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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Mathiang Anyoor and the White Army: Violence as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism in South Sudan**

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## ***Abstract***

**The use of violence as a conflict resolution mechanism is a controversial subject in conflict analysis. It may even be argued that at the superficial level, there is an apparent aberration in the idea that violence can engender peace. Indeed, conventional wisdom suggests that violence cannot be justified or legitimised if it is not objectively directed at conflict resolution, especially if it is driven by personal, political, economic, or other interests of the perpetrators of such violence. This article interrogates the idea of violence as a tool for conflict resolution with reference to reciprocal violence between the Mathiang Anyoor and the White Army in South Sudan. The paper argues that the factor of ethnicity plays fundamental role in the ignition and sustenance of violence between the aforesaid groups of militants. The case of South Sudan shows that every party to the conflict has its own interest, which propelled the party to enter the conflict. This paper argues that in the case of South Sudan, neither the Mathiang Anyoor nor the White Army unleashes violence for the benefit of peace and successful conflict resolution. The overall purpose of violence in this case was each group's economic or political interest disguised under the pretence of conflict resolution. Specifically, the instrumentality of violence enables each group to actualise economic and political agendas, which may not be readily achievable in the short term under peaceful conditions or using peaceful means. Within this milieu, there is little or no incentive to seek diplomatic means to conflict resolution. Hence, this paper argues that the parties at issue are often reluctant to reveal their true political and economic interest and, thus, they take efforts to misrepresent their real drivers for violence as a desire to achieve and maintain peace through violent means. This paper shows that successful peace implementation is dependent on the economic priorities of the party.**

**Keywords:** Mathiang Anyoor, White Army, violence, conflict, resolution.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The key focus of this article is the phenomenon of violence as a tool of conflict resolution. This article is confined to the context of South Sudan and aims at showing how the instrument of violence is utilized by either the local elites or external forces for the purpose of conflict approach violence as a peculiar means

resolution. The problem of violence has been debated in the framework of academic literature for over a century. However, every author investigates this problem in a specific context. The involvement of a specific context makes the problem of violence less ambiguous and abstract. In this connection, it needs to be pointed out

that there is a wide spectrum of authors who of attaining settlement of a conflict, without taking into account the efficiency and consequential elements of this means.

Aside from the above, this article is directed at the case of reciprocal violence between the Mathiang Anyoor and the White Army in South Sudan. The factor of ethnicity plays fundamental role in the ignition and sustenance of violence between the aforesaid groups of militants. The prolonged conflict between the Dinkas and the Nuers dates back to August 28, 1991, when the Dinka Bor Massacre were allegedly masterminded by a Nuer breakaway faction of the SPLM/A-Nasir led by Dr. Riek Machar Teny-Dhungon (Lam, 2007). The relatively recent carnage of Nuers on December 15, 2013, may be viewed as a response to the 1991 mass killings of Dinkas by the Nuers (Radio Tamazuj, 2015). The key argument of this article is that violence cannot be justified or legitimised if it is driven by revenge, political, economic or other interests of a particular group of people.

### **Legitimate dimensions of violence as an instrument of conflict resolution**

Analysing the problem of violence, Kaldor (2013), for instance, argues that all forms of contemporary violence, if used in the context of war, are ubiquitously viewed as illegitimate and detrimental. In other words, it is impossible to justify violence if it is perceived as an instrument of war. Following Kaldor's arguments, it can be inferred that the phenomenon of violence may be justified, although not objectively, if it is introduced as not a means of war, but rather as an instrument of peace. To put it in other words, violence may lose its illegitimacy if it is deprived of its destructive and military essence in favour of its peacemaking qualities. In order to demilitarise violence, it is essential to take strenuous efforts to prove the utility of violence as an instrument of conflict resolution, in view of the fact that conflict resolution equals to peacemaking.

The only way to justify the application of violence is to strip it of its illegitimacy. However, it is difficult to achieve the legitimisation of violence through its demilitarisation without a clear and comprehensive perception of the reasons and factors underlying violence in a specific context. As far as the context of South Sudan is concerned, it is possible to discern two major agendas which make the context of violence in this country specific: a) preliminary civil wars; and b) environment of a post-conflict instability. Therefore, in order to legitimize violence in South Sudan, it is vital to find out the underlying reasons and factors of the environment of a post-conflict instability which proliferates there.

