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## **Unpleasant homecoming:** The predicament of returning pastoralists from South Sudan to Aljabalain area, White Nile State

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## 1 Introduction

In many countries around the world (especially in Africa), the livelihood of pastoralists depends largely on trekking over vast areas of land in constant search of water and pasture for their animals. This nomadic life brings certain challenges including a constant desire to escape adverse conditions of animal health, government taxes and security threats. Pastoralists try to adapt to constantly changing conditions in the wider context of their existence. This applies to both the physical environment and the socio-economic and political conditions surrounding them. Although risk is a permanent part of life for human beings, its materialisation in the form of environmental threats is something that pastoralists in particular face. Like other human groups, pastoralists have their own priorities that they try to pursue; nevertheless, they are not always sure how to best satisfy their interests, this justifies the mobile lifestyle they adopt. Pastoralists often move across both administrative boundaries and international borders in search of better conditions for their animals, and ultimately themselves. In so doing they trade one type of risk for another and run into new risks, such as the threat of legal or security action by state agencies.

Pastoral nomads are known for their tendency to organise themselves, to a certain degree, independently of the state apparatus. Their livelihood depends largely on constant movement across vast areas of land, thus they defy fixed perceptions of borders. Throughout history, pastoralists have been involved in boundary-making processes against sedentary groups or other pastoralists, as demonstrated mainly by Barth (1969) and Leder & Streck (2006). In most African countries, borders were formed because of arbitrary decisions by colonial authorities. In many cases, pastoral groups found borders separated them from their kin or from parts of the habitat they exploited during certain times of the year. Naturally, the reaction of such groups was not to succumb and accept the new reality, but to resist and develop ways of securing their livelihood by going around what they saw as unnecessary hurdles.

Pastoralists are put in a difficult position by the state because they rarely abide by official rules regarding border control protocols. This adds another risk dimension to their lifestyle and is probably why government officials in many African and Asian countries so widely advocate the settlement of nomads. In Sudan, the government still reiterates a slogan from the 1960s that calls for the “settlement of nomadic pastoralists” at both a federal and state level. Four decades ago, Ahmed edited a volume dedicated to the discussion of the situation of pastoral nomads in the Sudan, with a special emphasis on the issue of their “settlement”. He stated, *“What is the opinion of the nomads in all this? Such a question seems to be overlooked. The nomads are not given a chance to express their views, nor are they given a choice in the suggested plans for their regions”* (Ahmed A. M., 1976, p. 9). This basic observation is still relevant for the debate today.

The government has its own logic regarding the settlement of pastoralists. Mobile pastoralists are a security risk for the state in many ways. State officials usually accuse pastoralists of being involved in or helping with a multitude of illegal activities including trade in arms and narcotics, harbouring armed opposition elements, evasion of taxes, smuggling of goods, and causing spread

of human and animal diseases. In short, the mobility of pastoralists, whether within or between states, makes them less subject to government control. Government officials also argue that the settlement of nomadic communities would lead to the better provision of services for pastoralists.

However, a report for UNDP Sudan (El Sammani & Salih, 2006, p. 39) adopted a moderate viewpoint. They concluded “As we have been arguing, **integration** connotes "improvement of the living conditions of the nomads, within their spatial containers and cultural settlements", and it is the approach which is recommended by this study, instead of settlement or sedentarization; for within it, it accommodates elective settlement, when seen as necessary”. The debate regarding the settlement of nomadic pastoralists through planning has now cooled down as most sides have accepted that forced settlement is neither a good nor a practical option. Instead, the provision of infrastructure and services is considered a better way to induce voluntary settlement initiated by the nomads themselves as a response to adverse conditions surrounding them. Ahmed (Ahmed A. M., 2002, p. 85) 2002) reports a good example of this trend. Ahmed found that in Sinnar State, Sudan, leaders of the Rufa'a al-Hoi pastoralists encouraged them to settle in order to benefit from the services provided by the government to villagers. This shows that better results can be expected when pastoralists and the government stop considering each other a source of risk.

