

'I was once lost': South Sudanese women in the diaspora

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One of the tragic consequences of South Sudan's wars was the displacement of the population. Fleeing violence, about four million people left their homes (WFP, n.d.). Most were displaced internally, rendered homeless in their own country. Hundreds of thousands crossed the borders, escaping to neighbouring countries. Thousands more relocated further afield, to states around the globe. In their new homes, refugees began to re-establish their lives, attempting to create a sense of stability while their country was being ravaged by war.

This chapter tells the story of South Sudan's dispersed population, focusing on some of the women who fled Sudan. It documents their journeys; often on foot, walking hundreds of miles, without food or shelter, fleeing from enemy fire. It describes what awaited them across the borders: massive refugee camps, inhospitable and teeming with people. The chapter describes the resettlement programmes that a small number of women benefited from, which relocated refugees to countries around the world. It goes on to explore women's experiences in the diaspora, documenting the struggles they faced and the successes they achieved. Finally, the chapter explores women's feelings about returning to South Sudan now that the war is over, as well as their views, hopes and concerns for the future of their country.

The experiences of women displaced by South Sudan's wars were different from those of men. Yet, while much has been written about South Sudanese men in the diaspora, women's stories have largely remained untold. This chapter focuses on a few women in particular, relating their stories, their opinions and views. In terms of methodology, a review of the existing literature was conducted, and interviews were held with several young South Sudanese women living around the world. Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, or using Skype. While not ideal for interviews, these technologies made it possible for women in different parts of the world to be included, giving the chapter a more international perspective. Some of the interviewees asked to remain anonymous, and for them, pseudonyms have been used.

In 2010, an estimated 370 000 Sudanese people were still scattered around the world (UNHCR, 2010). Since the ending of the war in 2005, returning to South Sudan has become a real possibility. Thousands returned in the period immediately preceding and following the landmark 2011 referendum. However, many refugees are now settled in new countries, with new jobs and new lives, and have no plans to return. Many of these men and women are among the best-educated South Sudanese people in the world and have gained hard skills that the fledgling South Sudanese state, desperately short on human capacity, is sorely in need of. Sadly it appears that these citizens and their skills may be lost to the new country forever, an enduring legacy of decades of conflict.

War in South Sudan

Prior to the wars (which took place from 1955 to 1972, and from 1983 to 2005), much of the population of South Sudan lived in rural homesteads, largely untouched by electricity and other modern technologies. For the most part, the population lived off the land, growing crops and farming cattle. Cattle were a key measure of wealth, and held a central place in economic and social life (Burton, 1978). The South Sudanese lifestyle was deeply traditional, and people adhered strictly to tribal and cultural practices. It was a communal way of living: family and neighbours were intrinsically involved in one another's lives; adults had a duty to care for the young; and the young a duty of care for the elderly. There was little concept

of individual ownership and interest, rather ideals of family and community acquisition prevailed. Disputes were resolved by community members, or by traditional leaders applying locally developed mechanisms.

Those in South Sudan claimed that the South was being marginalised by the North, where the nation's seat of power was held, and demanded more autonomy for the South. These demands led to war breaking out in 1955, and continuing until the signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in 1972. In less than a decade the resolutions contained in the peace accord had broken down, and war resumed in 1983. At that time, a soldier named John Garang broke away from the government's armed forces and founded the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The SPLA grew rapidly and soon became the dominant rebel group opposing the Northern government. The war was fought over a range of issues, including self-determination for the South, control over state resources including oil, and the role of religion in the state. Various other armed groups were involved in the war, which spanned a massive geographic area and was fought in various parts of the country.

During the war years, over two million people died and, as mentioned, a further four million were displaced. Civilians bore the brunt of the harm – caught in the crossfire and frequently also the direct targets of attack. At times Northern government armed forces launched attacks themselves, but they also operated through the Qout Sha'biya, a government-backed militia. Armed groups attacked villages and towns, abducting women and children as slaves and combatants, raping, torturing or killing others and setting fire to villages and surrounding lands, so that those fleeing would have nowhere to return to.

In the scramble to escape, parents lost their children, and children wandered the countryside alone. Possessions and homes were abandoned. People left their cattle – a significant loss, given the value that cattle held in society – and fled to what was known as 'the bush', where they hid for long periods in clearings in the vegetation. Conditions in the bush were terrible. People slept on the ground with no shelter, even during the long rainy seasons. Many had fled their homes with nothing and were forced to survive on shrubs, berries and any other edibles they could find. Thousands died of starvation or malaria and other diseases. The threat of attack was always imminent, and land or air strikes would have everyone scattering

once again. In time, people began to head for the borders, desperate to flee what had become one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

The journey to escape

While a privileged few escaped by air or were able to secure transportation on trucks and vehicles, most South Sudanese refugees made the long journeys on foot, covering hundreds or thousands of kilometres on their way to the border. People walked in groups, carrying what they could, but forced to leave most of their possessions behind. The soaring temperatures of South Sudan, which rise above 50°C, and the desert landscape that characterises large parts of the country, meant that, for much of the journey, little food or water was available. People chewed on plants or leaves, and even swallowed mud, to eke out some sustenance. Thousands died of thirst or starvation. Survivors recount that the weak and vulnerable sometimes fell prey to lions and other wild animals.

