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Overcoming ruptures: Zande identity, governance, and tradition during cycles of war and displacement in South Sudan and Uganda (2014-2019)

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6 'It has started again': The eruption of civil war and people's decisions to stay or go (2015-2017)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The peaceful period in Western Equatoria came to an end in 2015. This chapter describes this new episode in Western Equatoria's long history of ruptures (see Chapter 2) and movements (see Chapter 3). The main two questions it asks are: What were the causes and consequences of the civil war in WES in 2015-2017? And: Why did some people stay while others migrated, among other places to Uganda? To answer these questions, the chapter proceeds in two parts. The first part opens with an analytical reconstruction of the causes and phases of the civil war in Western Equatoria (see Section 6.2). Such a close examination is important, because the civil war, like its predecessors, defied often-held assumptions about war and, by consequence, about the nature of 'running' from it (see Sections 1.3.1, 2.5, and 3.3). The chapter analyses grass-roots perspectives on the war, and its manifold indirect consequences (see Section 6.3). This section illustrates how gunshots were but the most urgent of a host of problems that made life less liveable for ordinary people.

The second part of this chapter investigates why even in civil war, most people stayed in Western Equatoria while others moved away. A first section evaluates the 'structural factors' at play (see Section 6.4), and a longer section focuses on 'agency' – differentiating 'aspirations' and 'abilities' (see Section 6.5). I find that contrary to mechanistic diagrams – which often presume a sameness of potential migrants – in Western Equatoria there were advanced, intricate and historically-formed moral frameworks around the core question of when moving was acceptable for whom. These help to explain why and how families tactically split across countries, and why some elites aspired to stay (see Section 6.6). In a last section, I show some of the resultant varied 'pathways of displacement', which also problematizes notions like 'stayee' and 'immobile' by showing that also those who choose to stay have often moved temporarily (see Section 6.7). This chapter bridges the first part of this book on South Sudan, and the second part on Uganda.

'It has started again' is a poem written by Isaac, a Western Equatorian student who has ran from war multiple times (see Annex 2). In the poem Isaac describes what happens when 'it' starts again: People go quiet, extinguish fires and turn off lights and phones. Even crickets, frogs, owls and jackals are silent. In silence, women spread bed sheets on the ground to collect belongings in, children bring their school books, men the important documents. The whole

village knows that 'it has started again'. The poem significantly leaves unspoken what 'it' is. The violence of war is avoided, unaddressed. It is simply there again, as a storm beyond the influence of the author and the people he describes.

Another perspective on the war in South Sudan, is offered by statisticians. The most rigorous such study estimates that between December 2013 and April 2018 some 383,000 people died 'in excess' of normal mortality, with half of that number killed violently (Checchi et al. 2018). Although the researchers had no data from Ibba, Nzara, Tambura and Yambio counties, they estimate that in Western Equatoria some 38,800 people died 'in excess', and between 7,000 and 16,100 died violently. Additionally, some 4,5 million people became displaced of whom 2,2-2,5 million sought refuge abroad (UNHCR 2021). By early 2018, IOM estimated that some 25 percent of the villages in Yambio payam remained deserted (IOM 2018).

Figure 6: Estimated displaced and non-displaced populations in and outside South Sudan. Source: Checchi et al. (2018): page 17.

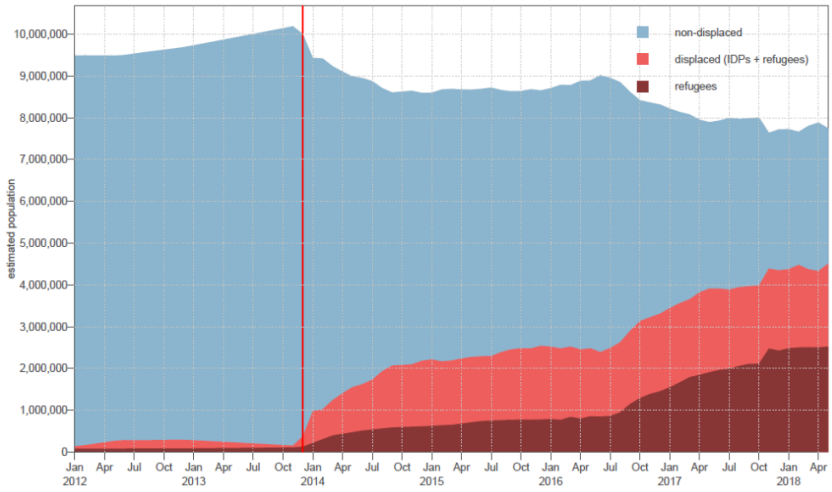


Figure 7. Estimated displaced and non-displaced populations in and outside South Sudan, over time. The red vertical line indicates the start of major conflict.

By aggregating complex human tragedy in clear categories and charts, these statistics offer insightful and bleak bird's-eye overviews. Yet they leave many questions unanswered: Why did conflict break out? Do the categories used here ('non-displaced', 'displaced' and 'refugees') adequately represent people's varied experiences and current positions? Why did some people leave while many others stayed put? These questions lend themselves better to the sort of qualitative inquiry that this chapter draws on.

Between the poem and statistics, this chapter contributes an analysis based on multi-sited and longitudinal qualitative research with 'stayees' and IDP's

in South Sudan, and Western Equatorian refugees in Uganda. Zande people would speak of *oto vura* (oto = run, race; vura = war, enemy), and use words like 'running' or 'escaping' to describe how they left their country. This relates to a largely quantitative body of work on migration 'determinants' in conflict, which suggest the critical importance of people's experiences with violence (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003); economic wealth and opportunities to leave (Adhikari 2013); political identity (Balcells 2018); and threat perception or individual risk preference (Ceriani and Verme 2018). This chapter finds that those factors all matter, but takes issue with the term 'determinants' – arguing instead for a more agentic conceptualisation of war-time migration. Further, the longitudinal and qualitative research that I conducted, sheds light also on less measurable and quantifiable but perhaps equally important cultural, psychological and moral factors which explain why and when which people leave (see Section 6.6).

This chapter will confirm that war-time migration often interfaces with peace-time migration patterns, and that even at the height of civil war people's reasons for 'running' are often varied. To properly analyse these deliberations, this chapter draws on general migration scholarship. Recently, critical migration scholars have critiqued the discipline's classical 'sedentarist' conceptualizations of migration as an abnormal and linear move from one place to another (Liisa H. Malkki 1995; Cresswell 2010; Schapendonk 2020; Schapendonk and Steel 2014), in response to objective 'push' and 'pull' factors (Kunz 1973; Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2018; Lee 1966). After the 'mobility turn' in migration scholarship, authors have argued to consider how mobility may be a resource that is 'differentially accessed' (Cresswell 2010), and how (im)mobility interfaces with economic, social and political relations (M. Büscher and Urry 2009, 100). Further, both individuals' *aspiration* and *ability* to migrate vary (Carling 2002; Haas 2021). I will apply especially Carling's insights to the case of Western Equatorian war-time mobility deliberations, and offer some suggestions for the application of his framework in a context of war. In the present case, refugees' migratory response is more 'reactive' than proactive (A.H. Richmond 1993), and the 'the push motive is overwhelming' (Kunz 1973). Still, I found that people made agentic decisions about *if, when, how* and *where* to go. Their 'running' often was an improvised process with several steps and considerable back and forth (Kaiser 2010; Schapendonk and Steel 2014).

Just as some migration and refugee scholarship may have had a sedentarist bias, others have argued that contemporary migration scholarship has a 'mobility bias'. That is, it overlooks or disregards immobility – 'spatial continuity in an individual's centre of gravity over a period of time' (Schewel 2019). This led King to call for more studies on why people do not migrate (King 2012). In contexts of war and displacement, this archetype is often simply referred to as the 'stayee (L.H. Malkki 1995, 515). In many contexts, including South Sudan, they outnumber refugees and IDP's. There is an important body of work on the dynamics between 'stayees' or 'stayers' and 'returnees' *after*

conflict (Allen and Morsink 1994; Lombard and Picco 2019; Bascom 2005; Kibreab 2002; Vrancken 2016; Hammond 2004; Grabska 2014). However, stayees' initial reasons for staying put remain understudied (Hammar et al. 1997; Revkin 2020). A common approach to stayees' motivations is to suppose that for them the 'push' and 'pull' factors may not weigh as strong (see Section 6.4), or that stayees might also aspire to leave but lack the ability to do so (Carling 2002). This chapter will analyse the deliberations of stayees, IDP's and refugees in more depth, drawing on unique material both from South Sudan and Uganda. To structure this chapter, I formulate three sub-questions:

1. What were the causes and consequences of violent conflict in WES in 2015-2017?
2. How did people in WES experience the (consequences of) violent conflict?
3. Why and how did people decide to stay or move, among other places to Uganda?

The logic of this structure is partly my argument: That the nature of the civil war determines people's experiences and perceptions of it, which in turn shape who has the aspiration and ability to stay or leave. Further, people's views of the present are profoundly shaped by their (vicarious) experiences in the past, and so present mobility deliberations are informed by lifetimes of living with war and displacement.

6.2 How 'it' started again: Causes and consequences of violence (2015-2017)

> When your world is destroyed and only a remnant is saved, then whatever is seen as a threat to that remnant becomes a hated enemy.
>
> - Chaim Potok, the Promise

Before I analyse why people stayed or left Western Equatoria, it is important to offer a short overview of the violent conflict. Most of the scholarship on the civil war in South Sudan focuses on political and military actors, and their strategies and narratives (Thiong 2018; Braak 2020; Øystein H. Rolandsen et al. 2015; Copeland 2016; Kindersley and Rolandsen 2017; HSBA 2016; Small Arms Survey 2017). This section, too, offers a brief introduction on these macro and meso-levels of the war. But it comes with a caveat. In writing about war, we have to be cautious of the 'narrative fallacy': to construct from isolated events a coherent narrative. The more I spoke with Western Equatorians about their experiences and perceptions of the conflict, the more I understood just how fragmented and opaque the civil war had been. Borrowing from ethnographies of war and survival (Finnstrom 2008; Lubkemann 2008; James 1979; Nordstrom 1997), Section 6.3 explores emic perspectives on the war: the 'it' that had started again.

