

# **NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH**

**Research Paper No. 232**

## **Urban attractions: returnee youth, mobility and the search for a future in South Sudan's regional towns**

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January 2012



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ISSN 1020-7473

## **Introduction**

Last January's successful referendum has ushered in a period of great excitement in South Sudan. On the eve of, and immediately following independence, many young people returned from camps for refugees and internally displaced people to the South. Rather than going back to the rural, pastoral and agricultural communities of their parents, many have chosen to seek opportunities in regional towns, spurred on by a desire to contribute to the building of their new country. More educated than their parents' generation, these young people hope to turn their educational achievement into employment.

Becoming engaged in wage labor, preferably obtaining a salary position with the government, or an international NGO—is widely embraced as the ultimate goal. However, in the present political economy of the South, this seems for most a remote possibility. Civil service appointments in South Sudan are political prizes used to reward men (and often also their family networks) who rose to high positions in the SPLA/SPLM during the war against the North, often regardless of their ability to perform the tasks required. This puts many young people at a distinct disadvantage, despite their educational credentials.

At this historic moment in South Sudan, educated young people stand to play a critical role in the economic and political life of the new nation. This research explores the various ways that returnee youth respond to unemployment as they seek new *urban* livelihoods for themselves in two larger towns in Eastern Equatoria State—Torit and Kapoeta. The project seeks to answer questions in a number of broad areas:

- what factors shape young people's choice to pursue urban livelihoods?
- how do returnee youth go about seeking employment opportunities?
- what kinds of networks and social ties do they rely on for information about jobs?
- do these ties help in achieving employment?
- what roles—political, economic or other—do returnee youth see for themselves in newly independent South Sudan?

In exploring the questions outlined above, this research contributes critical knowledge about returnee youth as they attempt to make new paths for themselves in a country that is undergoing a momentous transition. It bridges research on returnee livelihoods and urbanization with a focus on the political and social self-positioning of an under-studied group.

## **Youth and African cities in the literature**

The past two decades has seen an explosion of writing on 'youth' as a category of social, political and economic importance. Of particular concern have been the 'young' societies of the global south, which comprise roughly 85% of the world's youth population (Jeffrey, 2008; Abbink, 2005). As Boyden (2008) points out, the focus on 'youth' in the global south is in part due to these demographics. In societies where youth make up the majority of the population, there is broad agreement that this generation has enormous potential to direct the

course of events, regardless of whether scholars view young people in terms of their potential to create economic dynamism or their potential for violence (Boyden, 2008).

The question of youth has perhaps been of more critical concern to politicians and development planners in sub-Saharan Africa, where high population growth rates and low economic growth have combined to produce discourses of impending social and ecological collapse (Kaplan, 1994; Sachs 2011). Far from a recent creation, discourses linking urban youth with danger date back to the colonial era, where authorities sought to limit the presence of more educated ‘de-tribalized’ Africans in urban centres through various forms of spatial control (Burgess, 2005; Burton, 2001; Carton, 2000).

However, the 1990’s saw the re-emergence in popular imagination and scholarly writing of a discourse of ‘youth (in) crisis’ across Africa. Discussions of the ‘youth crisis’ referred implicitly or explicitly to the failures of the post-colonial state—and the generation that achieved independence—to deliver tangible life-benefits to subsequent generational cohorts (Diouf, 2003). At the same time, the ascendancy of neoliberal political and economic policies in the 1980’s and 1990’s lead to cutbacks in the civil service jobs as well as in education and other social programs across Africa.

For African states pursuing socialist development strategies—including Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania (among others)—the collapse of the Soviet Union and the material support it provided—signalled a shift toward more informal, ‘flexible’ labouring practices which left many young people without prospects for stable employment. An era of Afro-pessimism raised the spectre of the violent potential of a vast cohort of disaffected young people excluded from politics and the possibility of prosperity by ageing independence era politicians (Utas, 2008). The spectacular use of young people in the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the rise of violent youth gangs such as the Mungiki in Kenya have further reinforced this connection between youth, political and economic exclusion, and violence (Richards 1999; Keen, 2003; Hoffman 2006; Kagwanja, 2006; Rasmussen, 2010).

Yet, as Abbink (2005) demonstrates, the role of youth in African society should not only be seen in reference to their potential for violence. Abbink highlights the important roles played by students across the continent in shaping opposition political agendas and pushing for more open democratic forms of politics (Abbink, 2005). More recent work on East Africa has turned attention to the ways in which new cultural repertoires, particularly hip-hop and reggae, have been taken up and reworked by urban young people. The lyrics and stylings of this music, which expresses both alienation and consumptive desires, have taken root particularly among the underemployed and those in informal work (Perullo, 2005; Weiss, 2009). Additionally, while many youth are excluded from the formal economy, this does not mean that they are not engaged in productive work.

As Munive (2010) argues, the practice of ‘hustling’—creatively taking advantage of small opportunities in petty trade, fixing and other licit and illicit activities—provides many urban youth not only with material support necessary for survival, but also with a meaningful way to gain social recognition and respect. This research suggests a need to re-appraise the characterization of youth as ‘idle’ by recognizing the creative ways in which they attempt to overcome the economic barriers that confront them. It is in this vein that I undertook this research with South Sudan’s growing ranks of unemployed young people living in regional urban centres.

Urban youth in post-conflict contexts have often been treated by scholarly and practitioner research in reference to their potential violence. (REFS) They highlight the ways in which social, economic and political exclusion may contribute to renewed violence—whether political or criminal in nature—and argue for interventions that provide youth with economic opportunities as a way to keep young people away from more violent means of sustaining themselves (Njeru, 2010). Of particular concern in much of this research is the fate of ex-combatants, especially those who participated in armed conflict at very young ages (Ismail, 2003; Boothby et al. 2006; Annan et al. 2009; for critiques see Boyden, 2000; Beirens 2008; Dawes, 2008; Hyndman 2010).

Without seeking to diminish the importance of research or programs targeted towards ex-combatants, there can be conflation ‘youth,’ ‘refugee’ and ex-combatant categories, which can lead researchers to place undue focus on the violent potential of the young population. This has meant that relatively less attention has been paid to young people who did not participate directly in armed conflict, including young returnees who have spent their childhoods in the relative calm of refugee and IDP camps (but see Hoodfar, 2008; Hart, 2008). Not only have these youth been isolated from (some of) the violence of the civil conflict, they often have had more access to formal education and vocational schooling.

Increasingly, international NGOs operating in refugee camps offer trainings on topics such as community health and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, refugee and human rights, non-violent conflict resolution, and democratic values. When they return to their home countries, this cohort of young people, therefore, may have higher levels of skills, education and expectations with regards to employment, and be less likely to turn to violence as a livelihood strategy than ex-combatants and youth that remained in the country for the duration of the conflict.

In reference to the questions of returnee youth and urbanization in South Sudan specifically, it is widely documented that the country is in the midst of a period of rapid urbanization. This has only accelerated with the end of the civil war in 2005 and continuing return migration of formerly displaced people moving back South Sudan from the North and from surrounding countries. Reliable population figures are lacking for most of South Sudan, but some reports state that Juba, the capital of South Sudan, has more than doubled in population since 2005 to over half a million inhabitants (Martin & Mosell, 2011). Many other towns and cities report triple digit growth rates (Duffield, 2008; Sluga, 2011).

These observations suggest that, far from being a simple return to places of origin, return migration after displacement must be seen in relation to broader social processes, including urbanization (Long, 2010; Omata, 2011; Ziek 2004). In particular, returnees may prefer urban locations for an assortment of interconnected reasons that are social, economic and political in nature. These include: improved access to amenities such as school and health services; economic opportunities associated with development or government projects; persisting insecurity in rural areas; and shifting cultural preferences for the more dense social life that characterizes urban areas (Phelan & Wood, 2006; Duffield, 2008; on Juba, see Martin & Mosel, 2011).