Trains of people walked in silence, wary of attack. They had to repeatedly run for cover, hiding from the troops moving overland and fleeing at the sound of helicopters or fighter planes approaching overhead. Those caught by government or rebel groups would sometimes be rounded up and forcibly conscripted or taken as slaves.

Viola Aluel and her family lived in Abyei, a town in the centre of Sudan, considered to be the bridge between the North and South. Located in an area rich in oil reserves, Abyei was one of the most disputed towns in the war, and was vigorously claimed by both the North and the South. Viola lived in Abyei until she was 12 years old, during which time the town was controlled by the North. She recalls that it was not a peaceful place to live. Viola described how government soldiers used to pass through Abyei on route to the North, with abducted children and cattle in tow – a terrible sight to witness. She recalls the frequent sounds of gunfire. They could often hear the fighting nearby, and when the sounds of fighting got too close, they would run to the church to hide. People in the town were beaten randomly by government soldiers who arbitrarily accused people of colluding with the SPLA, doling out punishments for this. She recounts that at one point her cousins were abducted – and one of them was extremely sick at the time. There was little peace of mind in Abyei and Viola recalls that every day her

mother cried and prayed. Eventually her mother made the decision that the family would cross the border to the SPLA-controlled territory in the South (Interview).

They left Abyei in 1996. Leaving everything that they owned behind, they left one evening, carrying only food and water. Like thousands of others who made this journey, they walked quietly, in a group of about 30 people, led by men from the South who had volunteered to help guide people to safety. People struggled to keep pace, particularly those with small children. They rested only in designated areas before quietly setting off again. Viola recalls that people were very scared during the walk – being caught by government soldiers could be disastrous.

It took them four days to walk the 80 kilometres to Mayen Abun in the South. By the time they arrived, Viola's small feet were severely swollen. In Mayen Abun, Viola's family were met by an uncle who was working for an organisation that provided food to conflict-affected areas. Through him, Viola's mother was referred to the World Food Programme, which was providing humanitarian relief in the area. They soon offered her a job in Nairobi. Within two weeks, Viola's family left for Kenya, travelling in an aircraft belonging to the World Food Programme. Viola remained in Nairobi until 2006 when she finally returned to South Sudan (Interview).

Probably the best known of those who fled South Sudan were the so-called Lost Boys, whose journeys were made famous by a number of documentary films and by books, such as *God Grew Tired of Us* and *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak*. The Lost Boys were about 20 000 orphans and children who had been separated from their parents who walked in groups on foot towards the borders. The children, mostly boys, aged between 5 and 15 years, walked hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from different parts of South Sudan to neighbouring Ethiopia in the east, where they were eventually housed in refugee camps. The long lines of children had no food, water or supplies. They often did not even have clothes, losing pieces along the way, or trading items of clothing for food. Those who witnessed them describe rows of emaciated children, often walking completely naked. When Ethiopia's president was overthrown by rebels who were hostile to the South Sudanese refugees, the children had to leave Ethiopia, crossing back through South Sudan and then into Northern Kenya to Kakuma Refugee Camp. A large number died along the way – of

the 20 000 who began the journey, fewer than 11 000 made it to Kakuma. There were girls who made this journey too, although there were fewer of them, and their stories garnered less attention.

In addition to these children, hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese refugees flocked across the borders, settling in camps in Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya. It was from Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya that the major refugee-resettlement drives took place.

Kakuma Refugee Camp

Kakuma Refugee Camp is located in the Turkana District in the north-west of Kenya. It was established in 1992, to provide shelter for those fleeing South Sudan, and for a long time, South Sudanese refugees were the largest refugee group there, but the camp has since been expanded to house refugees from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. The camp is located near to Kakuma town, which has a population of 97 000. At times the refugee camp has been home to as many as 120 000 refugees, although it was built to house a maximum of 20 000 people.

Life in Kakuma is difficult. Located on a large piece of land, in a semi-arid desert environment, the camp suffers severe dust storms and searing temperatures, with an average daytime temperature of 40°C. The camp is host to a range of poisonous spiders, snakes and scorpions. Kakuma is divided into several sections, each housing refugees from different countries and conflict zones. The *Kakuma News Reflector* (n.d.) describes the camp as follows: 'The camp is a "small city" of thatched-roof huts, tents and mud abodes. Living inside the camp is equally prison and exile. Once admitted, refugees do not have freedom to move about the country but are required to obtain Movement Passes from the UNHCR and Kenyan Government.' For many, Kakuma became a home for years and even for decades – a 'limbo' where refugees waited for circumstances to change or for a better future to present itself.