This section distinguishes between three phases in Western Equatoria's involvement in the South Sudanese Civil War: 1) strategic avoidance, 2) local clashes with cattle keepers and SPLA; and 3) internal divisions. That last phase peaked in 2016 and has since then dragged on in lower intensity until the time of writing.

6.2.1 First phase: strategic avoidance (December 2013 – summer 2015)

In December 2013, war started in Juba. President Salva Kiir (SPLM/A) and then-Vice President Riek Machar (SPLA-IO) split, which sparked fighting initially mostly in Juba, and in Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity States (International Crisis Group 2014). The three southernmost Equatoria states remained relatively peaceful, as most people wanted to 'keep out of what they saw as a 'Dinka-Nuer war'' (Copeland 2016). During the first two years of the war, the central government and SPLM criticized the Equatorian political elite for not offering enough support (Copeland 2016). Equatorian elites conversely alleged that the ruling SPLM was squandering the hard-won independence with nepotism, tribalism and marginalisation. Many Equatorians felt that 'government belong[s] to other people' (de Vries 2015). And in Western Equatoria, popularly-elected governor Bakosoro and the Arrow Boys enjoyed a lot more popular support than the SPLA (see Section 2.6). During this first phase of the conflict, I was able to do fieldwork in Western Equatoria in September 2014 and January-April 2015. Things were peaceful west of Ibba, but tension had started building up around Mundri and Maridi.

6.2.2 Second phase: Local clashes with cattle keepers and SPLA (summer 2015)

A series of small local incidents triggered a vicious cycle of fear, distrust and violence. The causal chain behind the violence is long, disputed and political, but there are clear dates of local violent sparks that ignited wider instability. In Mundri it was the 6 May 2015 attack on a cattle camp and the subsequent shooting of the county's executive director. In Maridi it was an attack on a cattle camp on 7 June 2015. In Yambio, on 27 July 2015 three SPLA-soldiers were killed by 'youth' at Birisi village near the Congolese border, and an SPLA-soldier subsequently killed two civilians in Yambio (Radio Tamazuj 2015e). Elite-level political will for peaceful resolutions was now lacking, and cattle keepers were joined by the SPLA and the local communities by 'Arrow Boys.' Governor Bakosoro criticized the SPLA, saying they 'have lost direction, in all the states you find that the army attack civilians, the civilians attack army and so on' (Radio Tamazuj 2015d).

The violence appeared initially not to be primarily motivated by ethnicity, but by land disputes between migrating cattle keepers and farmers. However,

simmering disenfranchisement changed the way in which people interpreted local disputes (de Vries 2015). Anti-government grievances became increasingly 'expressed as opposition to the Dinka ethnic group, and its elite, specifically' (HSBA 2016). The violent incidents catalysed that process, and the narrative in some quarters shifted to 'trespassing' ethnic Dinka versus 'indigenous' Equatorians. Illustrative is a divisive quote that was circulating online and attributed to Governor Bakosoro:

> Dinka leaders and their community have failed our country, South Sudan. What's wrong with you people, wherever you go, problems and havocs follow? You ran from danger in your areas and only to come and cause havoc in our state ... I blame the Moru Youths for allowing a snake into their house and crying loud for me to come all the way from Yambio to kill the snake. You have to just kill it, why wait for me?[1]

These words are reminiscent of Zamoi's commencement speech in 2005, including the use of the term 'snake' to refer to ethnic Dinka (see Section 2.6). The quote was denounced by Bakosoro's information and communication minister Charles Kisanga as 'a complete fabrication ... aimed at causing confusion and disharmony between the state and political leadership in Juba' (Sudan Tribune 2015a).[2] There were many similarly divisive quotes circulating online throughout the civil war. The UN Panel of Experts wrote that it could not confirm 'the authorship of the letters or the existence or composition of the groups behind them, their wide public dissemination has nonetheless contributed to a surge in intertribal tensions (UN Panel of Experts for South Sudan 2015). True or false, divisions were exacerbated.

6.2.3 Third phase: Internal divisions (from August 2015)

From August 2015, Western Equatoria's internal divisions came to the surface and increased. Western Equatoria saw an increase in violence, became politically divided, and was carved up in three smaller states. The once peaceful and productive three Equatoria States turned into the main theatre of war, and a major source of refuge departures (Copeland 2016).

In August 2015 Governor Bakosoro was fired and briefly arrested, likely as a backlash for his criticism of the central government and SPLM/A, for his ties to the Arrow Boys, and for his national political aspirations (HSBA 2016). President Kiir then appointed a caretaker governor: Patrick Zamoi, a career soldier and Zande, who had also been governor of WES in 2005-6. Initially

1 A copy of this speech was still available at the time of writing on websites of dubious partisan reputation, like PaanLuel Wel. See also (Sudan Tribune 2015a).

2 Kisanga had after the 2005-6 Zande-Dinka clashes published articles to excuse governor Zamoi (Kisanga 2006a; 2006b).

many people welcomed Zamoi's appointment, but his second tenure proved to be different from his first. In October 2015 Zamoi reshuffled the state cabinet and the county commissioners, and took to the radio to accuse politicians loyal to his predecessor Bakosoro of being 'IO' (opposition).[3] During his tenure as governor there were many attacks by 'unknown gunmen' on ordinary people and local elites alike.[4] Some suspected that the governor was responsible for arming and using the youth, among whom the musician-witchdoctor-rebel Babiro.[5] Zamoi was also accused of grabbing some of Bakosoro's properties in Yambio, forcing tenants to pay rent to him. One armed group signed peace in April 2016,[6] but the violence in Western Equatoria continued to flare up periodically.[7] Some of these flare-ups had local origins (Night 2016; Radio Tamazuj 2016a; 2016b), others were closely tied to the national escalations – such as the clashes in Juba in July 2016 (International Crisis Group 2016).

Analysing the violent period that accompanied Zamoi's governorship, many of my respondents reasoned that the governor must have made a Faustian bargain with President Kiir: To become governor he would have had to swear allegiance to President Kiir. Some insisted that this was Kiir's revenge for the 2005 violence against Dinka, and that now Kiir would 'use the Zande [to] kill themselves.'[8] Again: Critique of Kiir and the central government was often voiced as opposition to the Dinka. Alfred Futuyo, perhaps the best-known Arrow Boys-commander and from July 2020 governor of Western Equatoria said: 'Zamoi left Yambio in 2006 a Zande and returned in 2015 a Dinka' (HSBA 2016). And so, the divisions within the Zande group did not necessarily mean an end to ethnic rhetoric: Instead, Governor Zamoi was now painted as 'a Dinka' because of his allegiance to the unpopular government in Juba.

By most accounts, the appointment of the new governor Daniel Badagbu in January 2017 somewhat improved the relation between communities and

3 Interview with former MP in Western Equatoria, Arua, 15 June 2017 and Interview with payam chief, Kampala, 16 June 2017.

4 The exact number is hard to verify. Certainly dozens, possibly hundreds. Sometimes people were killed, at other times just wounded and/or mugged. Among the elite victims was the speaker of the WES parliament, James Bage. He was shot dead in an ambush in Yambio, followed by wild speculation about who shot him and why (Sudan Tribune 2015b). Interview with refugee chairperson from Ezo, Rhino Camp, 23 April 2017; Interview with wife of chief in Kampala, 16 March 2017.

5 Interview with former chief, Uganda, June 2017.

6 In April 2016, a Western Equatorian rebel group – the South Sudan National Liberation Movement – signed a peace deal with the government. But Alfred Futuyo's South Sudan People's Patriotic Front (SSPPF) continued to fight.

7 For instance, on 10 November people in Yambio awoke to heavy gunfire which continued intermittently for days. Email correspondence with John in Yambio, 17 november 2016.

8 Interview in Uganda, 9 March 2018.

the Gbudwe State government.[9] As a refugee in Uganda summarized: 'Peace is coming back to Yambio. Killing is there, but not like before.'[10] We could term this the fourth phase, of low-intensity simmering conflict. There were occasional clashes between rebels and SPLA, and some roads remained unsafe. It remained akin to how Lubkemann described Mozambique's war: 'a period of prolonged and heightened uncertainty, punctuated by violent events' (Lubkemann 2008).

The civil war, the 'it' that refugees ran from, often took this form: Of local conflicts interlacing with political intrigue at the state- and national level. With (aspiring) politicians mobilizing youth to fight along identity lines, only to sign peace with their battlefield enemies at the next round of peace-through-power sharing. When peace was signed in 2020, the same old faces that had started the war were back at the national helm, and Arrow Boy-commander Alfred Futuyo became governor of Western Equatoria. This cynical system was described aptly in Darfur, where 'violence has been used not to achieve military victory but to raise actors' status in a patronage hierarchy' (de Waal 2014). In South Sudan, people with political aspirations sometimes engage in the civil war to advance their careers (Braak 2020).

6.3 MASHAKIL KETIR: VIOLENCE SEEN FROM BELOW

> If you have not seen the day of revolution in a small town where all know all in the town and always have known all, you have seen nothing.
> - For Whom the Bell Tolls – Ernest Hemmingway.

