The perpetration of violence against civilians—particularly sexual violence and the accumulation of women—fostered groupness and perennial discourses of ethnic group legitimacy and entitlement. It also became an expression of ethnic group legitimacy and entitlement. It was no surprise, since violence was an inherent part of the ethnicized mode of (re)production in SPLA-controlled areas. Through the often violent accumulation of women and through the performance of forced labor mostly by women, this mode of (re)production continued to evoke the legacy of slavery.

Although focusing on the predominantly Dinka SPLA, this chapter provides elements pointing to similar patterns in other armed groups’ areas of control, especially those of the Nuer. It gives an overview of pre-1991 violence by the SPLA and then addresses the 1991 Bor massacre before turning to the SPLA’s practice of sexual violence and its far-reaching implications regarding social class formation and state-expansion.

**SPLA Violence**

**Violence against Civilians**

The SPLA was involved in a cycle of conflict with the (mostly Nuer) Anya Nya II from the beginning of the war. Since the SPLA was better organized, SPLA retaliation was always more ruthless. Each massacre triggered more hostility, ethnic hatred, and unrestrained revenge. This formed the background of the 1991 Bor
massacre, popularly considered the peak of Nuer-Dinka ethnic violence during the second civil war. The general environment of fighting in South Sudan did not help restrain SPLA troops: they operated in a context where all militias instrumentalized civilians equally. Johnson and Prunier noted that “the pattern of fighting between the SPLA and local Southern militias involved attacks on civilian populations by both sides, entailing the wholesale destruction of villages and farms. This affected the SPLA’s reception in areas outside of the main Nilotic recruiting grounds (Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk).”

The guerrilla army resorted to more violence in areas that were not typical recruiting grounds, such as in the Equatoria region, where civilian support was harder to obtain and more often coerced. It was particularly harsh on civilians living in areas where government-sponsored militias roamed, such as eastern Equatoria and Upper Nile, where it targeted the Murle, the Toposa, some Mundari, and the Gajaak Nuer. The list of ethnic groups victimized by SPLA troops goes on. Massacres by the troops also expanded across boundaries, and the SPLA manipulated local conflicts to consolidate its grasp over the south, just like the British and the Sudanese government had done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The SPLA’s treatment of civilians in non-Dinka areas followed a drive to expand the Dinka’s reach to new territories—a protoconquest. The fact that the victimized communities were not grounds for SPLA recruitment contributed to SPLA violence but did not drive it. Indeed, the SPLA was never genuinely interested in promoting ethnic groups other than the Dinka within its movement. Ethnic discrimination against non-Dinka recruits were a key factor behind the 1991 split, and its uncompromising leadership transformed the SPLA into an ever more Dinka army, where the presence of a few non-Dinka leaders amounted to ethnic window dressing. Therefore, discourses of group legitimacy of the Dinka as national liberators were intended to mask the fact that this was in fact a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Indeed, not only did SPLA soldiers often look down on unarmed people as conquered and at their mercy. In many parts of the country, civilians migrated en masse to escape the advance of the SPLA, struggling to survive attacks by wild animals as well as landmines on the roads to garrison towns. The men who stayed behind were faced with forced conscription—or forced labor—serving the SPLA commanders’ capital accumulation. Women were also forced to labor for the troops. But they fell victim to another form of predation: sexual violence.

**Sexual Violence**

Rapes occurred throughout the entire Equatoria region, day and night, both in houses and outside, without any seeming pattern. In Nimule, eastern Equatoria,
women insisted that rapes were so frequent that whenever mothers left their daughters alone in the house, soldiers raped them. Gang-rapes were common and pushed some women to flee the town in 1989, only returning about ten years later. A woman from Yei, central Equatoria, confided, “Sometimes I was hiding in the forest because I heard the news that the SPLA was taking girls.” In western Equatoria, sexual violence was endemic as well. At night, the SPLA especially searched the houses for men running from forced conscription and considered deserters. Women were more likely to be raped when the soldiers did not find any men inside and became frustrated. Women were left alone with their rapists, a woman in Nimule remembered, because “no one would come rescue, everyone was too afraid to come rescue at night.”

Because the SPLA relied even more on forced conscription after its 1991 split, entire communities were emptied of men, replaced with increasingly Dinka SPLA troops and displaced Bor Dinka who relocated from Ethiopia and Bor to (eastern) Equatoria. There was little mystery as to the perpetrators’ identity, as women in Morobo, central Equatoria, lamented: “So many girls have been raped by those Dinka.” This did not mean that the Dinka wives of SPLA soldiers were not affected by sexual violence, but Dinka soldiers behaved even worse with women of different ethnic groups.

Sexual violence is typically “easier” on the perpetrator and as such more likely if the victim is from a different community, seen as “racially and culturally foreign and inferior,” notes Joanna Bourke of contexts of interethnic violence. The SPLA rapists thought of themselves as superior: they were the true nationalists (not the traitors supporting the kokora), the “liberators”—and on top of that, the men of the men, above all other “slaves,” if we go back to the roots of the term moinjiang (Dinka). Gang-rapes, as a form of group violence, reinforced Dinka group cohesion.

Sexual violence thus also became an expression of group legitimacy and entitlement. It was not about opportunism. The presence of local men did not discourage the rapists; quite the opposite. Even when the local men stuck around in the villages, rapes still occurred. Soldiers sometimes raped and gang-raped married women in the presence of their husbands; the husband was tied to a tree by the soldiers who lined up to rape his wife. Alternatively, women in Morobo related, “the husband lay down and became the mattress of his wife being raped.” One such husband, a Kakwa, talked about how his wife contracted gonorrhea and eventually died from it: “She was raped in 1987 by SPLA soldiers in Yei. They (the soldiers) went to the bush and raped women. They could do whatever they wanted.”