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency mandated to assist refugees, was responsible for administering the camp. It struggled to cater for the many thousands of refugees stranded in Kakuma. The number of refugees was far greater than had been planned

for, and the overcrowded conditions exacerbated the camp's many other problems. Although UNHCR provided food, there was never enough and hunger was a constant concern. Refugees also complained about the monotony of the food – residents lived for years on a diet which consisted mainly of beans, maize meal and vegetable oil (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

A significant number of children, including the Lost Boys, arrived in Kakuma without their families. Where possible, unaccompanied minors were settled into foster families, a preferred solution that allowed them to learn the South Sudanese way of life and culture (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). For the most part however, boys were placed in large groups or homesteads. Girls were given preference when it came to being allocated to foster families, as it was felt that girls were more vulnerable to attack and that foster families could offer them some protection. Some girls were lucky enough to receive support and protection from their foster families, but this was often not the case. Foster families frequently used girls as unpaid servants before marrying them off to benefit from the bride price the girls could fetch (Harris, 2009). Girls were sexually vulnerable in the camps and in their family placements, and there were frequent occurrences of rape or of girls being exploited in exchange for food and other basic commodities.

Local Kenyan communities tended to be hostile to the refugees and some would come to the camp at night and steal food or even kill people. Arbitrary shootings took place and residents of Kakuma reported that they felt extremely insecure there (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). The SPLA also frequently raided the camp to enlist new recruits for their ranks. Unaccompanied children made easy targets and many children, including girls, were enlisted while living in Kakuma.

However, life in the camp was not all bad. Despite the challenges, conditions in Kakuma were far safer than in war-torn Sudan, and at least some food, building materials and medical facilities were provided. Refugees in the camp received free education, something that UNHCR and other aid organisations prioritised. There were other positive aspects to life there too. A communal way of life developed in the camp, and refugees helped and supported each other. Close friendships and bonds were formed that many people reported missing when they were finally resettled in other countries (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

The Kenyan authorities preferred South Sudanese refugees to remain in the camps, rather than settle in their country. Viola Aluel, whose family moved to Nairobi, recalls that police often harassed refugees in Nairobi because they wanted to limit their numbers in the city. South Sudanese living in the cities and towns were often arrested and constantly had to pay bribes to the police. Viola explained that at least in Kakuma refugees had some respite from police harassment (Interview).

By January 2011, six years after the end of the war in South Sudan, there were still between 7 000 and 8 000 South Sudanese living in the camp. Many refugees travelled to South Sudan after the ending of the war, but returned to Kakuma, when they discovered that conditions in Sudan were not as stable as they had hoped. Those who still remain in Kakuma fear renewed violence and are choosing to see how things unfold, before returning to South Sudan. Others have chosen to remain in the camp because services such as education, and health care are more accessible and of a better quality than those that would be available to them in South Sudan (Enough Project, 2011).

Resettlement

The 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees set in place the international system for the protection of refugees. States signing the Convention bound themselves to providing refuge to asylum-seekers arriving in their countries, provided they met the narrow definition of a 'refugee' provided in the Convention. Article 1(A)2 of the Convention:

A refugee is anyone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

In order to spread the responsibility for refugee protection, and alleviate the burden on countries neighbouring on conflict zones, a system of *third-party resettlement* was developed. Third-party resettlement occurs when refugees who have fled from their homes to a second or neighbouring country are

subsequently resettled to a third country. Resettlement countries accept refugees where there is no alternative way to guarantee their security in their country of origin *or* in their country of original asylum. Admission criteria for resettlement differ from country to country. Where there are large groups of refugees, those who are considered particularly vulnerable are selected for resettlement.

Large resettlement programmes took place out of Kakuma into the US, Canada, Australia and a few other countries. Given the enormous number of refugees in Kakuma, and that these countries agreed to accept limited numbers of refugees, resettlement was highly selective. UNHCR and government representatives visited the camps to select those who would be moved. The resettlement of youth, and particularly of unaccompanied minors, was prioritised.

The US's resettlement programme was the largest. Sympathetic to the plight of the Lost Boys, the US agreed to resettle a few thousand children from Kakuma. From 2000, a total of 3 276 South Sudanese boys and 89 girls were accepted into the US for resettlement (Harris, 2009: 2). A number of reasons have been suggested to explain why so few girls were resettled. The Lost Boys' journey had become very well publicised, and many say that resettling the girls, whose plight was less well known, was an afterthought. Another view is that as the boys remained in large groups, they were more visible than girls, who had often been integrated into families (Harris, 2009). On a practical level, it is certainly true that candidates for resettlement were chosen mainly from lists of unaccompanied children living in the camp, and girls' names did not appear on these lists to the same extent that boys' names did. Girls living with foster families in Kakuma quickly became daughters and housekeepers and were soon 'lost' to the official register of unaccompanied minors. There is also evidence that girls were intentionally hidden from the UNHCR in order to keep their names off the lists. As noted earlier, some families benefitted from having girls remain in Kakuma – for some, girls were seen as valuable sources of unpaid labour and potential income (from bride price) – so they did what they could to avoid losing them to resettlement programmes. A final reason given for the small number of girls resettled is that the UNHCR consulted with Sudanese elders in Kakuma about which youth should be resettled. The elders proposed the resettlement of higher numbers of boys, arguing that males would be more likely to receive formal

education than girls, and were therefore more likely to be of value in helping to rebuild South Sudan after the war (DeLuca, 2009).