The relationship between nomadic pastoralists and settled populations is a long story that dots human history. Settled populations have managed to manipulate state apparatus because states were formed after the appearance of surplus in agricultural production. Even when nomadic pastoralists manage to seize political power in a state, they ultimately become settled. The relationship between the two styles of livelihood (mobile and settled) have tended to become interactive and dynamic, and researchers (Leder & Streck, 2006) have pointed out the fluid framework of nomad-sedentary interrelation. Nomadic economy and social organization are characterised by greater diversity and enormous flexibility. Nomadic communities respond to environmental settings and constant communication with sedentary social surroundings. However, policies applied by states or state-like organisations and their capacities of controlling nomad mobility, balancing conflicting interests and warding off their intrusions differ greatly. Therefore, continuous shifts of power and agency between nomads and the political administration of sedentary societies can be observed throughout history. When political conflict erupts in the borderland zones in which pastoralists live, they inevitably become engaged in it, and often become heavily victimised. The situation in the borderlands of Sudan and South Sudan is typical to what one researcher has vividly observed: “In a situation of sustained crisis, conflict has become endemic, pitting herder communities against each other, against sedentary neighbours and against the states that claim pastoralists as subjects” (Markakis, 2004, p. 31).

## 2 Adapting to new realities – a case from the White Nile State in Sudan

This paper addresses the current situation of some of the pastoralist populations living in the southern parts of White Nile State in Sudan. These people left South Sudan following its cessation in 2011 and the subsequent escalation of civil war. Pastoralists, especially those who live or used to live within the territory of today's administrative boundaries of the Aljabalain locality, have struggled with constant changes to their wider physical, socio-economic and political environment for over half a century. They have adapted to emerging conditions by constantly moving south across the administrative boundaries of a single state, albeit a state involved in civil war until recently when the situation changed drastically. The risks they now face are beyond what they are used to. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature and extent of the adaptation strategies adopted by these pastoralists caught in uncertain conditions. When characterising the situation of pastoralists in Aljabalain as "uncertain", I generally agree with S Calkins (Calkins, 2016, p. 2) where she writes that "*Conceived broadly, uncertainty is logically an intrinsic element of all action, because outcomes are always unknown and indeterminate. While uncertainty is inextricably present in all human enterprises, plans and aspirations, it is not evenly distributed across time and space. It is not a uniform property of action; rather, how it is perceived, experienced and dealt with varies*".

Adaption strategies from individual actors and deliberate group action to improve their risk averse behaviour can ultimately lead to social change. Furthermore, if risk refers to a condition of known danger, uncertainty refers to a situation where the nature of danger (as quality or quantity) is unknown. The present case study is significant because pastoralists who used to adapt to constant risks in their wider environment, now face new conditions that do not easily respond to time-tested adaptation strategies. Thus, the development of new adaptation strategies more suitable for handling the emerging conditions is likely.

Empirical data for this paper was collected between mid-September and mid-December 2015. I visited the towns of Kosti, Rabak and Aljabalain, in addition to visiting about 20 nomadic camps near Aljabalain. I conducted interviews and focus group discussions during four visits (each approximately five days) while a research assistant undertook an additional two further visits.<sup>1</sup>

## 3 The context

The White Nile State borders North and South Kordofan from the west, and Gezira and Sinnar from the east. According to the most recent population census (2008), the state has a total population of about 2.731 million, growing annually at a rate of 2.5%. Ecologically, the White Nile State lies within a semi-desert zone. Its topography is characterised by sandy areas in the

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west, the White Nile plains (areas along the river) in the centre, and clay areas in the east. The White Nile State is located in a dry region. The rainy season usually starts in June or July and continues up to September or October and rainfall varies from 300 mm in the north to 600 mm in the south. The high fluctuation of the amount of annual rainfall, the short duration of the rainy season, the recurrent drought intervals, the high evaporation rates and the lack of water harvesting projects makes rain water an expensive commodity. Ground water is found in good qualities in the northern parts of the state, but it is difficult to use because of its depth of more than 50 meters and the accumulation of the sands. The main water sources are the shallow wells, Idd wells (hand dug), hand pumps, Hafirs (excavated pools), and the White Nile River itself which crosses the state from the south of Khartoum to the borders of South Sudan.

The White Nile State accommodates both rain-fed and irrigated farming. The rain-fed sector is divided into two subsystems: large semi-mechanised farming and traditional farming. While the total grown area has almost tripled over the last four decades, mechanised agriculture has increased about 6.3 times and traditional agriculture by about 2.7 times. Irrigated areas have hardly enjoyed any significant increase. Sorghum is the main crop cultivated and together with sesame and millet, forms about 97% of the total area under rain-fed farming in the State. Other crops, grown on a limited scale, include watermelon, guar and other crops (Faki, Hashim, & Nur, 2015).

