girls, and the elderly all throughout Unity but particularly in southern Unity, Machar’s home region. The county commissioner Stephen Thiak Riek, the area commander Brigadier General Deng Mayik, and the operation commander for the state Major General Matthew Puljang were all implicated.⁸ The locations under attack by the

government were rarely rebel strongholds. But the government shelled civilians and pursued them into the swamps, where they starved and drowned.⁹ The government prevented aid from reaching affected Nuer communities and looted the Nuer food reserves, and government officials lured the Nuer into coming out of hiding to kill them.¹⁰ Still, government troops were just using cars with mounted heavy machine guns and trucks, which left some areas untouched.¹¹

Things changed on the ground in April 2014, when the government troops withdrew from Leer as IO attacked Bentiu on April 14. JEM troops supported the SPLA in Bentiu, but this was not enough: “Government troops got their reinforcement from the Bul Nuer, in addition to JEM,” explained a Nuer civilian from Leer.¹² The government then retook Bentiu from the IO in early May 2014.¹³

The Second Campaign of 2015: Nuer Perpetrators

In April–June 2015, the government embarked on its second scorched-earth military campaign against civilians, to dislodge both the remainder of IO troops and civilians it perceived as IO sympathizers. “At that time, there were small IO forces outside of Leer, attacked by the government,” recounted a Nuer civilian from Leer.¹⁴ An aid worker summarized the change in this military landscape: “Until May 2015, the frontline was at Nyaldiu, and from there, IO controlled the south of Unity. From April to July 2015, everything was taken by the SPLA in Unity state except Panyjaar.”¹⁵

Again, government troops rarely encountered IO troops, who had largely been defeated, and instead inflicted violence mostly on civilians.¹⁶ Human Rights Watch noted that despite the government’s rhetoric of “flushing out the rebels,” the government and its allied militias deliberately targeted civilians in what could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁷

In targeting Rubkona, Guit, Koch, Leer, Mayendit, and Panyjaar counties, the government displaced over a hundred thousand people. Attacks were meant to displace civilians from their villages and settlements. The perpetrators told their victims never to come back; they killed and raped in public to spread fear and looted cattle to compromise survival.¹⁸ It worked: by the end of 2015, 90 percent of the population had been displaced. The Nuer of Unity state were by far the most displaced population in the country, some of them crowded in the most populous UNMISS POC in the country, others hiding in the swamps, others dead.¹⁹

What differentiated the second military campaign was that local Nuer militias—especially at first the Bul Nuer—played a much more prominent role in carrying out the attacks. “In May 2015,” a Nuer civilian who fled Leer explained,

“the attacks were mostly carried out by the Bul Nuer . . . The Bul Nuer youth was first mobilized by the governor.”²⁰ Juba used the same rhetoric Khartoum had in the past civil war: “The SPLA rhetoric is to say that the Nuer are fighting among themselves,” noted a long-time aid worker there.²¹

The state coordination of annihilating violence serving Dinka supremacists’ agenda and the Nuer perpetrators’ own referencing of Dinka supremacist ideology and intent to destroy, made this violence genocidal. This second military campaign was the apex of subcontracting genocide, and this *modus operandi* could be replicated in other locations whenever necessary.

Contracting the Bul Nuer

Unity state was a favorable terrain to contract out some of the violence to Nuer militias—particularly to the Bul Nuer. It had already been the site of intra-Nuer ethnic violence during the second South Sudanese civil war, when Khartoum sponsored different Nuer armed groups who fought each other.²²

By the end of the second civil war, the Bul Nuer of the SSDF had constituted their own dominant class. The Bul Nuer troops were reintegrated into the SPLA only in 2006 via the Juba Declaration signed between Matiep and Kiir. The Bul Nuer dominant class then came to Juba to coexist and temporarily fuse with that of the predominantly Dinka SPLA. Elites coexisted in Juba but continued to compete in the countryside. In Unity, tensions and rivalry between the Bul Nuer and the rest of the Nuer sections (under Machar and Taban Deng’s leadership) continued after the 2005 CPA.²³ Kiir made sure to take advantage of this rivalry. He sided increasingly with the Bul Nuer after the 2010 elections to bench Machar’s side.²⁴ This contributed to the Bul Nuer discourse of group entitlement discussed later.

By the beginning of the third civil war, other Nuer sections already had negative stereotypes about the Bul Nuer, who had perpetrated violence against them in the second war and had formed their own discourse of group entitlement.²⁵ They saw them as brutish thieves, “taking things from people.”²⁶ With this competition and enmity between the Bul and the rest of the Nuer sections, it was easy for the government to contract its campaign mostly to Bul Nuer forces in April–May 2015.²⁷ Moreover, it was necessary from a military perspective. Of course, regular SPLA forces still played a role in those attacks. But the distinction between Bul Nuer fighters and regular SPLA soldiers was particularly tenuous given the fact that both the political and military leadership in the state were Bul Nuer.²⁸ This made leveraging support from Mayom, the Bul Nuer’s base, easy.²⁹ Those Bul Nuer troops were vital to the splintered SPLA, which had lost many recruits to the IO in December 2013 and experienced defections.³⁰

All in all, the troops attacking southern Unity in the second military campaign generally included a mix of uniformed SPLA troops (including Bul Nuer) and Bul Nuer fighters dressed in civilian clothes. The link between the SPLA and the Bul Nuer fighters was so organic that the SPLA sometimes appropriated victories by Bul Nuer fighters against the IO. Sometimes SPLA troops committed atrocities without the support of the Bul Nuer fighters, including burning houses and raping, abducting, and killing women in central and southern Unity.³¹ But SPLA troops still counted regular Bul Nuer soldiers anyway.

The mix of SPLA and Bul Nuer troops descended first on Koch county before moving south to Leer in mid-May 2015. They hung, shot, or burned civilians in their homes, raped and kidnapped women, and chased civilians into the swamps. Children and the elderly (both men and women) were shot, beaten to death, hung, or burned alive in their houses.³² They used “barches”—amphibian vehicles with mounted machine guns—to chase civilians into the swamps.³³ They attacked Leer repeatedly. “On May 18, 2015, the SPLA went to Leer with the Bul Nuer,” explained a Nuer civilian there at the time. “They stayed for three days there. It felt like three years.”³⁴

Contracting the Koch and other Youth

After June 2015, and especially in September, the government increasingly involved the local youth militias from Koch, Guit, Leer, and Rubkona (and to a lesser extent from Mayendit) counties in this second military campaign. The county commissioners appointed back during the first military campaign around February 2014 were instrumental in providing these reinforcements to the SPLA and Bul Nuer troops. Recruiting the youth was meant to cut down the IO base and coopt potential IO recruits.

