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'Threatening mini skirts' or 'agents of development': 'returnee' southern Sudanese women and their contributions to development

In September 2008 some 30 women and girls, mostly those who recently came back from displacement caused by the 22-year long civil war in Sudan, were rounded up and beaten by police in the southern Sudanese capital, Juba, for wearing tight trousers, mini-skirts and fitted t-shirts. Administrators condemned them for their "indecent clothing" and adherence to a "Nigger illicit culture" that was banned.[1] The cultural debate that erupted was not an isolated event as across southern Sudan there has been much controversy over the 'new cultures' brought by those returning from Khartoum, East Africa and elsewhere. As the *Sudan Tribune* noted, "[T]he incident[s] has[ve] revealed the dilemma south Sudanese are in after the peace in the region" (October 15, 2008). The author called on politicians to speak out on such social issues as dress codes, abortion and racism. He warned that hip-hop is cultural pollution for "undeveloped cities like Juba", leading children away from their studies:

> […] unregulated culture norms will destroy our social fabric. I believe special measures like Juba city ordinance[2] are needed to safe guard (sic) our social way of life and democracy. [….] We are all for change (positive one) but spreading hazardous behaviours like seen in Juba should be treated as a crime, because if not bring into an end ultimately it will infest the entire nation (ibid).

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[1] Several articles appeared in the local Sudanese press following the arrests in Juba (*Sudan Tribune*: October 9 and October 15, 2008) and on the SPLM website (SPLM, October 11, 2008). The Juba Commissioner's Local Order No. 4/2008 referred to a section of Social and Cultural Affairs of Local Government Act 2003 that crimininalised "all bad behaviours, activities and imported illicit cultures". The Order specifically mentioned "Niggers" in Juba County as potential targets, without explaining who qualified as a "Nigger".
[2] Juba Commissioner's Local Order No. 4/2008.

Return migration, be it in the after-math of conflicts, social, economic or political insecurity or in search of better livelihood options, is often depicted as beneficial to the migrants as well as their communities of origin. However, forced displacement and migration often imply dramatic gendered and generational changes both for the migrants and those who stay behind. Also, for those who were displaced during their early childhood or were born in exile, so called 'place of origin' or 'home' is constructed through tales of the elders and imagination rather than experience. Hence, 'return' is often to a place that migrants have little or no knowledge or experience of. Conceptualising war-time displacement as a catalyst of social change, this paper explores the processes and impact of the 'return' of the displaced southern Sudanese Nuer[3] women in the aftermath of the recent wars (1983-2005). It focuses in particular on the experiences of emplacement and contributions that 'returnee' girls and women bring to the communities in the place of origin. Forced migration and displacement due to conflict produces particular changes in gender and generational relations resulting in new configurations of social relations in general due to its abrupt nature and often traumatic gendered experiences (see Grabska 2010). Hence, emplacement processes in the context of settling-in 'after-return' will entail particular challenges for the gender and generational relations of those who had been displaced and those who had stayed bind. This paper is based on ethnographic research in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and following the returning displaced Nuer women and men to southern Sudan carried out between 2006-2007.

In this paper, I focus on two main questions. First, I consider the local meanings of 'development' examined through the eyes of Nuer women and men, both stayees and returnees. The concepts of 'home' and 'development' as imagined, lived and (re)produced are of key importance in the continuing shaping and re-shaping of gender identities, ideologies and institutions. Second, I discuss the perceptions of and actual

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[3] Nuer are the second largest ethnic group in southern Sudan. They reside mainly in Western and Easter Upper Nile regions, bordering north of Sudan and Ethiopia, respectively. In the past, the life of the Nuer population centred around agriculture and cattle. As agro-pastoralists, their livelihoods were subjected to seasonal migration between the village and cattle camps (see more Evans-Pritchard 1941, 1956; Hutchinson 1996).

contributions that 'returnee' women and girls make to their communities after return. In the context of after return emplacement, some 'returnee' women and girls are perceived as agents of development bringing education, valued 'foreign' experiences and knowledge. At the same time, their attempts at greater autonomy, freedoms and gender equality are often judged as threatening for the local gender order. In this way, the paper aims to elaborate on the interlinkages between social relations, gender categories and identity politics and migration processes. It demonstrates how gender (and age) are constraining concepts for women (and men), and how emplacement processes in the context of return migration are both experienced and perceived differently by women and men. This paper points to the particular challenges that return migration poses for the gender and age power hierarchies within the local communities. These findings are located within the wider debates on links between migration, development and gender, and particularly relevant to the African context.

CONTEXT, METHODS AND CONCEPTS

The context of this paper is the aftermath of civil wars in southern Sudan. Sudan has been at war for over twenty years, with numerous displacements, and conflicts affecting the population. The political and civil turmoil that erupted in southern Sudan as a result of the conflict which restarted in 1983 claimed over two million lives and resulted in one of the largest displacement in the world. Over five million people were internally displaced and another 500,000 sought refuge in neighbouring countries (ICG 2002). Signing of a peace agreement in January 2005 between the Government in Khartoum and the SPLA – the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) – made possible the ongoing repatriation of populations to southern Sudan, both spontaneous and organised by UNHCR. In the context of the January 2011 self-determination referendum in southern Sudan, this paper attempts to shed light on the strategies of women and girls in transforming, building and contributing to their communities.