The selection and interviewing process took around two years. Lists were prepared of those who would be considered for resettlement, and those whose names appeared on the lists were interviewed before a second selection was made. During a second round of interviews, names and ration cards were verified. This was a stressful process for those involved. Interview dates were frequently postponed and there were long waits between them, often spanning many months. The interviews were reportedly daunting, particularly for those who could not speak English (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). When the selection process was complete, successful candidates were offered limited preparation for their move. Some were given English lessons as well as briefings and reading materials on their adoptive countries. Finally, the selected few were flown across the world to begin their new lives.

Life in the diaspora

It was not only those resettled from Kakuma that made it abroad. South Sudanese refugees moved around the world through a variety of means, often travelling as immigrants or students, and seeking refugee status on arrival. Whole families also relocated and many young girls were taken across the world by their parents, spending most of their lives away from South Sudan.

Hundreds of thousands remained in Sudan's neighbouring countries, or sought refuge further afield on the African continent. They settled in refugee camps and cities, often forming large South Sudanese communities. Many were forced to move numerous times over the years, unable to find a permanent place in which to settle.

Agyedho Adwok's family left South Sudan when she was just one month old. Since leaving Sudan, she has lived in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya, residing in refugee camps and cities along the way. In 1985, two years after the war began, conditions were worsening in Juba, the city of her birth. Her father, who had been a professor at the University of Juba, became involved with the SPLA, soon rising to the rank of captain. At that time, the SPLA was operating partially out of Ethiopia, where it was strategically planning

its moves in South Sudan. Agyedho's father moved to Ethiopia to take part in this process, taking his family with him. They settled initially in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, but in 1991, the president of Ethiopia, Mengistu Haile Mariam, was overthrown by rebels who were hostile to the South Sudanese refugees, and Agyedho's family had to flee. In the years that followed, the family relocated a number of times, along with many thousands of South Sudanese refugees in similar positions. At the time of writing, Agyedho had returned to South Sudan and settled in Juba once more (Interview).

The experiences of South Sudanese women in the diaspora differ greatly. In some places, South Sudanese women remained poor, while in others they prospered. The section that follows focuses mainly on those who settled in the West, and provides a more in-depth analysis of refugee experiences in that part of the world.

Integration: adjusting to the new context

Life in the West was dramatically different to that in South Sudan and to the refugee camps that many had come from. Most of those resettled had never been in a city before, had never seen electricity and had never been in a motor vehicle. The food in the West looked different, the languages spoken were unfamiliar, and the customs and societal expectations completely foreign. Like other refugee groups, South Sudanese refugees faced myriads of challenges in resettling, including navigating new cultures, learning the languages and dealing with discrimination. Resettling was a significant adjustment and one that was, at times, overwhelming and difficult.

Research with immigrant and refugee populations has shown that the earlier in life a person moves, the easier the adjustment tends to be (Elhag, 2010). Children tend to acculturate more quickly than their parents, and, it has been argued by some that South Sudanese youth have been more successful in resettling than many other refugee groups (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

Research has also found that the effects of immigration are particularly intense for women, in part because of the 'gender renegotiation' that women have to face (Elhag, 2010: 1). For example, one of the challenges faced by South Sudanese women in the diaspora, common to many refugee and immigrant groups, are conflicting feelings about where to draw the line between fitting in to their new cultures, and maintaining their

traditional ways of life. Immigrants risk losing their culture, including its many positive and valuable aspects, and immigration involves a constant process of negotiating and renegotiating these identities. Anne Harris, who worked with South Sudanese women in Australia, explains that, 'the costs and benefits of acculturation compete: the stripping away of the difference demanded by assimilation/integration...[versus] the currency afforded by difference' (Harris, 2009: 4–5). Harris continues:

While these changed conditions in new countries partially represent increased opportunities for Sudanese young women, they do not come without a price. Many of my participants have gone to great lengths to counter perceptions of Sudanese women as disempowered and subjugated in male–female relationships even within Australia. And while they defend the cultural practice of 'bride price' (paid for young women by the men's families) to non-Sudanese, they simultaneously defend their new freedoms to concerned Sudanese family members who fear they are becoming too westernized and free. The double bind is clear: integrate and flourish, but not too quickly. For some young Sudanese women, these role tensions are constant and crippling. (Harris, 2009: 4–5)

Certain key variables seem to play a role in assisting South Sudanese refugees to adjust to new environments. For example religious groups have been key in aiding integration for some. Their Christian identities connected South Sudanese immigrants to a wider community of Christians in their new countries, providing them with both a community and a sense of belonging. Particularly in the US, the churches provided refugees with social support and assistance with integrating: volunteers from churches hosted refugees in their homes, invited them into their communities, helped them to find housing, cars and jobs, and donated clothes and furniture to them. This certainly alleviated some of the difficulties of integration (Elhag, 2010).