As such, rape was an act committed not just against women but also against men. Rape was, to use Catharine MacKinnon’s words, “a way men communicate
with one another." SPLA commanders especially—but regular soldiers too—appropriated married and unmarried women and forced them to become their concubines: they made what “belonged” to other men theirs. Here again the parallels with slavery were striking.

Rape was only the beginning: forced marriage (or forced concubinage) often followed, without bridewealth exchanged or with very little bridewealth paid, and sometimes even without the parents’ knowledge. A Moro man from Mundri in western Equatoria remembered how threatening the SPLA soldiers were to the parents of women they forcefully married: “The SPLA soldiers had promised dowry to the Moro girls’ parents. But they told them, ‘If you want dowry, you come to Bor to pick it up.’ But the parents were afraid to come to Bor.” In eastern Equatoria, a woman raped and forced to marry her rapist insisted, “Whether you liked it or not, the SPLA raped you and forcefully married you.”

Women as Capital

The capture of women did not just amount to sexual predation; it followed the rationale of capital accumulation because women were seen as capital. Soldiers took women and girls as they moved from house to house collecting food, kitchen utensils, clothes, etc. Women were considered resources to be looted. But they were different: even if they were commodified in the process, they were also extremely valuable capital to acquire. They generated wealth in cattle, they were a gateway to settling on new land, and they could be exchanged or distributed on the political market for military allegiance.

Women (including the SPLA female elite) treated as capital were instrumentalized in the process of social class formation serving the interests of that male dominant class. This does not mean that women were a class either, since not all women were equal and therefore women didn’t all experience war in the same fashion. The SPLA dominant class, for instance, also created its own female elite, whose status was mediated through that class. Women across all classes were conceived of as both political and economic capital because of certain social relations. Both forms of capital had military benefits. I use Thomas Piketty’s definition of capital: “all forms of wealth that individuals (or groups of individuals) can own and that can be transferred or traded through the market on a permanent basis.” In Piketty’s definition, only in slavery can people be considered “capital.” Slavery is exceptional in the sense that it is tied both to labor and to the absolute lack of choice on the slave’s part.

Production in non-Dinka SPLA areas—and to a certain extent in Dinka areas too—was accomplished through forced labor, a mode of production sharing similarities with slavery and performed mostly by women, just like in slavery in
sub-Saharan Africa. Women had no choice in the matter, faced with beatings and sexual violence. As the war went on, SPLA commanders concentrated wealth and monopolized violence. Thus marriages, whether sealed through bridewealth exchange or not, were irrevocable. Marriages were integrated into the SPLA’s circuit of predation from the onset of the war, while violence and heightened inequalities skewed the initial equilibrium of bridewealth exchange and prices. The marriage market itself became a “forced market.”

In this context, women were capital as much as slaves were. Their offspring were equally a source of future wealth and as such they were controlled and taken, as an Acholi (Equatorian) civilian recalled: “They collected even the past children of the women—and the [new] children she bears—and abandon her.” Thinking of women as capital also allows us to think of capital as akin to wealth and to analyze the institution of bridewealth in this context as the exchange of women-as-capital. Again, context matters, especially how women were turned into capital in this social landscape.

The women who were raped and forcibly married (with bridewealth exchanged or not) were especially entrapped in slavery-like conditions. They were either forced to or resigned themselves to be with the troops. Those who did willingly follow the troops made the same “choiceless decision” as other women in similar conundrums. They became concubines, workers without wage, cooking and washing the clothes of their abductors, thus performing labor essential to the running of the SPLA. The banality of concubines in SPLA troops was such that they went by the nickname of “outpost women.” Once following the troops, they were still subjected to sexual violence by the soldiers. By performing labor without wage and being forced into sexual labor, they became akin to sex slaves for the troops. The root of sexual violence was neither unmet needs nor opportunism. As capital, these “outpost women” were the objects of competition between soldiers. This could cause death by execution, since SPLA commanders saw these women as a threat to troops’ cohesion. But as capital, these women were also exchanged, accumulated, and invested.

**SPLA Rhetoric versus Reality**

Officially, the SPLA looked like it cared about limiting human rights abuses. This was part of its rhetoric and of its legitimacy to outsiders. From the beginning of the war, in 1983, it enacted its own disciplinary law, ratified in 1984, along with a penal code and a code of procedures. The disciplinary law described a number of crimes by military personnel, including rape and looting, that were punishable by the death penalty. Yet this structure was more theoretical than practical, with a lack of trained magistrates and of copies of legal texts in the SPLA areas.
Garang never held any of the high-ranking officers whose troops were known for their atrocities accountable, and executions were mostly carried out to sideline rivals.46

The organization of the SPLA’s headquarters and its field bases was reminiscent of a feudal system ruled by warlords answering to a king (Garang). In this system, apart from combat activities, the leadership could barely weigh in on the relationship between its soldiers and civilians.47 The soldiers accused of crimes against civilians were mostly tried according to customary laws. In many cases, the soldiers coerced or co-opted the chiefs and were subjected to a series of fines, typically used by commanders to amass wealth.48 Appointments of commanders in their home areas sometimes limited human rights abuses there (as in the case of Yusif Kuwa in the Nuba mountains), but sometimes not (as in the case of Samuel Abu-John in western Equatoria).49