When I first arrived in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, the official repatriation to Sudan organised by UNHCR and supported by the Tri-Partite Agreement (2006) between the

governments of Kenya and Sudan and UNHCR was underway. Trucks decorated with UNHCR and New Sudan flags, loaded with luggage and filled with Sudanese, mainly young men, were leaving Kakuma every week for the border with Sudan. The Nuer (and Dinka) were mainly transported by air as their 'homes' were far from the border, with small 50-seaters carrying returnees to their old/new homeland. I followed several repatriation convoys and witnessed preparation for flights in Kakuma and reception in southern Sudan. Some repatriated with support of the international organisations, others by themselves or with support of the southern Sudanese government.

UNHCR's repatriation was part of a regional repatriation operation. By January 2010, according to UNHCR's statistics, some 331,000 refugees from the region had been repatriated to Sudan, including 174,000 assisted by UNHCR.[4] During my stay in Kakuma, repatriation was slow, with only 1,800[5] individuals repatriated in 2006, but it picked up during 2007 and 2008, with some 15,000 returning to Sudan through UNHCR (UNHCR 2009). By the beginning of 2010, out of 75,000 registered Sudanese in 2005, only 8,000 remained in Kakuma. Some 47,000 either returned to Sudan by themselves or moved like many of the research participants to other towns in Kenya or Uganda. It is estimated that some 25,000 southern Sudanese refugees still remain in Kenya, mostly living in urban centres.

I followed the lives of the southern Sudanese Nuer 'returnees' and stayees in a small market centre of Ler, located in the oil reach area on the border with northern Sudan. Ler, a small county headquarter in the Unity state, Western Upper Nile Nuer region, bordering northern Sudan (according to local estimates, a population of some 5,000 people with over 80% being displaced during the wars), was a perfect example of the contemporary dilemmas facing southern Sudan, as any country emerging from long-term conflict. Ler was a place of 'returnees' – a melting pot of those who were displaced to different parts of Sudan and across the borders and who have undergone different experiences during the war. Daily I witnessed people coming back from Khartoum, Kenya, Uganda,

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[4] http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/southsudan?page=news&id=4991a8de2 (accessed April 28, 2011)
[5] Among them, there were some 850 Nuer (UNHCR Kenya 2008).

Ethiopia, other parts of Sudan, even from America, Australia, Canada and elsewhere. In fact, in Ler, or in the Western Upper Nile region in general, it was quite difficult to identify people who had not moved during the wars. Ler county was especially affected by the wars which resulted in almost complete displacement of the population, with varying length of displacement. There were many who were displaced more than once, and went to different places during the war before eventually coming 'home' to Ler. During my 10-month stay in Ler, I observed how the place was being made into an inhabited space. New *duels* and *tukuls* (traditional grass and mud houses) and *luaks* (barns) were being constructed on daily basis, new businesses were opening up in the market, traders were coming from all corners of Sudan, goods and people (mainly returnees, but also others searching for business opportunities) were arriving from the north of the country and East Africa as transportation links were improving due to the Chinese and Malaysian oil companies excavating resources in the area. Ler was booming and the influx of the returning displaced population and construction of homes and local administration offices were signs of peace.

I carried out a multi-sited fieldwork following the lives, trajectories, stories and movements of the displaced populations from Kakuma refugee camp to southern Sudan. In addition to observation, participation, semi-structured interview and group discussions, I traced the experiences of the displaced and stayees through their narratives collected through family life stories.

Return migration, emplacement and development

Over the last 10 years international institutions and organizations such as the World Bank, the regional development banks, the European Union and various United Nations offices has begun to see migration as a remedy to various development problems. In Central America, the example of El Salvador gave rise to the first UNDP Human Development Country Report to apply a human development approach to migration and to seeing El Salvador's highly mobile population as a fundamental development resource (PNUD 2005). In the 2009 global Human Development Report entitled "Overcoming

Barriers: Human Mobility and Development (UNDP 2009), the migration-development nexus went mainstream. In these and other similar publications the *impact* of international migration on development have revolved around remittances, their growth rate and the scope for making a more effective use of these financial flows.

Whether highlighted as the new development mantra (Kapur 2004) or dismissed as a short-lived potential, policy discourses have tended to focus on the *financial* qualities of remittances, often ignoring more complex scholarly insights and migrant perspectives (Levitt and Sørensen 2004) as well as the broader global contexts in which migration is embedded. There has been a considerable amount of research and policy work undertaken on the links between migration and development. This paper draws on the findings of research which details the potential economic, social, political and cultural contributions mobility may bring to both migrants and their communities of origin (e.g. Nyberg-Soersen et al. 2002, Ratha 2003). More recently, some studies have focused on the role of forced migrants on the development in their countries of origin (Fagen 2006; Lindley 2007, 2009; Omata 2009). Studies on the impact of remittances on the countries of origin (double the size of aid) have led to a general consensus among the international community that migration can be a positive force for development, with research findings suggesting that the economic power structures associated with remittance-led development may thus have a profound role in shaping the structures of states emerging from conflict (Ratha 2003; Fagen 2006). As some have argued, migration offers opportunities to access sustainable livelihoods that may simply not exist in the community of origin, leading Nyberg-Soerensen and Van Hear to argue that "the most important resource for the development of less developed countries (LDCs) is people connected by transnational networks" (Nyberg-Soersen et al. 2002: 24).