Kalyvas (2006) aptly claims that violence always has its logic. The proper application of this logic is purposed to help justify violence as a means of conflict resolution. Besides, the author points out that the illegitimacy of

violence is dictated by the fact that the application of violence often leads to indiscriminate consequences and by-products which tend to aggravate injustices and grievances (p. 83). Therefore, it is problematic to consider violence a legitimate instrument of conflict resolution as long as indiscriminate consequences and by-products of such violence are likely to take place.

To elaborate further, Kalyvas (2006) posits that violence may be a reliable means of dispute resolution only if it leads to justified results and favourable consequences (p. 278). However, violence in itself does entail detriment and harm and, thus, cannot be directly associated with favourable consequences. To buttress this, Kalyvas (2006), Barash (2000), and Kaldor (2013), discuss the category of selective violence. The concept of selective violence raises a significant interest due to its relevance to the problem at issue. Thus, for instance, Kalyvas (2006) differentiates between indiscriminate and selective violence and sets forth for consideration the prerequisites to legitimate violence. To be precise, Kalyvas (2006) divides the general study of violence into two reciprocal but autonomous components. The first component distinguishes between violence as a consequence and violence as an activity or process (Kalyvas 2006, p. 21). The second component differentiates between indiscriminate and selective violence.

Analysing this component in detail, it needs to be pointed out that, in contrast to other scholars (Arnold 2007; Johnson 2014; Kaldor 2013; etc.) who emphasise violence as a direct consequence of civil wars, Kalyvas' understanding of civil wars may be reduced to an exogenous association with violence as a dependent variable. The fact is that Kalyvas' theory of violence differentiates between two fundamental sorts of violence, indiscriminate violence and selective violence. According to Kalyvas (2006), the concept of indiscriminate violence pertains to violence committed massively without due respect to the preferences or actions of individuals. Certainly, this kind of violence cannot be considered legitimate or justified, even if it is carried out under the aegis of conflict resolution.

On the other hand, the notion of selective violence is considered by Kalyvas (2006) an aggression against those individuals who are targeted based on specific data and information about the detrimental or unfavourable effects of their actions. As far as the issue of distinctions between indiscriminate and selective violence is concerned, it needs to be pointed out that, in contrast to conventional literature civil wars and violence, Kalyvas (2006) is prone to justify the rational application of violence. To that end, Kalyvas' theory can legitimise, to a considerable degree, the use of violence if such violence is selective in its nature.

The analysis of legitimate dimensions of violence takes cognisance of a crucial point, namely that the application of violence can be justifiable under certain circumstances,

such as self-defence or selective violence. The justifiability of violence originates from the fact that violence is not merely a process, but also a product or effect which is brought about by rational individuals, such as political actors and civilians by means of their individual rational actions. This point coheres with Kalyvas' (2006) observation that violence may be deemed a rational action and product of such action which is directed at the fulfilment of the actors' interests within the boundaries of a specific territory. In other words, the question of legitimacy or justifiability of violence is frequently shaped by a specific context. That is, for some individuals and groups of individuals, violence may be perceived as a legitimate and justifiable action or result which perfectly reflects their interests and aspirations, whereas the other groups and individuals may condemn and dispraise violence as a purely illegitimate and unjustifiable phenomenon.

Regardless, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of justice is completely dependent on the meanings attached to violence by the rule-makers in every specific context and environment. The argument can be made that indiscriminate justice, as it is delineated by Kalyvas (2006), cannot be justifiable or legitimate in any context, due to the fact that it is usually counterproductive and 'many people prefer to join the rival actor rather than die a defenceless death' (Kalyvas 2006, p. 160). More importantly, in the context of South Sudan and this study, indiscriminate justice cannot be justifiable and legitimate because it cannot satisfy the objectives of conflict resolution. As a matter of fact, indiscriminately violent deeds which are carried out in both civil wars and post-war environments tend to undermine the interests of those who have recourse to such deeds. To that end, the majority of violent actors are inclined to substitute indiscriminate violence for selective violence as soon as they start realising that their objectives will never be achieved by means of the former.