Another variable is the number of South Sudanese people who resettle in an area. Where there are many South Sudanese, they tend to stick together quite closely and integrate less, a pattern that is common in many immigrant communities. One interviewee, Keji Majok left Kejikejo, a South Sudanese town close to the Ugandan border when she was eight years old. Her family first moved to Nairobi where there was an extremely large South Sudanese

community. Keji recalls that in Nairobi, her family associated mainly with other South Sudanese people, and seldom mixed with Kenyans, taking no steps to adopt the Kenyan way of life. In 1991, her family moved to Mutare in Zimbabwe, where there were very few South Sudanese people. She recalls that in her school, there were only six South Sudanese children from two families. Keji explains that things changed greatly as her family could no longer only associate with South Sudanese people, and so they began to integrate more with the local population, finally adjusting to the Zimbabwean way of life (Interview).

Receiving an education

From the moment of their arrival at the refugee camps, the message was repeatedly instilled in South Sudanese refugees that education was the key to self-improvement and to creating a better life for themselves. The UN and other aid organisations made education a key priority in the camps, employing teachers to teach refugees, often holding classes under the trees (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

For many, the promise of education was one of their main reasons for wanting to relocate. South Sudanese refugees arrived abroad with high expectations about the education they would receive, many believing that they would start their schooling immediately upon arrival, and that this would lead them into employment as qualified professionals. Unfortunately, this was rarely the case, and many had to put off going to school in order to work in low-paying jobs so that they could pay the bills or save up to pay for school or college. When they were able to study, many had to work concurrently, or had to care for their families, leaving them little time to focus fully on their studies. Disappointment around education seemed to be a common experience among South Sudanese refugees (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002).

When they did attend school or college, many South Sudanese refugees struggled academically. Most had received little education in South Sudan or had had their education interrupted by the war. This was particularly the case for women, who had seldom received any real education before leaving South Sudan unless they came from particularly wealthy or liberal families. Even the education they received in the refugee camps was not of a quality that adequately prepared them for schooling in the diaspora. Harris writes that despite having high levels of determination, South Sudanese women

often did not have the 'foundational aptitude or conceptual knowledge' to achieve as much as they wished to in their studies (Harris, 2009: 7).

Harris explains that the hardest part of resettlement often happens in the second or third year, when refugees begin to realise the barriers to achieving their goals. She explains that at some point they begin to recognise what a daunting challenge attaining a tertiary education may be, and they begin to understand that their dreams of becoming lawyers or doctors may actually be beyond reach (Harris, 2009).

The young women interviewed for this chapter made the point that the pressure to be educated came largely from their families. Aguil Deng, who moved to the US with her parents, said that in the summer breaks she was made to read or to go to the library, and was never allowed a vacation. If she protested that she did not want to study, her parents would scold, 'You can switch places with your cousins in the war'. Aguil explained that there was an expectation from her family that she would study for a 'hard' career. Her parents would ask questions like, 'Why would you study social sciences? How is that going to help Africa?' (Interview).

Despite the challenges and disappointments, South Sudanese women have attained far higher levels of education in the diaspora than they would have had if they had not left South Sudan. Many have received professional qualifications or tertiary educations, making them among the best-educated South Sudanese people in the world. Given post-conflict South Sudan's crippling lack of skills and human capacity, the women educated in the diaspora represent a tremendous potential resource for their country.

One of the steps that the government of South Sudan is taking to address the country's shortage of skills is to send people abroad to be educated, with the hope that they will return to South Sudan with hard skills. In 2008, Viola Aluel was sent by South Sudan's Ministry of Education to South Africa to study Social Development at the University of Cape Town. She completed her studies and returned to South Sudan in late 2010. Viola was sent as part of a programme created between the Government of South Africa and the Government of South Sudan, which planned to send about 200 students to study in South Africa. Unfortunately, due to bad management, nepotism, and a failure to market the scheme, fewer than five people actually benefited from the programme. Similar schemes in China, Egypt and India have been more successful (Interview).

Finding employment

On arrival in their new countries, South Sudanese refugees had to find work. At least in the initial years, most had to accept unskilled, low-paid jobs as maids, babysitters, nannies, pre-school attendants, nurses, care workers or in catering facilities (DeLuca, 2009; Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002). Even those who had qualifications when they arrived often had to take jobs at lower levels than they were equipped for (Abusabib, 2006).