As the capital of South Sudan, and headquarters of a number of United Nations Agencies and most NGOs, Juba attracts the highest number of educated young returnees. Contemporary research on returnees to urban areas in South Sudan has focused primarily on return migrants to Juba (Martin & Mosel, 2011). However, due to extreme price inflation and rapid growth, the cost of an extended stay in Juba is prohibitive to a significant proportion of job-seeking young people. Many returnee youth prefer to seek employment in regional urban centres

where they may have greater access to housing through local social and familial networks. Unsurprisingly, there is very little academic research on returnee livelihoods in smaller regional towns (but see Abdelnour et al 2008). Instead research and policy interventions outside of the capital have tended to focus predominately on rural livelihood assessments (USAID, 2005; Phelan & Wood, 2006; Ashkenazie et. al., undated). But, increasingly returnees are choosing to stay-on in urban areas, especially those places designated as way stations or stopover points for longer journeys (Duffield, 2008; Pantuliano et. al., 2008;).

Additionally, of those who do return to rural areas, many do not end up remaining there, moving back to urban areas after a relatively short period of time (Duffield, 2008; Martin & Mosel, 2011). This kind of continuing mobility and preference for urban places among returnees, especially the young, is borne out by my own observation in the field. My previous research, conducted over 13 months in 2009 and 2010, explored changing livelihood practices in a small town (less than 7,000 residents) in South Sudan that was experiencing significant return migration.

While that research focused primarily on subsistence livelihoods in rural areas, the practices of young returnees were underrepresented. In fact, I found that many young people (18-30 year olds) were not particularly interested in pursuing rural livelihoods. These results pushed me undertake the current study about the experiences of young people in South Sudan's rapidly urbanizing regional towns.

Definitions of 'youth' vary considerably with some including the very young, and others stretching to include people in their mid-30's (Boyden, 2008; Jeffrey, 2008). As this variance suggests, the boundaries of youth are socially negotiated and defined not only in reference to chronological age, but also to the categories of 'childhood' and 'adulthood.' Among a majority of the cultures that make up South Sudan—many of which are socially ordered according to what has been termed 'age class systems'—age or generational status remains a key aspect of identity (Hutchison, 1996; Burgess 2005; Jok 2005; Leonardi 2007).

Yet, owing to the experience of conflict, humanitarian interventions and western style schooling, traditional definitions of youth reflecting initiation or reproductive status have combined with others based on chronological age or political subordination to form a rather more loose conceptualization of youth, which may span from 15-35 years of age (Leonardi, 2007). For this research, the 'youth' category is defined with reference to chronological age (born between 1985-1995), socially salient local practices, as well as to the historically contingent experience that allowed this particular cohort of young people to escape practices of forced military recruitment in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

## **Methodology**

The research for this paper was conducted between October and December 2011, in two medium size towns in South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State—Torit and Kapoeta. Given the limited time frame for the research, I chose to focus the research in areas with which I was already familiar from previous research visits. Nevertheless, the two towns were chosen with the intention to capture a diversity of political, economic and migration histories that might impact young people's experiences of unemployment.

In each of the towns, I conducted semi-structured interviews with young people who were looking for work, which were audio-recorded. I also met with state and local government

officials, representatives of NGOs and CBO's to inform them about the research and to find out their understandings of what unemployed youth are facing. In addition, I collected data about the local economy, job market and informal economic activities through participant observation and informal discussions with young people I met in my daily activities—including motorcycle taxi-drivers, tea stall customers and vendors, cell-phone charging station attendants, copy-shop workers and spectators and players at informal football pick-up matches among others. Observations from these interactions were recorded daily in detailed field notes. In the analysis that follows, I reserve the use of direct quotes only for interviews for which I have an audio record.

### *Field locations*

The second civil war in Sudan lasted for over two decades, from 1983 to 2004, and impacted most areas of South Sudan. Most of the towns were held as garrisons for the Northern Army (SAF), but switched hands several times during the war. Additionally, intense internal factional fighting within the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the 1990's lead to additional displacement of southern civilians, as did the Lord's Resistance Army, which operates in the loosely controlled border areas adjacent to Northern Uganda and Eastern Congo. Experiences of displacement, therefore, varied considerably across location and time, with some areas suffering from more local and temporary attacks, and other areas impacted for decades. Broadly those displaced fall into four categories: a) refugees—those displaced across an international border; b) those displaced to Northern Sudan; c) those displaced across a significant distance within South Sudan, and; d) those displaced locally—e.g. within the same county).

This research focuses on two of the larger regional towns in Eastern Equatoria State—Torit, the current capital of the state; and Kapoeta, the capital under northern rule and currently a significant market town on the road connection to Northern Kenya. During the latter half of the second civil war Eastern Equatoria was a major theater of operations. After the fall of the Derg 1991, and the loss of its rear base in Ethiopia, the SPLA split along ethnic lines, with the faction lead by John Garang setting up its main command base in the mountainous border regions of Eastern Equatoria. Both towns were held as garrison towns by the SAF, and were taken and retaken several times during the conflict. Despite these similarities, the towns differ considerably in terms of size and composition of the returnee population.

Torit is the larger of the two towns, owing to its status as the administrative seat of the state government. It hosts a number of government institutions including the governors house, the legislative assembly, and government ministries at the state level, as well as county, payam and boma level administrative units. Located just two hours by vehicle on a recently graded road from Juba, it is one of the most accessible state capitals in South Sudan. As such, the town hosts a number of UN agency and international NGO field offices.

While it is located in the home area of the Lotuko tribe, Torit's population is comparatively diverse, with all of the linguistic communities of the state well represented along with other ethnic communities from outside of the state. There is also a significant presence of immigrants in the town, mostly from direct neighbors and members of the East African Community (Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda.) While the war took its toll on the infrastructure of the town, there has been a building boom since the signing of the peace accords. The town has a large and active market, owing to its proximity to Nimule, one of the most active border crossings in the country, with prices on goods similar or lower to those in the capital Juba.

Kapoeta, located in the drier eastern part of the state, is third largest town in the state (behind Nimule on the Ugandan border). It is the seat of Kapoeta South County, and was, under Northern rule, the capital of the state. Just two hours from the Kenyan border, Kapoeta is a thriving market town, with a number of traders with operations in the remote eastern areas of South Sudan locating storehouses there.<sup>1</sup> There are a small number of NGO's who established field offices in Kapoeta, however several of them have more recently closed these offices, or have a limited presence.

The town has a municipal power plant that provides reliable power to customers 7 hours a day. Kapoeta town is located in the home area of the Toposa, who are pastoralists that move their cattle across great distances according to seasonal grazing opportunities. However, relative fewer Toposa live within the town proper, many preferring to live in surrounding rural settlements accessing the town daily on foot. Town residents are mostly from the Toposa, Didinga and Dinka tribes, as well as a significant population of immigrant Kenyan and Somali traders and businessmen.

### *Recruitment*

Information about the study was posted (in English) on flyers on job boards, shop fronts, tree trunks and other places that jobseekers frequent to look for job announcements, as well as through word of mouth. When respondents called, pre-screening was undertaken to determine that they met the criteria for eligibility in the study—Sudanese nationals, between the ages of 16 and 30, with at least a primary level education (completed primary leaving exam). Returning refugees and internally displaced people as well as those that remained in South Sudan for the duration of the conflict were eligible to participate.

This method of recruitment has a number of benefits, but also some significant drawbacks. Posting flyers on job boards allowed for the self-targeting of respondents, as those who read the announcement were often looking for employment opportunities. It is also non-coercive, as potential participants are the ones who make the first contact with the researcher.

However, the placement of flyers on job boards also introduced some confusion, as a few of the respondents mistakenly thought that the flyer was in reference to was a job opportunity, or a scholarship program. Every effort was made to clarify the research purpose of the interviews, both at the pre-screening stage and before the start of the interview itself. Still, there is a possibility that some respondents participated in the hope of gaining access to some perceived benefit. Another drawback to this method was that because the flyers were written in English, the recruitment process was biased against those young people who were educated in Arabic, whether locally, in Juba or in Khartoum in the North.<sup>2</sup> This meant that relatively fewer people who had returned from northern Sudan are represented in this study.