Irrigated farming is concentrated in numerous large agricultural schemes as well as small schemes along the White Nile, which are irrigated by pumps from the Nile. Irrigated crops, however small in share they might be, are again dominated by sorghum that occupies close to three quarters of the area under irrigation, followed by wheat (18%) and cotton (8%). Groundnut was grown in small quantities under irrigation until the late 1970s but has almost vanished since then, except in the rain-fed sector where large areas in the rain-fed sector are allocated to groundnuts.

The White Nile is the biggest sugar producing state in Sudan, accommodating the huge Kinana Sugar Company, established in the 1980s, and Asalaya Sugar Factory, established in the 1970s. Moreover, sugar production in the state is currently witnessing enormous expansions. The two plants currently dedicate 221 thousand feddans to sugar cane production; however, new expansions are expected to more than triple this amount. The White Nile Sugar Factory, which was established in 2012, is the factory in the most advanced stage of implementation with an area of 163 thousand feddans under sugar cane. Another one under planning, Sabina on the Western bank of the White Nile in the area south of Kosti, is expected to occupy an area of 254 thousand feddans. Furthermore, Kinana is developing a new extension that falls wholly in Aljabalain locality. Unlike other sugar factories, for example the Guneid Sugar Factory, which is farmer-oriented, the factories in the White Nile are run by direct labour. The sugar plants, although not of direct farming engagement of the population, offer considerable employment opportunities. The new planned sugar schemes are thought to be based on a form of partnership

with farmers, in which case the livelihood dimension is expected to widen through both share-cropping and employment opportunities. Statistics from the Sudanese Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries (Faki, Hashim, & Nur, 2015) show that the White Nile state is rich in livestock, with a total number of 8.3 million animals. The state accommodates about 6% of Sudan's livestock wealth and ranks fourth in the total livestock numbers and livestock density. Thus, livestock provides important livelihood means for a considerable portion of the population. Dairy farming is also expanding in the State and the area is famous for cheese making, especially in and around Eldueim and Kawwa towns. The pastoral mode of livelihood is more prevalent in the southern parts of the state, both on the eastern and western side of the White Nile river but away from its immediate banks. However, due to the sandy soil in the west, there are pastoral activities are more prevalent in the western parts of the state. The clay soil, which characterises the eastern parts, have made it a target for the expansion of semi-mechanised agricultural activities.

The White Nile State accommodates a mixed population from all ethnic groups of Sudan; some are indigenous from relatively early times, and others immigrated in the more recent epochs of the Mahdist and colonial rules. As this paper focuses on the Aljabalain locality, it will primarily address southern parts of the state. The southern parts of the White Nile State are home to many pastoral groups who have practiced the tradition of north-south movement as a livelihood strategy for a long time. A number of factors, both incentives and constraints, have influenced the adaption patterns of pastoralists in this region. For the pastoralists of the southern White Nile, ecological, economic and political considerations are important factors defining the conditions they have to deal with.

The Aljabalain locality occupies the southern part of White Nile state on the eastern side of the river. It extends from Rabak city in the north, to the border with South Sudan just south of the small town of Joda. On its eastern side, Aljabalain borders Sinnar State. It has a total area of 4841 square kilometres and according to the 2008 census is inhabited by about 177,414 persons living in 71 villages. The locality is divided into three administrative units: Aljabalain, Joda and Kinana. The town of Aljabalain, the headquarters of the locality, is situated on the banks of White Nile River about 70 kilometres south of Rabak.

The population of the area is ethnically diverse. The main groups (tribes), known to be the oldest residents of the area, are the Sabaha, Nazza and Dar Moharib. The latter is a confederation of clans (Waghadab, Kibaishab, Khanfariya, Saadab and Rawashda) associated with the territory "Dar Moharib". According to some accounts, Sabaha and Nazza are considered part of the Dar Moharib group (Reid, 1930). Other smaller groups include Musallamiya, Rufa'a al-Hoi, Hassaniya, Ahamda, Silaim, Norab, Lahwiyeen, Taaisha, Miseiriya and Fulani. With the exception of the Fulani, all other groups are ethnically identified as "Arabs". All of them traditionally practice both cultivation and animal husbandry as means of livelihood. With the exception of Lahwiyeen who are camel herders, all the others traditionally mainly raise cattle but also keep sheep and goats. Cattle herders tend to move south in search of a better pastoral climate

for their animals, whereas the Lahwiyeen stay in the north because the southern climate is not suited to camel breeding. The Taisha group, who are originally from Darfur but migrated to this area after the downfall of the Mahdist regime at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, do not go south and practice more cultivation than animal husbandry.