This notwithstanding, indiscriminate violence never fades away, particularly because of the cons of selective violence. The fact is that selective violence is much more costly and effortful. Both the justifiability and legitimacy of selective violence are closely connected with the efficient planning, preparation, collection of information about specific individuals, etc. There is no doubt that selective violence is a very complex operation which combines the pros of both intellectual and physical steps. In this light, Kalyvas (2006) defines selective violence as 'a joint process, created by the actions of both political actors and civilians' (p. 209). To make a practical use of selective violence as a justifiable and legitimate instrument of conflict resolution, it is incumbent on political leaders to change their worldview and paradigm of thinking so that to regard civilians and nonmilitary actors as agents in their own right rather than simple pawns in the hands of the political or military elites.

Besides, similar findings are highlighted in the publication by Stedman et al. (2002). Barash (2000), Kaldor (2013), and Stedman et al. (2002) opines that violence cannot in itself be recognised as legitimate or justifiable. The positive or negative sides of violence as a scientific phenomenon manifest themselves only in a specific context. The scholars concede that the central issue in any conflict resolution process is the maintenance of peace (Stedman et al. 2002, p. 278). In that vein, restraining the perpetrators, not assistance to the victims, should constitute the key objective for those who wish to maintain peace. Following this logic, it is possible to justify and legitimise violence if there are two preconditions. First, the restrictive violence must be directed at the perpetrators of detrimental violence. Second, the violence must be carried out under the aegis of maintenance of peace and restriction of the uncontrolled violence. The subsequent analysis of the case of South Sudan is expected to unveil all the pros and cons of violence as a conflict resolution mechanism.

#### **Specific context of the utilisation of violence in South Sudan: Mathiang Anyoor and the White Army**

South Sudan is a specific context in which violence is utilised for the purpose of conflict resolution. To better delineate the case of South Sudan, it is vital to refer to the events of 2013, when seniors of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) as well as the officials of South Sudan's Ministry of Defence rejected any liability for mass killings of people in Juba in December 2013 by denying their responsibility for creating a militia which allegedly carried out the aforesaid mass killings and marked the inception of the new civil war (Radio Tamazuj 2015). However, there is also information that the militia in question is closely connected with the top politicians of South Sudan (Radio Tamazuj 2015). Despite these allegations and speculations, there is no evidence to claim that either the Minister of Defence Kuol Manyang or the SPLA's General James Hoth Mai has possessed any formal command power and authority over the group in question in the beginning of the crisis. The group in question, Mathiang Anyoor, confessed to Radio Tamazuj (South Sudanese radio) that they had emerged in 2012 and 2013, before being absorbed or dispersed into formal military structures in 2014 (Radio Tamazuj 2015).

Referring to the interview with Manut, a former Mathiang Anyoor warrior, the group in question is purposed to protect and expand the territory of South Sudan along its borders with Sudan to the North (Young and McEvoy 2006, p. 14). This purpose was explicitly demonstrated during the tensions between Sudan and South Sudan in early 2012. The soldier of Mathiang Anyoor claimed that the group even had an inspiration to march north to 'annex Kosti', a city which belongs to Sudan and is located to the south of Khartoum (Radio

Tamazuj 2015). Analysing Mathiang Anyoor further, it is appropriate to note that the recruitment of members of the group occurred at two stages, in 2012 and 2013. The warriors of the group consist of both adults and youth, including children. Another military source reveals that the fighters of the group have undertaken training in Pantit Military Training Center, which is located in Aweil West County of Northern Bahr al Ghazal State (Arnold 2007, pp. 18-67). Besides, it is unveiled by another military source that the size of the Mathiang Anyoor military force equals to an army division, including more than four brigades (3000 to 15000 warriors) (Radio Tamazuj 2015).

Shifting the focus to the issue of violence, it is found necessary to point out that there is strong evidence concerning the group's participation in mass killings of people in Juba in 2013. To be precise, both military and security forces of South Sudan cite a 60-page document of the African Union blaming the group in carrying out killings of people in Juba in December 2013 (Johnson 2014, p. 305). The evidence rests on the fact that the representatives of the group had been seen in Juba immediately before the massacres took place. In spite of this, there is little evidence indicating the involvement of the South Sudanese official military command in the coordination of massacres of civilians in Juba. Nevertheless, some individual members of the South Sudanese military may have participated in either the massacres or coordination of the mass killings (Hutchinson 2001, p. 325). Apart from the above, other significant evidence clearly indicates that some civilians might be involved in the formation and development of the Mathiang Anyoor. Thus, the evidence implicated Paul Malong Awan, who, in 2013, was the civilian governor of Northern Bahr al Ghazal. It was alleged that Awan took direct and effective part in the leading coordination of the project, named the Mathiang Anyoor (Gettleman 2012, pp. 26-89). The alleged participation of the civilians in the evolution of the group included the process of mobilisation of the force under the aegis of seventeen tribal elders and the former Chief Justice Ambrose Riiny Thiik (Radio Tamazuj 2015).