The 1991 SPLA split led to new factions and multiplied rape, killing, and looting.50 What the Bor Dinka considered “good commanders” (like Kuol Manyang) were in fact “butchers” to the eastern Equatorians who lived under their reign. After 1994 and its National Convention, the SPLA postured at improving its human rights record in several conferences that had no real impact. This culminated with the 1997 SPLM-Church Dialogue, the last attempt to redress fourteen years of a poor human rights record.51 Human rights abuses continued, since there was, at the SPLA’s highest level, never any will to redress them.52 Garang was even more on his guard since his authority had diminished in the eyes of the SPLA’s rank and file.53 Soldiers were demoralized, a typical sign of a breakdown of the chain of command.54 Symptomatically, they were less inclined to listen to orders.

As desertions increased after 1991, securing troops’ cohesion was more important than ever.55 So commanders allowed their soldiers to take more “booty” in women in a bid to retain authority, foster allegiance, and create new military kinship ties.56 In doing so, they hijacked the disciplinary system. It was easy: the SPLA had not even defined legally and culturally what constituted rape.57 The soldiers, less and less trained and increasingly forcibly recruited, understood disciplinary measures as mere warnings and reinterpreted them as threats forcing them to “legalize” the rape post-facto by marrying their victims to cover it up.58 They did so under the watch of “benevolent” commanders who had supplied them with alcohol. A Nuer civilian described the ambiance in those groups: “Suk-suk is the alcohol given by SPLA commanders to their soldiers . . . used during fighting. Whatever needs to get done, will get done. And they don’t feel guilty about what they’re doing.”59 This was typical of armed groups with low cohesion and forced recruitment, where rape was a “bonding experience” replacing other exercises in boot camps meant to increase cohesion.60
This practice facilitated rape and forced marriages, which fostered group cohesion. A female Bor Dinka SPLA soldier recounted how the soldiers hijacked the disciplinary rules: “Soldiers that kidnapped girls from their own places and they brought them as their wives . . . they married sometimes. Because there was a time when the SPLA put a rule to these people. ‘You rape somebody, you will be shot.’ At least, you want to marry. So, some of these cases (of rape) they come in a legal way . . . most of these commanders had to pay dowry for their soldiers.”

The hijacking of disciplinary rules was not exclusively practiced in the Equatoguarian region, since Nuer respondents corroborated this trend in the Upper Nile region too: “In Nuer areas, rape was not [punishable by] fire-squad either, just like in Equatoria—as long as you married the victim.”

**SPLA Groupness through Violence**

**The Bor Massacre**

SPLA groupness, fostered by the othering of non-Dinka (including through sexual violence), was exclusive but still variable in scale following political events. Dinka SPLA groupness was especially strong after the 1991 split and the Bor massacre, when Garang and Machar acted as ethnopolitical entrepreneurs. They both had large-group wounds to capitalize on—including feelings of humiliation from slavery, colonialism, and northern racism and struggles over the SPLA leadership and associated massacres. These feelings had already played a role in the formation of group entitlement ideology and discourses before the 1991 split. The 1991 split accentuated both Nuer and Dinka group entitlement ideologies and antagonism, which facilitated their manipulation by both Garang and Machar.

Ethnopolitical entrepreneurs or ethnonationalist leaders frame their arguments in resonance with narratives defining and praising their group and its heroes while blaming group enemies. These narratives shape ethnic, racial, or national identities. This framing of their arguments in resonance with these narratives and prejudices has an influence on how their organizations develop—in the case of the SPLA, a more and more ethnic Dinka army after 1991. But these leaders also frame their arguments referring to these narratives because they need to—their organizations’ needs influence this framing.

In other words, both Garang and Machar needed to reach for the “ethnic card” after the 1991 split if they wanted to have enough recruits. Machar capitalized on anti-Garang and anti-Dinka feelings to win more support. The massacres by Dinka SPLA troops between 1984 and 1988 were sufficient for the Nuer to consider the Bor massacre a retaliation. As for Garang, he rallied support among the Dinka of Bahr El Ghazal who were otherwise disappointed with the SPLA’s
neglect of their region.\textsuperscript{67} This allowed him to contain this competing Dinka constituency while losing other ethnic “buffers” in the SPLA, whose humiliation and discrimination had helped coalesce Dinka groupness and mask tensions between the two Dinka constituencies.

The Bor massacre proved that the Nuer were “looters,” “thieves without honor” who supposedly committed a “genocide” against the Dinka in Bor. Each side would, in the decades leading up to the third civil war, capitalize on macabre events before, during, and after the Bor massacre to gain political legitimacy and military manpower. Of course, negative stereotypes and discrimination against non-Dinka groups already existed prior to the 1991 split and the Bor massacre. In other words, what Stuart J. Kaufman calls “symbolic predispositions” (ideology and prejudice) against the Nuer already prevailed and had real consequences.\textsuperscript{68} What the Bor massacre did was to materialize the perception of a Nuer threat: not only were the Nuer rebels, looters, and traitors to the national cause, but after killing some Dinka recruits from Bahr El Ghazal on their way to the refugee camps back in the 1980s they were now the killers of the Bor Dinka, Garang’s home constituency.