The civil war and the elite politics behind it had been opaque for anyone I spoke to. During the third phase of violence in Yambio, Peter wrote to me, 'we in Yambio town are facing serious gun shots every night and you cannot know who is shooting and why.'[11] People would often contrast this war with the previous ones they had experienced, and say that 'this one' was more divisive and chaotic. As one refugee in Kampala put it: 'This is not a civil war, it is a house to house war. Brother to brother.'[12]

Violence directly affected ordinary people in numerous ways. Both the SPLA and non-state armed groups preyed on the civilian population for food, recruits and intelligence, and many civilians were raped, abducted or killed

9 Badagbu was a relatively young man who was mayor of Yambio town before becoming governor of the newly divided Gbudwe State. The other part of the former Western Equatoria State became the 'Tambura State'. In 2020 all were joined as 'Western Equatoria State' again.

10 Interview with pastor, Rhino Camp, 11 August 2017.

11 Email from Peter in Yambio, 6 October 2015.

12 Interview with catholic sister from Yambio, Kampala, 1 August 2017.

(Human Rights Watch 2016). In Uganda one female refugee from Mundri recounted how the warring parties, 'Would not discriminate, and kill even children ... Now, they do not segregate between soldiers and civilians ... Our youth were arrested and even killed in front of us. You cannot talk or they kill you, too.'[13] At night there were muggings and abductions in the towns. Various armed groups also operated road blocks demanding contributions from anyone that passed. The 'Arrow Boys' had earlier protected their communities against the LRA, but became more malignant (Braak 2020). In Uganda, an elderly female refugee said: 'This one of yesterday where boys were raping even our type, forced me to come to this red soil.'[14] 'This one' referring to the war, 'our type' to elderly women, and 'this red soil' to Uganda. Criminals and so-called 'unknown gunmen' exploited the instability to extort, loot and kill with impunity.

The violence of the civil war also had many indirect effects on life in Western Equatoria. It changed the way disputes were being resolved. In more peaceful times, the customary and statutory courts and the chiefs had been able to produce a semblance of order and stability (see Chapter 5). But even before war started in 2015, dealing with armed disputants had been their Achilles heel (Braak 2016). The violent incidents that took place during the second phase of conflict were not brought to the chiefs or courts, and they were in no position to halt the escalation. In the third phase many courts closed down and judges left their posts.[15] Old scores were being settled violently now, as some people hired 'unknown gunmen' or out-of-work rebels or soldiers to attack or kill their opponents.[16]

Local authorities were not only powerless to hold perpetrators of violence to account, but they became targets themselves. One of Yambio's B-Court judges was beaten up three times by armed groups. My key respondent Charles had been the chairperson of the County Land Authority's Land Dispute Committee in Yambio, and was shot after an unfavourable ruling (see Section 4.5.1). A customary court judge expressed a common fear: 'If we judge according to the laws it is at our own risk ... Because people are killing each other like nothing.'[17] In Uganda, a refugee from Mundri painted a Hobbesian image of South Sudan at that time: 'It is each for him or herself and God for us all. Even murder has no consequences.'[18]

The state bureaucracy was hamstrung mainly due to violence and insecurity, but also due to the economic decline. The low global oil price, lack of foreign currency, and the liberalization of exchange rates fuelled hyperinflation

13 Interview with 40-year-old female refugee, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017.
14 Interview with 56-year-old woman, Kiryandongo, 27 December 2019.
15 Interview by RA Evelyn 8 April 2017 in Yambio with County Court Clerk.
16 Interview with 32-year-old youth leader, Yambio, 4 Apil 2017.
17 Interview with vice-chairperson B-Court, Yambio, 3 April 2017.
18 Focus group discussion (FGD) with youth, female respondent, refugee settlement in Uganda, 13 August 2017.

(Francis 2016; Elias and Biajo 2020).[19] It is worth here to quote at length a former state minister who now lived in Kampala, on the consequences of war and economic collapse:

> The entire civil service has collapsed. Nobody is working. Then you have the question of security ... [Unknown gunmen] come to your house, and they can spend hours doing all sorts of things without anybody coming to stop them. So that means there is a breakdown of law and order ... Then you have the economy which has totally collapsed. Most of the roads are closed due to insecurity ... So things have deteriorated ... Anybody who is an intellectual is a target. So you have to run to save your life.[20]

This quote illustrates the civil war's many indirect and inter-connected consequences. To cope with this multi-faceted collapse, many wage-earners turned to subsistence farming. But it had become dangerous to travel to the gardens, often some distance outside of town. As one 42-year-old female farmer in Yambio explained: 'I used to bring my food from the garden ... [But] The rebels took over since 2016. I have nothing at all, and [there is] killing everywhere ... I fear that if I go, they will rape or kill me.'[21] Some rebels would allow people to go to their gardens, but doing so would arouse suspicion among government and SPLA.[22] As a result, many people stopped going to the farms. Such micro-level tragedies culminate in sobering cereal production statistics (see below).

Table 3: South Sudan, estimated cereal surplus/deficit, 2015-9 (tonnes). Source: Constantino et al. (2019), page 37.

Table 9: South Sudan - Estimated cereal surplus/deficit, 2015-2019 (tonnes)

State	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Central Equatoria	25 196	14 291	-13 294	-73 528	-92 092
Eastern Equatoria	6 338	-16 750	-21 355	-29 889	-37 177
Western Equatoria	86 767	18 542	10 601	52	-589
Jonglei	-149 738	-148 937	-159 079	-159 753	-163 559
Upper Nile	-78 942	-72 429	-58 864	-56 258	-57 675
Unity	-80 298	-79 264	-80 041	-73 686	-66 614
Lakes	-30 812	-28 889	-24 600	-22 459	-24 324
Warrap	-4 907	-19 459	2 132	1 027	-18 321
W Bahr al Ghazal	16 044	-4 350	-14 256	-28 802	-32 341
N Bahr al Ghazal	-38 315	-28 006	-25 529	-25 098	-25 549
Total	**-248 666**	**-365 248**	**-384 285**	**-468 395**	**-518 240**

19 In early 2015 the exchange rate was 6 South Sudanese Pounds for 1 US Dollar. By the end of 2017 it was 190 SSP per USD. By September 2020 the black-market rate was 500 SSP per USD.

20 Interview with former Western Equatoria State minister of physical infrastructure, Kampala, 21 June 2017.

21 Interview with 42-year-old female farmer, Yambio, 4 April 2017.

22 Email correspondence with respondent in Kampala, 29 October 2020.

This table shows how the Equatorias have fallen from producing a 118,301 tonne cereal surplus in 2015 to a 129,858 tonne deficit in 2018. In the erstwhile bread basket for South Sudan people were returning to one meal a day. The report explicitly links this drop to 'the expansion of conflict' and the 'massive refugee outflow' (Costantino, Shiferaw, and Bonifacio 2019, 29). War, displacement and economics were closely intertwined.

The reincarnation of war also had existential ramifications. Less measurable than agricultural output, but equally important. South Sudan's independence in 2011 had been accompanied by euphoria, the overcoming of divisions, and hope for the future. It had been tempting to believe that Khartoum or 'the Arabs' were the origin of evil, and that life would be altogether better under South Sudanese leadership (see Section 5.2). The decades of civil war and the thousands of lives lost were made meaningful from this perspective. The resumption of war in 2013 made many people question that narrative, and their vote for independence. Both in South Sudan and in refugee camps in Uganda, some people 'blamed themselves for being (born) South Sudanese'. One chief in Yambio said, 'I don't [know] why I exist in this country. While other people enjoy their life, culture and norms, for us in South Sudan we only enjoy shedding blood.'[23] In exile, people would also reflect on the bleak situation back in South Sudan (see Section 8.2).

These sorts of expressions are reminiscent of existential crisis, or what Janoff-Bulman termed 'narrative rupture'. In her view, most people live in an 'assumptive world' built on two core beliefs: that the world is benevolent and meaningful, and the self is worthy. When traumatic events occur, these beliefs are challenged or even shattered (Janoff-Bulman 1992). This can be a powerful motivator for flight (Schon 2019). My material suggests that people had different dispositions (see Section 6.5.1), but for many the existential or psychological effects of war weighed heavy. While many Western Equatorians' prior experiences with conflict meant they were familiar with the evil humans generally were capable of, this war for some shattered their belief in the good of the self – defined in South Sudan not just individually, but as 'us' juxtaposed with the 'other'. Which 'us' people identified with, and how, had long been a political question. During the Sudanese civil wars, to mobilize and unify southern resistance against the Sudanese government the SPLM/A periodically promoted a southern Sudanese identity (see Section 2.5). Then in the years leading up to 'this one' there had been attempts to close the Equatorian or Zande ranks against the 'others': primarily the Nilotics/Dinka-dominated central government and SPLA. But even that group formation was challenged by the reality of the civil war, as it increasingly affected even the most intimate social circles. As a church member summarized: 'There are a lot of atrocities happening in the area which is done by us, ourselves: killing, robbery. And there is no way people can trust their family member or friend again because

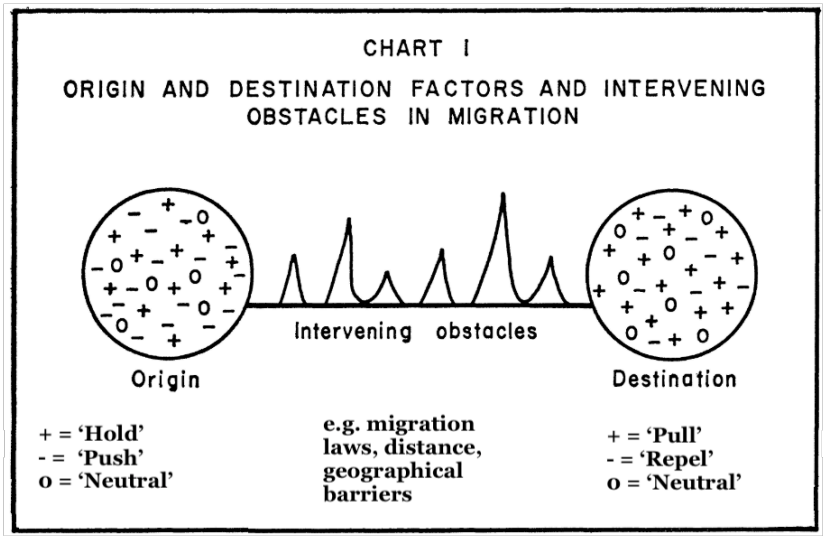
23 Interview with executive chief, Yambio, 24 May 2018.

the very person you love so much – your best brother or friend – can turn against you at any time and kill you.'[24] War was no longer other people, it was *us*.