Migrant contributions to development are increasingly acknowledged - and sometimes even used in political campaigns directed towards maintaining migrants' loyalty towards their homelands – but the assumptions underlying the study of the asymmetrical transfers that accompany migration continue to reflect the interests of the Global North (Glick Schiller and Faist 2009), and ignore the ways in which migration has been both

securitisized and developmentalized (Isotalo 2009). More critical studies, however, warn of the diverse experiences of migration and the potential social, including gender, inequalities that migration inflicts on both migrants and those who stay behind (INSTRAW REF, REF).

To clarify what I mean by return and emplacement, I follow the definition of 'return' and repatriation proposed by Hammond (2004a) which seems more open to accommodating the continuum of movement and displacement framework. Hammond defines return as varying both qualitatively and in terms of its duration, and it should be understood as a process by which a returnee establishes the social, political, and economic ties that define him/her in a meaningful way as a member of a community whose primary ties are to the country or region (but not necessarily the village or city) of origin, rather than to the location of exile. She describes the process of integration as involving the creation of a new code of citizenship, where power and legitimacy are redefined both by pressure from above (by political leaders) as well as negotiation from below (within the community) (2004a: 188).

I build my definition of emplacement around the concept of Appadurai's (1996) 'locality production'[6] and extend it to include the re-negotiation and creation of new set of social norms, including gender relations, which so far has been rarely addressed by the studies focusing on return of refugees. I argue that displacement might result not only in a loss but also might create an opportunity to construct new social norms in the context of interactions and integration processes between 'returnees' and those who had stayed behind. Hence, such an approach might provide an avenue of problematising 'return' as part of a process for both those moving and those who had stayed behind, so far little explored in forced migration literature.

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[6] In order to conceptualize the process of emplacement Appadurai's (1996) 'locality production' might be useful here. Appadurai defines locality as a 'phenomenological quality', or 'dimension' of social life, to be distinguished from 'neighbourhood', which he defines as an 'actually existing' social form in which locality is 'realized' (1996: 178-179).

The existing literature on the link between return migration (especially in the context of conflict-induced displacement) and development remains relatively gender-blind, without paying specific attention of the differentiated experiences of women and men migrants in the return processes. Emplacement (settling in) in Ler was performed through a myriad of activities such as accessing land, building a house, farming, finding a 'job', cooking, reconnecting with and visiting friends and relatives, and taking part in community events. They were experienced and employed differently by women and men, young and old, depending on their access to social networks, and experiences of and during displacement. In addition, emplacement was linked to the practice, negotiation and (re)production of gender relations, including starting a marriage process. It also entailed being and becoming (again) a Nuer, a congruent identity that linked the personal experiences of 'place' and *cieng* (community/home) to wider gendered social and communal obligations, rights and networks of mutual support. Akin to the emplacement process studied by Hammond among the Ethiopian returnees in Ada Bai (2004), emplacement of the Nuer involved both material and moral aspects of practice (Migdal 1988). For the Nuer, it was often a dialectic between gendered practices and representations by returnees and those who had stayed behind that were turning an unfamiliar or changed place into a familiar safe 'home'. These places were, however, both experienced and emplaced differently by old and young, women and men. In this paper, I focus specifically on the experiences of returnee girls and women.

Local meaning of 'development' and 'settling-in'

Before I turn into the discussion of the experiences of returnee girls and women and their contributions to development – it is necessary to understand the meaning that Nuer women and men attached to 'development'. For the Nuer women and men, development was designated as '*wa nhiam*' – which signifies to move forward. Nyakuol, a widow in her forties who had been displaced for 15 years in Ethiopia and then in Kakuma, described changes in the refugee camp in Kakuma and later after return in Sudan: "*Ke Kakuma, duëlgora*, UN, *duëlkuoth*, women rights *a thin. Gaatkon wa nhiam, entedi, nyiiri ke dholi nuäri ti ngac ke ngoani, teke* education. *Ke Kakuma, cieng mi pai ben* (in

Kakuma, a new custom/mode of life arrived). *Ke Sudan, nei ti naath ngude* (In Sudan, the Nuer are still [behind]).["7] Nuer often interpreted a new custom of life as arrival of 'modernity', 'development' and 'civilisation' into their lives. They were two diverse interpretations of 'development' – one linked to the structural 'development' – with arrival of services, infrastructure, but also government laws and gender equality. The other interpretation was linked to personal identities - English words 'development and 'civilised' were often used by young Nuer to distinguish their new identities and modes of behaviour from those who had stayed behind in Nuerland. The Nuer metaphor often used by my respondents to describe these 'new' identities was '*nei ti cike ker'*. This signifies people who have awoken and have seen light, which many of the Nuer associated with literacy, Christianity, awareness of human rights and gender equality. The Nuer interpreted it as a distinction that produced new aspirations and identities among women and men and impacted conjugal relations. For others however the gender equality discourses represented a threat to the established order – *cieng nuara* – a type of development that was bringing destruction to the 'local culture' (community).