The Bor massacre would become what Vamik D. Volkan and J. Christopher Fowler call a “chosen trauma” for the Dinka, united as a group in its remembrance and transmission passed from generation to generation: a symbol for decades in the Dinka leadership’s nationalist exclusionary and war-mongering discourse.\textsuperscript{69} Its perception was not rational, but it did not need to be.\textsuperscript{70} As Volkan and Fowler intimate, “the historical truth about the event is no longer a psychologically key element for the large group; what is important is the sense of being linked together.”\textsuperscript{71}

Indeed, the idea of the “Bor massacre” would become different from the massacre itself. The 1991 massacre occurred in the context of past massacres and fighting. In the short run, the November 1991 massacre in Bor was the culmination of a series of interfactional fights after the SPLA split of August 1991. In September–October 1991, the Nasir faction under Riek Machar, reinforced by the Anya Nya II and armed civilians referred to as the “White Army,” fought with Garang’s SPLA around Ayod, in Jonglei.\textsuperscript{72} Both factions attacked civilians on both sides of the Nuer-Bor Dinka border. Machar’s troops counterattacked deep into Dinka territory around the district of Kongor, situated less than a hundred miles away, north of Bor. In November 1991, Machar’s troops and Anya Nya II troops, along with armed Nuer civilians, launched another attack against Garang’s troops in Kongor and Bor: these attacks, although they also affected Kongor and Duk county, are what are known as the “Bor massacre.” They were initiated by the Fangak Anya Nya II and the Mor Lou Nuer from Akobo, Nasir, and Ayod counties—communities affected by SPLA killings in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{73}
Both Nuer and Dinka soldiers and civilians interviewed for this book felt that the Bor massacre was retaliation for past SPLA violence against Nuer civilians. The massacre was designed to target Garang’s homeland in Twic East and Bor. Both Nuer and Dinka respondents (some of them personally involved in the fighting in Bor at the time) stressed that the massacre was not about ethnicity but about politics and payback. In the end, none of these were mutually exclusive: they all combined in violent politics, ethnicized from the beginning of the SPLA’s formation.

Comparing the 1991 Bor massacre to the 2013 Juba massacre of Nuer civilians—which was also payback—a Dinka SPLA officer who fought in Bor during the 1991 massacre recalled, “The massacre in Juba in December 2013 was worse than the Bor massacre of 1991. The massacre of 1991, it was not Riek who started it, it was the SPLA. The SPLA killed the Nuer in Akobo, Nasir, Maiwut. This started in 1983 until 1991, to curb the Anya Nya II and it resulted into looting and killings. That’s what angered Riek Machar and led to the retaliation in Bor 1991. In 1991, Riek wanted to capture Garang’s home.”

Interethnic fighting had indeed already started before 1991 between multiple groups, and it continued afterwards. Immediately after the Bor massacre, the SPLA burned down Nuer villages, and retributions against the Nuer continued well into 1993. Violence against civilians continued to occur throughout 1993 and 1994, in Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr El Ghazal, although on a lesser scale. Civilians were generally dragged into the fighting by both SPLA factions.

The exact casualties of the Bor massacre are still unknown, but the distinction between civilians and soldiers was problematic throughout the conflict. Dinka SPLA soldiers who fought Machar’s troops under the command of Kuol Manyang in Bor in 1991 insisted that both soldiers (SPLA and those under Machar) and armed civilians were killed. One of them gave a much more nuanced picture than the common depiction of the massacre of defenseless Dinka civilians:

The SPLA used the Bor massacre for propaganda to ethnicize the war. Both Riek’s and SPLA soldiers killed people in Bor in 1991. The Bor massacre was not only against the Dinka. It was against both (Nuer and Dinka). But the SPLA used it for propaganda. Bodies were in decay so they could not be identified . . . And the SPLA told the UN it was just Dinka civilians. The Nuer who died in Bor were soldiers but also civilians who came to loot the cattle. Civilians were on both sides. But “civilians” and “soldiers” were categories used by both sides. The SPLA said “civilians,” Machar said “soldiers.”

Machar resorted to arming civilians because he did not have enough men, and he allied with the Anya Nya II at the outset of the fighting. Another Dinka SPLA soldier who fought against Machar’s troops in Bor recounted, “Machar’s
forces crossed the whole Bor land from Bor North to Bor South and to Mangala. Riek’s intention was not to kill ethnic Dinka. They looted cattle and killed people. It was opportunism. They had their own agenda, which was to raid others. Cattle was taken. Civilians were killed in cross-shooting and in looting… The majority of Riek’s troops were not officers, they were cattle-keepers… Most of the White Army was cattle-keepers. The cattle they looted, they kept for themselves.83 A soldier from Machar’s troops who descended on Bor in 1991 offered a similar account: “The civilians fighting for the White Army took the cattle. Whenever there’s a military defeat, be it between the Dinka and the Nuer or the Murle and the Nuer, whoever wins always collects the cattle… Cattle taken by Lou Nuer was distributed among soldiers.”84 Just like Garang, Machar—and the rest of the splintering commanders—had no genuine interest in disciplining their troops.85 Lack of discipline and proper command, looting in the absence of wages, and grievances for past massacres of the Nuer all played a role in large-scale violence against the Dinka.86

But did the Bor massacre amount to a genocide, as it has been portrayed by some Dinka activists since then? Sharon Hutchinson and Jok Madut Jok noted a more primordialist and racialist understanding of “ethnicity” by Nuer soldiers after the split versus before. They argued that before the SPLA split, the definition of “ethnicity” was more fluid, and that women were considered “illegitimate” targets in the context of Dinka and Nuer ethical codes of warfare.87 Hutchinson also argued that the SPLA did not take captives and that women were annihilated: “Women and children were gradually recast by rival Southern military factions as legitimate targets of ethnic annihilation.”88