The returnees from South Sudan, the subject of this study, currently live in about 19 makeshift camps (furgan) to the northeast, east, south, and southeast of Aljabalain town. Some of the camps are as close as 2 miles to the town while others are closer to Joda near the border with South Sudan. It is noticeable that the local people use the term 'returnees' to refer to all those who had lived in southern Sudan but have been compelled to move north because of emerging security issues. While earlier arrivals who came after the eruption of war in the south in 1983 have been integrated in the planning of new neighbourhoods at the outskirts of the town, new arrivals are squatting in the bush near the tarmac road or further to the east. Many of the new arrivals came back after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. According to informants, many of those who were active in Popular Defence Forces (PDF) forces felt that Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces would have the upper hand in the south after the CPA therefore, they feared retaliation and left. However, the majority of returnees arrived after the referendum of 2011 and some as late as 2013 after the outbreak of the civil war in South Sudan. The following table summarises the main characteristics of the returnee camps covered by fieldwork. It should be noted that the figures for number of families per camp are less reliable as informants showed a tendency of expecting aid from the government although it was explained to them that the study has nothing to do with that.

Table 1: Main returnee camps in Aljabalain area

No.	Camp	Ethnic group	Location	Date of return	N of families
1	Haj Musa	Sabaha	Southeast of Aljabalain	1984	50
2	Awlad Amer	Sabaha	South of Aljabalain	1995	250
3	Hai Alkassara	Silaim	East of Aljabalain	2007	55
4	Awlad Idrees	Nazza	Northeast of Aljabalain	2008	30
5	Sheikh Musa	Norab	South of Aljabalain	2008	40
6	Awlad Musa	Sabaha	South of Aljabalain	2010	70
7	Abbaker	Fulani	South of Aljabalain	2010	56
8	Iyal Ibrahim	Musallamia	South of Aljabalain	2010	70
9	Adam Adlan	Miseiriya	East of Aljabalain	2010	80
10	Abdalla Husain	Miseiriya	East of Aljabalain	2010	120
11	Hasanab	Nazza	East of Aljabalain	2011	50
12	Abudigin	Nazza	Southeast of Aljabalain	2011	30
13	Haj Mohamed	Fulani	Southeast of Aljabalain	2012	50
14	Haj Yassin	Nazza	Southeast of Aljabalain	2012	70
15	Aradeeb	Fulani	Northwest of Aljabalain	2012	200
16	Faneesh & Ali Jodad	Nazzah	Southeast of Aljabalain	2012	300
17	Adam Sulaiman	Rufa'a al-Hoi	South of Aljabalain	2012	22
18	Mohamed Abdulrahman	Dar Moharib	East of Aljabalain	2013	42
19	Saria Aljabal	Bargo	East of Aljabalain	2015	25

Source: fieldwork (2015)

## 4 Mobile pastoralism and the southward drift

Until the advent of colonial administration in the Sudan in the beginning of twentieth century, the area between the White Nile and Blue Nile, later known as “Al-Gezira” (island in Arabic), was characterised by the prevalence of a subsistence economy largely based on rain-fed cultivation and transhumant livestock breeding. Most people combined the cultivation and livestock breeding without much difficulty since there was plenty of land with very few restrictions. The prevailing pastoral system in these areas has always depended the movement of animals. In the rainy season animals are moved north and in the dry season they go south towards the river. The Gezira scheme, established in 1927 as the largest cotton plantation in Africa, came at the expense of pastoral activities. Large areas that were open communal grazing areas were claimed for irrigated agriculture. The “Al-Managil Extension” of the early 1960s expanded the original scheme.

The open communal land tenure system, which was prevalent in areas away from the banks of the river, made it easy for subsequent Sudanese governments to allocate open grazing areas to new agricultural projects as they see fit. As a result, open communal grazing lands shrunk. In 1970, the government of Ja’afar Nimeiri passed the “unregistered land act” which stipulated that any unregistered land in the country at the time of the law’s enactment would be considered government land. Since much of the land was unregistered, the law gave state institutions the power to confiscate any land according to need.