The US has a policy of 'economic self-sufficiency', which guides the lives of all new immigrants and refugees. According to the policy, refugees must find a job as soon as they can on arrival, so that they can pay their own bills. In the United States, resettlement agencies assist refugees with job placements, rather than providing much financial or material support. Finding employment is therefore a major focus of US refugee policy. This differs in countries such as Canada, where there is more state support and less emphasis on self-sufficiency (DeLuca, 2009).

In South Sudan, women's roles had centred on the home and women seldom held formal jobs. Men worked outside, while women were responsible for caring for children, food preparation and taking care of living quarters. Finding work outside of the home was therefore a great adjustment for South Sudanese women in the diaspora. In finding jobs, they had to navigate new relationships, new behaviours and new expectations. Gaining employment had significant effects on gender relations too. It was in finding employment that some of the greatest steps towards integration took place.

Changing gender norms

South Sudanese society is deeply patriarchal. Societal rules encompass clear-gendered divisions and, from an early age, children learn the ways in which both men and women are expected to act. Men are the heads of households and women are expected to be subservient to them. These perceptions of gender and the role and place of women were significantly affected by life in the diaspora. On arrival in the West, South Sudanese women found themselves in an environment that promoted their independence rather than deference, and exposed them to new ideas about the ways in which men and women could relate (Elhag, 2010). This made women begin to question the values they had been raised with, and in time, it began to affect

the gender relations between South Sudanese in the diaspora.

However, it was not only exposure to new ideas that affected gender relations; necessity also played a part in changing roles. Increasing employment of women outside of the home, led to the household division of labour becoming more equitable – when women accepted job offers, men had to perform more of the household tasks purely out of necessity, particularly if they were not working themselves. Couples in the diaspora also found themselves dependent on one another in ways that affected the traditional gendered division of labour. For example, women often had to rely on their husbands to assist with tasks that they would have done alone in South Sudan, such as grocery shopping (particularly if the women did not speak English), or child care (if the women had appointments or had to go to work). This forced a merging of male and female roles (Benesova, 2005). In terms of physical space, too, South Sudan had provided distinct male and female spaces in spacious homesteads, and men and women spent much of their time in separate areas. In the diaspora, couples were forced together physically, living in small apartments where there was not enough space for separate male and female areas (Benesova, 2005).

Thus gender roles gradually began to shift, altering the ways in which women perceived their roles as mothers, daughters and wives. Women often welcomed these changes more than their husbands and male relatives did, which at times caused friction in marriages and other family relationships. The shifts also caused stress for parents and children, with parents more entrenched in traditional ideas, struggling with the ideas, values and lifestyles that their children were exposed to at school.

Mary Luak, who was raised in Washington by South Sudanese parents, described the difference between being at home with her family and time outside of her home, saying, ‘it felt like a schizophrenic life’. Mary attended an American school and took part in American activities, but then came home to a South Sudanese home, where traditional rules applied; men ate before women, and were served their meals by the women and girls (Interview). Keji Majok who was raised in Zimbabwe echoed this, saying that at school she was exposed to the ideas that boys and girls should mix and were equal, while at home she was taught the opposite. Keji explained that her father was very strict with her, making her stay in the house, because he believed that girls should not go out (Interview). Aguil Deng, a South

Sudanese woman who was raised in the United States, said that her parents had different rules to those of other American families. Her parents were under the impression that American children were out of control and had no respect, and therefore felt that she should not spend time with them. Her parents would say things like, ‘Why do you need friends? You have sisters.’ Aguil was not allowed to spend the night at friends’ homes until her parents had met the other parents. She was not allowed to date boys until college (Interview).

It can be argued that issues related to ‘gender renegotiation’ tended to make integration more complicated for women than it was for men. Some found it difficult to become the assertive women the West expected them to be, having been raised to be more deferent (Harris, 2009). In general though, exposure to different gender norms has been positive for South Sudanese women, in that they have opened up a range of possibilities that these women never had before.

For those who have returned to South Sudan, changes in gender norms have created a different set of issues. Keji Majok recalls that when she went back to South Sudan, she had trouble accepting the way in which women in her family were treated. When voicing her concerns, Keji got into trouble, and was told that she was badly behaved and disrespectful (Interview).

Discrimination

Many foreigners and most refugees around the world face discrimination. This can be a barrier to finding and keeping jobs; it can also stand in the way of successfully attaining an education, and make it harder to assimilate into the new culture.

Research has documented the fact that in the US, African immigrants are often stereotyped in the same way as African Americans, resulting in them being harassed, intimidated or unlawfully arrested by the police (Elhag, 2010). Interestingly, Aguil Deng disagrees with this finding, averring that in her experience, African immigrants are treated differently to African Americans. She feels that in America, it is more important how one sounds, so if one has spent most of one’s life in the USA and sounds American, then in her experience, one is not discriminated against. Aguil added, however, that in the area where she grew up, everyone had originally come from somewhere else and so xenophobia was never really an issue (Interview).