Peter Adwok Nyaba’s account of the “massacre” indicates that the aggressors’ motivations were economic and related to kinship expansion. Their goal was not to decimate the “Dinka race” through the killing of women and their children or through the impregnation of Dinka women with Nuer children.89 Nyaba’s account was corroborated by that of John Young, who wrote that usually in attacks, there was a “willingness to assimilate… the conquered people.”90 Women and men from Bor and from Garang’s SPLA interviewed for this book denied that women were specifically targeted during the massacre. One of the Dinka SPLA soldiers who fought Machar’s troops in Bor in 1991 stressed that even though a lot of people had died in Bor, including women, the majority of them (including women) were killed in crossfire and that some women had been killed when they attempted to protect cattle from looters.91 One female Dinka SPLA soldier from Bor corroborated Nyaba’s analysis: “No, they were not targeted as women. But you know, the moment people fight, and you are defeated, women are taken… Because in our culture when they get women, they take them and they marry them.”92
Other interviewees, both Dinka and Nuer, confirmed that the Lou Nuer inter-married with the Bor Dinka women they captured following the Bor massacre. But these marriages were forced and did not involve the payment of bridewealth. A Dinka man from Bor recounted how in 2008 (seventeen years after the massacre), one of these women who had birthed four children to her Nuer abductor finally escaped from Nasir. This woman’s escape resonated with how other women from Equatoria also tried to break free from their Dinka (or Nuba) SPLA abductors. There too the SPLA often absorbed the women that its soldiers raped. Thus predation strategies, more than ethnicity, ultimately drove both Machar’s faction and the SPLA’s treatment of most civilians and especially women. This was a marked difference with the nature of the sexual violence of the third civil war.

**Violence, Predation and Cohesion**

After 1991, the perpetration of sexual violence and the accumulation of women-as-capital came in handy to the disintegrating SPLA: it fostered groupness and perennial discourses of Dinka group legitimacy. In other conflicts such as Sierra Leone (1991–2002), rape and especially gang-rape socialized combatants and reinforced group cohesion. It was used when soldiers were coerced into joining armed factions with little internal cohesion. Rape—especially gang-rape—can create bonds of trust more rapidly among strangers, in part because it is risky due to STIs. The perpetration of high levels of violence such as gang-rape can thus increase group identification and ensure group longevity.

In the SPLA, sexual violence also reinforced groupness because marriage frequently followed rape. This was the opportunity to create new exchange contracts. The patronage of marriage by commanders created new ties of obligation between commanders and soldiers and reinforced troops’ cohesion. Commanders substituted themselves for the fathers of their soldiers by either paying the bridewealth or witnessing the agreement between them and the bride’s family, thus guaranteeing the future payment of the bridewealth. A former Dinka SPLA soldier illustrated how the patronage of marriages created feelings that reinforced loyalty to commanders:

> The problem of postponement of dowry, it’s because there was no resources (to pay it). Some commanders and soldiers who did it, they were telling me that commander x, y, z, was the one who paid dowry for my wife, proudly. And you know, to do that, it’s somebody that really loves you, it has to be a member of the family, and even sometimes in a real family, they don’t do it. Not everyone will give dowry for you, it
has to be the closest, your best friend, that will pay dowry for you. And so, some say that, proudly, that commander x, y, z paid dowry for the wife . . . or do negotiations, with the chiefs and the relatives.99

Feelings of pride illustrated the soldiers’ sense of place—their own perceptions of their place in the social order, under their commanders.100 The payment of the bridewealth by their commanders or their role as guarantors did not represent just a “courtesy” or a “favor,” nor could it be summed up as material assistance. The “gifts” made by the SPLA commanders to their soldiers constituted ways to retain their authority.101 Other examples of voluntary participation in bridewealth payments by nonrelatives to retain political allegiance also existed prior to the war, not just among Dinka but also among the Nuer.102 Therefore the SPLA commanders’ “gifts” dressed their military power with the traditional attire that resonated through the communities of their soldiers, solidifying their power as patrimonial rulers.103 These commanders and soldiers, along with the bride’s kin, became part of the same social contract bound by obligations.

The patronage of marriages became part of the SPLA’s military strategy early on: without it, its soldiers might have contested the authority of polygamous commanders or deserted. In Dinka culture, where procreation affords immortality, poor men without sufficient cattle for bridewealth often feared they (in fact, their line) would “perish.”104 War magnified such a threat, and the fact that these soldiers were far from their home areas and without their cattle augmented the risk of dying without an heir. Most soldiers were poor, but answered to the orders of wealthier polygamous SPLA commanders. These commanders rarely granted them the luxury of a permission to return to the village and marry.105 From the soldiers’ point of view, “if you got a small chance to marry, you took it!”106 For the SPLA leadership, if not handled, the soldiers’ celibacy was a ticking bomb. A former Dinka SPLA platoon commander who contributed to pay his own officers’ bridewealth confirmed this: “If I solve this problem—marriage—soldiers will remain with me. The SPLA has become a big family.”107

Garang facilitated the patronage of these marriages: he instructed that following the centralization of captured resources at the SPLA headquarters, the zonal commander would dispatch the resources earmarked for bridewealth (cattle or money) to the platoon commander who would then pass it on to his officers.108 Commanders and officers paid some of the installment or at least signed a letter of guarantee of payment in presence of the paramount chief, in order to secure their soldiers’ kinship expansion—sealing their acquisition of women-as-capital.109