As previously mentioned, land in the White Nile is attractive for irrigated sugar plantation schemes. The result of the development of new plantations has been the shrinkage of traditional grazing land. To make things worse, semi-mechanised farming has also contributed immensely to the shrinkage and decline of grazing land. The semi-mechanised farming corporation, established in 1978, encouraged urban businessmen and senior retired civil servants to invest in the production of cereal crops and oil seeds in rain-fed land using both tractors and manual labour. The new trend soon spread all over the central clay plains of Sudan, from Gadaref to Nuba Mountains. In the White Nile areas, an area already deeply impacted by sugar cane plantations, the negative effect on pastureland has been maximised. Nevertheless, pastoralists in this area have continuously responded to the agricultural expansion by adjusting their north-south movement.

Some pastoralists have completely adjusted their traditional seasonal migration and now avoid bringing animals north, rather moving east to west within southern Sudan (from lowland to highland). Before the secession of South Sudan, there was an expansion of semi-mechanised rain-fed farming in what used to be the Upper Nile Region in southern Sudan. Pastoralists did not face problems of scarce grazing land here because the land was underused. Additionally, it was possible for many to practice agro-pastoralism in the south. Moving from White Nile to Upper Nile meant only crossing administrative boundaries. Those with large herds of cattle did not find it viable to bring their livestock to the north even during the rainy season. Pastoralists

from White Nile, Blue Nile and Sinnar states were able to adapt to living conditions in the south, as not much bureaucracy was involved in boundary crossing. Their adaptation strategies to conditions in southern Sudan included, most importantly, learning the languages of their Nilotic neighbours and the formation of alliances through (a) friendships, (b) northern men marrying southern women, (c) labour exchanges in the pastoral and agricultural sectors, (d) established reconciliation procedures for solving interethnic conflicts through traditional tribal leaders. These strategies enabled northern pastoralists to live in the south for many years with reasonable confidence, social capital and institutional backing.

There are two ways that families tend to manage the mobility of the domestic group. Firstly, some families preferred to retain the traditional mobility style and moved back and forth from north to south according to the pattern of rainfall in each year, making adjustments during drought spells. These families usually have a medium to small number of cattle (under 300 animals). As the number of animals increase, they may change their strategy and adapt to the availability of natural resources, which is critically matched with the number of the herd that a family owns. Secondly, families with large numbers of cattle preferred to keep their animals in the south permanently. These families may allow women, children and old men to stay in the north. The youth who stay with the animals in the south are relieved periodically to visit relatives and participate in social occasions. Families who cared about educating their children would send them back north to stay with relatives and go to school. However, despite the adverse conditions that militate against keeping families in the south, many reported that their families stayed there with them for years.

## 5 Effects of the secession of South Sudan and the subsequent civil war

Pastoralists from White Nile and Blue Nile area had a complicated existence in southern Sudan. Despite the long history of contact with Nilotic groups in the south that enabled them to adapt well environmentally and socially, the long civil war (1983-2005) that led to the ultimate secession of South Sudan affected their existence there in different ways.

The tactics of guerrilla warfare used by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) affected the civilian populations of the borderland areas in Upper Nile, White Nile and Blue Nile. Fighters for both parties were often recruited from the various ethnic groups. Further, the SPLA and SAF made continuous attempts to incorporate a whole group on one side of the struggle and heavily exploited persuasive ideological statements. SAF, under the Ingaz regime that ascended to power in June 1989, waged a holy war "jihad" against infidels. Likewise, SPLA wanted to liberate the whole of Sudan from the grip of traditional non-progressive forces. Moreover, the ruling regime invented the infamous Popular Defence Forces (PDF) as a new effective platform for recruiting youth to support the army's military campaign in the south. Each group has the features of a militia than a regular army. The involvement of

youth from pastoral groups was disproportionately high. Campaigners deliberately targeted pastoralist groups with long standing relationships with the south, groups could gain from a war that would give them better access to natural resources in southern Sudan. These groups included the Baggara tribes living in South Darfur, East Darfur, West Kordofan, South Kordofan, White Nile, Sinnar and Blue Nile.

Through my fieldwork interviews, it was evident that most pastoralists from the borderland communities who joined PDF did so for pragmatic reasons. For them, it was a chance to permanently secure pasture for their animals should the SPLA rebel group be defeated. During the long civil war, most Arab pastoralists aligned with SAF and most Nilotic pastoralists aligned with SPLM, however, there were also examples of the opposite alliances. Some “southern” pastoralists were allies of the Sudanese government while some “northern” pastoralists became members of SPLA fighting units. In both cases, political expediency could have been the prime driver. Pastoral people are more interested in securing their livelihoods than achieving ideological goals uttered by the political class at the centre stage.