The county commissioner who played the most pivotal role was Koang Biel of Koch county, who had been part of the SSDF in the last war (1983–85) under the command of the SSDF Bul Nuer leader Paulino Matiep. “The relationship between the Jagei and Dok Nuer used to be good,” recalled Dok Nuer women who fled Leer. “But this changed when Koang Biel was appointed by Kiir and mobilized the youth to go and kill. JEM moved together with the Jagei . . . If they decide to go to Leer, the JEM, Jagei, Bul and Dinka, go to these areas.”³⁵

Koang Biel formed an alliance with the Bul Nuer militias who had raided Koch county’s cattle en masse in 2014 and 2015.³⁶ So instead of raiding back from the Bul Nuer, Koang Biel recruited, armed, and instructed the Koch county youth to raid Leer county to reclaim cattle. He acted as a typical ethnopolitical entrepreneur by steering up intersectional enmity, telling the Koch youth and cattle keepers that their cattle had been previously looted not by the Bul Nuer from

Mayom county but by the Dok Nuer from Leer (Machar's home). He was not the only county commissioner to manipulate his fighters, explained a young Nuer woman from Koch who survived being shot: "The commissioners from Koch and Rubkona don't want the cattle keepers to get their cows back from the Bul Nuer. They want them to go fight other counties to get cows. The county commissioners from Rubkona and Koch cooperate together and say that the raiding is done by the people from Leer. But cattle from Mayendit, Leer, Koch, Rubkona, Adok have all been taken by the Bul Nuer."³⁷ Koang Biel also paid for this campaign by letting the youth keep part of the cattle they raided.³⁸

Koang Biel, himself a victim of in-group policing, also made sure to practice violent in-group policing.³⁹ People in Koch were divided. On the one hand, there were those who agreed to join him and the SPLA to protect their cattle and properties from looting and destruction by the SPLA and were given a chance to loot others and aggrandize their own herds.⁴⁰ On the other hand, some decided to join IO, others were bystanders who joined neither group, and finally, some left for fear of being killed. "Some key people of the Jagei Nuer are still in the bush up to now," claimed a civilian from Leer.⁴¹ The neutral bystanders who remained in Koch town only did so because they had old or disabled relatives in town who were unable to walk the journey to UNMISS POC. They were regularly accused of being IO supporters. One of them explained: "They say to us: 'If you don't want to join us, we will take your properties' . . . Koch town is divided in two: those who side with the county commissioner, and those who don't loot and are regularly accused of being IO."⁴²

In collaboration with the Rubkona county commissioner Salam Maluet, Biel went further than intimidating those reluctant to join him. He commissioned the Bul Nuer in September 2015 to fight Koch and Rubkona counties' cattle keepers who wanted to raid Mayom for their looted cattle and who were opposed to raiding Leer. In-group policing also affected Leer county, as a Nuer who fled Leer noted: "After this assembly [at Biel's county headquarters] in July 2015, they [the Jagei armed youth] were based in Leer, to mobilize people and get rid of people. 'You're either with us, or against us.' They tried to mobilize the youth from Leer, but it was difficult to mobilize them, and a lot of them refused and joined IO instead." So the government resorted to forced recruitment: "The recruitment in Leer was forced. The youth refused to join, which led to killings to scare them into joining."⁴³

The distinction between regular SPLA soldiers and the youth was here again often very flimsy, since some of the recruited (but untrained) youth were given SPLA uniforms. With increased involvement from the local armed youth, fewer SPLA soldiers coordinated these attacks. They were less "necessary" than they used to be. Civilians who fled the attacks in Guit county in August 2015 pointed out that the troops were largely Nuer, coordinated by just a few SPLA commanders.

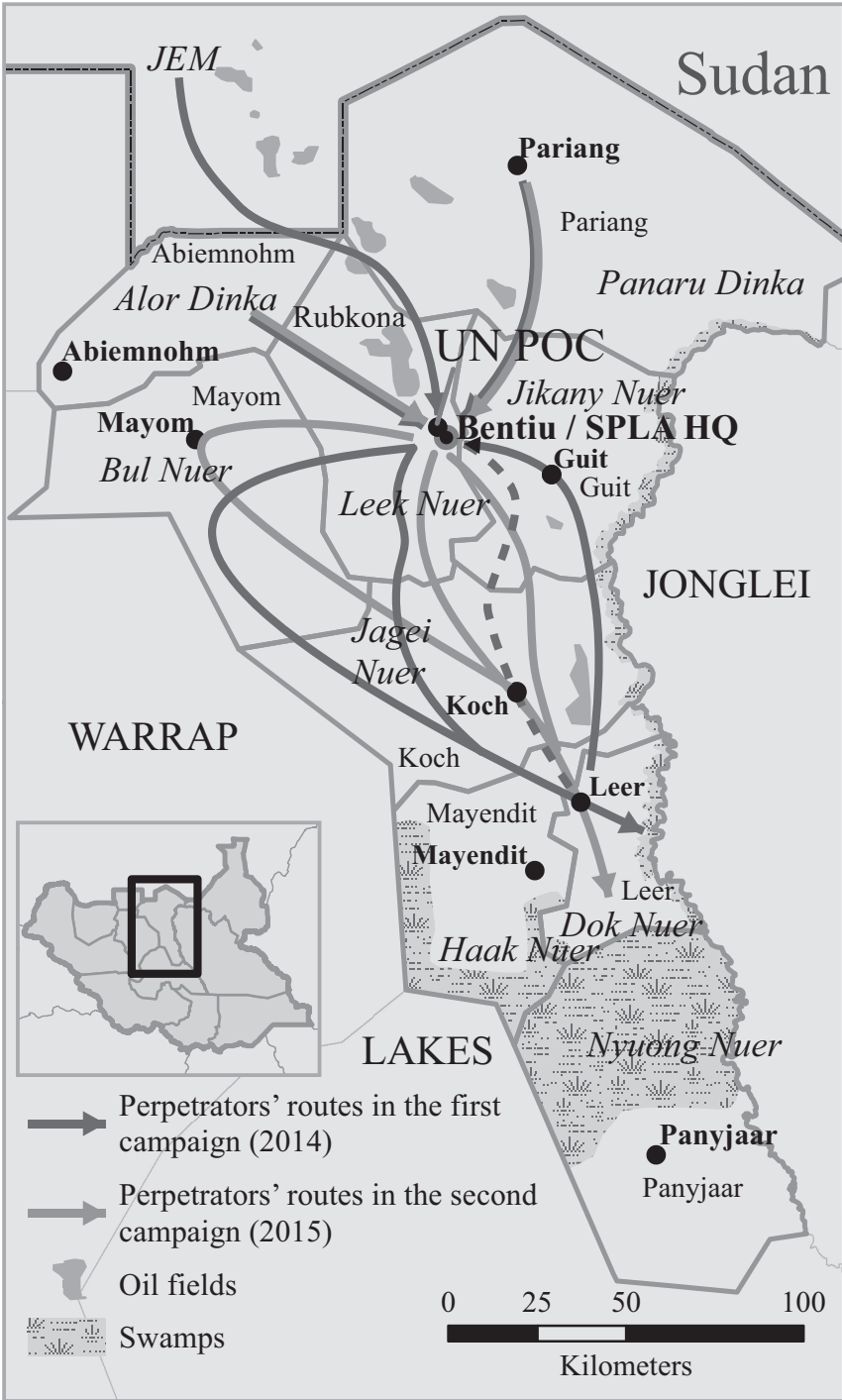


FIGURE 8.2. Map of the two government campaigns in Unity state (2014–15).

The attacks by the Bul Nuer and, most notably, the Koch youth involved their wives, sons, and sometimes their elderly relatives, assigning each age/sex group its own killing and looting tasks. A young man who survived being shot in Leer explained: “The youth from Mayom comes with women and soldiers. Those of Mayom—the youth, the soldiers, young boys aged ten to twelve, and women—are going to Leer now.”⁴⁴ Another woman from Mayendit reported that “the Koch youth and the soldiers had come to Dalual, near Leer . . . They came with their women, their wives.”⁴⁵ In Koch county too, perpetrators came with their children and wives.⁴⁶ This was, as far as research for this book goes, the form of genocidal attacks the closest to a popular event, as in other genocides involving the mobilization of various segments of the population. It illustrated that entire groups were involved in these attacks, pursuing their own goals.

Perpetrators’ Goals

The puzzle with Unity state was that these multiple perpetrators pursued different goals, which made it easy for the government to describe it as another Nuer civil war.