Additionally, the response to this recruitment method was markedly different in each of the field locations, with more than four times as many people responding in Torit (n=37) than in

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<sup>1</sup> Many goods imported from Kenya destined for Juba and areas east of the Nile are transported through Uganda and enter at Nimule, instead of taking the Kapoeta road due to poor road quality.

<sup>2</sup> Before the signing of the CPA, schools in garrison towns typically operated according to the Sudanese national syllabus, with Arabic as the language of instruction, while towns under SPLA control often adopted the curriculum from either Uganda or Kenya, with English as the language of instruction. In Torit, both curriculums were available at primary and secondary levels, while in Kapoeta town no schools were operational during the conflict.



Kapoeta (n=8). While I cannot know for sure the reasons for this discrepancy, there are a few factors that may have impacted response rates. First, the literacy rate Torit is significantly higher than that of Kapoeta town. Additionally, because Torit has more opportunities for employment, it appears that more educated young people go there in search of employment rather than to Kapoeta. Finally, there seemed to be greater general skepticism about the project in Kapoeta, particularly with young people from the majority Toposa population.

Given the recruitment method, it should be clear that the opinions and perspectives presented in this study cannot be taken to represent those of young job seekers generally in South Sudan, or even in the towns in which the research was conducted. In particular, while efforts were made encourage participation of a broad range of people, the small numbers of women (n=6), returning IDP's from Khartoum (n=3) mean that the diversity of their experiences is underrepresented. The complete lack of participation of Toposa youth in the Kapoeta field site poses a significant limitation to this study (though interestingly there were several Toposa participants in Torit). A comprehensive survey of young people in the 10 states of South Sudan would be a valuable future contribution to assessing the general state of youth in South Sudan's regional towns.

### *Interviews*

The data presented in this report is drawn from participant observation, informal conversation with young people, NGO staff and government officials as well as from 42 semi-structured interviews. Each of these interviews followed a general arc yet left room for the participant to direct the flow of the conversation, and for further probing to bring out both commonalities and divergences among the participants. Most interviews were conducted in a public but quiet location such as a guesthouse patio. While these locations did not offer complete confidentiality, an effort was made to ensure interviews were conducted away from other patrons to protect the privacy of the participants.

About half of the interviews were conducted jointly with the help of my research assistant, Manager Luka Lino, who is himself a South Sudanese returnee youth who grew up in a Kenyan refugee camp, and whose perspectives shaped the interview process. He also acted as a translator when needed (Juba Arabic/ English; Didinga/English and Kiswahili/English). In Torit, a total of 35 interviews were conducted with 36 participants, while in Kapoeta the total was 7 interviews with 8 participants. In each location there was one joint interview, which occurred when participants came together and requested that they be interviewed jointly. All but two of the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. For those that were not recorded, extensive notes were recorded during the interview. The interviews typically lasted between 15 and 50 minutes.

### **Continuing mobility for returnee youth**

While repatriation has been the preferred of the three 'durable solutions' for refugees for more than a decade, the consequences of large scale repatriation efforts on returnees and the communities to which they return has, until recently, received less interest among scholars (but see Rogge & Akol, 1989; Warner 1994; Black & Koser 1999; Hammond 1999; and Long & Oxfeld 2004). Research on repatriation in other regions has suggested that urban centers are particularly attractive to returnees who have spent long periods of time in densely populated refugee camps (Omata, 2010; Long 2010). Others have noted repatriation is often

not a one-off mover from camp to home, instead a longer process of that may involve multiple moves between (rural and urban) locations, and in some cases include temporary or more permanent trips back to the refugee camp (Hovil, 2010; Long, 2010).

While the conditions of return varied widely among the participants in this research, it was common for returnees to remain mobile for years after their initial return. Many of the young returnees I interviewed mentioned that they had lived or stayed in another location since they had returned to South Sudan, regardless if they had repatriated spontaneously, or with the assistance of one of the many organized repatriation programs sponsored by UNHCR. Unlike in the Liberian case described by Omata (2011), South Sudanese youth were equally likely initially to have gone to their home village as to the capital Juba for a significant period of time—ranging from several months to more than 3 years—before deciding to look for work in the urban centers of Torit and Kapoeta. A few had even spent time in towns in neighboring states before their move to Eastern Equatoria.

Take for example Peter<sup>3</sup> a 26-year-old Kuku speaker who returned to South Sudan in 2009, after finishing secondary school (O-Level) in Uganda. Though he wished to continue with his studies in Uganda, he lacked the resources to pay school fees, and so felt that he had no option to return to South Sudan. Initially, he decided to go back to his parents' village, near Basi in Central Equatoria where he worked for a time as a volunteer teacher. But soon he found that he was dissatisfied with life there:

Peter: I am staying from Basi. Then [I stayed] there because our parent is from there. That's why. I see the situation if you stay at home, the job cannot look for you. Unless you are going to look for a job. That is why I decided to come to Yei. And to Yei, and then I proceed to Juba.

After going for various training courses (in computers and driving), he moved to Yei, the town closest to his home village to look for a job as a driver. After five months with no success in getting a contract, he decided to move to Juba on the advice of a friend:

LN: And then, why did you decide to move on, to go to Juba?

Peter: Because, I have my friends which are staying from Juba. They told me if I come to Juba, I will get a good job, in an organization or NGO. That's why I decided to come...That is why I came to Juba. I stayed there for three months, then I have, I get nothing. I just worked as a contractor (doing construction). Then after that, I get that money, then I decided also to come here. Because, this world is not an easy world. It's just full of challenges. You need to move and get new, look for job.

When his efforts to find stable work in Juba were not as fruitful as he had hoped, he came to Torit to join his brother, who had told them that there were job opportunities in there:

Peter: I have my brother, which is a soldier. He is working with the payam administrator. He's the one who told me that this place, they are lacking workers. He said, 'let me come here'—that is why I decided to come here.

I open with Peter's reflections on his experiences of mobility and unemployment because they point to two—often interconnected—factors that shape the decisions of young returnees

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<sup>3</sup> The names used in this report are pseudonyms, to protect the identity of participants. Additionally where they appear, the names of villages of origin have been changed, for the same reason.

about their futures. As his comments suggest, mobility is a defining feature of the experience of educated young job seekers in South Sudan. But looking beyond the fact of continuing mobility, I found that decisions of young people about where they went, how long they stayed, and why they decided to move on again are influenced by two main considerations. The first is their educational and employment aspirations. The second is the particular geography of family and other social networks (something I will come back to in more detail the next section of the paper.) But for now, I want to emphasize the role that these two factors play in the continuing mobility of young people.

As Van Hear (2003) has noted, extended stays in refugee camps can have the effect of shifting young people's expectations and aspirations, especially as they relate to education and employment. Among the South Sudanese returnees with whom I spoke, this was certainly the case. Gaining access to schooling had been a key consideration in family choices around seeking refuge from the conflict over an international border.

So it is not surprising that among these young people, many had taken advantage of gains in access to formal schooling and improved quality of education during their time outside of the country. The hope of these young people and their families, was that academic credentials would allow them to escape a dependence on subsistence agriculture, as the following exchange with 25 year old Jacob who undergone training to become a driver underscores:

LN: And why are you not interested to live there in the village?

Jakob: Is there any place, any vacancy there for working? Because we are people who are used to town. And I will not be going to go and stay in the village.

And a short while later:

LN: Why, why don't you want to dig?

Jakob: I am having a license of being a driver. My hope is now a driver. I can drive

This hope of leaving aside the hoe and getting a job with a salary was often pegged to pursuing a life and livelihood in town, rather than the village. Towns presented many more opportunities for waged work, spanning from casual work in construction, security and cleaning to more prestigious jobs with government, international NGOs and UN agencies. As Jacob's comments suggest, educational attainment shaped young returnees' employment aspirations and played a key role in shifting young people's perceptions of their appropriateness or suitability to agricultural work and pastoralism.

This emerging sense of the impropriety of subsistence livelihoods for those who had gone to school motivated many to move to urban areas in search of waged work. Cultivation—*digging* in common speech—came to be seen by returnees as a fallback option to be pursued once all other possibilities had come to nothing. However, many young returnees rejected that they were completely uninterested in pursuing subsistence livelihoods. Instead they saw digging more as a *complement* to other kinds of income generation strategies rather than as standalone way to support themselves and their families.