The north-south conflict in Sudan has a long history dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the slave trade was a common practice and groups of African origin were the prime target for slave traders. The historical narratives of slave trading greatly affected the relationship between southerners and northerners, even after the British colonial authorities abolished the practice in 1924. Mistrust between the two groups surfaced after the dawn of independence for the new Republic of Sudan. The southerners in Parliament demanded a federal system of governance from the outset; the northerners initially agreed but failed to implement it afterwards. This sparked the first civil war in Sudan that lasted until 1972 when the Addis Ababa Accord formed a decentralised regional government in South Sudan thus ending the conflict. Just a decade later, in 1983, a new civil war began when the SPLA launched a more comprehensive military opposition movement against the central government in Sudan. This war ended with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, which guaranteed an independence referendum for southerners after a six-year transitional period. The referendum of January 2011 confirmed the overwhelming desire of the people of South Sudan for independence from the north, and a new country was born. Unfortunately, it has not contributed to ending the mistrust or reducing conflict between the two Sudans, because it appeared that each country continued to harbour armed opposition groups of the other country. To make matters worse, a civil war began in the new South Sudanese state due to the escalation of internal conflicts among the ruling elite. These developments have cumulatively affected the life of pastoral groups in the borderland areas of the two countries. The most significant results of the so-called “problem of the South” affecting the borderland areas can be summarised as follows:

1. The secession of South Sudan has redefined the identity and status of Sudanese people of northern origins living in South Sudan, and the Sudanese of southern origins living in Sudan. Large numbers of people on both sides of the border have suddenly lost their rights, in many cases leading to a complete personal disaster. Although this was a general

condition affecting the population all over the country, the effects on borderland communities have been disproportionately high.

2. The level of mistrust between the northern and southern pastoralists has risen drastically to the extent that any small interpersonal conflict can quickly expand to engulf the whole community. More importantly, the shared social capital between southerners and northerners has eroded. Time tested conflict resolution mechanisms that were operated by tribal leaders are no longer working under the new constraints.
3. The chaotic security situation drastically increased the intensity of and number of animals involved in cattle rustling. This left some northern pastoralists with no option but to leave South Sudan and relocate in Sudan. Old friendships and transactional relations between pastoralists and some SPLA officers who helped them with security matters in the past are no longer operative because the new civil war has divided them along ethnic lines: mostly Nuer and Shilluk fighting the Dinka.
4. Government authorities on both sides of the border became increasingly suspicious of borderland communities who are suspected of smuggling rebel groups and/or their arms across the borders. The borders have been officially closed several times either for security reasons or to prevent smuggling from Sudan to South Sudan. This has resulted in restricted mobility and increased marginalisation for communities in the area, creating a negative impact on life in the borderlands.
5. Not all northerners in the south are pastoralists. Many were involved in mechanised farming activities in the vast plains of Upper Nile. The secession of South Sudan and the subsequent civil war stopped mechanised farming because the farmers were then considered foreigners and faced higher risks than before.
6. Many of the northerners operating as petty traders in small towns in the south had to leave because of the growing security threats and the hostile attitude from both government officials and the public. They either withdrew to Juba or moved back to Sudan.

It is clear that a total disruption for the livelihood of pastoralists in South White Nile State has taken place because of the development of events in South Sudan. This has actually been the case for most pastoralists in the border states. Given that pastoralists have a long history of risk averse behaviour, it is important to see how these people have managed to adapt to the new emergencies that have suddenly engulfed them.

## 6 Unpleasant homecoming and new adaptation strategies

The comprehensive peace agreement between SPLM and the government of Sudan led by NCP, signed in Naivasha Kenya in 2005, started the new trend for most pastoralists to exit southern Sudan. The inclusion of the referendum close in the agreement was an early warning for many observers that the secession of South Sudan was inevitable. In 2005, just a few months after the agreement was signed, the SPLM historical leader and one of the engineers of CPA, John Garang, prematurely and suddenly died. His death contributed to a more pessimistic forecast of the fate of a united Sudanese country.