CHANGING LANDSCAPES OF 'HOME'

Return migration of the displaced Nuer to Ler was taking place within a changed landscape of their 'homes' and their own selves. Changes took place 'at home' with the areas being subjected to fighting between the northern and southern armies as well as to the internal conflicts over oil resources among the Nuer themselves (see Hutchinson 1996' Johnson 2006; Grabska 2010). Post-conflict landscape was marked by general impoverishment of the population, with burned houses, dispersed households, stolen or killed cattle. Moreover, the emerging southern Sudanese state and its growing administrative structures were changing the socio-political landscapes of the communities. This was coupled with the emerging discourses of women rights and gender equality in the national law often influenced by donors' agendas as well as women's social movement. This included new provisions for gender equality in the

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[7] "In Kakuma, there are schools, UN, churches, women rights. Our children go forward/progress. Now Nuer girls and boys are knowledgeable and educated. In Kakuma, a new Nuer custom/mode of value has arrived. Things are done differently from the past."

southern Sudanese interim constitution and gender equality guarantees in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA 2005). Influx of returnees with diverse experiences and visions coming from different places of displacement brought about debates within the Nuer communities of the future of *cieng nuara* (Nuer village, culture, community) and what it meant to be a Nuer. This resulted often in power struggles among different visions of the society and the southern Sudanese communities.

Return migration of displaced populations and their emplacement processes sparked debates around changing social norms and introduction of new habits that the returnee were bringing with themselves. The incidents of arresting 'dangerous trousers and threatening mini-skirts' represent: the struggle between holding on to a strong culture and tradition while trying to embrace development and a 'new' lifestyle often brought by returnees. My neighbours, friends and passer-bys were preoccupied with the transforming social relations, especially changes in the behaviour of the youth, contestations around appropriate behaviour of being a 'good' girl (*nyal ma goa*) or a 'respectable' woman and a 'real Nuer' man (*wur nuära*). Contestations around gender identities were part of settling-in process for women and men returnees who often referred to *nyuuri piny* as 'becoming a real Nuer women/man'. Another gendered element of emplacement process was through marriage and the establishment of own households, which led to becoming an adult and 'local' *raan* – citizen and human.

The social and cultural landscape of settling-in and 'emplacement' for returning populations was dominated by reminiscences of war and militarisation of the Nuer social life. Meanwhile, the accelerating changes in social, and gender in particular, relations that increasingly perplexed the contemporary Nuer were initiated already during the colonial times and first civil war (see Hutchinson 1990, 1996). Wars and internal conflict brought dramatic changes to gender and generational relations. During the war, militarisation of the Nuer communities meant that majority of the young men and boys joined voluntarily or forcibly the rebel forces. Violence (including rapes, kidnapping of women and children, purposeful killing of women and children) not only between the northerners and the southerners but also among the southern communities, and the Nuer communities

themselves led to the reconfiguration of gender relations (see Grabska 2010, Hutchins 1999, Hutchinson and Jok 1999). The emergence of hyper-masculinities due to the power of the gun was coupled with the emergence of independent women households since men either killed or joined the rebel movements. Moreover, as migration dynamics were gendered, men enjoyed better access to migration across borders while majority of women either stayed behind or were displaced internally often settling in the outskirts of Khartoum.

While 'homes' and these who had stayed behind had changed, so did these who were displaced. Those who settled in refugee camps experienced also changes in gender and generational relations due to exposure to education, gender equality and human rights programming of international aid organisations in the camp and experienced the multi-cultural environment of the camp population. Those who had spent their childhood and youth in the camps have been socialised differently from those who spent shorter time in the camp experienced their childhood and youth through war in Sudan. Thus, the type of 'development' that returning population were bringing to their 'home' in Ler varied also according to their war-time experiences and the place of their displacement.

The rest of the presentation focuses on the social and gender aspects of emplacement and settling-in through the practice and negotiation of gender relations, and in particular gender identities, norms and marriage process. It attempts to provide some answers to the following questions: How are 'returning' and settling-in experienced by girls and women and how 'return' is intertwined with gender relations, identity and self? How are perceived 'returnees' by those who had stayed behind? What are the contributions to development that 'returnee' women and girls bring in terms of changing local gender relations concepts?

GENDERED EMPLACEMENT OF GIRLS: THREATENING MINI-SKIRTS AND TRANSFORMING GENDER IDEAS
Gendered *cieng* and *nyuuri-piny*

Gladis, a 17-year old daughter of a local commander spent 15 years in Kenya and came back to Ler in April 2006. When I ran into her at a water pump in Ler in January of 2007, she recounted her arrival in Ler:

> When I arrived in Ler, I thought I would not survive here. Most of my life, I spent in Kenya and didn't know the life in *cieng nuära* [Nuer village, home, community]. I didn't know how people were behaving and what I was supposed to do as a girl. I spent all my life in schools and had no idea about the responsibilities of a Nuer girl. At the beginning I refused to do anything, but then I realised that I could only survive if I learned the life of the village. I slowly learned how to carry water on my head, look at me, I am a professional now! I learned how to make traditional foods such as *walwal*, *kisra*, *akop*; how to grind sorghum on a stone and how to serve people. At first, I didn't even enjoy the local food, I didn't like the taste. I missed *chapatti* [Kenyan corn flatbread]. After a while I adjusted and now my life has become much better. The one problem that I had was lack of job. I had nothing to do apart from the work at home, because despite being an educated girl it is difficult to find work here. People don't want you to work outside the house. There is no freedom for girls here, and girls are valued only when they are married and bring bridewealth.

For long-displaced girls coming 'home' to Nuerland was a fundamental challenge. They had to learn to (re)negotiate their greater space and freedoms gained in displacement. The process of *beben cieng* (homecoming) and *nyuuri piny* (settling-in) involved "learning to be a *nyal nuära* (Nuer girl)". It required following what 'the locals do' and becoming acquainted with local customs, obligations and the responsibilities considered female in *cieng nuära.* Gendered emplacement involved (re)negotiation of self, gender identities, aspirations and practices.