In the SPLA “family,” commanders acted as fathers, and the brothers-in-arms as the traditional uncles and other relatives.110 No one else had the temerity to
“bid” for the bride. Decades later, those brothers-in-arms who contributed to one another’s bridewealth were still friends with each other—they behaved like family and they referred to the SPLA as a “big family.” The wartime postponement of bridewealth payments to a peaceful future contributed to the longevity of those social contracts between commanders and soldiers, which multiplied when soldiers practiced polygamy. By the end of the war, many soldiers in the SPLA had more than one wife, most between two and four. One SPLA soldier remembered, “They married, they married from each location! They had so many wives! . . . If you had an opportunity, you just married! Wherever they go, they get married.” Yet in this patrimonial capitalist economy, the SPLA (and factions) commanders always remained on top.

**SPLA Social Class Formation**

**Large-Scale Polygamy by the Dominant Class**

Thanks to their control over the war economy, commanders acquired women-as-capital through large-scale polygamy. Combined with their patronage of their soldiers’ marriages, this consolidated their ascendancy as the dominant class. This was not unusual: throughout the lineage slavery systems in west-central Africa in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the uneven distribution of women also enforced social control and socioeconomic domination. Important polygamous men in Nigeria’s Biafra region even became a class distinguished by the size of its polygamous families and number of slaves and clients. Similarly, the acquisition of women contributed to building the power of SPLA commanders like Paul Malong.

Polygamy, afforded through the reinvestment of looted cattle, provided the SPLA commanders (and commanders from other armed groups) with the perfect avenue for wealth display. New wives served as a testimony of a man’s military exploits, as one former SPLA battalion commander put it, “You get new wealth, new wives. If you defeat your enemies, you keep their wealth! If not, they take yours!” Capturing resources were key to sustaining the acquisition of these new wives. Commanders like Malong used relief money diverted from the slave buy-back programs in the 1990s to marry more wives.

In fact, marriage was the best way to immediately “invest” into valuable long-term capital sowing strategies, explained a Nuer civilian: “They marry and [thus] use the loot to reinvest and get rid of the cattle as soon as possible before it gets looted.” Large-scale polygamy—or the large-scale acquisition of women-as-capital—was meant to generate long-term wealth, a former Dinka SPLA soldier attested: “War wealth is associated with big families. You have more money or
you have more cattle, you want to have more wives . . . And then you have more wives, you have a lot of children, most of them girls, who will be married. This is the whole mentality.”121 In extending their lineages, commanders increased their political power. These powerful men were generally not subjected to customary bridewealth prices and often paid them later. There was no competition for the women they coveted and sometimes eloped with, which meant they could pay as little twenty cattle for bridewealth.122

The SPLA’s dominant class was mostly Dinka, especially after 1991. Intermarriage between non-Dinka commanders and Dinka women was rare given that the Dinka monopolized most SPLA positions granting access to resources. But promotion to the same status of a Dinka could happen for a few non-Dinka men, similar to in Rwanda where before the genocide a Hutu man could experience upward social mobility through access to cattle and in the process be “tutsified.”123 This demonstrated that ethnicity could be more or less primordialized depending on the parties’ interests.124 Yet the Toposa (Equatorian) wife of a polygamous Kakwa SPLA colonel who also married a Dinka woman explained, “He was recognized in the community and with resources, and he attracted Dinka women too,” but “the Dinka family was not happy about their daughter’s marriage to a non-Dinka.”125 All in all, ethnic absorption was mostly one-sided, and the alien ethnic identity of men intermarried with Dinka women endured in the eyes of the Dinka beholder.126

SPLA commanders used the taxes collected from civilians while pulling the strings of the war economy to acquire more women-as-capital. For the Dinka, no limit except age and wealth restricted how many women one could marry, and their practices echoed those of other powerful Dinka men before them, such as chief Deng Majok who married around 250 wives in the 1940s–60s.127 Parents volunteered their daughter for marriage to the powerful SPLA (and factions) commanders.128 Some of the less prominent commanders did not bother to pay any bridewealth, or paid very little.129 Polygamy was reputed to be most practiced in the Dinka areas of the Bahr El Ghazal region, but it also prevailed in Equatoria and in Nuer areas.130 There, lower bridewealth prices facilitated even more the accumulation of women-as-capital, as Nuer men explained: “Eastern Equatoria was ‘free of charge.’ There was no bridewealth paid sometimes, and besides the bride prices were cheaper.”131

The demographic bias in the marriage market—with men dead, on the frontline, or fleeing as refugees while commanders preyed over single (or sometimes married) women—made it easier for the commanders to acquire new wives.132 Many of Garang’s commanders had multiple wives and monogamy was the exception.133 These commanders were reputed to marry tens of women and did so more easily in the countryside than in the scrutiny of the towns.
Respondents remembered commanders who married fifteen, twenty, forty, even fifty-one wives.134