The announcement of the new state of South Sudan in 2011 came as no surprise for many observers, especially pastoralists from adjacent communities in Sudan. Those who foresaw the increasing risk of living in South Sudan had already started to leave, but some were still confident that their long-term alliances and knowledge of the south would allow them to continue living there. However, the unexpected break of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013 dealt a final blow to any optimism that some still held regarding life in the new country. The civil war began in Juba, far from the borders, but quickly reached the oil rich parts of Upper Nile (mainly Unity state) where the main warring ethnic groups (Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk) live in adjacent territories. The new civil war took an ethnic shape with the Nilotic groups at the centre. Pastoralists from White Nile have traditionally allied with Nilotic groups in the south but fighting between the different Nilotic groups led to the erosion of the social capital on which the pastoralists rely for survival in South Sudan. In interviews, informants identified this as a key reason for the mass return of people to Aljabalain from South Sudan after 2013. However, if the figures in the above table are correct (table on page 10) they indicate that the majority of returnees actually arrived in this area after 2010, clearly demonstrating the effect of the 2011 referendum on the decision to return “home”. It should be noted, however, that this is not the only area that received returnees and the situation could be different in other places.

Homecoming is a difficult decision for White Nile pastoralists who have been living in South Sudan for decades. They say environmental and grazing conditions there are much better for livestock breeding despite the risks involved, some even declared that they are willing to give away half their herd if they are allowed to stay because they expect to compensate it in a short time. However, all of them complain of the difficult conditions they found themselves in after the referendum and outbreak of the civil war. They specifically mention the changing attitude and behaviour of South Sudanese towards them, they are often reminded that they are foreigners and must go to their country. This was an effect of the civil war; it left many scars on the lives of individuals, as well as whole groups of people in borderland communities. It is a common fact that such communities suffer most when violence occurs along the boundaries or borders.

Although used to dealing with risky situations, the returnees found themselves facing new realities with which they have to cope. Their previous survival strategies focused on exploring further possibilities in the south, this time, however, they had to reverse their strategy and look

for new solutions in the places that they moved away from years before. The expansion of semi-mechanised farming means that the stark reality is that no open grazing areas are left. Even animal migration routes had been exploited by agribusiness men coming from urban areas because of corrupt practices and the absence of pastoralists most of the year in the previous decades. The same thing was reported in Sinnar and Blue Nile States (Harbi, 1988; Ahmed A. M., 2002; Abbaker, 2016) where the situation has led to violent confrontations. A strong tribal lobby of the Rufa'a al-Hoi leadership has managed to persuade the central government in Khartoum to reduce scheme areas for farmers by 10% to open more grazing areas and animal migration routes.

Collective action among returning pastoralists in White Nile is quite limited compared with the situation in Sinnar. The pastoralist union was the only voice available to them through which they could address government officials and air their demands for land reform and services. However, the pastoralist union was dominated by those practicing agro-pastoralism. The ethnic background of pastoralists in this region is so diverse that they lack a coherent tribal political structure, this is evident from table 1. It is clear that the possibilities for collective action among White Nile pastoralists are very slim. For this reason, the future of pastoralism in this area may be determined more by the attitudes and strategies adopted by individuals seeking improvement of livelihood chances for their respective households. When asked about how they intended to pursue their goals with the government, many camp leaders did not have a clear vision about what to do. Some members of PDF actually professed that if the government had not collected arms earlier, after the signing of the CPA, they would have revolted like the Darfurians.

Given the living conditions for pastoralists in south White Nile, it is possible to see evolving patterns/trends of new adaptation strategies being adopted by different pastoralists according to the situation of each household rather than following a generalised customary practice. Cattle breeding demands a lot of water resources and pasture requirements so many pastoralists have shifted from cattle to sheep breeding. This has the added bonus that smaller animals are easier to sell at market. Many pastoralists sell their animals when in need of cash for food or medicine, the selling of a small animal perfectly fits such needs while the selling of an ox or a cow leaves cash that needs to be reinvested. The same pattern has been noticed among pastoralists in other areas in Sudan and has been reported by (Ahmed A. M., 2002; Abbaker, 2016; Osman, 2008; Mohamed, 2017) for Rufa'a al-Hoi in Abu Hojar, Rufa'a al-Hoi in Al-Mazmoom Al-Damazeen and Lahwiyeen in Khash Al-Girba respectively.