BUL NUER GOALS

The Nuer perpetrators who gained the most from these attacks were the Bul Nuer. As an aid worker put it, “The bloody conquest of southern Unity state in May 2015 by the SPLA Bul Nuer was paid in loot.”⁴⁷

The Bul Nuer had developed their own sense of group legitimacy, originating in the role of their SSDF commanders under Matiep’s leadership in the past war. They were historically the strongest Nuer section militarily, having received the most support from Khartoum, and their leader Matiep had been Kiir’s second in hierarchy in 2006–12, after the 2006 Juba declaration.⁴⁸ A dominant class had emerged in SSDF areas through a predatory mode of production, accumulating wealth in things and people, and mirroring that of SPLA areas. From the sense of Bul Nuer group ownership and legitimacy built on this predatory wealth accumulation derived another example of group entitlement. It placed the Bul at the top of Nuer hierarchy.

In implementing government violence, the Bul Nuer SPLA and youth aimed to capture as much wealth as possible from other Nuer sections. After all, extreme group entitlement dictated that it was their due. A displaced civilian from Mayendit county commented that “they’ve got way more money than before. All the cows have been taken by the Bul Nuer.”⁴⁹ The Bul Nuer SPLA and youth also made clear during the attacks that they despised other Nuer sections. They wanted to strengthen their position and control of Unity, even more so on the

eve of the implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement, signed between the government and Machar's IO after months of international pressure. They were not ready to let the other Nuer sections—especially the Jikany—rob them of their leadership over Unity state. They displayed their own discourse of group entitlement: “In the government, they created another name here: *ther chuong*: ‘fighting for their rights’—to be given governorship after Taban Deng,” recalled a Nuer civilian from Bentiu. “Taban is from the Jikany Nuer. So *ther chuong* is Bul Nuer language, and the conflict between Nuer and Dinka has become a conflict between Jikany and Bul. This term was created by Joseph Monytil, who was chosen by Salva Kiir as governor.”⁵⁰

The Bul Nuer group legitimacy and entitlement paralleled that of the Dinka from Bahr El Ghazal, especially from Kiir and Paul Malong's areas, at the top of Dinka hierarchy. This created shared class interests in their respective ascension. The Bul Nuer elite had more in common with Kiir's faction because class interests trumped Nuer ethnicity. Its goals were more aligned with those of Kiir's faction (who now ruled the ethnocracy and dominated Dinka ranking) than with those of the other Nuer sections, who were always its closest rivals.

This showed how different versions of extreme ethnic group entitlement could coincide out of dominant class interests, especially when (most likely temporarily) confined to different parts of the country. The convergence of ethnic dominant class interests was not surprising, given the similarities in dominant class formation processes in both SSDF and SPLA areas in the last war. Civilians from other Nuer sections perceived the Bul Nuer as conquerors, in the same way that Equatorians saw the Dinka of the advancing SPLA. Therefore, the dominant Bul Nuer class, at the top of the local ethnic ranking system in Unity state, was the best executant for the policy of Kiir's faction. It used Kiir's faction just as much as it had used Khartoum's support in the past.⁵¹ And the same processes of dominant class formation and consolidation through the accumulation of cattle and its sale and reinvestment into the expansion of kinship networks, continued.⁵²

Both Bul Nuer perpetrators themselves and their victims identified the Bul Nuer much more with the Dinka than with the Nuer. They and the Dinka elite benefited the most from the war in Unity state. Class trumped ethnicity to such a degree that Bul Nuer perpetrators adopted and relayed the discourse of Dinka perpetrators. They understood ethnicity as a social radar, a tool for social navigation in times of war.⁵³ This explains why they offered their victims a chance at ethnic conversion. Of course, it also meant that while ethnic defection to the Dinka was useful to them, it was contingent and as such temporary.⁵⁴ Whenever this association with the Dinka would cease to be useful, the Bul Nuer could easily turn their back on the Dinka ethnocrats. For instance, the twenty-eight states decree, passed unilaterally in October 2015 by Kiir in violation of the country's

Transitional Constitution to divide up the country's ten states, effectively redrew boundaries to the advantage of the Dinka constituency, most contentiously in oil-rich areas, and marginalized non-Dinka groups. This created considerable tension between the Bul and the Dinka of Unity as it encroached on their land.⁵⁵ The Bul Nuer's allegiance was thus conditional, and they kept their Dinka counterparts on their toes by continuing to recruit in Mayom county. Their ethnic defection did not imply that the Dinka ethnocrats considered them genuine Dinka either—they just needed a strong ally against the rest of the Nuer.

OTHER PERPETRATORS' GOALS

The violence perpetrated by local Nuer groups in Unity looked like a set of dominos. The south of Unity—Leer—was the end of this domino sequence precipitated by Bul Nuer raiding and was hit the hardest.⁵⁶ This was partly a function of geography: Leer was raided successively and simultaneously by various perpetrators descending south. Of course, Leer was also hit the hardest because Machar hailed from there, which placed the Dok Nuer at the bottom of Nuer hierarchy, dominated by the Bul, and made Leer the perfect political target. At the bottom of the barrel, Leer was a reservoir for plundering.

In this Nuer ranking, the Jagei Nuer perpetrators from Koch anxiously tried to secure a second position after the Bul Nuer.⁵⁷ Both Bul Nuer and Jagei Nuer had the goal of securing and improving their own group's social status through plundering, destruction, and accumulation (including of women and children they did not kill). In June–July 2015, the Jagei Nuer youth “came every day to collect the remaining cattle after the Bul Nuer raids (in May).”⁵⁸ They did the same in Leer: “They came every day to collect everything from us,” a woman from Leer recalled. “Cattle, clothes, and then they burned the houses.”⁵⁹

The fact that the Nuer Jagei perpetrators included women and children illustrates that they all participated in these attacks as a group, just like the Bul Nuer SPLA soldiers and youth in April–July 2015. The wives, armed with machetes, were tasked with finishing off the wounded after the raids and helping to collect and organize the loot in Leer, Koch, and Guit counties. These attacks considerably enriched the perpetrators in cattle, to the extent that it lowered their marriageable age.⁶⁰

Perpetrators from other Nuer sections also fought to preserve or even improve their own personal and group status over ordinary civilians from Leer and those who sided with IO in their own county. This meant that the war also trickled down into local conflicts over cattle raids. “I joined the government in July 2015,” explained an armed Nuer government youth from Rubkona. “It’s a conflict within Rubkona county. It’s also a conflict between IO and the SPLA . . . I joined the government because a big part of Rubkona county is near Mayom, and the

youth from Mayom comes to Rubkona and takes the cows.”⁶¹ This anxiety pushed recruitment and invariably escalated in tit-for-tat cattle raids. But overall, group ranking remained determined by the perpetrators’ position in the local-national network controlled by the center in Juba.

State Coordination of the Attacks

Indeed, the state (Juba) regulated events on the ground via its key intermediaries: SPLA commanders, SPLA soldiers from different divisions (especially from Bahr El Ghazal), and the instrumental county commissioners. There was effectively no difference between the government of South Sudan (GoSS) and the SPLA; as an aid worker put it, “The SPLA and the GoSS are the same thing: all the county commissioners are appointed by the SPLA.”⁶² “The SPLA division commander gives orders to the county commissioners,” explained a civilian from Leer. “Decisions are made at the Juba level.”⁶³

The county commissioners coordinated those attacks on the ground. Before and after the attacks on Leer, troops gathered at Biel’s headquarters to receive instructions, report back on the attacks, and organize the division of the loot after the attacks. A Nuer civilian from Leer described these assemblies in June and July 2015: “First Koang Biel had a general assembly with the soldiers and gave them directives, [and the soldiers] then report back to him. There were few Bul Nuer—the majority of them were Jagei. And then there were a few Dinka soldiers from Aweil and a few from Rubkona . . . The Dok Nuer hid their cattle, hence the eleven attacks and the pursuits in the swamps. On July 17, Koang Biel had another general assembly: he said that if these people (Dok Nuer) did not accept [being] raided, then they shall be killed and their houses burned. Assemblies are carried to count looted cattle and plan new raids.”⁶⁴