Paul Malong, running the war economy of Northern Bahr El Ghazal, “built a wide network of connections” through large-scale polygamy.135 He already had about forty wives in 2001.136 He sent out his soldiers to collect them from different communities in his home state (from Aweil North, Aweil Center, Aweil East, and so on) and bring them to him, a Dinka civilian from his home state remembered: “Malong married in four different communities—all of them from Northern Bahr El Ghazal. This is a very strategic plan! Because you can’t fight with the husband of your sister. And he used to pay so many cows!”137 By 2015, when Malong had become the SPLA chief of staff, a Nuer civilian compared this wide network to an “empire,” adding, “Malong has eighty-six wives. Where does he get the cattle? From the people. His close family is made of four hundred people.”138 In oil-rich Unity state, Nuer commanders did exactly as Dinka commanders.139 For example, Peter Gadet “always married on the way, wherever he passed.”140 Bridewealth payment was key to legitimizing kinship expansion, and was understood as a long-term investment.141

Signifying their ascendency, commanders used bridewealth payment and price as a marker of social distinction meant to convey their command over others: “Gadet paid for the dowry of his wives—some parents even offered their girl but he wanted to pay . . . Parents are very proud, so they don’t demand dowry. But high-ranking officers use it to demonstrate they can afford it. They’re proud to pay.”142 For parents, marrying their daughter to a commander meant protection. But commanders also expected it in return: “Parents gave their daughter for promotion. If your daughter has been married by a big person, you can do whatever you want, you can be protected. Also if someone mistreats Peter Gadet, you have to go and defend him.”143 This exchange revealed a codependency that was typical of a patrimonial relationship.144

Large-scale polygamy was key to building and sustaining political and military power, and it is no coincidence that some of these (very) polygamous wartime commanders—from Malong to Matiep, Gadet and Gatluak Gai—proved to be forces of disturbance during the war and long after.145 Their own large-scale polygamy extended social contracts beyond even the kin of their brides. Indeed, other men were involved in tending to the reproductive potential of the women-as-capital, as former Nuer SPLA soldiers explained: “[Military] leaders marry with many wives and have them stay with somebody. When you marry twenty wives, thirty wives, you marry and look for another one once the marriage is completed and you can have other children.”146

Paul Malong reportedly had his relatives and followers, whose bridewealth he paid, impregnate his more than forty wives for him, much like the Nuer prophet
Deng Laka in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{147} The Nuer commander Peter Gadet also paid for his followers' bridewealth, or accumulation of women-as-capital, and also had them impregnate his wives, a respondent explained: “Gadet has about eighty wives. He doesn’t know who impregnated which one. He just birthed the first boy, the rest doesn’t matter. Even his soldiers can impregnate them, so long as the child is named after him, he doesn’t care. He paid for the dowry of the wives.”\textsuperscript{148}

The Creation of a Dependent Middle-Class

SPLA soldiers thus tended to their commanders’ own women-as-capital when necessary, and they could only marry because their commanders allowed them to. In this manner, the SPLA dominant class evidently created for itself a lower stratum. First, it was guaranteed followers by crafting new military kinship ties through “gifts” of bridewealth. That reinforced cohesion, permitted the acquisition of women-as-capital, and reinforced and mitigated risks for class conflict between the dominant class and its followers. It also demonstrated to the followers their “place” in the social order, under their commanders.\textsuperscript{149}

Secondly, the elite ramified its lower base through the elevation of SPLA soldiers to an economic status superior to that of the local population.\textsuperscript{150} This new stratum became the intermediaries between the “rulers,” and the “ruled.”\textsuperscript{151} By enabling its lower stratum to marry so many wives, the elite allowed these men to taste the privileges it enjoyed, thus fostering the illusion of a commonality between the rulers and its intermediaries, which typically paves the way for future collaboration.\textsuperscript{152}

Without the creation of this military middle class, the SPLA would have collapsed. The dominant class could not have sustained its accumulation of capital—including women-as-capital—and its tending to it. Instead, the middle class helped the dominant class accumulate capital to the detriment of the masses of ordinary civilians. This codependency was typical of patrimonial systems of domination.\textsuperscript{153} The system, of course, remained stratified. Capitalism in SPLA areas was decidedly patrimonial. Upward social mobility was only afforded through marriage.\textsuperscript{154} This middle class could only climb the social ladder by marrying the daughter of a commander, which was the passport to a promotion and to more capital accumulation.

Symptomatically, not all soldiers were allowed the opportunity to commit rape, marry, and accumulate women as they travelled, as Dinka SPLA wives explained: “Not all the soldiers have married a lot. Because there are others who have no power.”\textsuperscript{155} As a result, inequality increased greatly during the war as the dominant class concentrated its wealth. This explains why polygamy still
generally decreased during the war, due to the depletion of resources and their concentration in the hands of a few.

**Expansion and Protoconquest**

Equatorian groups such as the Bari and the Acholi had explicitly and actively avoided intermarriage with the Dinka back in the 1970s–early 1980s to counter what they considered to be a first attempt at Dinka inner colonization after independence. This was against the backdrop of centuries of demographic expansion by the Dinka that turned it into the majority group.

The second civil war considerably accelerated Dinka expansion through the violent ethnic absorption of non-Dinka groups. Non-Dinka groups in Equatoria were worried about their demographic future, and with good reason: Jok noted of the Dinka troops, “Undeclared roles, at least for the rank-and-file, included viewing reproduction as a national obligation, not as an individual one.” The Equatorians could no longer refuse intermarriage once the predominantly Dinka SPLA violently conquered them.

Sexual violence was deeply connected to territorial and demographic expansion, because as MacKinnon points out, “violating other men’s women is planting a flag; it is a way some men say to other men, ‘What was yours is now mine.’ As often happens when men plant flags, someone was already living there.” The SPLA’s territorial and demographic expansion was tantamount to a protoconquest. SPLA military advances came with sexual violence, forced marriages, and land-grabbing, which all followed a logic of capital accumulation rooted in a mode of production inherited from slavery.