6.4 Structure: 'Drivers' and 'determinants' of movement

The resumption of war confronted South Sudanese people with a familiar dilemma: Would they stay at home or migrate (again)? Peter and his family, with whom I opened the introduction of this book, were among the roughly four million people who moved away from their homes over the course of the war. But why did these four million leave? Migration scholars have typically drawn on two sets of explanations to explain why people (don't) move: structure (e.g. 'drivers', 'determinants' or 'emigration environment'), and agency (including aspirations and capabilities) (de Haas et al. 2019; Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2018; Carling 2002; King 2012, 3:29). One of the foundational theorists in the field, Lee, differentiated four types of factors which shape migration: 'Factors associated with the area of origin' (push and hold), 'Factors associated with the area of destination' (pull and repel), 'Intervening obstacles' (e.g. Berlin wall) and 'Personal factors' (e.g. personality, intelligence, knowledge, contacts) (Lee 1966). For clarity, I have included Lee's original chart of the first three factors, and added a legend below.

Table 4: Lee's Theory on Migration. Source: Lee (1966). Bottom lines added by author.



24 Interview with 53-year-old secretary of church, Yambio, 9 May 2018.

Lee's 'push-pull'-framework has since been criticized for being too static, and portraying migrants as passive pawns (Haas 2011, 32:8).Yet his ideas were more nuanced. He wrote about the importance of 'personal factors' and that some structural factors 'affect different people in different ways', and that migration results 'not so much [from] the actual factors ... as the perception of these factors' (Lee 1966, 50-51). Certainly, his paper makes odd hierarchical distinctions between 'high quality' and 'low quality' migrants and populations, assumes people's 'natural inertia' and draws conclusions which have since been disproven. Yet the core of Lee's framework remains useful for analysing the structural side of migration, and many newer frameworks mirror it to a considerable extent. For instance, Van Hear et al describe 'drivers' of migration ('external material forces that influence mobility') which 'shape the broader context within which aspirations and desires to migrate are formed and in which people make their migration decisions' (Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long 2018, 930–32). These frameworks both help to think about the way in which the *mashakil ketir* (many problems) of the war, may have generally influenced mobility deliberations.

Looking at the case of Western Equatoria through this lens, one can discern ample 'drivers' or 'determinants' for migration. 'Hold factors' included the familiarity of home, land access, and/or a job. As we will see, many people had wanted to stay during the war to protect their family or property. In this way, war may actually encourage *immobility* for some. But most of the manifold faces of the war constituted 'push factors', and we might differentiate 'proximate drivers' (the general insecurity and impunity, the economic crisis, the closing of schools, offices and markets) and more urgent 'precipitating drivers' (specific attacks or threats). 'Pull factors' in Uganda included the comparative safety, good English-language education, and relative familiarity from earlier migrations (Braak and Kenyi 2018). 'Repel factors' for stayees included the reluctance to become (again) a refugee, which many people associated with dependence on aid or remittances. We will go into these deliberations in more detail in Section 6.5.

Crucially, such an analysis of the structural side of migration indicates why people *might* migrate, but not why they *do* or *do not* (A.H. Richmond 1993, 8). Too strong a focus on the structural side of the equation – with its 'drivers', 'determinants' or 'predictors' – would risk conveying a misleadingly deterministic and functionalist picture of migration (Arango 2004; Haas 2011, 32:16). Faced with similar structural conditions, people make different choices. And across the world, many people stay put in defiance of economic models that would predict their departure, something that has been called the 'immobility paradox' (Malmberg 1997). To explain people's very varied decisions to stay or go in the case of Western Equatoria, the next section focuses on the agentic side of mobility.

6.5 Agency, aspiration, and ability

Migration scholars focusing on structural explanations have typically acknowledged the importance of 'personal factors' (Lee) or 'agency' (Van Hear), but have often left that part of the equation rather underdeveloped. In an influential conceptualization, Long explained that: 'The notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion' (Long 2001, 51:16). In times of conflict, scholarly and policy accounts tend to take a more macro view – considering 'civilians' somehow comparable, as 'hapless bystanders, either abused dependent variables or candidates for aid' (Barter 2014, 2). We ought not romanticize agency: Often people's positions in war are precarious, and the scope for their action limited to choosing the lesser evil (Lubkemann 2008, 209; Frankl 2008). Still, this section will illustrate that even in conflict zones, people cannot be reduced to dependent variables. Instead, they remain fully human: social beings immersed in history, using the limited influence they have to navigate a precarious present.

This section explores, simply, why and how people decided to stay or move, among other places to Uganda. In refugee studies there has been an inclination to assume simply that people leave war *because of war or persecution*, without further analysing precisely *what elements* of war made *which* people go *when* and *where* (see Section 1.3.2). And yet from my interviews it quickly became apparent that displacement had rarely been a straightforward or automatic response to 'war' in general terms, instead it often required elaborate planning and organizing, and people's decisions varied enormously.

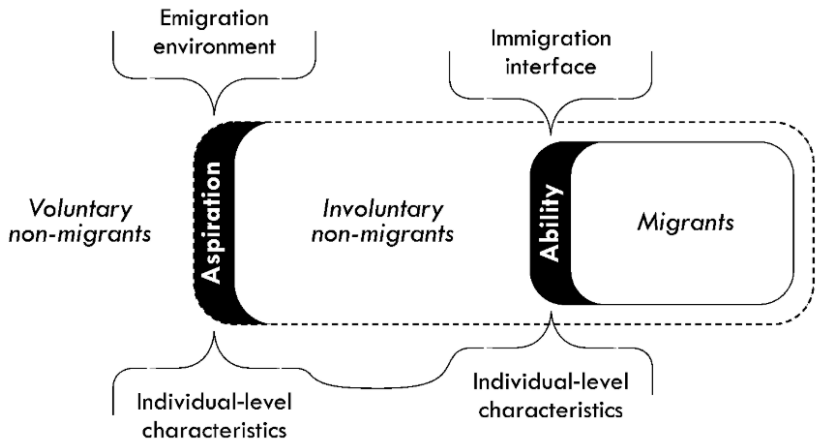
To analyse this agentic side of migration, this chapter draws on the 'aspiration-ability model' (Carling 2002).[25] This model differentiates three groups of people: those who choose to stay, those who aspire to migrate but can't ('involuntary immobility'), and those who migrate.[26] It centres around two concepts. First, *aspiration* 'defined by a belief that migration is preferable to non-migration. The aspiration to migrate can vary in degree and in the balance between choice and coercion' (Carling 2002, 12). Second, *ability* which for Carling is broadly constituted of the 'immigration interface' (e.g., available modes of migration, barriers, requirements, costs and risks) on the one hand, and 'individual-level characteristics' (e.g., gender, age, family migration history and social status) on the other. To include intermediate-level of analysis,

25 There are other models that capture similar factors, like the 'Motivation/Opportunity'-work (Schon 2019).

26 Beyond this, the model resembles Lee's classical model: the 'Emigration Environment' is similar to Lee's 'origin and destination factors', the 'individual-level characteristics' are similar to Lee's 'Personal Factors.' The 'immigration interface' is a facet of Lee's 'intervening obstacles'.

Carling counts social relations with the household and beyond as individual-level characteristics.

Figure 7: Carling's aspiration-ability model. Source: Carling (2002: 12).



Carling considers migration as the inevitable outcome of the combination of a person's aspiration to migrate and their ability to do so. This indicates that he sees 'aspiration' as a very strong desire on which people would immediately act if given the opportunity. Although Carling's work is based on a case study in Cape Verde (not a conflict-affected country) he does propose this model to cover migration across the forced/voluntary-spectrum. He writes that 'Civilians in an area of warfare could have stronger aspirations to leave, but even less ability to do so ... In other words, even when the mobile are 'forced' those who stay behind could be involuntarily immobile' (Carling 2002, 8). From Carling's logic follows deductively that all those who migrated had the aspiration to do so. I think the term 'aspiration' becomes awkward at the coercive side of the spectrum: Did a man whose house was on fire have the *aspiration* to move out? Nonetheless, Carling does not suggest that an aspiration has to be voluntary. These are semantic footnotes to Carling's framework. which is otherwise useful for thinking about individual agency and its constituents, also in a time of war.

In the following three sections I use Carling's framework to analyse the case of Western Equatorians' decisions to stay or move. From the dozens of stayee and refugee accounts, I analyse how aspiration and ability respectively featured in peoples' decisions.

6.5.1 Aspiration to stay/move: Intentions, personality, and experience

> How can I leave my country and just go somewhere to suffer? For sure I cannot! I will not run away, even if multiple bombs are being dropped in and around Yambio. I will just hide around and emerge whenever it subsides. If it is not my time to die, I will not die. My land is for my children and I cannot leave it just like that for someone to come and grab it when I am out of the country.[27]

This quote is from a teacher in Yambio, responding to our question whether he had aspired to leave, too. His answer is illustrative of the many different factors that 'stayees' in Western Equatoria and refugees in Uganda weighed in their decisions. In this section I distil from the dozens of interviews that we did on this subject a number of factors which shape people's 'aspiration' to leave. Where the terminology of 'drivers' and 'structural factors' suggests a universality to the way they are shape migration decisions, in the following discussion I highlight how people weigh these factors variably.