To understand the experiences of *nyuuri-piny* in Ler, we have to first consider the meaning of 'home' for the Nuer women and men. *Cieng*, signifying home/community/village for the Nuer women and men is a gendered space and is experienced differently through the performance and realisation of masculinities and femininities. The underlying gender ideology embedded in the creation of *cieng* through marriage influences the different social construction of women and men, girls and boys within the 'home' and 'household' space (Hutchinson 1996). The visual and lived representation of this difference is practiced in separate spheres of life within the household, whereby men and boys sleep traditionally together with the animals in a barn, *luak,* whereas women, girls and smaller children live in a

house, *duël* (Evans-Pritchard 1941; Hutchinson 1980). Their different spatial and social positions determine their responsibilities and status in the household and the society at large, decision-making, access to resources and entitlements (*cuong* – rights). Formation of an own household through marriage and procreation relates to the passage to full adulthood. Through shared division of responsibilities and procreation, the identities of men and women are socially intertwined and likewise, their identities are interwoven with *cieng*.

Based on the feminist analysis of household (see Kabeer 1998, Whitehead 1981), I elaborate on the meaning of *cieng*, and home, as a site of a household. Creating ones own household, *cieng*, through marriage is a critical point for Nuer femininities and masculinities. Girls and women referred to two ideas of *cieng* each representing different stage in their passage to adulthood. Nyayena, a young returnee woman, explained*:* "*Cieng, home, is a place where I was born. This is when I was a girl in my father's home. Now, I am married, I am ciek* [woman] *and I am in my own home, in my husband's cieng.*" Through marriage, transfer to husband's house and subsequent procreation, a girl (*nyal*) becomes a woman (*ciek*), gains rights to property in the house and ability to control domestic work and resources through her own cultivation.

Confronting, negotiating, resisting and conforming to gender order

The emplacement processes for the majority of returning populations were taking place within the framework of family reunification. The coming together of the dispersed family members demonstrates other dilemmas of households fragmented by war. NyaSunday, a teenager, who was in Kakuma and finished seven grades of primary school found it difficult to communicate with her father, Bol, after 'return'. For 15 years Bol had been in Khartoum without any contact with his daughter. When they started living together in a village nearby Ler in 2007, NyaSunday was often frustrated:

> These people do not understand that we, the ones who were in Kakuma, are different. My father insists that I get married because he is in need of cattle. But I want to continue with my education, I am not a cattle-camp *nyal nuära* [Nuer girl]. I have

changed, I am modern town girl and I want to finish my school before I get married. Our lives were too different during these years. We do not understand each other.

These experiences and narratives show that displacement as a process is irreversible and 'home' is not static. The irreversibility of displacement and its impact on social relations, and gender relations in particular, were discussed by women and men seeking to reconcile 'old' modes of livelihoods with 'new' ways learned in the places of displacement. For those who were displaced as children and grew up in refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya and elsewhere, going to southern Sudan was part of their ongoing migratory trajectory. They experienced and adapted to life in different places which resulted often in changes in gender identities and ideologies. Moving to Nuerland was filled with anxiety. Although they were supposedly 'coming home', southern Sudan was a place that they barely remembered, let alone were they familiar with its lifestyles. For them it required learning the place anew.

The story of Gladis as well as experiences of other young women between the age of 14 and 20 who spent most of their lives displaced demonstrates that they had the hardest time to settle-in. These girls and young women were perceived and saw themselves as 'different' and felt like strangers. Most of them were educated, single and more liberal in their behaviour and attitudes than those who stayed behind. In this way, they were 'different' from their local age-mates, who were mostly illiterate, married and conservatively segregated from the community. Within the Nuer gender ideology, girls are constructed differently within the space of 'home' and household with specific obligations, limited freedoms assigned to them and socialised to be subordinate to their male relatives. In Kakuma, some of these rules were relaxed due to human rights and gender programming, access of girls to education and distance from 'home' and 'real Nuer culture'. For displaced girls, *beben cieng* meant confrontation with the strict interpretation of what is considered to be a 'good, obedient and respectable' behaviour of Nuer girls.

'Returnee' girls' contestations of their social status within the community and the household was represented by their embodied resistance of speech, dress-code, social

interactions and special mobility. Returnee girls, especially those from East Africa, were visible on the dirt roads of Ler. They wore tight trousers and mini-skirts, had colourful hair extensions, played sports with boys and young men, conversed freely with their male friends, moved around the village and often travelled by themselves to far away places. They also had little idea about the Nuer girls' tasks including milking cows, making traditional foods and grinding sorghum. In Kakuma, the staple food was different and was provided by the UN, usually already grinded. Returnee girls were also the only girls who were attending higher classes in school as the rest of the local girls were either not sent to school or were already married. They were bringing new ideas of 'development' some of which were not appreciated by those who had stayed behind. The behaviour of returnee girls or young women was usually frowned upon especially by local women. My host who stayed most of her life in Ler commented:

> Look at Nyariek [a returnee girl from Kakuma], she thinks she is a man. She is not behaving like a good girl. *Jen wa loorä* [she roams loose], wears bad clothes and talks with men. My daughter, Nyamuc, she is a good girl. She stays at home, does the [domestic] work, does not go out unless to fetch water or charcoal and does not socialise with boys. She shows *pöc* [respect/shyness]. These Kakuma girls are *jiäke* [bad]!