The accumulation of women-as-capital went hand in hand with the SPLA’s “occupation.” In Equatoria, communities associated sexual violence with plunder, conquest, and domination by the SPLA. A former female Kakwa (Equatorian) SPLA soldier explained her comrades’ brutality by their predatory drive: “Many of them were illiterate. The vision of the SPLA was that they were not oriented at all about the future. They were oriented that: ‘when we capture a place, the houses, we take them! We take the houses, we take everybody, the women there, we take!’ This is what they were orientated on!”

Sexual violence was thus not opportunistic, and the risks associated with it were well worth the benefits. A former Dinka SPLA battalion commander explained the capitalist logic: “You have to marry more, so that you can have money, you have more land, and you can protect your cattle.” The protoconquest expanded south into Equatoria with the 1991 split, the Bor massacre, and the need for new pastures. A Moro civilian from western Equatoria confirmed
that the SPLA’s logic of capital accumulation culminated in land grabs: “The SPLA was all over Mundri before 2005. . . . They want our land! During the SPLA time [second civil war], they took their cattle there on Moro land, and their cattle are doing well there!”165

The logic applied from west to east in the southern region. In central Equatoria (Yei), a Kakwa (Equatorian) husband whose wife was raped by soldiers in 1987 recalled, “The SPLA did not want to see any other tribe in Yei . . . The SPLA was now in Yei, the Dinka. My house was occupied by the SPLA, my food taken away.”166 In eastern Equatoria (Nimule), the SPLA used rape to terrorize and displace people so they could settle on the land—in the words of one woman, “They grab your wife, they grab your land, and then they settle.”167 The same trend was depicted in western Equatoria (Mundri), as a Muru civilian explained: “Muru girls were raped and the marriages between Muru girls and Dinka were forced, leading to Dinka settling on the land during the second civil war. Similarly to what happened in eastern Equatoria, the Dinka stayed.”168

The SPLA’s multifaceted predation—its mode of production—thus resulted in Dinka expansionism. After 2005, Dinka settlers would consolidate this inner colonization in the interwar period. Finally, in 2013 a new war would start the third, and this time annihilating, phase of conquest.

**Predation, Social Class Formation, and Dinka Nationalism**

Looking back, the ascension of the dominant class-in-formation largely relied on the reinvestment of its economic predation into the acquisition of women-as-capital. This dominant class thought of itself as “the best” and as such became a military aristocracy.169 It partially distributed women-as-capital to a predominantly Dinka group that had become violent and exclusionary. To many non-Dinka civilians, the power of the SPLA was like “the power of the rapist over the raped.”170 An Acholi (Equatorian) man explained, “If you want to have a scar that will never heal, you’ll come mess with our wives.”171

The SPLA’s ethnicized mode of (re)production, resting on predation and culminating in a protoconquest, thus fostered feelings of group ownership over the country and therefore Dinka group legitimacy.172 These feelings initially originated in the SPLA myth of national liberation, created in 1983. This myth, conveyed through propaganda and acted out in international political arenas by Garang, gained traction mostly among the Dinka. It could not have been otherwise, given the progressive Dinka-ization of the SPLA and the violence the SPLA committed against non-Dinka civilians.
The SPLA myth of national liberation evolved with the fluctuation of Dinka groupness following political events and the way in which Garang handled them. Garang was not a proactive ethnopolitical entrepreneur throughout the twenty-two-year-long war. His actions were dictated rather by the pressures he felt within the SPLA. But the “founding narrative” of SPLA nationalism became increasingly Dinka and exclusionary. This was partly Garang’s responsibility because the SPLA leadership was not genuinely interested in fostering ethnic diversity in its ranks. If it had been, it would have curbed ethnic discriminations in its ranks, promoted other ethnicities to real positions of power, and actively combated human rights violations, especially against other ethnic groups. But it did none of these things, while capturing enough international leverage to be considered the representative of the southerners at peace negotiations with Khartoum. As a result, what emerged in 2005 when the peace agreement (CPA) was signed was an SPLA nationalism mostly identified with the Dinka. This implied that other ethnic groups, associated with other armed groups formed in protection from and retaliation against the SPLA, were conceived of as “traitors” to the national cause championed by the SPLA.

Stereotypical Dinka symbolic predispositions (ideology and prejudice) about the Nuer and the Equatorians shared similarities, especially to the extent that they were all lumped into a “non-Dinka group” of traitors and rebels, people who could not be trusted (just like the Northerners), had no “vision” (something Garang prided himself on), and would squander the SPLA’s national project. Because the Equatorians had not contested the SPLA leadership early in the war and because their women were consistently considered “cheap” by Dinka soldiers and raped and appropriated, Equatorian men were emasculated and as such they were considered “cowards” in Dinka symbolic predispositions. The Nuer were stereotyped as “fighters” from colonial times. They had contested power within the SPLA, which, when compounded with the 1991 Bor massacre, made them a real threat, a perception that extended to groups allying with them.

By 2005, there was already more than the embryo of an idea that non-Dinka groups had been undermining the southern “nation” throughout the war of “national liberation,” which is a key ingredient in genocides. After all, the Germans also thought of the Jews as undermining their nationality before the Holocaust. The third civil war would intensify this exclusionary nationalism following a political crisis that reactivated prejudices against the Nuer.