The information from the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (2015) indicates the secret nature of the mobilisation into the group, which appeared to have happened latently from community to community (O'Balance 1977, pp. 87-112). The mobilisation into the group was allegedly driven by the desire of unleashing violence. It is instructive to note that the peak of violence was witnessed in December 2013. It was reported that, at that time, hundreds of Mathiang Anyoor, arrived in Juba neighbourhoods prior to the accomplishments of their training (Jok and Hutchinson 1999, p. 138). Reports suggested that the deployment of the group was accelerated because of political reasons. It seems that somebody inside the political elites anticipated violence

at the time the National Liberation Council was about to meet (Radio Tamazuj 2015).

According to the leaked African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (2015), there are substantial allegations that the Presidential Guard coupled with the Mathian Anyoor, took active part in a 'general cleaning' exercise in Juba on December 9, 2013, 'the true purpose of which was a reconnaissance exercise to see where ethnic Nuers were living in the city, in preparation for the later massacres' (Radio Tamazuj 2015). The human rights divisions of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) reported that at least 225 civilians, predominantly those of Nuer origin have perished as a result of individual incidents in various districts of Juba on December 16 alone (UNMISS 2015). Also, after another single incident in the Gudele neighbourhood, 'at least 300 Nuer men, possibly up to 450,' were killed in the building of the police (UNMISS 2015). In addition to these reports, the UN Mission has documented that 'extra-judicial killings continued on a daily basis until 18 December 2013' (UNMISS 2015).

The fundamental problem around the instances of violence in Juba lies in the fact neither the UNMISS reports nor any other empirical evidence clearly identified the perpetrators of the crimes allegedly committed by the Mathian Anyoor. Another aspect of the problem stems from the fact that both the Presidential Guard and fighters in the SPLA uniforms have been observed among the perpetrators of the crimes (Radio Tamazuj 2015). As a matter of fact, after the events in Juba, the Mathiang Anyoor went on fighting on the side of the South Sudanese government as more SPLA soldiers mutinied and the civil war unleashed (Radio Tamazuj 2015). Former fighters tend to talk with pride about their executions of civilians in December 2013, as well as about their fighting alongside SPLA.

Summarising the evidence about the massacres allegedly committed by the Mathiang Anyoor, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that not every example of selective violence can be considered legitimate and justifiable. Also, the case of Mathiang Anyoor and its alleged participation in mass killings undermines the idea of justifiability and legitimacy of selective killings at all. The fact is that the massacres of 2013 in Juba should be viewed as examples of selective violence, because the focus of killings was directed mostly at the Nuer populations of Juba (African Union 2015). Moreover, the perpetrators did not unleash violence spontaneously but took active part in the preparation and implementation of violence in practice. However, it is possible to claim that the violence in Juba in 2013 could never be justified and legitimised as a conflict resolution mechanism, particularly because it failed to achieve its objective – the maintenance of peace (African Union 2015). In other words, the violence at issue did not mitigate the situation in South Sudan and

failed to prevent the inception and proliferation of the next civil war in the country.

On the other hand, the violence which has allegedly been carried out by Mathiang Anyoor may be viewed as a means of securing economic interests under the pretext of conflict resolution. In this sense, it is possible to agree with Woodward (2002) that the objective of conflict resolution is not desirable by all parties to the conflict as an end in itself. The fact is that every party to the conflict has its own interest which has driven that party into the conflict. Therefore, each party aims at finishing the conflict in its terms and with the least detriment to itself. Generally speaking, Woodward (2002) is correct in arguing that a successful peace implementation is dependent on the economic priorities of the party. In the case of South Sudan, it is clearly visible that the Mathiang Anyoor did not unleash violence for the benefit of peace and successful conflict resolution. The overall purpose of violence in this case was the group's economic or political interest disguised under the pretence of conflict resolution. This point illustrates Ballentine and Nitzschke's (2005) view that political and economic interests play crucial role in the justification and motivation of violence. However, the parties at issue are often reluctant to reveal their true political and economic interest and, thus, they take efforts to misrepresent them for the desire to achieve and maintain peace through violent means. The same situation is associated with the formation and operation of the White Army, another military group of South Sudan which consists of rebellious fighters (Arnold and Alden 2007, p. 372). The key discrepancy between the Mathiang Anyoor and the White Army lies in the fact that the former is constituted largely by Dinkas, whereas the latter consists predominantly of Nuer. Therefore, the confrontation between the two military groups is inevitable, due to the fact that the issue of ethnicity plays crucial role in the armed conflict in South Sudan. In this sense, it should be noted that the White Army, similar to the Mathiang Anyoor, has recourse to selective violence, because each of the confronting forces tends to unleash violence against one another.