Discrimination against foreigners is worse in some countries than in others. South Africa, for example, has an unfortunate history of xenophobia, with violent attacks against certain foreigners sporadically taking place, and resulting in death and further displacement. Keji Majok, a young South Sudanese woman currently living in South Africa, notes that xenophobia is palpable, and can be felt on a daily basis. Interestingly, she notes that these are not based on the fact that she is South Sudanese as much as on the mere fact that she is and looks foreign. Reactions to the fact that she is from South Sudan are mixed. Many South Africans actually find it intriguing as she is often the first Sudanese person they have met. She does, however, recall that when growing up in Zimbabwe, children used to tease her about being South Sudanese, mocking her about the fact that Sudan was not a good country and that people were going hungry there (Interview, Keji Majok). Mary Luak who grew up in Washington remarked that no one there had heard of South Sudan, and if they had, they had heard only bad things, or they confused it with Somalia (Interview).

Contact with those in South Sudan

During the war, those living in the diaspora followed the news from home from a distance, trying to keep track of what was going on, and attempting to check on the well being of those who remained in South Sudan. Direct communication with those at home was difficult but possible.

Mary Luak recalls that during the war her family had sporadic telephone contact with certain people in South Sudan. Aside from this they received news from people who were arriving at the refugee camps on the borders, or in Khartoum. Mary's family followed what was going on in South Sudan closely. She describes one occasion when, following a massacre in a certain town, her family managed to get hold of video footage taken by people who had arrived in the town soon after the massacre, so that they could see for themselves what had happened there (Interview). Keji Majok's family kept contact with South Sudan through her father's eldest brother who remained behind. However, Keji recalls that they did not hear all of the news, and did not know about many of the deaths that occurred there (Interview).

Communication with South Sudan has become far easier since the ending of the war. A host of cell-phone service providers now cover most of the South Sudanese territory, connecting even remote rural areas. Many small

towns have internet cafés, or public places such as libraries or community centres where people can access the internet. This has made it easier for those in the diaspora to stay in touch with family and friends within South Sudan.

Remittances form an important part of the relationship between refugees and those remaining in their home countries. Around the world, refugees feel a strong sense of obligation to send remittances back to those they have left behind, in the form of money or goods, and thus find themselves taking on the role of 'global breadwinner' (Johnson & Stoll, 2008). These remittances often form an integral source of income for households and communities in conflict zones. On a global scale, remittances reportedly form the second largest source of external funding for developing nations (Rath, 2003).

Many South Sudanese who settled in the diaspora sent remittances back to South Sudan and to refugee camps such as Kakuma. Mary Luak recalls that her family was always sending clothes, books and money to South Sudan. Her father also paid for relatives in South Sudan to attend school (Interview). Several interviewees living in the diaspora reported strong pressure to send money home. When people hear that they are living abroad, they phone them to ask for money, as there is a perception that those in the West have access to large sources of income. This puts refugees in extremely difficult positions – particularly as many are struggling financially themselves. Many refugees report both feeling extremely guilty and being looked at negatively if they do not provide for those remaining in Africa (Muhindi & Nyakato, 2002), and many have continued to send remittances to South Sudan in the post-war period.

Returning to South Sudan

Since the end of the war in 2005, the situation in South Sudan has stabilised to a certain extent, making it possible for many refugees to return home. The International Organization for Migration estimates that between 2007 and 2009, 1.2 million refugees returned to South Sudan; of these, 60 per cent were part of female-headed households (IOM, 2009).

Most of the women interviewed for this chapter were still living in the diaspora at the time of the research, which was conducted in 2010 and 2011.

When questioned about whether they would consider returning to live in South Sudan, their responses were mixed, and they raised several factors that stood in the way of them returning. For one, the situation in South Sudan remains unstable, with frequent armed clashes and persistent security concerns. Those interviewed displayed a mixture of optimism and caution about whether independence would really be granted to South Sudan or whether renewed conflict might recur. They explained that they would not consider permanently moving back to South Sudan, until there was more certainty about the country's future.

Another factor preventing the interviewees from returning was the difficulty of living in South Sudan, given the lack of infrastructure and services. Although it might be 'home', it is not an easy country to return to. A few of the interviewees said that they had always thought they would return to South Sudan after the war, but after visiting the country, they had changed their minds. Aguil Deng, for example, returned to South Sudan soon after the war. She described the frustrating process of trying to register a construction and development company; travelling from government ministry to government ministry, foiled by how disorderly the system was, and the way in which everything relied on having personal connections. Aguil soon returned to live in the United States. Reflecting on her experience, she says that the system in South Sudan seems to be a difficult one in which to work and achieve anything (Interview).

Another point mentioned repeatedly by the women interviewed was that it would be difficult to adjust to the strict traditional gender roles in South Sudan, after having lived with the more liberal gender roles of the West. Interviewees expressed concerns at how rigid the societal rules are in South Sudan. Keji Majok complained that in South Sudan they are all about 'rules, rules, rules' and offered this as a key reason why she did not think she could live there (Interview).