LN: You don't fear digging, but you prefer work?

John: You... you know, work is also... digging is okay. And both of them are okay. When—you know—when you're working, when you're working in the office, so the

money you're receiving there can go and help you in other parts. And then the one you are digging here will help in the family.

This perspective is not surprising given that ongoing reliance on supplemental subsistence cultivation is a common practice in South Sudan even among with civil servants and NGO workers.<sup>4</sup> The need to find an income source outside of agriculture was spoken of more as a feeling that an ongoing transformation was of the economy was underway. Among the young people I spoke with there was a sense that increasingly daily life even in remote villages is mediated by money, rather than other forms of exchange.

The need to find paid employment in the face of rising expectations and a changing economy are at the core of practices of continuing mobility. However, some of the young people recognized the risk of too much mobility. Returning to the experiences of Peter, with whom I opened this section, I asked when he thought he might go to look for work in yet another town. He responded in this way:

Peter: No no [I'm not planning to move again]. Because you know in the life—if you move up and down, maybe the chance which you need. Maybe that chance which will come, maybe it will just get you when you are not there. If you have not stayed... Let's say it has dropped on that day, but in the other place. Then if you are not there, immediately they will change it.

Moving too much, or to an inappropriate place had the potential to limit young people's ability to find work, especially if they could not draw on pre-existing networks of information and support. As with Peter, Samuel—a twenty-one year old returnee from the refugee camps in Adjumani District in Northern Uganda—based his decision to move to Juba on information of a close friend and the assurance on his part that Samuel would not lack for a place to stay:

Samuel: Ah. It is only a friend, who—he was going also to Juba. He told me; 'Ok, my friend, Samuel, so we shall have to also go and you get something.' So I also agreed. I went with him. We were staying with him well...."

Léonie: And this friend, you know him from where?

Samuel: It was from Uganda (the refugee camp).

Both Peter and Samuel were ultimately unsuccessful in finding work in Juba, and based their decisions about where to go to next on where they could take advantage of existing familial and social networks. This brings me to the second factor shaping young returnees' continuing mobility: young people's ability to call on the assistance of family, clan and friendship ties while they looked for work. Though no one spoke explicitly of their social 'networks' as such, they did discuss the importance of being "known" in their ability to get jobs. This was true of finding work in both the formal and informal sector (something I will take up in some detail later in the paper.)

In general, young people relied heavily on networks for both material support and critical information about work opportunities. And the location and relative strength of these social

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<sup>4</sup> My prior research in South Sudan found that very often county level government employees—spanning from low level health workers and teachers to higher paid department heads and county judges—continue to engage in subsistence production in addition to their salaried work for the county.

ties deeply shaped the direction and timing of young people's choices relating to mobility. With the exception of a handful of people, few of the young people I spoke with would consider moving to a town outside their own state to look for work, unless they had previous contacts there, or had managed to land a contract for employment prior to their move. I turn now to explore just what kinds of support young people relied on in their search for work.

### **Networks of support**

The previous section of the paper draws attention to the remarkable mobility of young returnees in their search for paid work. In this section I look more deeply at one of the factors that shapes this mobility: young people's networks of support. I assess the relative importance of existing social networks—specifically familial, social (friendship), and ethnic—in the job-seeking process. I make a distinction between the kinds of social contacts that can be relied on for material support and those that provide other less tangible forms of assistance such as information about jobs, advice and 'connections.'

The reliance on kinship ties among refugees, displaced people has been widely documented in the literature (see Boyd, 1989; Host 2003; Willems, 2003; Keown-Bomar, 2005; Clark, 2006; Plasterer, 2011; Chatty, 2010). And for the Nilotic and Sudanic people of South Sudan more generally, kin-based relationships play a major role in everyday life. While much has changed since the writing of seminal anthropological works on the region such as Evans-Pritchard's *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (1951), the responsibility to look out for and assist kin is still central the South Sudanese social landscape.

Young job seekers rely heavily on familial ties for material support—including housing, food and sometimes pocket money—while they looked for jobs in urban centers. The ability to rely on kin was so banal that young returnees didn't think it warrant mentioning during the interviews, unless asked directly. Many expressed surprise, and quite a few laughed incredulously when I asked if their relatives asked them to contribute for rent or for feeding.

Paulino, for example, is a 23 year old from the Lopit ethnic group. In 2010 he spent the year in Khartoum on a government scholarship, studying at Juba University, which was located there at the time. When the Khartoum branch closed for relocation back to South Sudan in December of that year, he came to live with his elder sister in Torit, who works as a policewoman. Since he was uncertain when his program at the university would re-open due to lack of facilities in Juba, Paulino had spent the preceding months looking, unsuccessfully, for work. Because of his lack of income, I asked Paulino about the support that his sister provides:

LN: So she is helping you to live here? You don't... you have to pay something, or?

Paulino: Anyway, no no! Anyway what I know is I am just eating from home, even sleeping there...But something like payment? That one is not there.

And a bit later in the interview:

LN: So with your sister, you are living there. You don't have to contribute? She is just helping you?

Paulino: No, no. I have nothing to contribute, but they used to help me. In case of anything. Like if there is advert, eh? If I ask them for money, let me say a certain

amount for photocopying, then a certain amount for the envelope, then they will help me. Like five pound, or even twenty, they help me...

For Paulino and several other respondents, family members not only housed and fed them during their extended job search, they also helped them out with pocket money when asked if the money was clearly going towards helping them apply for work. While kin were most often mentioned in relation to assistance with housing and sustenance, there was considerable variation in young people's feelings about this support.

This variance in perception about their own reliance on kin was typically dependent on the type of the relative providing support—with the reliance on close relatives taken as natural. Since nearly all of the people I interviewed were not originally from either Torit or Kapoeta, it was rare for them to be living in their family home with parents. In the absence of parents, the family members most often mentioned in relation to this kind of material support were elder siblings and paternal uncles, whose help it was generally assumed could be relied upon without question and without any need to contribute money to the household.

However, for those job-seekers who were able to find casual work—typically in construction, or as motorcycle-taxi drivers, there was a sense that when they did earn some money, they should give something to the household in which they stayed, even if no one asked them to do so. This was the case with Angelo, a water seller who was living with his sister:

LN: Here in Torit, do you have a place to stay?

Angelo: It is not my place, but it is my sister's place. I stay there. But not yet, at least if I could have something, I could buy a land. Because this is why I am just managing to pick water, so that I can buy a land. Maybe in the future I can make the building.

LN: So your sister, she is now married? Is her husband there also.

Angelo: Yeah, he is there. But they are just bearing with my situation because I explained to them.

LN: And do you contribute for feeding? Or they don't ask?

Angelo: Yeah, yeah they don't ask. At least if I see the situation and there is nothing, then I give. I manage to pick water myself and then I give. And they don't ask me."

The reliance on siblings and paternal uncles was such a banal practice that a number of respondents mentioned the lack of these specific relatives as an explanation of why things were especially difficult for them. Here is Peter again, this time talking about his decision to leave Juba:

Peter: I was not, I was not putting freely [in Juba]. But—you know—with relatives. It could be better if I stay with my parent or brothers. But that one [that I was staying with] is a relative...and then the situation is not all ok. There are even some words which can frustrate me, that is why I decided to leave.

As this suggests, young people spoke with more tension when discussing their reliance on distant relatives, including stepparents,<sup>5</sup> aunties, maternal uncles and other more diffusely related people. Nevertheless, young people saw the households of extended family as the 'proper' place for them to stay. Often this meant putting themselves under the authority of an elder relative, who might provide material support, but also might exercise significant control over their movements and actions.