Biel coordinated his attacks with his other county commissioner peers.⁶⁵ All county commissioners involved in the attacks received their share of the loot.⁶⁶ “Every county commissioner is instructed by Salva to destroy their own place,” said a Nuer woman from Koch who survived being shot. “They get a lot of money because they support Salva’s side . . . Koang Biel is the worse.”⁶⁷ A Nuer civilian described Jagei Nuer troops from Koch descending on Leer: “Koang Biel was their commander, the county commissioner of Koch. Wal Yach was the commissioner of Leer and they coordinated together the troops’ movement.”⁶⁸

The county commissioners were expert ethnopolitical entrepreneurs: they channeled group anxieties at being socially demoted into actions serving the group goals of both the Dinka leadership and the local Nuer perpetrators. They spread rumors to motivate attackers. A Nuer woman from Koch further explained: “The county commissioners from Rubkona and Koch cooperate together and say that

the raiding is done by the people from Leer.”⁶⁹ Leer’s own county commissioner (Wal Yach) also pinned Bul Nuer raiding on Leer inhabitants, as Biel instructed.⁷⁰

Ideology, Intent, and Genocide

A few elements made these state-coordinated attacks genocidal. First, Nuer perpetrators—ethnic defectors—appropriated the center’s Dinka supremacist ideology. Second, they identified their target group in a form of groupism typical of genocides. Third, they expressed their intent to kill that group in both direct and indirect ways.

Dinka Supremacist Ideology and Ethnic Defection

I have noted that the perpetrators were increasingly Nuer. Yet the Dinka were still present all throughout the military campaigns in Unity state.⁷¹ Dinka from Abiemnohm and Pariang (northern Unity) were spotted in attacks on Leer in August 2015. SPLA Divisions 3, 6, and 5 came through Warrap, Aweil, Bentiu, and Leer. Most Dinka perpetrators in Leer came from Division 5.⁷² All in all, the Dinka perpetrators in Unity state were mostly from the northern and western Bahr El Ghazal region.

Survivors of attacks pointed out that the perpetrators, even when they were Nuer—and the vast majority were—depicted themselves as Dinka.⁷³ The youth from Mayom and Koch counties identified themselves to their victims as Dinka instead of Nuer, presumably because they associated Dinka ethnicity with the central power and wealth. They did not feel any sort of Nuer solidarity with the civilians they victimized. A young man from Leer who survived being shot said of the Koch youth (the Jagei Nuer), “When they took control of Leer, they killed everyone and they said, ‘We’re Dinka, we’re not Nuer’ . . . All the Nuer supporters to the SPLA say they’re Dinka, not Nuer. And Salva Kiir says ‘I’m Dinka and I’m fighting the Nuer.’”⁷⁴ Another young woman from Koch, also a gunshot victim, said the same thing of the Rubkona youth who descended on Koch in July 2015: “They were also calling themselves ‘Dinka.’ When they catch you, they beat you and they tell you, ‘Call yourself Dinka, otherwise I’ll kill you.’ These men were the youth, not the SPLA. But they were instructed by the county commissioner to do that.”⁷⁵ Another young woman from Leer demonstrated how much the Koch and Leer youth shared the same rhetoric than Dinka attackers: “The people who attacked are from Leer, and from Koch: they’re together . . . Some of the attackers were Dinka . . . They’re from Bahr El Ghazal, Pariang (northern Unity), etc. They shot my mother in the hand. If they ask you, ‘Are you a Dinka?’ then they

ask you, ‘Are you a rebel?’ My mother didn’t say anything and she was shot in the hand. The Koch Jagei Nuer also ask the same question . . . If they find you, they kill you.”⁷⁶

Overall, victims’ testimonies pointed to the same rhetoric in all main Dinka and Nuer perpetrating groups—from the Bul Nuer attackers to the Koch, Leer, and Rubkona youth. In all perpetrators’ groups, Dinka ethnicity became a synonym for political legitimacy and the right to live. The reverse was also true: Nuer ethnicity was equated with rebellion; it implied death. This rhetoric illustrated how much Dinka group legitimacy and entitlement had degenerated into an exclusionary ideology adopted by subcontracted Nuer perpetrators. “When they ask you ‘are you a Dinka?’, you’re lucky,” another man from Leer said of his attackers. “Then they say, ‘You cannot be outside if you’re not a rebel. If you’re not a Dinka, you’re not with the government.’”⁷⁷

Following their own ethnic defection from the Nuer to the Dinka group, Nuer perpetrators thus practiced a form of ethnic miscuing (passing as Dinka).⁷⁸ This may have been an attempt to diffuse responsibility and accountability for their crimes against their original Nuer peers as well. “When they come to Leer and do all these things, they come as ‘Dinka,’”⁷⁹ explained the gunshot survivor from Leer.⁸⁰

Ethnic defection did not equate to the perpetrator’s’ literal integration into the Dinka, especially given the supremacist ideology of the Dinka hardliners. Yet the perpetrators did not come up with it on their own. This was communicated to them—whether explicitly, as victims posited (“they were instructed by the county commissioner to do that”), or implicitly.⁸¹ Either way, it was the result of a command.

Both ethnic defection and miscuing were expressions of the perpetrators’ attempt to navigate the war socially. Ethnic affiliation worked as a kind of social radar: something to hold on to to make the most of this war or just survive it. From the government’s side, Juba was implementing the same strategy as Khartoum in the last war: playing Nuer groups against each other to weaken the opposition (IO) and displacing Nuer populations to secure control over the oil fields. A Nuer civilian from Jonglei, at the time in Unity state, noted, “It’s as if the Dinka wanted the Nuer to have internal problems. Last time, the Arabs did the same. They tell you, ‘You’re my friend,’ they give you a gun, ammunition, and then, ‘Go and fight your friend.’”⁸²

Nuer communities under attack took full measure of the ethnocracy’s role in coordinating the attacks against them. They chose to express this by calling the perpetrators “Dinka Jagei” and “Dinka Bul.”⁸³ While countering the government narrative of a Nuer civil war, this name-calling of perpetrators also marked the success of the government’s divisive strategy of the Nuer, resulting in the unraveling of Nuer groupness and the eroding of overarching Nuer ethnicity.

The Nuer perpetrators disassociated themselves so much that they tried to force—at least rhetorically—ethnic conversion upon their victims. They threatened to kill civilians who refused to say that they were Dinka (“call yourself Dinka, otherwise I’ll kill you”).⁸⁴ In doing so, they were professing Dinka ethnic domination. Yet these Nuer perpetrators still differed from the Dinka perpetrators of the December 2013 Juba massacre, who had offered no chance at Dinka conversion at all to their victims. This was consistent with the government’s polarizing strategy, which through violent cooptation chipped away at Nuer groupness.

Finally, the fact the Bul Nuer and Jagei Nuer were both trying to secure their place in Nuer hierarchy in the context of local-national alliances most likely made them more compliant than Dinka perpetrators (more present in the first campaign) in fulfilling the objectives of the Dinka ethnocracy. In other words, anxious about their own status, subcontracted Nuer perpetrators were overzealous. A woman from Koch explained: “Among them, there are Dinka . . . The Bul Nuer want to be appreciated by Salva Kiir . . . They want to be appreciated by their boss for killing people.”⁸⁵ This overzealousness by local perpetrators, often watched or coordinated by a few regular SPLA Dinka soldiers, thus contributed to a crescendo in violence, in both scale and frequency. Between 2014 and 2015, the population of the Bentiu UN POC nearly tripled to reach over 140,000 people, while households in Unity state got 20 percent smaller.⁸⁶

Intent to Destroy

GROUPISM

The flip side of the Nuer perpetrators’ ethnic defection to the Dinka was that they targeted their victims by associating Nuer ethnic identity with rebellion—with Machar’s IO.⁸⁷ In doing so, they revived the old negative ethnic stereotype about the Nuer (*nyagat*, rebels) that had plagued the SPLA in the second civil war.