A first and foremost factor shaping peoples' migration aspirations is their differential experience with violence. A lot of forced migration scholarship wrongly assumes that during war people 'across a country are uniformly affected by aggregate-level violence' (Adhikari 2013, 83). My research instead illustrates the variety of experiences, even within the same city. Many of the refugees I interviewed in Uganda had had personal experiences with (the threat of) violence, and would qualify the Refugee Convention' requirement of 'persecution' (see Section 7.1). Some had been raped, forcibly recruited or mugged, others had been shot, or were threatened (see Annex 1: Portraits). Most others had lost relatives or friends. Such personal experiences shaped people's aspiration to leave. Consider the words of the wife of a chief, now a refugee in Kampala:

> When war would come to South Sudan, usually I stayed. But this time I was fearing. At night people can come and attack me. It happened twice. They targeted me specifically. After my husband got arrested ... To be safe, every day I would go at 9 in the evening to sleep with a friend for the night, and only come back the following morning. The first night they came and found that I had left, they left some bullets in front of the door.[28]

This woman contrasts her normal inclination to stay – even during wartime – with her decision to leave this time because of personal threats. For many people such personal experiences with violence translated into an aspiration to leave, even if some also chose to stay.

A second, partly related, factor was people's political position within Western Equatoria. When Bakosoro was fired and new governor Zamoi came

27 Interview with 38-year old teacher in VTC-area, Yambio, 11 April 2017.
28 Interview with wife of chief, Kampala, 16 March 2017.

in during the third phase of conflict, his entourage and their families felt threatened (see Section 6.2.3). This large group of people felt vulnerable and uncertain about their future in Western Equatoria, and some were specifically targeted. A refugee student in Kampala explained: 'In Yambio what caused most people to flee was after the change of [state] government ... Then insecurity and hatred came. Some people felt like we were the sons and daughters of Bakosoro.'[29] In Uganda, these refugees saw their displacement not as an unintended consequence of conflict, but as a deliberate part of it. Some suspected that the powerful were plotting to grab their land: be they a new governor, or the ethnically exclusivist central government and SPLA (see Section 4.2.3) (Craze 2019, 11; Thompson, Schie, and Jackson 2019). Being a refugee, for those people, was not simply a 'rupture' between people and place, but also a 'disjuncture between a displaced person and the state' (Hovil 2016, 124). Their presence in Uganda was a testament to a ruptured social contract.

A third factor shaping migration aspirations were the manifold economic effects of the war (see Section 6.3). One female stayee in Yambio argued that people '[fled] the country because of the economic hardship not necessarily because of war.'[30] Similarly, Peter who had brought his own wife and children to Uganda explained that 'families also run away because of economic difficulties. Because life has become very difficult and they see going to the refugee camp to receive food ratio as some solution to their challenges.'[31] Crucially, somebody who leaves a warzone for economic reasons – even famine – would not qualify according to the Convention as a 'refugee' (UNHCR 2017). And yet hunger has been used as a weapon of war in the Sudans and beyond (De Waal 2005) and most of the 'excess deaths' in South Sudan were caused not by direct violence but by the manifold other consequences of war (Checchi et al. 2018).

A fourth factor shaping migration aspirations was people's perception of the war. There was considerable disagreement among and between refugees and stayees on the cacophony of events we label 'war'. Uncertainty, both of the present and future, often characterizes war (Horst and Grabska 2015a). Everyone was trying to understand the 'security situation' (NGO-speak that has been incorporated into everyday speech in South Sudan). To see clear in an opaque situation, people drew on analyses and intuition, own observations, memories, emotions, discussions with family, friends and acquaintances, radio news and social media (De Boeck 2015). Some people focused on individual events, insisting to see them as 'incidents' rather than the general state. For instance, one stayee recounted how she 'had been running up and down from time to time. For example, on 6 December 2017 we ran up to Sakure near the border with DR Congo because of the heavy shooting between Babiro and the

29 Interview with 24-year old student in Kampala, 20 March 2017.
30 Interview with 30-year-old women leader, Yambio, 4 April 2017.
31 Email correspondence with John in Yambio, 3 May 2018.

SSNLM headed by Abel Banga.'[32] This woman – a 49-year-old cleaner, not a military specialist – knew the names of those in charge of the fighting factions. Such detailed knowledge of the war helped her to stay safe within South Sudan. Other people rather (or also) constructed a coherent overarching story of the general state of affairs. For instance, one elderly refugee in Uganda said: 'South Sudan was supposed to be a nice place, but our uncles after becoming leaders started war with the Nuer, and now our boys have joined them too. They do not know how to use guns, that is why most of us are here to rot in this [refugee settlement].'[33] The word 'uncle' is often used by Zande to refer to ethnic Dinka. In her account, the war ruined the promises of independence and she had to go.

A fifth and related factor shaping peoples' migration aspiration, was their ontological orientation, and specifically their interpretation of 'God's plan' and free will. Stayees in Yambio often drew on pre-destination to argue for staying, saying 'if it is not my time to die, I will not die.'[34] People would often decry the folly of 'running from death.' This is linked to the Zande proverb '*Yo ngba tini a té*' (Literally 'There is no place which is good,' effectively 'The grass is always greener on the other side'), and expressions like '*Gu pai Mbori akehe, ka boro ariangaha te'* (What God has written, no one can change). People use this to say that life everywhere has problems, so it is best to face the situation where you are. Refugees believe that their 'running' can also be part of God's Plan.[35] As Charles put it in a refugee settlement in Uganda: 'Life was becoming squeezed in my own country, so I knew that God wanted us to go.'[36] In this line of reasoning, God requires of people to be active. Predetermination is not an excuse for inertia. In the language of psychology: God has given the refugees an internal locus of control (L.E. Jackson and Coursey 1988). An elderly female refugee in Uganda invoked yet another Zande proverb: *Batiriki I so ko puu ni baso, nzapia nzapia I so ko pirapira* (He who sat still was hit by the spear, but the one who ran only got bruised). People cite these beliefs as important reasons why they did (not) aspire to leave.

Sixth, and also related to people's perception of the war, were their previous experiences with war, displacement and return. Many people had only just returned from exile and were profoundly reluctant to leave again. South Sudanese singer 'Crazy Fox' voiced a common sentiment of stayees when he sang in a wailing voice: '*Ana gaid, ana ma mashi.*' (I am staying, I am not leaving). Like this singer, many Western Equatorians said they were tired of 'running'. One 53-year-old church official in Yambio insisted that he did not

32 Interview with 49-year old female cleaner, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
33 Interview with 71-year-old woman, Kiryandongo RS, 29 December 2019.
34 Interview with 38-year-old teacher in VTC-area, Yambio, 11 April 2017.
35 Future psychological research could study to what extent 'stayees' and 'refugees' differ in terms of internal/external locus of control.
36 Interview Charles, Kiryandongo RS, 29 May 2019.

consider leaving this time: 'Even if the war escalates further, I will not leave South Sudan. Maybe I will run to the nearby bush. Because I had suffered a lot in the past wars.'[37] This sort of temporary 'going to the bush' will be further explored later (see Section 6.6). Part of the suffering people had experienced in previous wars, was that they had lost their land or houses. This now became a main reason that stayees cited for staying (see Chapter 4). This quote from a South Sudanese aid worker in Yambio further develops that discourse:

> Men remain behind to defend their land. They think that if they all leave the land, many people, especially cattle communities, will infiltrate the area and occupy their land. And that by the time peace comes and they return it will be impossible to remove the illegal land occupants. This has happened in the past during the SPLA war.[38]

Crucially, many people who decided to stay nevertheless have contingency plans ('Plan B'). A 42-year-old government official had so far been reluctant to go, but said: 'I have my brother in D.R. Congo [and] we do communicate with him. I think if the situation goes beyond what it is now, I will escape to join him.'[39] Similarly a 25-year-old business woman in Yambio explained: 'If the insecurity escalates further, I will escape to DR Congo ... I [would] prefer taking refuge in Uganda, [but] I have no money to go up to the refugee settlement.'[40] This citation already hints to the importance of the second concept in Carling's model: ability. People's decision to leave are not shaped only by their assessment of the home situation, but also by the feasibility of travelling elsewhere (see Section 6.5.3).

6.5.2 Aspiration to go to Uganda

People often did not just aspire to *leave* Western Equatoria, but also to go specifically to Uganda. People are not just 'pushed' out of civil war, they are also 'pulled' by 'the expected quality of life in possible destinations' (Turkoglu and Chadefaux 2019). Western Equatoria directly borders the Central African Republic and DR Congo, and in previous civil wars most people had sought refuge in those countries (see Section 3.3). Yet in the current war, more people have opted to come to Uganda. When I asked Western Equatorians why they had chosen Uganda, no one mentioned Uganda's reformed refugee legislation and policy (see Chapter 7). Instead, they often cited four reasons: security,

37 Interview with 53-year-old secretary of church, Yambio, 9 May 2018.
38 Email correspondence with South Sudanese aid worker in Yambio, 3 May 2018.
39 Interview with 42-year old payam administrator, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
40 Interview with 26-year old business woman, Yambio, 11 May 2018.

hospitality, education, and familiarity. First and most importantly, Uganda was widely seen to be more secure than eastern CAR or north-eastern DR Congo. Second, people felt Uganda was much more hospitable now than those other countries. In 1998, the SPLA had invaded north-eastern DR Congo to force refugees to go back and to loot (Marks 2007, 15) (see Section 3.4). As a result, as a 53-year-old Western Equatorian refugee in Arua put it, 'The DRC does not need refugees ... DRC rejected them.'[41]