For a minority, this was a bargain that was not worth striking, especially if the relative did not offer an acceptable level of care. Simon, a 21-year-old returnee was one of them. After being separated from his parents in an attack on his village, he had fled to Uganda, living in several refugee camps before returning to South Sudan in 2007. He spoke candidly of his struggle's to find relatives that he could rely on without feeling uncomfortable. After taking a course on auto-mechanics, he had managed to arrange volunteer position at a garage in Juba to get some additional experience. However, he only stayed there for a few months, in part because of his untenable living situation:

Simon: You know, Juba is expensive. If you don't have someone there in Juba, you can't just stay. So I was in Juba, I was with one of my aunties. But you know these people, who were since here in South Sudan, there is difficulties. They look at you, even if you are near to them [related], they are just simplifying. They say ahtch! This is from the other one. So they have that policy where nobody cares.

LN: So even with your auntie, you feel like she is not really caring for you?

Simon: Of course! Because she cannot give be even one pound. For one pound! So I had to stay within...

LN: What about feeding? She doesn't give it?

Simon: Feeding? Yeah I get it there with my friends, that we have been together in Uganda...[My auntie] she don't give me anything so I had to struggle again. At least there I worked, and at the working place, I ate there. I come and sleep only at the place where my relatives are living. Only, sometimes, when I have good luck, I would get the relatives when they are eating and I enjoy the meal with them.

Caring in this context meant not only providing food and a place to stay. Many young returnees lamented a lack of moral support, encouragement and guidance from their elders. Simon's comments also points to the particular challenges facing returnees, who are not always fully welcomed and supported by family from home they were separated during the war.<sup>6</sup> Things were a bit better for Simon in Torit, where he lived with an uncle, one that had sponsored his secondary school education. Still, he felt there was some tension in his living situation, and decided after some time to look for another place to stay:

LN: So here, you are staying with your uncle? Is it? You don't have to pay any rent to him or anything else like that?

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<sup>5</sup> Given that polygamy is commonly practiced in South Sudan, a step-parent in common usage is used to describe both a father's other wives as well as the second spouse of a widowed woman.

<sup>6</sup> However, this was not a very common complaint, and my prior research with returnees in South Sudan showed a surprising level of acceptance and support among family members split during the war.

Simon: No here I'm staying with my uncle. This is uncle that we stayed together with him (in Uganda). He married a woman, and that woman does not want people in his home. So the woman pressurizes us to leave the home. As I'm talking to you now, I'm just passing to a place where I stay only. I rent it for myself.

Simon was one of several young people who had been separated from immediate family during the civil war. While he was lucky enough to be accompanied by a close relative in Uganda, others were not as fortunate.

Indeed, more half of the young people I spoke with were missing at least one parent, had been orphaned or had been separated from family members during the conflict. Orphans in particular felt the lack of these familial networks of material and moral support acutely. A few mentioned efforts to find distant relatives, and cautiously to begin to cultivate relationships with them. This points to the critical importance of kin based networks in providing material support, advice, and 'connections' that have the potential to assist young people in finding work. Taban, a 24 year old originally from Kajo Keji, spoke of getting to know relatives who he had tracked down when he was working in Juba. Even though his workplace provided accommodation, he chose instead to stay with relatives:

Taban: We had some place in the company, where we can put (sleep) only. But all along I was living with my stepfather. Since the war break out, they were here in Juba; they never went out...So I was living with them so that they get used to know me also. Since I went (to Uganda as a refugee) when I was young, till I was old, they had never seen me. So I was living at home with them, so that I get used to my relatives.

For Taban, it was important to spend time with his relatives so that they could get to know him, and to recognize him as part of their family.

William, another young man orphaned by the war shared a similar perspective. When he came back to South Sudan, William initially went to Juba, since he had heard that some of his relatives were living there. He spent three years there, working and looking for family members. When he lost his job catering, he then decided to shift to Torit, partially in hopes that he might find some of his extended family living there. After five months, he managed to find a few relatives, and has introduced himself to them. When I asked if they offered any assistance to him, he explained that he hadn't yet broached the topic with them:

William: I don't know exactly because I have not talked with them yet. I came to them and I introduced myself. I told them I am a son of ABCD so I heard that before you were a relative to this person. So they have said, yeah we have even heard of your name. But accommodation.... so up to now there is no any other word [of advice] that they give to me on how to live.

William's comments point to the degree to which material and moral support are intertwined in the ways that young returnees think about family.

While I have focused in this section on the material support provided by kin based networks to the returnee youth with whom I spoke, it is important to recognize that young people did not feel they had an unconditional claim on or right to material support from family. They saw the responsibility to support each other as distributed throughout the family network. Many spoke of their own responsibilities to support various family members. Assistance can take the form of returning home to help elderly parents during the planting season, sending



money for school fees, or by providing a place to stay for more recent arrivals to town. Here a frustrated Simon talks of his future and his responsibilities to his family:

For Simon as well as others, the responsibility to family members was acutely felt, to the extent that they sacrificed their own educational aspirations in order to pay school fees for their siblings. Similarly, Mary, a 19 year old Toposa woman also used the money she earned by brewing alcohol to support her younger brother's basic schooling, even though she spoke at length about wanting to find enough money to return to secondary school herself:

LN: And now with that money, what would you use it for?

Mary: I have my small brother, he's studying in Kapoeta, I used to, to pay his school fees with this money.

LN: And he's in which level of schooling?

Mary: He is in class, he's in class III

LN: So you want him to finish at least primary? Then...

Mary: Then he will go and look for his own life...

Similarly, Marco, a primary school teacher earning a modest salary, face similar internal pressure to support his siblings. While Marco currently had a job, I agreed for him to participate in the research because he was looking for another job—one with a salary that would be sufficient to support his siblings:

Marco: Actually, I am still finding a new job I'm trying. Because what I can see is my brothers they are now grown up. Doing the school. Even my sisters, they are also in the school and my father is not there. And my mother also passed away. So I have to look for another job to help them, later go back to the school. Because one of my brothers, is now in P8. I am not able to, to sponsor them home, because there is little money so I have to look for another job if I can get another job of 300 or 400 a month, per month then it is okay. It can save my brothers and sisters to go back, to continue their school.

As the comments of these young people show, obligations to family members, and family members' responsibilities toward young people significantly shaped young people's experiences of job seeking.

Kin-based social networks provided a key resource for young people, and often provided them with a safety net against hunger and destitution while they looked for work. This allowed some young people to hold for formal work. For others, responsibilities *for* other family members, notably children and younger siblings pushed them to accept whatever work they could find including manual labor, taxi driving and washing, even when they were qualified for better paying kinds of work.

Those that had close family members living in town that were willing and able to host them were in the majority among respondents, suggesting that this kind of social support is both common and expected, at least in Eastern Equatoria. Unsurprisingly, orphans had greater struggles in accessing kin-based social support, and instead often turned to friends for assistance. Even among those with strong family support networks, friendship networks

provided another resource for young job seekers in Kapoeta and Torit. It is to these networks that I now turn.

### **A little help from my friends**

While family networks were most commonly mentioned, they were by no means the only networks that young returnees relied upon for material support. Friendship ties, especially those forged in school or in the refugee camps constituted another important set of relationships that returnees turned to for material assistance while looking for work. Even more critical to young people, was the information that these networks provided about job opportunities. In this section, I first discuss the extent to which young people relied on friends for material support. I then explore in more detail the perceived importance of friends in their role as conduits to information about job opportunities.

As the previous section made clear, most young returnees living in urban areas, relied on their families for the most basic forms of material support—such as food and housing. Yet there were many reasons why a young person might not be able to rely on family as they faced periods of unemployment. These include not having relatives in the area, estrangement from existing family, or being an orphan.

In particular, orphans and those that had been unaccompanied minors in the camp were very likely to draw on the help of friends in lieu of the material support usually provided by families. This may involve pooling resources, sharing food, or merely a place to sleep. Sometimes, this meant living with along with a friend at their family home, as with Susan an 18-year-old Toposa girl who had originally come to Torit with the hope of finding someone to sponsor her secondary education:

LN: Why did you decide to come to Torit?

Susan: I came so—my friend advised me to come with her. She was telling me—let me go with her to her parents so that her parents can able, if they are able to help me also to go to school. So the time when I came, the parents told me—now they cannot be able to sponsor me. So I think, I should not go back [to Riwoto] because if I go back there, there's no way I can stay. So that I stay with this friend of mine, even if I'm not at school, they continue keeping me at home, as long as I am staying [with them] I am eating.