Comments about the 'inappropriate' behaviour of Kakuma girls were common in daily conversations among my neighbours and guests. They felt that these girls were introducing 'foreign' culture that was threatening their system of values. They saw them as 'loose' and 'bad' behaving inappropriately and bringing shame to the family. Returnee girls were the group most ostracised, policed and looked at with disdain by those who stayed behind. In her study among northern Sudanese communities in Cairo, Anita Fábos (2008) used the concept of propriety, *adab*, to describe the moral stands and attitudes among Sudanese migrants. For them to be a real Sudanese meant to subscribe to certain moral, ethical and aesthetic values, to have *adab*. For the local Nuer women in Ler, confining to their interpretation of *adab* meant being able to acquire reputation of *nyal nuära goa* (good Nuer girl) in the community. Through expressing *pöc* (shyness/respect) and *dual* (fear), girls were to gain respect, status and enjoy good prospects for a profitable marriage.

Moral panic that was raised by returnee girls' dress-code and behaviour resulted in an official policing of 'mini-skirts and trousers'. The Ler commissioner outlawed the fashion of trousers and mini-skirts and called on girls to behave 'morally'. References to 'morality' and bringing 'bad social behaviour' (*cieng jiäke*) were common during Sunday services in the Catholic and Presbyterian churches. Some of my Kakuma friends were beaten up and arrested by local police for wearing shorter skirts. I often witnessed local men and women scuffing at girls' clothing. Some of the more conservative approaches to dress-code came also due to Arabisation and cultural adaptation of Nuer displaced to Khartoum. They adopted more strict fashion codes, with women wearing Arabic dresses with *tob* (scarf covering the dress from top to toes) and head-covers.

In the words of Hodgson and McCurdy, women and girls are labelled 'bad' or 'loose' because "they disrupt the web of social relations that define and depend on them as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, and lovers" (2001: 6). The conversations with elders confirmed that early socialisation was a vital component in the creation of the ideal girl/wife. The values of respect for and obedience to their fathers and later husbands were instilled in girls from an early age. Girls, like Nyamuc, were labelled *nyal ma gua* (good girl) when they maintained their subordinate position, through respecting the authority of their fathers, later their husbands and sons. Similarly to Tutsi and Ha women studied by Lovett in Western Tanzania, Nuer females "learned that their subordination was a life-long condition" (2001: 53). They demonstrated respect through carrying out their domestic duties, not speaking back to their fathers and husbands, agreeing to marriages arranged by their fathers (and mothers) and not 'roaming around freely'. When they challenge the criteria of 'respectability', like Nyariek and other returnee girls, even though this term is loosely defined and changeable, they go against the dominant, or hegemonic, configuration of gender, in other words, "the norms of "appropriate" gender roles, relations, responsibilities, and behaviour" (Hodgson and McCurdy 2001: 6). Passed on through internalisation and socialisation, bestowed through references to 'our culture' (*cieng nuära*) and 'tradition', these gendered norms become sources and thresholds of local moral and social orders. As in other communities, women were often equated with

the bearers of 'national' or community' culture (Yuval Davis 1997, REF). When Nuer women overstep these gendered boundaries, they threaten the establishment of the moral foundations of the community. This is specially feared by those, men and some (mostly stayee) women, who have most at stake to loose when the norms are changed. This was the type of 'development' or '*wa nhiam*' that was seen as threatening to the local Nuer gender order.

Another area of adjustment for returnee girls involved their awareness and exercise of freedoms which they acquired through human rights and gender-mainstreaming programmes in Kakuma. The lack of freedoms in Nuerland was harshly felt by most of them. These constraints were also recognised by their male relatives and other returnee men. Amaring, a brother of NyaSunday, who spent most of their lives in Ethiopia and Kenya, expressed his concerns:

> Girls here have no rights and no freedom. They are punished for wearing trousers and mini-skirts, not allowed to play sports and don't go to school. Their only right here is to get married and do domestic work. They are very tired as they are overworked. It is hard for my sister and others like her who were in Kenya. They are not used to this.

Despite the new southern Sudanese government commitment to gender equality and equal legal rights enshrined in the CPA and the interim constitution, the local customary practice prevailed. According to the local interpretation of girls' position in the community, they are not allowed to speak for themselves. For example, during one of the court sessions in Ler, I witnessed a case of divorce of one of the returnee girls. When she attempted to present her views, a male chief confronted her: "*You are a girl, you have no right to talk here. It is your father who will decide; nyeri thiele wec* [girls have no brains]". This was one of the many reminders for these 'modern educated empowered Kakuma girls' that in Nuerland their social status was different. Caught up between 'tradition' and 'modernity', yet being aware of their legal rights required painful re-adjustment to a more inferior gender status after return. They had to learn how to manoeuvre their constrained position and limited access to freedoms.

Nyakuol, a returnee widow, complained about the situation in Nuerland:

> Here in Ler, life for women is different [than in Kakuma]; there is no human rights [for women]. When you disagree with your husband, he will just beat you and even if you complain to the court or the police, they will laugh at you. Your neighbour, Nyakuma, complained about her cousin beating her, and the police wanted to put her in jail. These people here are still [backwards]. They have no idea how to treat women. They say they give us 25% [representation according to CPA], but in fact, they are the ones who always talk in meetings. There are no women in the Ler administration, and the ones that are there, are wives of commanders and big people. When they give a woman a job, they just want you to do domestic work, like serving food, cooking, washing and sweeping compound. The life for us women here is more difficult, because we learned in Kakuma that as humans we have rights and we are equal but here, the women are still behind. For the girls it is hard, because they were free in Kakuma to attend school, to participate in the community, but here, they are just expected to cook and do the domestic chores.