This association between Nuer ethnicity and rebellion was a form of groupism that differentiated the perpetrators from their victims. Nuer civilians, so long as they were choosing not to live in garrison towns and villages with perpetrators identifying themselves as Dinka, were considered a “rebel group” to be eliminated. “The government says, ‘These Nuer people are rebels,’” explained a civilian from Leer.⁸⁸ Another man from Rubkona related, “The SPLA tells people, ‘If you leave town, we consider you IO, we kill you and we take your cows.’”⁸⁹ According to a young woman from Leer, “The people who are not staying with them (the government’s side) are considered rebels. If they find you, they kill you.”⁹⁰

The only way for a man not to be killed while exiting “legally” was to disprove his given rebel identity through an official piece of paper signed by a government official and showed at a checkpoint.⁹¹ This was reminiscent of the killings

at checkpoints during the Juba massacre of December 2013. The only difference now was that the men manning those checkpoints were Nuer and not Dinka. But they identified as Dinka and their Nuer victims identified them as Dinka too.

INTENT TO KILL

For the victims, it was clear that the attacks were meant to kill, not just loot or scare into submission. Perpetrators often outnumbered their victims in these attacks.⁹² Civilians were so keenly aware of their perpetrators' intent to kill them that they did not build barges or canoes for fear of helping the SPLA troops to reach them into the swamps.⁹³ Speaking of attacks in Leer county (in Thonyor and Thuriel) in August 2015, a Nuer civilian who fled to an island recalled, "Attacks were not about taking cattle, they were about raping, killing. From 6am they attacked, and people fled to the swamps. If they found a girl or woman, they take her. If they found a man, they shoot him."⁹⁴ Old people were not spared either: "The youth flees and leaves the elderly behind," two women from Leer narrated. "So when they come, they kill the old people. Whenever they find someone in Leer, they kill him/her, whether from IO or not."⁹⁵

Other civilians from Leer recounted how "the SPLA gathered people in one house and burnt it."⁹⁶ "Sometimes they hung people, beat them with guns, and collected people to burn them."⁹⁷ Such extreme violence did not just affect Leer county: for example, less than an hour's car ride from Bentiu, in a town named Ding-Ding in Rubkona county, Bul Nuer troops, after shooting down civilians, also hung six people up the village tree in May 2015: three women and three men. The dehumanizing character of the violence was not lost on the victims: "I wonder," asked another man from Leer, "when these people come and get you—is that a person or an animal that they kill like that? Has the world forgotten we're human beings?"⁹⁸

COMPROMISING SURVIVAL

Annihilating violence and a scorched-earth policy inducing starvation indicated an intent to destroy the group of Nuer civilians defined as "rebels" by the perpetrators. The fact that perpetrators did everything to compromise the victims' survival manifested their intent to kill, this time by attrition.⁹⁹ They left nothing behind for the civilians to survive. They took the cattle, burned the food they did not take with them, and destroyed humanitarian material (including seeds, medical equipment, and drugs) to diminish these communities' chances at survival. They burned a lot (if not most) of the houses in these counties, along with food supplies they did not loot.¹⁰⁰ They looted the civilians' clothes, down to their shoes. Some civilians fled in their underwear.

Those who managed to escape and tried to head north to the UN POC had to walk for days, weeks, or months, depending on the route. They faced SPLA

attacks on the road, resulting in looting, killing, and rapes. While the UN POC offered shelter, the trick for civilians from central and southern Unity was to make it there alive. A woman from Guit recounted how out of her group of a hundred civilians who fled her county in May 2015, “they [Dinka soldiers] killed twenty of us after hunting us down on the road.”¹⁰¹ Another woman recounted, “We saw them, they wanted to kill us, we ran away again.”¹⁰²

As a result, families scattered to multiply their chances at survival.¹⁰³ A Nuer civilian from Leer described how he dispersed his seventeen children: “Seven are still there [in Leer county’s swamps], ten are here [in Bentiu POC]. I was hiding on some island.”¹⁰⁴ Another woman from Rubkona related the same survival tactics: “Some of my children remained in Jazeera. My husband is in the bush with them.”¹⁰⁵

By May, the counties of Guit, Koch, Mayendit, and Leer risked famine. A young woman from Leer explained, “There’s nothing to eat . . . There’s no food to eat and killing is still going on.”¹⁰⁶ The only reason why the international monitoring body of food emergencies, the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC), did not declare famine then was that bodies could not be accessed and counted in this war zone.¹⁰⁷

Yet the implications were clear to the civilians from southern Unity: “People who are still in the swamps, hunger will kill them,” those of Leer predicted.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, some starved, others drowned—especially young girls.¹⁰⁹ “The heaviest cost of war is on adults, who channel all the resources to children,” explained an aid worker in Unity. “And the cost of war is especially heavy on pregnant women.”¹¹⁰ The attrition of Nuer civilians in the swamps crippled the group and obliterated its demographic future. “There’s no household who hasn’t lost a relative,” said a civilian who fled Leer.¹¹¹

Civilians in the swamps also still faced government attacks, as a Nuer refugee on an island in late July 2015 reported: “They attacked from Leer the people in swamps, in the islands.”¹¹² Some people, desperate for food and hoping to cultivate, returned to their villages. They were immediately exposed to new waves of attacks by different armed groups, sometimes minutes after they had arrived.

Consequently, in 2015, mortality rates exceeded twice the emergency threshold, and that was still a conservative estimate. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) calculated that, among the twenty-four communities it had accessed (the equivalent of a quarter of the population of Unity state), a total of 10,553 people had died over the course of the year. This figure included 7,165 violent deaths and 829 deaths from drowning. The 7,165 violent deaths were just the tip of the iceberg and did not factor in sexual violence.¹¹³

GENOCIDAL RAPE

Yet sexual violence killed, crippled, and displaced the Nuer as a group during both military campaigns in Unity state. The perpetrators' intent to destroy the group through rape was clear. This is what made those rapes genocidal.¹¹⁴

During the first campaign, government and JEM troops raped women in particularly cruel ways, for example sticking a woman's dead baby's arm into her vagina.¹¹⁵ In Leer, rapes were followed by acts of forced cannibalism and killing.¹¹⁶ Rapists aimed to rape as many women as possible. They used stones, guns, and sticks to rape their victims. They meant to destroy women's reproductive capacity, and victims often died from gang rapes. The mental toll on the victims and their communities was evident and affected them physically too.¹¹⁷

Rape continued to be used as a tool for genocide in the second military campaign of Unity. Most women raped were still gang-raped, following threats of murder and beatings.¹¹⁸ Rape was a collective punishment on the Nuer group: "They call civilians 'people from Riek Machar.' That's why they rape," explained a woman from Koch. "It's to punish the women."¹¹⁹

The intent to kill was still clear in those rapes. A young woman raped by two Bul Nuer soldiers in Guit, related, "They saw people, they grabbed me, they said, 'If you run, we'll kill you.'"¹²⁰ "They tell the women, 'If you don't want us, we'll kill you,'" two other women from Leer reported. "And rape is another way of killing civilians. It's not only one person who rapes—it's ten. Sometimes the women die."¹²¹ In fact, the number of perpetrators could exceed ten. "My mother died of rape in May 2015," recounted a young woman from Koch. "She was raped in May by twenty men from the Bul Nuer militias."¹²²

Gang-rapes were often succeeded by torture, murder, or death from rape injuries. "One person was raped by ten men, and later on, when they finished with her, they killed her," attested women from Leer. "It happened a lot, every day."¹²³ Another woman from Koch proclaimed, "Rape is a form of killing. Rape is killing the community."¹²⁴ Gang-rapes were often witnessed by others and done in public, intended as a performance, with some of the victims too injured to leave their village. SPLA soldiers gang-raped both women (including pregnant women) and female children, and castrated both men and boys. Bul Nuer troops also consistently threatened women they had just raped that other troops would come later to kill them if they did not leave.¹²⁵

Therefore, rape was both "torture and a form of killing."¹²⁶ The association of rape with killing was so strong that women from age fifteen all the way into their sixties were considered a liability on the road paved with SPLA ambushes.¹²⁷ Indeed, any male civilian who refused to surrender cattle and female relatives was considered an IO supporter who should be annihilated.