For others, it meant several friends banding together to establishing a household of their own. This allowed them to pool earnings from casual labor, with each person contributing to rent and food costs when they were able. In this way, they could limit the risks that accompanied their uncertain condition. Still others went to friends to borrow money when they were in need. For example, John was staying with a distant relative who expected him to contribute a small amount towards food. When I asked him how he got the money for the contribution, John explained:

John: I just borrow from my friends, because I have my friends, they can help me. When they give, when they give 10 pounds, then I go [to my relatives] and give them, to go and buy with the—the vegetables from the market. Yes. That is how I survive.

Leone: What kind of friends are these that give you money like that? They must be good friends! You know them from where?

John: We know ourselves from the school, from the school. Because we students, when we are in the school, you know each other. You're like brothers. We are like mothers. We're like—it's like you have a mother, one, father one.

While John speaks confidently of the strength of his friendships, for others this kind of assistance was seen as more occasional, and uncertain. Lopeyo, described the casual nature of material support provided by friends in this way:

Lopeyo: If you stay here [in Kapoeta], sometimes you can meet your friend when they are getting salaries, then they can assist you when you are struggling.

Unlike the material support received from family member, young people recognized that the support of friends was contingent on an often unspoken sense of mutuality. That is, they could ask a friend for help this week, with the assumption that that friend could rely on them later if the situation was reversed. This kind of mutual assistance among friends was a critical resource for many.

However these networks of mutual support were particularly subject to breakdown, especially when one's occasional reliance on the assistance of friends became more chronic.:

Lokwar: But you cannot stay with friends, when you don't have any work even. You know sometimes when you stay without any work, how can we survive in that place? Always, you know, even here—everything even like food, the people are using money. So, even sometimes they can get, they are saying always... 'Why don't you use your own resource? Why don't you look for your own work then we share together everything. That's a very important thing, just here in the town. That is why I—just have problems. This is the problem that I face here in Torit.

The inability to find any kind of work in the four months since he arrived in Torit from his village left Lokwar feeling rejected by his friends, and despondent about his next steps. Without a secure place to sleep at night and always unsure of where his next meal was coming from, he was considering going back to his village. There, at least he would have a roof over his head and be assured food daily. Lokwar's situation was the most tenuous of the young people I spoke with, but his desire to return to his home village points to an important factor that shapes urban unemployment in South Sudan. This is the possibility of exit, and return to subsistence livelihoods.

While the return to subsistence livelihoods has often been held up as a solution to urban unemployment in the developing world (Li, 2010), what is unique about South Sudan is that this option is considered seriously and pursued by urban dwellers. The comparative abundance of land, and the fact that many salaried workers continue to engage in subsistence production *may* play some role in the readiness of many urban dwellers to consider return to rural areas as an option when facing extended periods of unemployment.<sup>7</sup>

So far in this section, I have focused on the material support provided to urban job seekers by friends, and outlined the particular importance of these networks for orphans. Yet, while

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<sup>7</sup> Still, urban-rural connections in South Sudan are not well understood, or documented and the issue merits further study.

orphans particularly relied on friendship for *material* support, a majority of my respondents spoke about the importance of friendship networks because friends offered encouragement, advice and, quite often information about vacancies or opportunities for casual work. As the comment by John above suggests, the friendships made at school or in the refugee camp were discussed with particular reverence.

The story of the friendship between Josef and Augustino gives a sense of just how deeply these ties run. The two had lived together and struggled for survival in the same house as unaccompanied minors in Kakuma Refugee Camp in northern Kenya. Josef had returned to Sudan in late 2007, because of a policy in the camp limiting access to secondary school for South Sudanese students.<sup>8</sup> Initially when he came to Torit, he stayed at the home of an uncle to another friend that had lived as an unaccompanied minor with them in Kakuma. Not able to find work in town, he returned to his village to cultivate the land.

When the rains failed he returned back to Torit, determined to figure out a way to earn enough to go to school. He was able to borrow a panga (machete) from his friend and spent two years harvesting and selling timber poles for construction, finally raising enough money to pay for his school fees and basic maintenance. Augustino, on the other hand, had only returned from Kakuma days before our interview, and had been staying with Josef since he arrived. The two young men painted a picture of contrast, with Augustino feeling very hopeful for his future, and Josef displaying a grim sense of determination to struggle through the challenges of post-return life in South Sudan. He gave the following advice to Augustino:

Josef: I told him my dear, now we are here we are settled like this. Please, if you want to—maybe—to change your life. There is no way of changing your life here. At least only you sweat. You get a panga, and what? You cut trees down, and then you survive. That's all—the way how we can go and change our lives.

Augustino, for his part, appreciated his friend's willingness not only to host him but also to familiarize him with life in Torit:

Augustino: You know, when you first come to a place, people around—first they study the way they're living...And also—you know—this place, I don't know. Completely! He's the only person who used to take me around; he says here I am moving, even when it's time for taking a bath we go there [to the river]. Then coming home, when it's time for moving, we move. But this place I don't know anything.

Augustino's comments speak to the ways in which the web of social relations that young people could call on shaped their experiences looking for work in urban centers. Young people relied heavily on friends that had come to town before them for an orientation to the different practices and strategies required to thrive in any particular town. Though James had not been successful in finding a job in Torit, he didn't consider moving to another town to look for work, in part because he wouldn't have the same level of social support:

James: Yeah this, Torit is close to my place. And I know so many people. My brothers, from my clan, they are here. So I can just meet them, and we talk and they can help

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<sup>8</sup> In 2008 a large scale voluntary repatriation program initiated in Kakuma which encouraged South Sudanese refugees to return home. On the assumption that many remained in the camp in order to continue with schooling, one secondary school was closed and places for South Sudanese were severely curtailed at another. The policy was reversed after two years. [Personal Communication, Interview with UNHCR Field Representative, Kakuma, June 2010]

me—giving me advice. Yeah they can help me. Some of them they are working with the government, you know, it is—yeah they are working, but there is no any guarantee that they can give me a money. No they cannot.

LN: You think having people you can talk to is important? As opposed to going to a place where you are not known?

James: Yeah.

LN: And why is that? Do they help you in other ways?

James: Actually they—for advice, they can advise me. They can advise me sometimes. Not that all people, they like giving advice to their colleague.

Of young people who expressed discouragement at their situation, many also spoke about the comfort they received from meeting friends to seek advice or to discuss their problems. Daniel, a 25-year-old secondary school graduate mentioned a good friend from church that he often sought out for discussion, moral support and guidance:

Daniel: And there is one of my friends, just we worked with him. And for me, just, I like very much. We have a relationship so that we can discuss, so much things, which can be taxing ourselves. When I have a problem immediately I can go to him. Just I can raise up the problem, so that we can discuss. Also mine, I like very much discussion, through the Bible. Yeah I can just discuss with him because anytime, just—I can go to him. And for that one, it just keeps my encouragement in this situation where—really the life is so terrible.

The ability to openly discuss their struggles with friends who have either shared their experience, or who had been more successful in finding work was greatly valued by the young people whom I spoke to. They felt an acute desire for guidance as they attempted to chart new kinds of urban lives for themselves, and often turned to friends to get it. This was especially true of those whose parents or other relatives were not able to contribute in this way—either because they had died during the war, or because they continued to pursue subsistence pastoral livelihoods in rural villages and had little advice to give about finding salaried jobs.

Friends formed another critical resource for young people in their role as conduits for information about job opportunities. Many of the young people lamented that it was very difficult to find work if you didn't have some sort of 'connection.' While family members offered the strongest form of connection, young people whose parents had never gone to school relied heavily on the connections provided by friends. These connections could take many forms. It might mean getting advance notice about an upcoming vacancy, or information about what kinds of credentials were valued by NGOs. It could take the form of an informal introduction, or a voucher for your character when resumes were being reviewed.

Lopeyo: You see, sometimes here. You see when I was in Juba, I applied. Because, when you apply, those who are in the NGO, who are working here. Because if you know somebody here who is working with that NGO, she or he here—she will support you. He says this one is a good boy. Yeah this one is a good boy he can stay well, he can do this work. And then sometimes you will not get your name, there. But, if you—if you have friends who are working in that department, immediately you will succeed.