Third, Uganda has a relatively good education system and children are taught in English. After previous periods of displacement, those who returned from Uganda came back well educated and fluent in English, whereas those that went to the CAR or the DRC had learned French, Sango or Lingala-languages that are relatively useless in South Sudan. As one refugee in Arua explained to me: 'Those who learned French in CAR are jobless in South Sudan. But those who came [here] those days are the ones who [were now] working in offices because they learned English.'[42] Formal education has been scarce in South Sudan, and one of the few means for social mobility or consolidation (Akoi and Pendle 2021). 'Office work', typically for government or aid organizations, is prestigious and comparatively well-paid. So, by sending the children as refugees to Uganda now, people hope that they will be among the high-qualified returnees who will have good jobs in South Sudan in the future. This chimes with a wider observation in the literature on displacement and return, that often conflict-related mobility is part of peoples' strategies not just to survive, but also to develop and meet a family's needs (Kaiser 2010; Akoi and Pendle 2021). These mixed motives are illustrated well in this account by a female refugee in Uganda:

> There was war throughout our area. Even if you go to hide in the bush, they will follow you there. [My husband] said I should come here because it is better for the children, who can have an education ... Education here is good and the children are taught in English.[43]

The fourth reason many Western Equatorians mentioned, was that they were already familiar with Uganda. Uganda had hosted Sudanese refugees during the 1960s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (Kaiser 2006a, 599) and now again in the 2010s. These statistics are reflected in people's biographies. As one 27-year old Western Equatorian in Uganda told us: 'Our grandfather was a refugee here, and he told us that Ugandans are welcoming.'[44] After previous episodes of displacement, refugees who could afford to do so, sometimes left their children behind in school in Uganda, even when they themselves returned

41 Focus group discussion with men from Western Equatoria, Arua, 25 August 2017.
42 Interview with Balanda refugee, male respondent, Arua, 15 June 2017.
43 Interview with 40-year-old female refugee, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017.
44 Focus group discussion with men from Western Equatoria, Arua, 25 August 2017.

to Sudan (Kaiser 2010, 55). During peacetime also, many people travelled to Uganda for trade, education or medical care. This confirms that patterns of displacement typically map on to peacetime migration patterns (Kaiser 2010).

6.5.3 Ability to stay or move: Assets and social networks

Not everyone who *aspires* to migrate is *able* to do so. This applies in a warzone as much as in more stable areas. Carling proposes to analyse *ability* to migrate as determined by the confrontation between 1) the 'immigration interface' and 2) 'personal-level factors'. He defines the 'immigration interface' as 'all the available modes of migration, with associated requirements, costs and risks' (Carling 2002, 13). Note that Carling's work is long-distance migration from Cape Verde, and so he posits that the main barriers to migration are 'the direct or indirect results of restrictive immigration policies'. But in our case of (refugee) migration from Western Equatoria to Uganda, the immigration policies are not strict (see Section 7.1). Here, there are other obstacles to migration. Carling writes that 'individual-level characteristics' (e.g., gender, age, family migration history, social status) 'differentiate between people in their ability to overcome the barriers to migration.' This conceptualisation of 'ability' is reminiscent of Lee's classical distinction between 'intervening obstacles' and the 'personal factors' that matter in overcoming said obstacles. This section explores for Western Equatorians the available modes of migration, the obstacles, and how personal factors mattered throughout.

There were ample 'intervening obstacles' for Western Equatorians aspiring to travel the 400-500 kilometres to Uganda. One could either fly or go over land. There were flights from Yambio with MAF and WFP to Juba and to Arua or Kajjansi in Uganda. But passengers had to be affiliated with church, government or NGOs, needed identification documents, and pay some 200-300 USD for the ticket depending on the destination. These were prohibitive preconditions for most Western Equatorians. Those with affiliation and identification, still often lacked the money to send the whole family abroad, and so tough choices ensued on whom to bring to Uganda and whom to leave behind.

The road was the more accessible option for most, and the theatre of a great variety of movements. On the quick and safe end of the spectrum, some people travelled with the Ugandan military (UPDF). Their trucks drove regularly to Western Equatoria, and to CAR beyond for their operations against the LRA.[45] Western Equatorian car owners could pay to join the convoy. Albert for instance paid 100 USD and spent 3 days on the road from Yambio to Kaya on the Ugandan border. After the escalation in Juba in July 2016, the UPDF sent a convoy there to repatriate Ugandans. Some South Sudanese were able

45 Interview with former MP, Arua, 15 June 2017.

to join these trucks because they paid,[46] had Ugandan relatives,[47] or could pass as Ugandan.

Many other people travelled from Western Equatoria by bus, lorry or shared taxi-van (*matatu*) using a variety of routes depending on where they were, the comparative safety of the routes, and the availability of transport. Many went over Juba, some over Yei, and others through the DR Congo over Doruma and/or Dungu. The South Sudanese options varied in cost, but were dangerous, especially after war escalated in Central Equatoria over the course of 2016. Armed groups and bandits operated countless roadblocks. On the border with Sudan the SPLA and border authorities reportedly stopped women and children from leaving (Kindersley and Majok 2020), but I heard of no such practices along the southern border. The Congolese routes were sometimes safer, but typically included extortive 'taxation' by police and army. The immigration policies of Uganda were not an obstacle in and of themselves: One could register as refugee for free at the Ugandan border, and then be transported to a refugee settlement. However, aspiring refugees knew that not all camps were alike and sometimes incurred extra costs so as to be able to choose their destination (see Section 7.4.1).

The prime 'personal factor' needed to overcome these 'intervening obstacles' and act on the aspiration to migrate, was money (preferably US Dollars). Many of the stayees said that rich or 'big people' had left or sent their families abroad.[48] A 27-year-old police man in Yambio said: 'Those who run away are the ones having money to go. We the poor just remain here and we will die here.'[49] Refugees generally acknowledged that they had been able to leave because they had access to money. As a nineteen-year-old male refugee student said: 'We came to Uganda because we were able to afford transport up to here. Those who were badly off either remained in the towns or moved to their villages. Others moved to the nearest border.'[50] These findings underscore that mobility is akin to a resource that is distributed unequally (Cresswell 2010; Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004), and so it's often the better-off people who migrate (de Haas et al. 2019; Czaika 2012; UNDP 2009).

Crucially, not all those who had access to money in this time of crisis were themselves wealthy. This relates to a second personal factor: social networks. It has always struck me how many people know one another in South Sudan, and how much vital information is passed through these networks. The Western Equatorian community was close-knit, everyone but a handshake or two removed. The most relevant social networks that helped people migrate appear to have been the family, church, multi-ethnic national networks (through

46 Interview with 25-year-old female refugee, Kiryandongo RS, 15 May 2017.
47 Interview with 27-year-old refugee, Bidibidi RS, 18 August 2017.
48 Interview with 49-year-old female cleaner, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
49 Interview with police officer, Yambio, 10 April 2017.
50 Interview with Baka student, 19-year-old man, Arua, 7 August 2017.

education, trade and government/army service), transnational mono-ethnic networks (for instance, connecting Zande in South Sudan with diasporic family),[51] and international networks (some people had a network of foreign colleagues or friends). These networks offered material support as well as information critical to any migration decision.

In Uganda I often met people who had been able to elude arrest or assassination due to their close connections – especially across ethnic and political fault lines. One key respondent was in Yambio during the war, when an 'unknown gunman' came to him and confessed that he had been hired to kill my respondent. The gunman preferred not to do it because he was close to the respondent's elder brother, and instead he let my respondent 'run'.[52] Even more common were accounts of people who had been tipped off by friends 'within the system'. Consider this former Arrow Boy who was wanted by the state government in Yambio and first fled to Juba:

> In Juba I was working with [an INGO], but I always had lunch with a Dinka friend at the Ministry of Interior ... I always paid his lunch. Then he told me one day that they were coming to arrest me. I decided to leave the office and as I walked out of the Ministry, I saw the vehicle with soldiers coming to arrest me, all with red caps.[53]

Often 'the system' is broadly used to refer to people in government, and sometimes its armed branches.[54] People who had at one point or another been a part of 'the system' often still had friends within who helped tip them off.[55] This illustrates well how, as in prior times, social networks and privileged knowledge about violence and the state were crucial for survival (Leonardi 2013).

So far, my findings on 'ability' echo earlier scholarship on conflict-induced migration from Syria, which found that money and connections (there '*wasta*') were crucial in shaping migration 'opportunities' (Schon 2019). Yet several accounts hinted towards a third set of personal factors around the ability to 'blend in'. The flight to Uganda (and through Congo) was easier, safer and less costly when people spoke the relevant languages.[56] But blending in went beyond language. One Chief recounts how he travelled with a UPDF-convoy:

> It was easy for us because of our colour, they did not segregate us. If you were a Dinka, they could just identify you as South Sudanese. But us they allowed to

51 Interview with vice-chairperson B-Court, Yambio, 3 April 2017.
52 Email correspondence with respondent in Kampala, 29 October 2020.
53 Interview with 29-year old former combatant from Yambio, Bweyale, 10 May 2018.
54 Interview with former MP, Arua, 15 June 2017.
55 Interview with former state minister, Kampala, 21 June 2017.
56 Interview with refugee chairperson, Rhino Camp, 18 May 2017.

> enter. We did not pay, not even at the border! It helped that I knew some Luganda, because I stayed here for so long.

The chief was able to 'escape' Juba to Uganda because he spoke Luganda and because his appearance could 'pass' as Ugandan. In this way, a person's ability to migrate is shaped in part by birth, experience, and performance.

6.6 Moral frameworks and positionality

These frameworks and charts might convey a deterministic picture of people's decision to stay or move. That would be misleading. Historically, many scholars have filled the question mark of individuality with a *homo economicus*-conceptualization of migrants: with migrants as 'individual, rational and income-maximizing actors, who decide to move on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation ... free choice and full access to information' (Haas 2011, 32:9). However, this view is ahistorical, reductionist and mechanic. First, even economists have long realized peoples' 'bounded rationality' in practice, and that rational choice is constrained by earlier experiences, emotional patterns, and cognitive limitations (Simon 1955). Second and more importantly, people are social beings who often derive meaning from their relations to others. Qualitative work has highlighted that migration (and staying) are not just motivated by economic reasons, but often also by political, moral, social, spiritual, psychological and emotional considerations (King 2012; Lubkemann 2008). Moving can mean political flight (see Annex 1: Portrait, Albert), emancipation, an 'adventure' (see Portrait, James), a rite of passage, or a 'life-making' tactic (Carling 2002). More often than not, it carries multiple meanings.