Nuer men and boys were also the targets of genocidal sexual and gender-based violence. Men were being killed for being men, considered potential IO recruits. They were especially targeted by killings, and many fewer survived the journey to the UN POC in 2015 than in 2014.¹²⁸ They were more likely to be killed immediately than women, who were gang-raped and killed, or died later of rape injuries.¹²⁹

The use of rape as a tool of genocide did not stop once women reached the POC. Forced to reexit the camp in search of firewood to cook food provided by aid agencies, they met the perpetrators again: “When you go out, they rape you, they beat you, they kill you. The women who are raped outside the POC, some of them come back, but some of them are killed.”¹³⁰

The state did not just use rape to destroy its victims. Indeed, as in other contexts such as Sierra Leone, gang-rapes were meant to redress low cohesion among diverse and forcibly recruited troops.¹³¹ They solidified ties among perpetrators by diffusing responsibility from the individual to the group. These rapes were so systematic that they amounted to a collective “job,” or “task”: “These people, when they come, they catch the ladies. If the ladies run, they shoot,” explained a woman gang-raped in Guit by Bul Nuer soldiers. “These were SPLA soldiers with uniforms . . . about ten other women were raped with me, next to one another, outside the houses.”¹³² The performance of tasks is typically the most efficient at binding groups—more than collective trauma, for example.¹³³ Here, these gang-rape tasks meant to involve as many soldiers as possible. Another woman from Rubkona recounted, “I was raped while 9 months pregnant . . . The attackers wore military uniforms . . . Four other women were raped as well. Only one of these men did not take part in the raping.”¹³⁴

Mass collective rape thus made groups—that of the perpetrators, and that of the victims. It reinforced group cohesion among the Bul Nuer and other Nuer armed youth, not immune to in-group policing and forced recruitment.¹³⁵ It also reinforced the victim groups’ cohesion, who now refused to marry from within the perpetrators’ groups.¹³⁶

Mass gang-rapes also participated in the process of ethnic ranking within the state and among Nuer sections. Indeed, the women from Leer were most frequently gang-raped, followed by women from other counties; by contrast, the Bul Nuer women from Mayom, associated with the government, were least frequently raped. This was a demonstration of group worth, with real demographic implications.

Gang-rapes were an expression of Bul Nuer group entitlement, through both the acquisition and the destruction of women’s individual bodies, and as such they were also a form of conquest. Perpetrators raped, abducted, and killed pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, induced labor in dramatic conditions,

and separated mothers from young babies left to die.¹³⁷ Perpetrators spread HIV as well, which even if unintentional would still contribute in the long run to the demographic destruction of the victim group.¹³⁸

The rape and killing of women and the abduction of young women and girls destroyed the collective material wealth of the other Nuer sections—especially the Dok Nuer—since women represented wealth in cattle through bridewealth exchange. “They take the girls and kill the mother. You look for the cows, you look for the girls,” explained a Nuer civilian from Bentiu. “The girls, you’ll take them. You kill the mother, you’ll take the children. Small boys, you kill . . . Anyone big, you kill them.”¹³⁹ Perpetrators accumulated labor and capital supporting their group ascension.¹⁴⁰ “More children mean strength: militarily, politically, and raiding will be easier,” recounted a Nuer civilian from Leer. “They [the Bul Nuer] think that they can have more children and more power.”¹⁴¹ The same applied to the Koch youth: “The armed youth gets the benefit of birthing a new generation with the women they captured, without paying any dowry,” attested a man from Leer.¹⁴²

Expanding the Dinka Conquest: From Ten to Twenty-Eight States

The second genocidal phase in Unity also expanded the Dinka conquest. Indeed, mass displacement of Nuer civilians from central and southern Unity state freed up space for the SPLA to move in—similar to the first phase of genocidal violence in Juba.

The goal of government attacks was not to defeat the underarmed, underfunded, and undermanned IO, but to uproot civilians of the “wrong” ethnicity, packed in the UN POC or in the bush and swamps, and to capture their land. It was clear that “the government’s rhetoric that IO surrounds Bentiu is meant to allow the SPLA to go attack the villages.”¹⁴³ Aid workers on the ground at the time of the second military campaign (2015) noticed that “on the way to Koch, the schools are empty, the villages are empty. The oil refineries are empty. The SPLA moved in and around it.”¹⁴⁴ A man from Rubkona who survived being shot explained, “The government wants to clear off the area. Civilians in the POC know that . . . they know that nowhere is safe.”¹⁴⁵

In addition to the involvement of Dinka SPLA soldiers from the Bahr El Ghazal region in most attacks, Dinka civilians—including from the northern part of Unity—tagged along: “People who’re not soldiers, who are Dinka but not SPLA, came to take civilians’ clothes, to loot. They also come from Pariang, and Abiemnohm, these Dinka.”¹⁴⁶ Civilians were reluctant to leave their homes,

even under deadly attacks, precisely “because they want to protect their land,” observed an aid worker in southern Unity.¹⁴⁷

In Bentiu, SPLA soldiers and their families quickly moved into the homes of civilians who fled to the POC. Nuer civilians noticed that “Dinka from Wau, Pariang, Bor, Aweil, Abiemnohm, and Rumbek” came to settle, encouraged by the Dinka Division 4 commander Deng Wol, from Warrap.¹⁴⁸ Those who refused to move to the POC to protect their homes had to contend with threats, violence, curfews, and night searches by SPLA soldiers.¹⁴⁹

Among Dinka sections, the Dinka from northern Unity benefited from a decree passed unilaterally by Kiir on October 2, 2015, in violation of South Sudan’s Transitional Constitution.¹⁵⁰ This decree redivided South Sudan from ten into twenty-eight states. Government rhetoric held that the redivision of South Sudan would mitigate conflict through power devolution to the people. Kiir’s legal advisor repeatedly referred to the SPLA leader John Garang’s moto of “taking the towns to the people” to dress this reform in legitimate attire and appeal to Garang’s followers.¹⁵¹

In fact, the twenty-eight states decree consolidated the ethnocrats’ military power on the ground and accelerated resource accumulation to advance the Dinka conquest. This fait accompli was an attempt to behead IO through a system of cooptation, before any implementation of the peace agreement (ARCSS) signed in August 2015 between Kiir and Machar.

Ambrose Riiny Thiik, the JCE chairman, was one of the speakers at the only public debate on the twenty-eight states in Juba, even though he no longer was chief justice. He vocally expressed his opposition to the August 2015 peace agreement “imposed” by the international community while seated next to the presidential legal advisor.¹⁵² This spoke volumes about the role of the JCE in the twenty-eight states decree, yet it was impossible to date this expansionist plan of the Dinka land.

In effect, the twenty-eight states decree amounted to an expansion of Dinka territory while pushing non-Dinka communities out of their homeland through violence: to the UN POCs, to the bush, or to neighboring countries. Unity state was a case in point. There, the twenty-eight states decree pushed the boundary of Dinka land south. It expanded the Dinka Abiemnohm and Pariang counties in northern Unity, united them into a new Dinka state called “Ruweg” encroaching southward on Mayom (Bul Nuer land), Guit, and Rubkona county. “Abiemnohm and Pariang will try to take the river down to Kilo Talatin (Kilo 30),” explained two civilians from Bentiu. “It will become part of Pariang. So land in Rubkona will be taken. This twenty-eight states decree will change colonial borders.”¹⁵³ A former Nuer oil worker from Rubkona noted, “Unity oil fields belong to Rubkona. Manga belongs to Guit. Both are taken by Pariang county.