Because they're the ones explaining to those people. Yeah. They say this one is a good boy, this one is a good girl. They can handle this work very well. This is the problem here.

For Lopeyo and others, great weight was put on these kinds of connections, though more often this was brought up as an explanation of why the young people I spoke to were not successful in getting jobs. Those who did have friends working in ministries, government offices or NGO's often lamented that their friends were not in a high enough position to be of much help. Still these connections provided a glimmer of hope to young people, and were valued highly for their potential usefulness in the future.

The lack of a 'connection' was often mentioned in reference to the challenges of finding formal work, but friendship relationships were perhaps even more important in young people's search for informal ways to earn money. Many of the young people I spoke with considered themselves unemployed, even when they were engaged in casual work like construction, water vending and motorcycle taxi driving. When I asked young people about how they managed to find these kinds of odd jobs, most first mentioned their networks of friends. Lotiman, a returnee from Uganda doing occasional construction work explained:

Lotiman: We have some friends whom we have been with them in Uganda then some colleagues, and some engineers whom they know we can do better work. They just go and call for us, then we go and do.

And again Samuel, who was already driving a motorcycle taxi (boda-boda) after arriving only two week previously:

Samuel: Because mostly here people used to, maybe most of the people that help the needy person is only friends.

LN: So is it your motorcycle you are riding, or how do you have it?

Samuel: It was also a friend. As I told you friends are maybe better than relatives. Now I came here also. Here it is good enough that I am staying with my stepmom. Yeah and I am having also a friend from within here. He is having around three motorbikes. Now he is also making a boda-boda. Now he got me working.

The networks of friendship that provided connections to jobs were not all of the same effectiveness. This can be seen very well in Kapoeta, where minority Didinga have been very successful in obtaining jobs with NGOs. Perhaps, initially Didinga were successful in finding positions with NGOs, because they had higher education levels compared to the majority Toposa group. While educational differentials between the two tribes have not changed much, now Didinga have the additional benefit of leveraging connections to those already employed to learn about new positions at all skill levels including program staff, drivers, cooks and night-watchmen.

The remarkable effectiveness of this particular network is evidenced by the story of Grace a young woman I met the first day she arrived from Kakuma. She had just finished taking her secondary exit exams in Kenya, and had come to stay with friends from the camp and look for work. When I ran into her the next week, she was one her way to work cooking and cleaning at the compound a well-known international NGO based in the town. While

exceptional, Grace's experience shows the critical role played by friendship networks in accessing employment opportunities.

But for others, finding opportunities for casual work could be a struggle, especially if they had only recently arrived to town, and did not have a strong social network to connect them to jobs. Jacob was staying with people from his clan, but did not feel like they were of much help in his search.

Jacob: As well, you see I am not one of this place. I am just, I came from Juba. I spend my time in Juba, but here when I am trying to get work here, people, they don't know me. That is why I got difficulties. I don't have where people say 'you come for me and there is a vacancy in ABCD.' Anyway I am just waiting on the board, when they put [an advert], then I will go.

The experiences of Grace and Jacob also point to the overlap between family, friendship and clan/ethnic-based networks, whose specific contribution cannot be untangled. Very few people explicitly mentioned their own reliance on ethnic based ties for material or informational support. In fact most people saw tribalism as a major obstacle to their own success. Yet it must be recognized that hometown friends and even friendships forged in the refugee camp were often among those that spoke the same language. So the kinds of friendship relationships I have been discussing were often also embedded within ethnic or tribe based social networks.

### **“They are practicing nepotism, tribalism and corruption”**

The perception the others were benefiting from tribal affiliation or powerful relatives was widely held among the young people with whom I spoke. However, few thought that they could rely on these kinds of connections themselves. There was some variance about among respondents about the relative importance of having credentials versus having a strong connection that could place to in a job. Those who had not managed to finish secondary school were much more likely to see their lack of credentials as a bigger obstacle to their ability to find work.

Peter: Some people can get job, while they are even—while they don't have qualification, because you know, it's that, if you have the eyes, one eye ahead, if you have somebody ahead, it will connect you. Though you go forging the paper from the computer, you can get it. But for us who don't have some people ahead, you need to have your qualification.

But among those who had finished secondary, there was a palpable bitterness to their words when they spoke of the need to have a high-ranking relative in order to get even minor positions in the government. David, a 23 year-old economics student waiting for the re-opening of Juba University had this to say:

David: In fact I'm looking for to find actually a position, before I go to the University. So that I get something little, it can help me. Whether in the government, or nongovernment organization. But up to now—anyway never. In the government sometimes, they, they—because they—let's say that the job opportunities that are now available here, it is not up to date. It's actually, it's full of corruption. It is full of corruption.

LN: So you don't think that it's easy to get work?

David: I don't think so. It's not easy for me to get. Even if I have the qualifications! But it's not easy for me to get it.

LN: They give it to who, instead?

David: Anyway, it is going to be to the manager. The manager or the director will pick one of his child, or the daughter to his child, he will employ them. The one he knows best. He will employ them. And then we, who are not known, I don't think so. We will just not, we will not be picked. And then to occupy such job opportunities—no.

Simon was perhaps the most frustrated person I talked about this issue. Simon recounted his experience of rejection from government work. He had applied for a job with one of the state ministries as a driver/mechanic, had been called for an interview, and eventually received an appointment letter. But when he reported to work, the head of the ministry concerned told him and several others who came with their letters that the ministry had never advertised for the position and that regardless there was no budget yet. The minister asked them to wait, but when the list was re-issued some months later, all the names that had been on the list were replaced by others who had not even been called for interviews. Simon has this to say about the affair:

Simon: When it came again, it was with a different list. And these people who were on the list? When we went for the interview, they were not even there! Their faces had not been seen. But why? Why did they get work and others not? So when we came again, I—I personally even—I immediately took that paper of appointment letter, I just crushed it. I tore it up. I said, it's useless!

LN: So who are the ones that can really put those people in? They are in what [pay] grade?

Simon: Yeah. These are the DGs and the directors within the ministry. So you get what they do is—like me, personally, what I have seen them do—is just somebody who is close to this one [the director] will work. And this is where you get the majority of the people who shifted from the village, those that came here thinking that they will get work, but when they get here they find that this has been practiced. And they end up stealing and doing other things...So I—even I myself—feel so! I feel through my heart that—why? Why do I, who have studied a little not get a chance? And there are some other people whom I have known personally, who have not gone to school, but you get him holding a big post with the government or with NGOs. And so you become a cynic and you say, okay, this is useless! There is nothing you should do.

While Simon's feeling of frustration was comparatively strong, the sense of disappointment felt by many of the youth, especially those who were unable to find work after finishing school, was pervasive. This dissatisfaction with the actions of government in particular, left many questioning the impact that independence could have on their futures. This is not to say that young people were not supportive of the independence of the country. All expressed positive feelings when asked directly about it, and none said that it would have been better for them to stay with the North. Still, the sense of hope and promise that I had witnessed in the year running up to the referendum had slightly waned in the months since the flag was raised.



## Emerging political subjectivities

For the most part, young people facing unemployment in Kapoeta and Torit did not think about their experiences in overtly political terms. For them, unemployment was an obstacle to be faced and overcome, not something that expected to be permanent. Rather than think about unemployment in terms of the failure of the government, many felt that in order to really contribute to the new country they had to first upgrade their skills and qualifications. Lorot's comments were fairly typical of those who had not yet finished secondary:

Lorot: Now—the question of getting independence? You know, independence is automatic. It may change my heart, but physically I cannot be changed. Because if—now if it's going to change, though you don't get a job or employment, you only have that patriotism in your heart. You will love your country because you are independent. But now, in the side of maybe all of these individual problems? Like me now, when it comes to me individually—like me maybe I have not finished the school, all of these chances which will come as a new country I will not—I will not get it and others will enjoy.

LN: So you see in order to really enjoy independence, you must at least have something of education?