Finally, a number of women commented that they feel foreign when they are in South Sudan. Keji explained that although she feels strongly Sudanese when she is in the diaspora, when visiting South Sudan she felt different and foreign (Interview). Mary Luak recounted that people in South Sudan repeatedly told her that she was not Sudanese enough (Interview). Aguil Deng, now working as a public health practitioner, explained that it is far easier for her to work in other African countries; there they see her as a

'fellow African', while in South Sudan, they see her as a foreigner because she has spent so much of her life outside of the country (Interview).

However, despite these factors, a number of women have returned to South Sudan, and feel that it is the right thing to do. In 2005, Agyedho Adwok visited Juba, the capital of South Sudan, for the first time since her departure as a child. After that first visit, she returned abroad to study further, but has since returned to live in Juba. When asked about whether she plans to remain there, she replies, 'Maybe not forever, but for now.' Agyedho explains that in Juba, she has a sense of being home. 'In Nairobi life was difficult, because I was living as a refugee. There was always something that reminds you that you are not at home.' On living in South Sudan she says, 'Even with the heat and the lack of services and life being uncomfortable there, it is worth it.' She concludes, 'I was once lost, and now I am back' (Interview).

Views about the peace process in South Sudan

All around the globe, South Sudanese people voted in the January 2011 referendum to determine whether the South of Sudan should secede from the North. A total of 58 203 votes were cast from voting stations in countries such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Canada, Australia, the UK and the US. The diaspora referendum results reflected an overwhelming vote in favour of secession.

Women in the diaspora have watched the peace process unfold. Despite the distance, they are well informed and have opinions, hopes and concerns about the situation in South Sudan. They are joyful that the war is over, pleased at the progress that has been made to date, and hopeful that peace will persist.

However, these women also have concerns about the situation in South Sudan, some of which they raised during the interviews. For example, interviewees commented that, for years, the people of South Sudan have had one common goal – the fight against the North. They expressed concern that now that this common goal has been removed, the people of South Sudan will begin to turn on each other for power. Tribal tensions are a significant source of concern. Keji Majok recalled that when she visited South Sudan, she was struck by how pronounced the tribal hostilities were, saying that she

could feel the hatred and the palpable awareness of tribal differences. Keji raised the point that while the Dinka, the largest and most well-off of the tribes, are now leading the new government, those from other tribes are still suffering and will soon begin to get angry (Interview). Mary Luak took this one step further, saying that among Southerners there are some who believe that South Sudan might follow in the footsteps of Rwanda as a result of the ethnic friction.

Mary Luak's views were different from those of the other women interviewed. She confessed that she was not entirely pro-separation. Mary explained that when she started studying Sudan more closely, she began to see that it made more sense for Sudan to be one unified county, albeit one where everyone is treated equally and where the South is not marginalised. Mary made the point that separation is an emotional decision, but not a smart one, and that those supporting separation have overlooked the crippling lack of development, capacity and infrastructure, as well as the pressing ethnic tensions. Her years in the diaspora have allowed her the distance to form this view, but Mary acknowledges that her pro-unity opinion is an unpopular one (Interview).

All of the women interviewed expressed the hope that the situation for women in South Sudan will improve. Mary Luak commented that in the short time since they have been in power, the new South Sudanese government has already pushed through a number of conservative rules that discriminate against women. She feels that the men in South Sudan have absorbed misogynistic attitudes from the North, and that these developments do not bode well for the future of South Sudanese women. She hopes that steps are taken to tackle this, and to elevate the status of women living in South Sudan (Interview).

Conclusion

During the devastation of the war, hundreds of thousands fled South Sudan. Moving on foot, pursued by enemy troops and weakened by famine and disease, South Sudan's people fled across borders, many falling along the way. The refugee camps along South Sudan's borders became among the biggest in the world, and despite the overcrowded and unpleasant conditions, became home to many thousands of refugees, for years. A fortunate few

were given the opportunity to move further afield, where their new journeys began.

Adjusting to a life in the West was filled with challenges. For South Sudanese refugees, coming from a deeply traditional and largely undeveloped country, the pace, culture and ideas were a significant adjustment. New skills had to be mastered, new challenges overcome and the difficult process of navigating a foreign homeland begun. Over time the women in the diaspora acquired skills, education and jobs, and became among the best educated of all the South Sudanese people.

The war in South Sudan has come to an end, but many of its people remain dispersed, grappling with the difficult decision of whether to continue their lives in the far reaches of the world, or to return to an uncertain and undeveloped homeland. South Sudan 'feels like home', yet at the same time, it is foreign, and so different to the new lives they have become accustomed to. For a country desperately short of skilled and educated people, the educated women of the Sudanese diaspora are a precious resource. However, the question remains as to whether they will return or be lost to the country forever. Interviewing a number of remarkable South Sudanese women living in the diaspora suggested the sad reality that many may not return. Perhaps this will change when the new state is formed and the situation becomes more stable. If not, their absence will be one of the great and enduring losses of the wars in South Sudan.

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