Kaikang in Mayom has oil wells [wells dug, but not connected]. This is also taken by Abiemnohm.”¹⁵⁴

The twenty-eight states decree was “all about the oil and the land,” in the words of a civil society member.¹⁵⁵ This created anxiety even among the subcontracted Nuer perpetrators, especially the Bul Nuer. The victims recognized this conquest: “Kiir wants the oil-producing areas to be owned by the Dinka people,” said women who escaped from Leer. “That’s why they’re killing us.”¹⁵⁶ “Kiir wants to take the oil of Rubkona, to Dinka land,” noted another civilian from Rubkona. “The same thing is happening in Malakal.”¹⁵⁷

Indeed, there was a pattern. Not only was it reminiscent of Khartoum’s displacement of Nuer civilians in the last civil war through the SSSF.¹⁵⁸ What happened in Unity state also prefigured another genocidal phase in the other oil-rich state of Upper Nile, this time against the Shilluk, shortly after the full start of the Equatorian campaign.¹⁵⁹ Violence in Upper Nile had not yet reached its apex. But there, the twenty-eight states decree also encroached on oil-rich traditional Shilluk land in the capital of Malakal.

Therefore, the subcontracted Nuer perpetrators who uttered a rhetoric rooted in exclusionary Dinka ideology and acted under the watch of a few Dinka soldiers served the expansion of the Dinka conquest while pursuing their own group ascension. They contributed to expand the Dinka conquest by waging violence—including rape, the equivalent of “planting a flag” on another man’s territory.¹⁶⁰ Violence eliminated civilians and crammed them in the UN POC and in the swamps, thus freeing their land both for the government to exploit oil and for the local Dinka, who were the minority group in the mostly Nuer Unity state, to expand their territory.

Unity’s War Economy

Predatory wealth accumulation was part of the expanding conquest and increased with violence and displacement. Government troops consistently pillaged the homes and looted the cattle of civilians in their *luaks* (cattle barns) and their cattle camps. In May 2015, armed Bul Nuer youth, supported by the SPLA, raided and plundered cattle from every county in southern Unity except Panyjaar (too far down south) and most of Mayendit, which was looted by SPLA soldiers and armed youth coming in south from Lakes.¹⁶¹ Cattle looting continued for the rest of the year and afterwards, as the armed youth from Koch played an increasing role in violence. The raiders amassed the looted cattle in their own cattle camps.¹⁶²

Beneficiaries included the county commissioners coordinating the attacks and providing troops.¹⁶³ The division of the looted cattle followed precise rules of

allocation. “A list even circulates every day to distribute the cattle depending on ranks,” a Nuer civilian explained. “Wal Yach gets fifteen, the Koch commissioner gets twenty, Khor Gatmai gets fifteen. The rest is taken by the youth. Paul Malong takes his share from the governor of Unity. The share to the state governor is not given in name to a particular person, but to an office, a department.”¹⁶⁴

The county commissioners all quickly expanded their kinship networks thanks to these profitable genocidal campaigns.¹⁶⁵ Looted cattle went up to the governor of Unity state—the Bul Nuer Joseph Monytil—who reallocated some of his share to the central government in Juba. The looted cattle also made its way to the Bul Nuer SPLA leadership in Bentiu, with numbers tattooed on the looted cattle distinguishing who owned what.¹⁶⁶ The armed local youth was last in getting its share, after part of the cattle was traded.¹⁶⁷

Of course, it was impossible to know for certain how many cattle each of those stakeholders received after each raid. But the estimate of twenty cattle delivered to the Koch commissioner Koang Biel was in the realm of possibilities.¹⁶⁸ The Koch youth was very frequently involved in raids. In June 2015 alone, they raided Leer eleven times.¹⁶⁹ They seemed to raid more than once a week—say two to three times a week. If averaged to 2.5 raids per week, over a six month-period, Biel could have accumulated 1,200 heads of cattle. With a low estimate of cattle price (US\$80 per head of cattle), this meant a biannual revenue of \$96,000—or \$192,000 over a year.¹⁷⁰ This is likely an underestimate, and to the political elite it was pocket money.

Predatory wealth accumulation continued to be ethnically differentiated. Even someone like Biel had to contend with a hierarchy reflecting Nuer ethnic ranking in the distribution of looted cattle between the county commissioners. All the county commissioners paid tribute in looted cattle to the Bul Nuer.¹⁷¹ This tribute was both for military support and as a form of racketeering reminiscent of wartime SSDF and SPLA practices. This was typical of a state-building process, and logical since the Bul Nuer dominated the state administration in Unity. Therefore, cattle looting and its conversion into tribute enriched the Bul Nuer the most out of all the Nuer subcontracted by the government. This consolidated the Bul Nuer dominant class constituted in the second civil war. In doing so, it also reinforced Nuer ethnic ranking. But the trade of looted cattle, especially between the Bul Nuer and the Dinka, also continued to illustrate shared dominant class interests between the two ethnic groups.

The capture of Nuer civilians’ resources was highly profitable. Cattle were so abundant that those not feeding the troops thus had to be sold as quickly as possible or moved for grazing and health.¹⁷² The trade of looted cattle from Leer and other counties involved several intermediaries. While still at the site of the attacks, the various perpetrators resold the cattle they looted to traders, mostly

Bul Nuer.¹⁷³ Those traders transported it to Bentiu and then Mayom to sell to Bul Nuer buyers from Mayom and to Dinka buyers from Warrap and from Abiemnohm and Pariang counties in northern Unity state.

Of course, it was impossible to separate the traders from the SPLA. “Some traders are still with the SPLA, they’re the ones buying these looted cattle,” explained women from Leer.¹⁷⁴ “Without support from the government [the SPLA],” said two civilians from Bentiu, “they could not have traded.”¹⁷⁵ “The government has all the cows!” proclaimed other civilians. “The majority of the traders are from Mayom, and then the wealthy soldiers buy the cows. They’re usually from Bul Nuer and Dinka, and Toro Boro (JEM): they are all buying the bulls.” Wealthy soldiers were especially Bul and Dinka from both Mayom and Warrap, Kiir’s home state.¹⁷⁶ They shared the same dominant class interests, resting on the same types of predatory and ethnically differentiated wealth accumulation, which shaped discourses of extreme group entitlement.

“Some [looted] cattle also reach Juba,” a Nuer civilian from Leer explained. “And Aneth, between Abyei and Abiemnohm—that’s where the Arabs and Darfuri come to take the cattle.”¹⁷⁷ The “Arab” (Messiriya and Darfuri) and Dinka traders from Northern Bahr El Ghazal and Warrap thus congregated in this SPLA-run market of Aneth in Abyei (near Warrap), and in the markets of Agok, Mayom, Pariang, and Abiemnohm.¹⁷⁸ Some of the looted cattle eventually wound up in Sudan via Abyei and then Darfur and Southern Kodofan. Northern Baggara traders cooperated with Bul Nuer traders to transport and sell the looted cattle to the Omdurman cattle market, famous for trading looted cattle in the last war.¹⁷⁹ Thus the perpetrators reactivated the last war’s economic networks.