Many families have also started diversifying their livelihood activities. Some family members would seek work in small or large urban centres and others even migrate outside Sudan in search of better opportunities to earn a living and help the family. This is popular among families with a modest herd because they can keep the herd with limited resources and can benefit from the dairy products. In contrast, families with large numbers of cattle preferred to keep their animals in South Sudan permanently but allow their families to stay in the north pursuing non-pastoral activities and allow their children to go to school. Some rich pastoralists have resorted to a

different strategy and have bought an agricultural scheme (farm) that they can cultivate and let their animals graze remains from the harvest during the dry months of the year. Such farms include an excavated water pool to meet the animals' needs for water. Such a strategy works well with small animals (mainly sheep) because of their lower watering and grazing requirements. This represents a move from traditional livestock breeding to a commercial style. Alternatively, a herd owner can also pay a scheme owner a certain amount of money so that his animals may graze post-harvest remains, usually such a deal will include a constructed water pool inside the scheme.

Sedentarization has become a practical option for some pastoralists, especially the poor who have already started exiting the pastoralist livelihood and moved with their families to urban centres. When the number of animals owned by a family falls below a certain range, it becomes difficult for the unit to sustain itself in a pastoral livelihood system. A substantial number of such families now live in squatter settlements encircling towns and cities in Sudan; becoming part of the class of the "urban poor". In the White Nile State this phenomenon can be seen in the outskirts of Aljabalain, Kosti and Rabak towns.

## 7 Conclusion

For several decades, more land has been cultivated, leading to the shrinking of grazing areas in today's White Nile State. The main factors behind the expansion have been (a) the expansion of the Gazira scheme, (b) the establishment of sugar plantations (Asalaya, Kinana, White Nile), and (c) the expansion of semi-mechanised rain-fed cultivation by urban-based business entrepreneurs. Consequently, pastoralists reduced their northward journeys and expanded their southward mobility, in terms of both places visited and the length of the stay.

During the civil war between the SPLA and government of Sudan (1983-2005), many of the pastoralist youth became engaged in confrontational activities in the south. This was opportunistic behaviour with the aim of securing their interests in water and pasture in the region. The secession of South Sudan dealt a big blow to the livelihoods of the population of south White Nile State, particularly pastoralists who suddenly became foreigners and now had to buy their way through the system at higher costs than before. The civil war in South Sudan, which erupted shortly after the birth the country, further complicated matters for the pastoralists. Although they reluctantly returned to their home areas in the north, they left some animals in the south, which the youth look after. The conditions in the south are still difficult and the youth survive by giving money or livestock to whoever represents a threat to them.

The returnees express feeling of bitterness for two main reasons. Firstly, when they returned to Sudan, they could not find land on which to establish their camps because someone had already claimed the land. In the end, they had to settle on small strips of land with no grazing areas nearby for their animals. Secondly, they feel betrayed by government authorities who failed to

address their urgent needs of water, schools, health service and land, despite the fact that they fought on its side during the civil war against SPLA forces.

Without enough government support, and due to the lack of effective leadership to mobilise returnees to take collective action, each family has adopted an adaptation strategy that suits their own conditions. The net result of such strategies points to a significant trend for the decline of mobile pastoralism in Aljabalain area and White Nile State in general. This looks like a more general trend that applies to most pastoral communities in Sudan. Overall, it looks as if the early debate on the settlement of nomads in Sudan has culminated in leaving this important segment of the population to deal with their problems alone. While integration in agriculture has become a good choice for wealthier nomadic pastoralists, the poorer ones have clearly opted for exiting this sector altogether. Those who still keep their animals in South Sudan will continue to face the predicament of uncertainty for some time.

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In many countries around the world (especially in Africa), the livelihood of pastoralists depends largely on trekking over vast areas of land in constant search of water and pasture for their animals. This nomadic life brings certain challenges including a constant desire to escape adverse conditions of animal health, government taxes and security threats. Pastoralists try to adapt to constantly changing conditions in the wider context of their existence. This applies to both the physical environment and the socio-economic and political conditions surrounding them. Although risk is a permanent part of life for human beings, its materialisation in the form of environmental threats is something that pastoralists in particular face. Like other human groups, pastoralists have their own priorities that they try to pursue; nevertheless, they are not always sure how to best satisfy their interests, this justifies the mobile lifestyle they adopt. Pastoralists often move across both administrative boundaries and international borders in search of better conditions for their animals, and ultimately themselves. In so doing they trade one type of risk for another and run into new risks, such as the threat of legal or security action by state agencies.

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