I found rich and contested moral and normative frameworks concerning when moving was acceptable and for whom. Between 'structure' and 'agency', they simultaneously shape people's 'aspiration' and 'ability' to stay or leave. In Western Equatoria, they were tied to people's gender, age and social standing. A study in the South Sudan-Sudan borderlands found that local authorities blocked women and children from leaving the country – and that those who left were predominantly young men (Kindersley and Majok 2020, 24). From Western Equatoria to Uganda, conversely, the majority of migrants were children ('our future', 'the seeds') and women. Moving away was seen to be altogether less acceptable for men, chiefs and leaders (see Sections 5.7 and 8.2). Some stayees indeed accused those who left as 'cowards'[57] or those who 'don't have a heart, or they don't know the hard life.'[58] Such a negative reading was not unanimous but influential all the same, and it plagued the conscience of some refugees as well (see Chapter 7).

57 Interview with 38-year-old teacher in VTC-area, Yambio, 11 April 2017.
58 Interview with payam administrator, Yambio, 3 April 2015.

Members of every ethnic group and clan 'escaped'.[59] Yet within the Zande ethnic group, men of the Avungara-clan still enjoyed elevated wealth and positions, so a common perception was that they had more often been able to send their children and wives to Uganda.[60] Yet Avungara men themselves had to stay in Western Equatoria, lest they lose their privileged position in terms of authority and land (see Section 8.2). They could often be (temporarily) excused if they were personally threatened or attacked, were often quick to express their desire to go back to South Sudan. Men often said they had to stay in South Sudan to protect their land from illegal occupation ('grabbing'), and to provide for their family in the refugee camps. 'Most men remain behind mostly to look for money to send to those who are in the camps,' one church leader explained, 'Since those men are working class, they could not leave their jobs and go to the camp to stay idle.'[61]

'Staying idle' or 'becoming a beggar' was a big fear both for stayee and refugee men who associated refugee life with landlessness and unemployment, and with aid dependency (see 8.2).[62] A government official in Yambio expanded: 'Because in any foreign country like Uganda it is very hard to get a job. Because most of the [Ugandan] citizens are highly educated whereby a refugee cannot get a job easily.'[63] Many men associated displacement with humiliation and shame, like this court clerk: 'I cannot leave this beautiful land of mine to go to any country because the indigenous [people] of the area where I run will tease and mock me.'[64]

Older people in Yambio often said they were 'too old to run'.[65] They dreaded the physical ordeal of 'running', felt that their life was not worth the costs, or that 'it is better I die here than in another country'.[66] One 64-year-old man in Yambio was illustrative of this reasoning: 'I don't have any dream of going outside the country just because of war. I am already old and there is no need for me again to go anywhere, the only thing I can do is to send my children outside.'[67] This was a typical trope for the wealthier elderly Western Equatorians. 'The children are the future seeds for our clan, tribe and nation,' a church leader in Arua reasoned. 'The elders bring them here and go back to struggle alone.'[68] Families sought to send their women children to the refugee settlement to shield them from harm, to alleviate the burden of feeding

59 Interview with vice-chairperson B-Court, Yambio, 3 April 2017, Interview with 64-year-old senior state official, Yambio, 13 April 2017.
60 Interview with 26-year-old business woman, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
61 Interview with church leader, Yambio, 9 May 2018.
62 Interview with 32-year-old youth leader, Yambio, 4 Apil 2017.
63 Interview with government official, Yambio, 13 April 2017. Same argument was made in interview with 32-year-old surveyor, Yambio, 10 May 2018.
64 Interview with clerk at court, Yambio, 8 April 2017.
65 Interview with 53-year-old secretary of church, Yambio, 9 May 2018.
66 Interiew with female farmer, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
67 Interview with 64-year-old senior state official, Yambio, 13 April 2017.
68 Interview with Western Equatorian church leader, Arua, 17 June 2017.

them, and so that the children could access Ugandan education (which in South Sudan had a very good reputation).[69] Young men had another reason for leaving: if they were to stay at home, they might be suspected of being part of an armed group or they could be forcibly recruited into one.

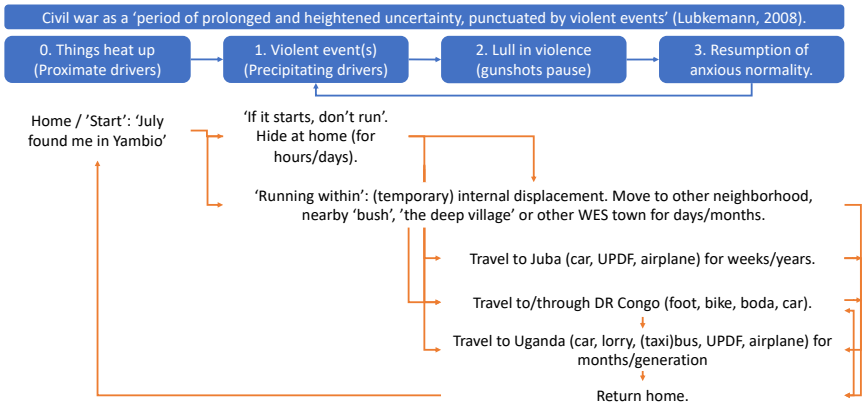
A sensitive debate surrounded the political allegiance of the refugees. Some of those who managed to get their families to Uganda, were themselves fighting 'in the bush or on the government side.'[70] The rich South Sudanese political elite, on all sides, often continued to fight war at home after installing their families 'outside': sending their children to good schools and investing their money in real estate in East Africa and beyond. But some Some stayees took the line of hawks in government, arguing that refugees were predominantly 'IO',[71] whereas others held a critical view of such allegations.[72] 'For the government staff if you go outside the country without proper written permission,' one internally displaced payam administrator explained, 'The government will claim that you have joined the rebels or SPLA IO'.[73] Fear for such dangerous allegations motivated some in government to stay in South Sudan.

6.7 Pathways of displacement: Who stays and goes?

From dozens of accounts of migratory responses to conflict, I have distilled a highly simplified scheme of displacement pathways (see below). At the top in blue are the rough conflict phases which repeat cyclically in a time of civil war. The civil war spanned several years, with violent events at irregular intervals. In white are people's frequently mentioned mobility tactics in response. At the bottom are the many stayees: people who either had no aspiration to leave, or were unable to do so (the 'involuntary immobile'). They may still 'run within', but have not travelled outside their state. The arrows denote all the possible ways that people move from one step to the next, or back. Any clarity suggested by the below scheme would be belied by people's often prolonged journeys, being stuck in transit, and changing plans along the way (see Annex 1: Portraits).

69 Interview with 26-year-old business woman, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
70 Email correspondence with John in Yambio, 17 november 2016.
71 Interview with 38-year-old male farmer, Yambio, 10 April 2017.
72 Interview with 78-year-old former politician, Yambio, 14 April 2017.
73 Interview with 42-year-old payam administrator, Yambio, 11 May 2018.

Figure 8: Conflict conjuncture and displacement pathways



Stayees: Both those who had no aspiration to leave, and those who were unable to do so ('involuntary immobile').

Due in part to previous cycles of conflict, displacement and return, and partly due to 'normal' migration, Western Equatorians were already in different places when conflict erupted (see Chapter 3). For instance, hundreds of Western Equatorian students had already been living in Uganda for years when conflict escalated in 2015, and they became 'displacement by absence' (Kunz 1973). Sometimes, the financial support they used to receive from relatives in South Sudan dried up and so they were forced to move from Ugandan towns to the refugee settlements.

When violence would peak in Western Equatoria, a common response was first to wait. One day in Uganda, Isaac recounted his grandmother's teachings about war: 'If it starts, don't run because you don't know where the bullets are coming from. It is better to stay put, pack your vital things and wait for it to cool down.'[74] Once things 'cooled down' and there was a lull in the fighting, people would run to the nearest place they presumed to be safe: another neighbourhood, the surrounding 'bush,' the 'deep village,' relatives, or other towns. In our conversations, people referred to this as 'running within Yambio here' or 'running to the bush'.[75] Consider the account of this 42-year-old farmer interviewed at his home in Yambio:

> We have been displaced many times. Especially in 2017. My family and I used to run and stay with my sister in Hai Kuzee [neighborhood in Yambio] ... We would fear too much, and leave our houses to go somewhere for some days for safety.[76]

74 Conversation with Isaac, Entebbe, 15 May 2019.
75 For instance, in an interview in Yambio with a payam administrator on 11 May 2018.
76 Interiew with female farmer, Yambio, 11 May 2018.

During such 'running within', people would monitor whether things at home were improving or not. Most went back home as soon as anxious normality was restored, even as the war continued. UNHCR estimated that some two thirds of South Sudan's overall population was still 'at home'. However, our case illustrates that in South Sudan being 'at home' and identifying as someone who stayed, does not mean that one has not been also displaced by violence temporarily.

Among the 'stayees' or 'immobile' (both deceptive terms), some lacked the *ability* to leave: the 'involuntary immobile'. Lubkemann suggests that in Mozambique, such people were especially adversely affected by war and, in effect, 'displaced in place' (Lubkemann 2008, 194). This was undoubtedly true for some Western Equatorians. However, I found that there was also a group who stayed voluntarily. That is, they had had the *ability* to leave, but no *aspiration* to do so. In Western Equatoria a youth leader said: 'The ministers, directors, commissioners, and even those working with big NGOs have all transported their family members outside South Sudan.'[77] Crucially, these powerful people themselves typically returned after having brought their family out (see Section 6.6). These accounts disprove two stereotypes about conflict and migration: That people only stay in a warzone if they lack the *ability* to leave, and that 'stayees' did not move.