Lorot: You have to have something that can maybe make your life a bit easy. But to be independent is something very nice. For us we love to be independent. Because we have forgotten all of those troubles we were undergoing, they have gone.

This struggle for education and further training was spoken of by nearly all of my respondents. For some, it meant trying to find a way to complete secondary school, or to go for a university degree. Others looked to improve their skills through training programs—notably in driving and computer literacy. Still others focused on supporting the education of family members, so that younger siblings or children would have greater opportunities when their turn came.

Yet for a few, there was palpable sense of disappointment with the government. While the majority of young people who I spoke with felt that it was still too early to make judgments about the government, others openly challenged the government to do more for youth:

Lino: Yeah, as you can even see now in Torit here we could not even see even one time one day—even the workshop to encourage, to explain you know now that we have got the independence now what are we going to do for youth. Even this training of agriculture to train the local people. I could not even see it, even from Juba. You know they are supposed to train the young guys. Like, you people—now we have got our own country, let's go and do this, let's go and do this.

LN: So you don't see they are doing too much?

Lino: Completely. Yeah I actually that is why we are talking about poverty. Poverty is really the order of the day. But I'm very eager to go to school, even working. I don't want to work. Because I know for sure education is one of the keys for human life if you're not educated I don't think you will be like somebody who is really a human being. Okay but if you really have enough knowledge you go and educate people. You go and talk with the other, elders. You go and educate the young kids at home and, you

know. But now, we the young people, we don't—the government—our own government! They don't want to support us, who are eager and want to go to school. More especially me. I went even to the Ministry of education, I said you people you have to help me. For me, I don't have my father. My father's been deceased during the—the long years, during war. Okay my father has been a commander in the SPLA. But now I don't have somebody who can support me.

Like Lino, many youth were eager to contribute to the development of their new country, but felt that the government failed to recognize the resource that educated and ambitious young people represent. David also felt this frustration:

David: Anyway—what I can say is, because the job opportunities that are now available, both in the nongovernmental organizations, and then with the government. We the youth ourselves, we are just loitering. We are looking for where to work, but it's not possible. They're supposed to make some training centers here, so that, so that we join, after that we are able to work. Even if around the market—like connecting the electricity. Many others we can do it! That is after attending the course for it. But now we're just staying idle but, the ones who have gone to school, they're the one searching for jobs. You never went to school, you will not find a job. That is why you see most people of my age, they are riding boda-bodas, and all this. It is because—these are some of the signs of frustration. Some of them even are, they have certificates. You never know, they have certificates. But because of the frustration. That is why they resort to riding Boda-boda.

The frustrations brought up by David were echoed by others who felt that, given their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm, more effort should be made to make use of young people for development.

For a few, the disappointments that they felt about the lack of support for youth on the part of the government prompted them to question their political loyalties:

Paulino: Me I supported SPLM before. But now if there are some parties to come, I will see which one is good then we shall. Because SPLM they have done nothing. But the so-called SPLM is the ruling government. They said for them they came through war, they have to rule. Up to now even, and we accept. We push, we want to bring democracy for the system of the government, if it is introduced fully, then we shall see.

Paulino expresses what I have come to name a *politics of postponement*, which has characterized South Sudanese politics since the signing of the CPA. This is the postponement of criticism of the ruling SPLM party—the political wing of the rebel army that won the right to self-determination for the South—until after independence is achieved and consolidated. In my prior research, there was a broadly held sentiment that the time to challenge the practices of the ruling SPLM had not yet come. Now that independence has been achieved, the feeling that there is a need to confront the corruption and nepotism endemic to the government is gaining traction.

As Paulino's comments show, young people are beginning to ask the SPLM to give an account of what they have managed to accomplish in terms of development since 2005, and to think about what alternatives they might have to the status quo. While South Sudan is nominally a democracy, South Sudanese recognize that for the moment, it is still basically a one party state. Some hold on to the promise of democracy, and are looking forward to the

time when there will be several parties from which to choose in elections. Daniel was one of these:

MLL: What kind of changes do you expect?

Daniel: Now let me begin with the changes. Because there is too much, let me say in the part of the government and mostly, let me say the par, the parties are mostly the let me say, the parties are one, the previous one, there is one parties which dominate Southern Sudan, and we need democracy. All the party will be equal.

LN: So you want many parties?

Daniel: Yea. Many parties and then the main party will enter into Southern Sudan—ah—that is what we call changes. Which means we can keep on having good relations. Which means, the people [in government] will be changed. According to the situation.

Even for youth that were not overtly critical of the government, most followed political developments closely. They were excited by the opportunity to participate in their fledgling democracy, and really hoped that the government would live up to the promise of self-rule.

From my discussions with youth in Torit and Kapoeta, it is clear that experiences they of unemployment are shaping young people's political subjectivities in South Sudan. Of particular concern for youth was the ubiquity of favoritism in government hiring practices and in determining access to scholarships. Additionally, many lamented the lack of training opportunities that would help them gain the skills necessary to land jobs—such as computer skills and English (for those who had done their schooling in Arabic).

Where those programs existed, for example in teacher training, young people were frustrated that the certificates issued by government and NGO's were often not recognized or valued in hiring practices. The frustrations resulting from these failures in leadership were causing some young people to question government policies and to consider other political options. However, it was clear that critical political subjectivities among young people were still nascent. Youth, on the whole, did not articulate their frustrations as political bloc. Instead the majority saw their lack of access to the benefits of independence in individual terms, and were still willing to wait to see what the government might do for them and for the country.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have attempted to draw out some of the defining features of post-return life for South Sudanese youth. In particular, I document the reality of continuing mobility for young people as they seek out new livelihoods for themselves. As refugees, many of these young people had much greater access to education than their counterparts who stayed in South Sudan.

They have returned to South Sudan with the hope that with their skills and training, they can contribute towards building their new nation. They hope to find work government and NGOs so that they can improve life for all Southern Sudanese. Education and patriotism have combined to re-shape young people's expectation about their futures, which more and more are tied to South Sudan's rapidly urbanizing towns. Continuing mobility is symptomatic of this larger shift in aspirations.

Yet, as I have attempted to show, mobility is heavily shaped by the social-networks upon which young people can call for material support, moral guidance, and information. Where young people choose to go to look for a job, how long they remain there, when they chose to abandon urban centers for subsistence productions, and ultimately whether they are successful are a very dependent on the strength of these networks. While social networks play a key role in supporting young job seekers in the city, unemployed returnee youth often feel as if they lack the critical ‘connections’ that will land them the jobs they are looking to find. For some, the inability to find work is internalized, pushing them to seek more training or to return to formal schooling.

But for others, the fact of nepotism, corruption and un-ethical hiring practices lead to a more critical stance vis-à-vis government and NGOs. They felt shut out of the benefits of independence because they lacked the kinds of social networks that allowed other, less qualified candidates to succeed. Many felt that both government and NGO’s were failing South Sudanese youth, who could bring both skills and enthusiasm to the state-building project. Yet while the bitterness of unemployment colored their view of politics, among the people I spoke with there was a patience in their criticism, and a muted hope that once the new state got over its growing pains, life would improve for young people.

The rapid of urbanization the South Sudan is undergoing in the context of large-scale return migration may be remarkable in comparison other contexts of refugee repatriation, but increasingly scholars of return migration are documenting the draw of urban centers for repatriating refugees and returning internally displaced people (Eastmond, 2006; Chatty, 2010; Long, 2010; Hovil, 2010; Duffield).

What is the relevance of these findings for refugee and repatriation policies? How should governments, international agencies, and INGOs re-think the ways in which they deal with situations of mass return in light of the tendency toward urbanization and continuing mobility? A critical first step is that policies relating to return migration and repatriation should assume that continuing mobility and urbanization play a major role in large-scale return movements.

These factors should therefore be considered in the development of assistance schemes and policies. These policies should support returnees’ choices about where, and how they wish to pursue their future. This might mean offering alternative support packages which might have returnee’s choose between the typical ‘seeds & tools’ package and, say, a computer literacy course, or a training on developing micro-enterprises. While assisting mobile populations presents significant logistical challenges, respecting the desires and aspirations of returnees should be a priority.

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