Girls (and women) who were displaced for a long time experienced 'return' and settling-in as a loss of freedom and rights. Hence for them, return migration or movement to Sudan implied regress in 'development' – both personal and structural. They often reminisced about their lives in Kakuma with rights to education, greater freedoms to move around and interact with other girls and boys. They also had less domestic obligations which they shared with their brothers and other male relatives. "*In Kakuma, our brothers used to cook and help us with domestic work. But here, they say that they are men, and they cannot go to the kitchen,*" commented Gladis. They also enjoyed greater freedoms in choosing boy-friends and husbands. *Beben cieng* to Nuerland meant entering stricter community and family obligations and responsibilities and more subordinate position, and hence undermining their newly gained privileges.

Gendered emplacement after 'return' for displaced Nuer girls and women signified several challenges to their gender identities and rights altered during wars and displacement. The 'modern' characteristics of womanhood acquired in Kakuma, including access to education, greater freedoms of inter-gender socialisation, movement, dress-code, decision-making, leadership and participation in the community activities were (re)negotiated in the context of relations with those who had stayed behind or were

displaced to Khartoum. Perceived as loose and prostitutes, some aspects of returnee women and girls' behaviour was seen as threatening to the local gender order. Gendered emplacement implied (re)negotiation, adaptation and contestation of gender norms, identities and self in the context of confrontation of diversification of gender identities produced as a result of diverse experiences of wars and displacement. Returnee populations, however, were also bringing in new social and gender relations ideas, which manifested itself in changing notions of gender relations among the communities who had stayed behind, a contribution to the social 'development'.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF *WA NHIAM* (DEVELOPMENT)

Returnee girls and young women were bringing new concepts of femininities and challenging the local and militarised forms of womanhood. Their subtle and more visible actions of daily practice of 'gendered self' were forms of ambiguous resistance to the existing gender inequalities within their own communities, without openly challenging the hegemonic patriarchal system (see Cowan 1990). Educated, outspoken, seen as good cooks, being able to take better care of children and contributing to the community through their ability to find paid work, 'returnee' girls and women were expanding the roam of possibilities and freedoms for women. Notwithstanding their reputation as 'loose' and 'bad', they were often seen as desirable marriage candidates due to their education and ability to contribute to the household. Hence, their positive 'values' and potential contributions to *wa-nhiam* of the family, household and wider community were hence acknowledged.

Despite constraints and local shaming, returnee girls and young women continued to challenge the limited gender status that they occupied in Nuerland. Some of them played volleyball and socialised with men, others continued to go to the market, sometimes spoke at public meetings and expressed their views in the court. Surprisingly, the returnee fashion and 'roaming around free' were becoming popular among the younger local population in Ler. With influx of returnees to Ler, there were more girls wearing 'inappropriate clothing'. In fact, the most desirable items in the market were jeans. When

I offered to go shopping with my host's daughter, 13-year old Nyamuc who spent most of her life in Ler immediately wanted to get a pair of jeans. At a wedding of a young returnee man that I attended, the bride and her bridesmaid (who never left Ler) were both wearing jeans outfits and red hair-extensions. Although returnee girls had to confine to some extent to the local fashion and behaviour requirements, their own preferences were bringing change to the local customs. During my ten-month stay in Ler, there were increasing numbers of girls riding bicycles, playing sports, attending school, going to local 'disco' and moving around 'freely'. Cosmetics also became desirable 'modern' items among locals and Kakuma women were making profit on selling soaps, body lotions and hair-extensions that they brought from Kenya. On my trips to Nairobi, they often asked me to bring new supplies. Fashion and bodily expressions were seen as social contributions to 'development' of the local communities and turning them more into 'East African' and Western standards experienced in displacement or seen on television. These embodied everyday forms of resistance, as compared to the forms of peasant resistance advanced by James Scott in *Weapons of the Weak*, were manifestations of girls' and women's agency and power that they were willing and able albeit within constrained limits to exercise (see Scott 1985, Ortner 1995).

Returnee (young) women were also working as teachers, nurses, community organisers and bringing up children differently. Returnee girls were promoting the idea of schooling among the local girls. Nyakuma, my host and other women who stayed behind in Sudan often commented on the goodness of education for girls:

> When they know something, they will be able to be more respected by the husband and manage independently even if the husband does not support them. I wish I could have had this chance before. These Kakuma girls are better off this way.

Under the influence of other returnee girls (and maybe mine), Nyakume, decided to join adult education programme ran by the Catholic Church. She insisted that her 13-year old daughter Nyamuc continues education in the Ler primary school. They often asked me to help them with homework and quiz them in mathematics and English. Nyamuc took

example of other returnee girls and became determined to succeed in school. Despite her numerous domestic tasks, she was diligent in her homework. "*I want to be like your friend Nyayena, who knows how to read and write, speaks thok khaway* [foreign language, ie English*] and has a job*," Nyamuc explained her learning zeal quoting an example of my returnee friend.

Education for girls and women was also being slowly recognised by local (male) authorities. On a visit to the Ler commissioner, Nyayena, a returnee woman directly him asked for land, a job and financial support. She was outspoken and when she saw a mattress in the compound of the commissioner, she inquired if he would give it to her: "*I am a returnee and need to a bed for my daughter and myself. Can you assist me? Once I get a job, I will pay you back*". The commissioner smiled and told me:

> Returnee women [and girls] are very different from those who stayed behind. They have been educated and they are not afraid to ask for their rights [entitlements]. They have no fear, are able to represent the community and support their families. They are bringing development for women here.