There was a considerable group of people who were internally displaced. From Western Equatoria some went to Yei or Juba, and some moved between Western Equatorian towns. But probably the largest internal displacement took the form of 'conflict-induced urbanisation' (Büscher 2020; K. Büscher 2018). In some instances, entire villages moved to the towns together.[78] Such conflict-induced urbanisation had a longer history in Western Equatoria, for instance when people had moved from rural (border) areas to the towns to escape the LRA (see Section 4.4.1) and, further back, when people fled the predatory slavers in the late 19th century (see Section 2.3). Some of those who were internally displaced, later crossed the border to Congo or Uganda.

Many South Sudanese households tactically split: with the (wife and) children in Uganda, and the parents or men staying in (or returning to) South Sudan. By 2019, UNICEF estimated that some 60 percent of the 1,2 million South Sudanese refugees in Uganda was below 18 years old (UNICEF 2019). Many women in the refugee settlement also took care of non-biological children. Often, those who stayed in South Sudan still earned better incomes than they anticipated in Uganda, and would support their families in the refugee settlement with 'reverse remittances' (Mazzucato 2010). A small group of politicians, business people, and aid workers would now lead 'transnational lives' (Portes 2003): crossing the border between South Sudan and Uganda (and sometimes beyond) at least once per year to juggle family and work. Many more people

77 Interview with 32-year-old youth leader, Yambio, 4 Apil 2017.
78 Interview with chairperson CLA, executive chief, Yambio, 5 April 2017.

were now part of 'transnational families': 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, i.e. 'familyhood', even across national borders (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

Many Western Equatorians preferred not to 'run from war' and become a refugee (again), and opted for one of the other mobility tactics to remain safe during the worst of the violence. Even those who aspired to go to Uganda, found that the complicated pathway to displacement was rife with dangerous and costly obstacles. Resultantly, only a minority of Western Equatorians had both the *aspiration* and *ability* to 'escape' to Uganda. Their lives will take centre stage in Chapter 7 and 8.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter started with a riddling chart: While millions of people have moved since the South Sudanese Civil War erupted in 2013, a majority has 'stayed'. This chapter drew on unique empirical material gathered over several years with both stayees and IDP's in South Sudan and with refugees in Uganda, to paint a detailed picture of the war in Western Equatoria (see Section 6.2), its consequences for everyday life (see Section 6.3), and people's subsequent decisions to stay or to go. Throughout, the chapter has related empirical findings of this case to the wider literature, and found some striking differences.

The civil war in Western Equatoria was a 'period of prolonged and heightened uncertainty, punctuated by violent events' (Lubkemann 2008). This chapter distinguished three phases of the war, and noted that most people left Western Equatoria in the third phase when the conflict divided Western Equatorians and Zande internally (see Section 6.2). Beyond the intermittent direct violence, the war also had countless other consequences: ordinary disputes became more violent, impunity increased, the state bureaucracy was hamstrung, agriculture collapsed, social order eroded, and many felt existential anxiety. These '*mashakil ketir*' (lots of problems) made life much less liveable – even if these problems were more acute for some people than for others (see Section 6.3). This multi-faceted collapse could be analysed as the 'structural' side of people's subsequent decisions to stay or run (see Section 6.4). Yet my data does not support the deterministic and mechanic language of 'determinants' of migration (Arango 2004; Haas 2011, 32:16), which struggles to explain non-movers or 'stayees' (A.H. Richmond 1993). The structural side helped to explain why people *might* migrate, but not why individuals actually *did* or *did not*.

For this reason, the longest section in this chapter is devoted to the agentic side of staying and moving, for which I have used Carling's 'aspiration-ability model' (see Section 6.5). I sketch how aspirations to stay or leave were shaped

by people's: 1) experience of the war; 2) political position; 3) economic effects; 4) perception of the war; 5) ontological orientation; and 6) their earlier experiences with war, displacement and return (see Section 6.5.1). Whereas the first three factors are commonly listed in the largely quantitative migration and political science scholarship on migration decisions, the latter three have received comparatively little attention.

Crucially, people aspired not just to *leave* Western Equatoria, but also to go to Uganda. And so Section 6.5.2 explored why people were attracted to Uganda over the geographically closer alternatives of CAR and DRC where Western Equatorians had been refugees in earlier wars. People's ability to act on any aspiration to migrate was shaped in part by their access to money and social networks (see Section 6.4.2) (Schon 2019), but also by their ability to 'blend in' by speaking languages and 'passing' for Ugandan or Congolese. In between structural and agentic factors, people's decisions were also informed by normative and moral frameworks at the intermediate level, which determined when moving was acceptable for whom (see Section 6.6). These frameworks have, to my knowledge, not been highlighted in earlier literature on conflict-induced migration and 'staying'.

Lastly, I have sketched some common pathways to staying or displacement (see Section 6.7). This account of displacement shows how blunt the policy categories of 'stayee', 'IDP', 'refugee' and 'returnee' are. A first problem with these terms, is that they suggest that the defining feature of a person is whether they migrated in response to war. Chiefs, ministers, farmers, housewives and fighters all become lumped together. This chapter, instead, has shown how and why people experience and perceived war differently, and consequently made different migration decisions. A second problem, is that these terms suggest a stasis: Someone *is* a stayee, which does not reflect people's continued mobility geographically and between these categories. A third problem is particular to the 'stayees'. Those who stayed in Western Equatoria had often also 'run within' multiple times, before returning home. Some of these stayees were 'involuntary immobile': they had aspired to leave, but were unable to do so (Carling 2002). Some of them were bitter: 'Those who run away are the ones having money to go' (see Section 6.5.2).

Yet not everyone who stayed in war-time Western Equatoria did so involuntarily. There were people who had had the ability to leave, but no aspiration to do so. This category of 'voluntary stayees' in civil war has so far received little attention in refugee and forced migration literature. These were often people who were expected (by themselves or wider society) to stay – men, the elderly, Avungara, chiefs – lest they lose status, positions and assets. They also wanted to send 'reverse remittances' from South Sudan to their families in the refugee settlements, and contrasted their status at 'home' with their expectation of 'sitting idle' in the refugee camp. This finding remarkably chimes with Carling's research in peaceful but poor Cape Verde: There 'most migrants come from the middle socio-economic strata' as the poor may *aspire*

to leave but have no *ability* to do so, while the wealthy have a low aspiration to leave (Carling 2002, 33). This is true, also, in war-affected Western Equatoria. Many of these more well-off Western Equatorians first brought their family to safety in Uganda, registered as 'refugee' there, and then returned 'home' to South Sudan alone. So the terms 'stayee' or 'immobile' are again not quite right.

In the life stories of my respondents, displacement was rarely a singular, straightforward move from one location to the next. 'Running' often took the form of considerable back-and-forth, trial and error and opportunity-driven improvisation. This kind of behaviour can better be understood when conflict-induced mobility is historicized and contextualized in earlier patterns of migration and the 'life-making' efforts of individuals and families (Leopold 2009; Kindersley 2016). Many Western Equatorians had lived in Uganda before, and some were even born there. Consider Chief Zaza who fled from South Sudan to join his Ugandan family-in-law (see Annex 1: Portraits). People's lives are about much more than conflict, loss and victimhood (L.H. Malkki 1995). It is important to see how, 'Personal histories of war, loss and displacement ... were intertwined with struggles to find schooling, get married, earn money, protect families and property, deal with difficult neighbours and relatives, redress and revenge grievances, and gain status or power' (Leonardi 2013, 144). In times of conflict, too, people aspire to better lives and use migration in service of such dreams.

In the introduction, this chapter proposed to use general migration theory to analyse the initiation of migration in a time of conflict. This chapter confirms that 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration are no binary phenomenon, but rather opposite ends of a spectrum. Some South Sudanese people left their homes at gunpoint, and walked to the nearest international border with nothing but the clothes on their back. However, Uganda is a long way from Western Equatoria so most people used motorized means, and chose not to do so while the bullets were flying. Migration theories and concepts – such as Carling's aspiration-ability model – are useful also for understanding refugee deliberations precisely because 'refugees' constitute a very diverse group (L.H. Malkki 1995; Edward 2007) (see Chapter 7). Although many Western Equatorian refugees experienced direct violence or persecution in South Sudan, most fled generalized violence and decline, and were simultaneously 'pushed' by the fear that things would get worse, and 'pulled' by hopes for education for their children. We can still say that these people were 'forced' to leave, but that does not preclude agency. People did not just leave South Sudan, but came to Uganda and not to nearby CAR or DR Congo. This is not meant to undermine the legitimacy of their protection claim, but rather to stress that also in times of conflict people weigh many factors in making the decision to stay or leave.

The episode of rupture and movement chronicled in this chapter, was in some ways a continuation of history and lived experience (see Chapters 2 and 3). Often, people's wartime survival tactics and migration decisions were

informed by inter-generational teaching (see Section 6.6). Malkki's propositions – that people have always been mobile, invented homelands, imagined nations, and constructed identities – are historically accurate for Western Equatoria (L. Malkki 1992). And yet this experience of flux and reconstruction, does not diminish some people's desire for it to be otherwise. Displacement, even if it is familiar, is often a traumatising and rupturing process. It is hard to overstate just how hopeful many people (including myself) had been about the independence of South Sudan in 2011, and about Western Equatoria in early 2015. After 'it started again' people – those who stayed as well as those who left – mourned the loss lives and property, but also the loss of this empowering sense of hope, sovereignty and unity. Many people had hoped that the next chapter of their histories would continue in a peaceful and united Western Equatoria. Yet now they found themselves once more divided, and scattered across various places old and new.