In the tragic events of December 2013, the involvement of the White Army is also confirmed by empirical evidence. As it is documented, apart from civilian casualties as a result of the alleged attack of the Mathiang Anyoor on Juba at that time, the militants of the Mathiang Anyoor have also suffered substantial losses incurred by the opposing White Army. Digging deep into the nature of violence waged by the White Army, it may be appropriate to note that, in contrast to deliberate and well-planned attack of the Mathiang Anyoor, the White Army tends to demonstrate 'a more spontaneous response' ('Draft Report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan' 2015, s. 46). The African Union Commission characterizes the White Army as a conglomeration of youth fighting formations which

originate from county. The name of this rebellious group 'refers to white ash from cow dung with which the youth smear their bodies' ('Draft Report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan' 2015, s. 46).

Back to the grievous events of December 2013, it needs to be stressed that as soon as it was conveyed via cell phones that there had been a mass killing of Nuer citizens in Juba, young people of Nuer origin mobilised to depart for Juba in order to rescue their people. The aforementioned young people mobilised with relative ease and swiftness, particularly because of the fact that they were fresh from a campaign against David Yauyau's Murle paramilitary groups (Collins 2008, p. 144). In view of the above, it can be said that the violence erupted as a result of the White Army's actions. In addition, it may be argued that the violence can be justified and legitimise with more certainty as compared to the violence practiced by the Mathiang Anyoor. The proneness to justify and legitimise the violence spread by the White Army as opposed to the violence erupted as a result of the Mathiang Anyoor's attack is enrooted in the realisation that, at first glance, the White Army acted in response, self-defence, intending to protect its population. Therefore, the selective violence of the White Army can more likely be qualified as a conflict resolution mechanism.

This notwithstanding, compelling evidence suggests that the violence perpetrated by the White Army had a negative dimension. To be precise, the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan reported that the White Army left the villages and towns they swept through in their march to Juba with the smell of carnage, demolition and loot ('Draft Report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan' 2015, s. 47). This implies that the White Army's violence was not actually as selective and restricted as it might seem.

Evaluating the violence of the White Army through the prism of theoretical approaches to justifiability and legitimacy of violence, it is possible to agree with Malwal (2014) that Dr. Reik Machar's white Nuer tribal army was not a phenomenon of pure response and restoration of justice (p. 204). Similar to the Mathiang Anyoor, the evolution and operation of the White Army are closely connected and motivated by the political and economic interests of its founder and senior managers. It should be noted that, in the hands of Mr. Machar, the White Army is not an instrument of conflict resolution, but rather a mechanism of actualisation of his personal ambitions (Spaulding and Beswick 2000, p. 187).

It is highlighted in Malwal's publication that Mr Machar does not lead the Nuer White Army to fight the Dinka and the Mathiang Anyoor, but rather utilises the White Army to take over the power of South Sudan according to the prophecy of the late Nuer spiritual leader, Ngundeng (Malwal 2014, p. 204). In this sense, the violence unleashed by the White Army cannot be considered

justifiable or legitimate, similar to that waged by the Mathiang Anyoor, because neither of the group utilises violence for the purpose of conflict resolution.

## CONCLUSION

It is possible to generalise that violence can never be justified or legitimised if it is not objectively directed at conflict resolution but, instead, is driven by personal, political, economic, or other interests of the perpetrators of such violence. The case of South Sudan shows that every party to the conflict has its own interest driven that party into the conflict. In the case of South Sudan, it is clearly visible that neither the Mathiang Anyoor nor the White Army unleashes violence for the benefit of peace and successful conflict resolution. The parties at issue are often reluctant to reveal their true political and economic interest and, thus, they take efforts to misrepresent their real drivers for violence as a desire to achieve and maintain peace through violent means.

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