Similarly to other 'wayward', 'dangerous', 'wicked' and 'vagabond' in Africa (see Cornwall 2001; Lovett 2001; Hodgson and McCurdy 2001), young returnee women in Nuerland in their 'transgressive' behaviour were pivotal in transforming gender relations and other domains of social life. This was not only through the adoption of new fashion styles among the local girls, but also through their desire to go to school. 'Somehow educated', as they referred to themselves, returnee girls and young women enjoyed greater ability to access paid jobs, communicate with outsiders, raise issues with the authorities, expand their choices over husbands and (re)negotiate patriarchal bargain within the household (Kandiyoti 1988, Kabeer 1998). Despite the decline of their privilege as compared to the freedoms that girls and women enjoyed in Kakuma, they manoeuvred their limited spaces in Nuerland. Their mothers, and often fathers, who also spent substantial time in displacement supported the quest of girls for further education. Several returnee women sent their daughters to schools in Bentiu and often talked about the importance of education for girls. "*When they know something, their lives will be better. They will not be easily abused by men. Girls who are illiterate they just accept the*

beating, but girls who know something are respected by their husbands and in the community. They can also be more autonomous," commented Nyajung.

Although seen as 'loose', 'bad' and 'immoral', returnee girls (and women) were expanding concepts of femininities, women's positions and gender norms. Similarly to 'wicked women's role in the reconfiguration of gender relations in Africa in Hodgson and McCurdy (2001), 'loose' returnee girls were agents of change in the Nuer communities. While 'loose' and 'bad' signified the fear of men and some women of 'losing' control over their daughters and wives, at the same time, it pointed to the changing gender power relations. Similarly to women doing men's tasks, 'loose' girls and women were posing a threat to the power structures through their 'uncontrollable' behaviour, 'roaming' freely around the market and transgressing 'gender acceptable behaviour'. Girls were contesting and stretching gender space and boundaries also through their subversive politics of their own agency. Through female solidarity and support from some women (and men), girls were able to exercise their limited agency (Ortner 1996) and subverting some of the strict constraints to their status enshrined in the hegemonic structures of 'our culture' discourse. These actions became similarly to other 'wicked' and 'vagabond' women in Africa "sites for debate over, and occasionally transformations in, gender relations, social practices, cultural norms, and political-economic institutions" (Hogdson and McCurdy 2001: 2). According to Sherry Ortner, these acts of resistance and transformation that returnee girls and women negotiate through their everyday actions contribute to the transformation of themselves and their communities:

> (…) The question of adequate representation of subjects in the attempt to understand resistance is not purely a matter of providing better portraits of subjects in and of themselves. The importance of subjects (whether individual actors or social entities) lies not so much in who they are and how they are put together as in the projects that they construct and enact. For it is in the formulation and enactment of those projects that they both become and transform who they are, and that they sustain or transform their social and cultural universe. (1995: 196).

The idea of the project evoked by Ortner helps us to contextualise and understand the social contributions to 'development' that 'returnee' women and girls were bringing

about was expressed through the fact that what it meant to be a girl and a woman was being questioned, contested, and (re)negotiated in the post-conflict Nuerland.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to add a more grounded gender perspective to the literature on and knowledge of the processes and experience of emplacement, migration and development in the context of refugee return. Most importantly, I tried to show that migrant contributions to their communities of origin need to be analysed beyond financial remittances, including social remittance. The paper attempts to provide some answers to the question regarding the impact on social relations, gender categories and identity politics that migration and its processes of return carry with them. Peggy Levitt coined this term with the focus on the other social and cultural contributions of migrants (1999). I would propose to extend the concept of social remittances by including the changes in gender identities and expending spaces of women's activities through their migratory experiences. The type of social gender capital that they bring from their migratory experiences is, however, not always perceived as positive by those who stay behind.

Filtering the notions of 'home' and 'development' through the gender lens shows complexities, different strategies and challenges in (re)establishing oneself in the process of 'return'. This analysis allows us to better understand the complex social processes involved in gendered emplacement that play themselves not only on women and men's bodies but also on their social identities, gender institutions and ideology, networks, physical capital and place itself.

By deconstructing 'development' and providing a local view of what *wa nhiam* entails, I argue that as much as forced displacement and relocation affect 'reordering' of gender relations within different societies (Babiker 1999; Indra 1999), the notions and experiences of 'home' and 'return' are both gendered and gendering often shifting the practice of gender relations themselves. Based on culturally-inscribed notions of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' within and in relation to the 'home' space as a site of

household, women and men's experiences of 'losing home' due to forced displacement and 'settling-in' after 'return' through the creation of own household vary due to gendered obligations and entitlements within the household and the community. Gendered emplacement involved learning *cieng nuära* (Nuer culture), 'local' gender practices and (re)negotiating own gender identities, aspirations and norms. Displaced populations were bringing different cultural habits, including education, dress-code, religion and manners that collided with altered due to wars gender ideology and identities among stayees. In the process, they contribute new ideas of 'development' and '*wa nhiam'* to the community of origin and set in motion transformation of social order. This demonstrates the hybridity of social and gender identities and the inscription of place-making projects in the context of post-return emplacement (see Turton 2005, Hammond 2005) in identities and personal projects