Launching the Third Phase in Equatoria

A genocidal mode of production, resting on ethnic supremacy and consisting of annihilating predation and a profitable war economy, contributed to precipitate the third genocidal phase. The SPLA brought some of the cattle looted en masse from Unity state into Western and then Central Equatoria via Lakes state to graze and to protect and aggrandize the Dinka elite’s herds.¹⁸⁰

The routing of the looted Nuer cattle by Dinka cattle herders and the SPLA into Western Equatoria was the first step toward further expanding the Dinka conquest, this time into Equatoria. The problem was that the local Moro (Equatorian) from Mundri (Western Equatoria), were already frustrated with the Dinka. Grievances dated back to the last war and worsened after December 2013.¹⁸¹ Still, the Moro noticed the change in 2015: “There’s more cattle now, because they take it and loot it.” Unity state’s cattle also wound up in Wonduruba, in Central

Equatoria, south of Mundri and Juba. As the SPLA brought the looted cattle from Unity on their land, both the Moro (from Mundri) and the Pojulu (from Wonduruba) started joining the IO.¹⁸²

They had good reasons: with the SPLA came the Dinka cattle herders from Lakes and Warrap who benefited from its protection and who started raiding the Equatorians' cattle too.¹⁸³ Again, it seemed impossible to really distinguish the cattle herders from the SPLA. A Pojulu man from Wonduruba whose cattle was raided said, "The Dinka have taken on the cattle . . . The Dinka out in the bush with cattle also have the SPLA uniform . . . There are many men keeping the cattle. They have weapons, even the big guns—PKMs, RPGs, Kalashnikovs." The Dinka cattle herders came with their families, the Pojulu man noticed: "They keep the cattle in groups and with their wives and children, they reach about fifty people . . . There are many cattle, even with women and children. They're all Dinka."¹⁸⁴

As the SPLA was trying to bring its cattle from Western Equatoria (Mundri) into Central Equatoria (Yei county), it continued to route the cattle deeper into Western Equatoria, to Maridi. "Mundri was the first place to blow up," explained two civilians. "It was on May 27, 2015." This was right at the height of the second military campaign in Unity state, with mass cattle raiding. "There was a lot of cattle brought [into Equatoria] by the Dinka. People started resisting because the cattle was destroying the crops and people were shot after protesting. This led to the formation of militias to resist."¹⁸⁵ An inhabitant from Mundri West, whose crops were trampled on by cattle, explained: "When we said something, the Dinka fought us . . . It started in April 2015. . . people started joining the IO because the government supported the cattle keepers . . . From Mundri, it affected Maridi and Yambio."¹⁸⁶ Fighting between the SPLA, its cattle herders, and the local inhabitants joining IO, the Arrow Boys, or some other militia engulfed Mundri, Maridi, and Yambio from June 2015 onward.

As a result, the SPLA moved cattle again, both expanding its conquest and frustrating the locals. Dinka SPLA soldiers and associated Dinka cattle herders and their families all made their way into Yei county from Maridi. "They—the SPLA—were coming with lines of cattle, on their way to Central Equatoria," a bemused civilian recalled. "The cattle were [walking] with the children and women—especially Dinka"—symbolic of the expanding Dinka conquest. "People in Yei heard that they were coming with big lorries and started to become angry."¹⁸⁷ By September 2015, war had spread to Western Equatoria and tensions were mounting in Central Equatoria.

Meanwhile, the international community had pressured IO and the government into signing a peace agreement in August 2015 (ARCSS). Kiir expressed serious reservations about it after it was plainly rejected by the JCE. IO, wary of

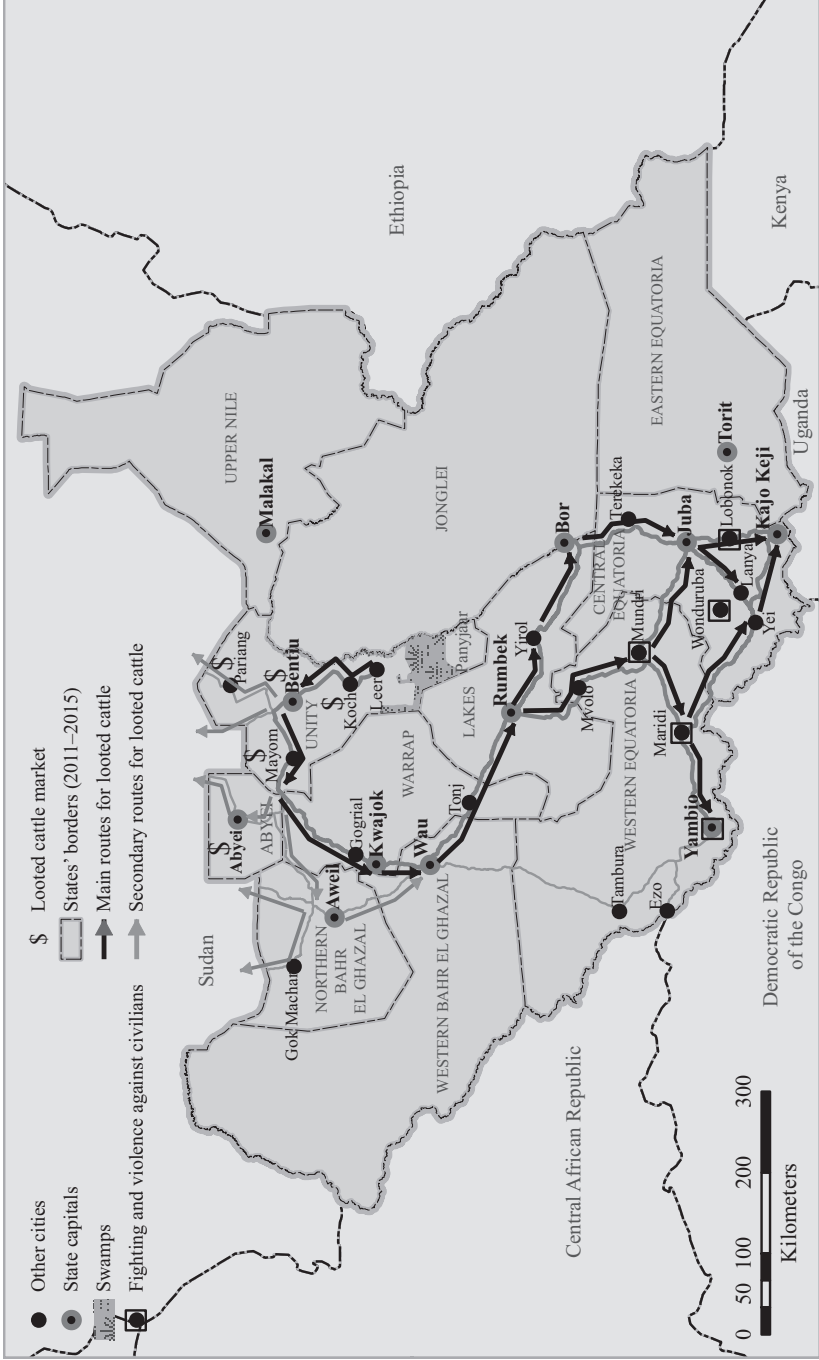


FIGURE 8.3. Map of looted cattle route from Unity into Central Equatoria (2014–15).

another military confrontation and massacre in Juba, especially with Machar's return, increased its presence in Equatoria. The imprint of Unity's looted cattle on Equatorian land, combined with increased violence by the SPLA and Dinka cattle herders, frustrated the Equatorians enough to push them to the edge.

Equatoria was ripe for the third phase of the government's genocidal violence. Extreme violence started in Western Equatoria in late May–June 2015—the looted cattle's trampling on Equatorian crops was the last straw for the locals. Violence escalated in September–October 2015, when Paul Malong ordered helicopter gunships to attack Mundri and Maridi. Yet it would take the arrival of Machar and his IO troops in Juba in March 2016, implementing the August 2015 peace agreement, and the subsequent fighting between these troops and the government in July 2016 to precipitate the apex of this third phase of the genocide in Central Equatoria.