

Dreams Are Not Made of Concrete

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1.

The sun is slowly coming up on one of the main thoroughfares in Juba. Most of the streets do not yet have names; the city is too young, and we navigate using landmarks. At night, I am lost in the endlessness of the dusty tracks, the absence of electric lighting, the silence of the stars, and the uncertain edges of urban settlements.

The night is receding, and the sun is throwing the market stalls of Konyo-Konyo into flat relief. It is an auburn light, still so faint that it seems as if objects (a corrugated iron roof, a blue UNHCR tarpaulin, dried fish) are clinging to it, holding its chaste offerings to themselves like gifts of flowers. There are only a few cars on the street, and the dirt has not yet absorbed the sky in its swirling dominion. I sit next to a roadside stall (a cardboard box with a cloth on top, charcoal in a brazier, a heavy pot on the fire) drinking the burning-hot sugar syrup that passes for tea here.

The road lies ahead of me, unmoving. Soon, cars will be careening over potholes, cutting cartographies through the dusty furrows of the road as they make their way into town.

In 2005, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) signed a peace treaty with the northern government, ending 22 years of civil war. In 2011, just two months before I wrote these words, Southern Sudan voted to decide on whether it wants to secede from the North. Juba is soon to become Africa's newest capital. Throughout the conflict, the city was in a state of suspended animation: the government controlled the urban center, but the SPLM, seasoned guerrillas, had encircled it. Supplies came at a premium.

Residents who remember that time speak darkly of searching for food in the rubbish. The core of the city dates from this period: a series of stone houses, owned by northern merchants fearing for their future, that today form an embattled stockade in the midst of a rapidly growing urban sprawl. Since 2005, a new type of urbanism has sprung up.

Tent cities shelter along the banks of the Nile. Then there are the concrete bungalows built by soldiers and politicians, and the endless squatter camps that are going up overnight, as thousands of internally displaced people return south after years of exile.

It is not just those displaced by war that have flooded into Juba. There are East Africans looking for work, journalists looking for fame, and endless aid workers, whose extravagant salaries have turned Juba into an unlikely boomtown. Their uncertain coexistence makes for an uneasy peace. We all live next to each other, in this city that is not quite urban, not quite a city, and not yet a capital.

We wait for the results of the referendum.

2.

In *Sans Soleil*, Chris Marker's elegiac investigation into the nature of memory, the narrator tells us that she received a letter from Krasner:

He told me that in the 19th century, mankind had come to terms with space, and that the great question of the 20th was the coexistence of different concepts of time.

There is some truth to this, I think, drinking my third tea of the day as the sun climbs higher in the sky, and the market stalls, ad hoc constructions of tarpaulin and corrugated iron, start to shine. I wave at a lumbering UN Land Cruiser careening over reluctant potholes. The driver, Haider, is a Pakistani soldier spending a year with the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). I met him a few nights ago, at the sprawling UN compound next to the airport, and we bonded by dreaming of *Sajji*, that wonderful dish of roast lamb stuffed with rice, beloved in Balochistan. Lamb of any kind felt very far away that night, surrounded by UN pizza joints, and something like a shared bodily memory (grease, rare meat that gives easily in the mouth, the smell of charcoal) brought us together.

The UN compound is a world of its own, replete with curfews, endless security barriers, and a bar playing Britney Spears. As we talked, Haider explained that though he was living in Southern Sudan, he did not live among the people he was supposed to be helping. As I looked around the compound, at the endless rolls of barbed wire and armed guards, this didn't strike me as much of a surprise. Haider was sick of Southern Sudan. He liked the money—four times what he was paid in Pakistan—but hated being away from his family: “Here, I am just waiting to live again,” he told me.

Abruptly, Haider got up; a Pakistani soldier in the distance motioned to him. It was time for bed. He explained that though he was of a higher rank in the UN hierarchy, the gesturing soldier had spent longer in the Pakistani army, and so, in all matters social, he deferred to the motioning commander. That night I talked to a Rwandan policeman, a Serbian soldier, and a drunk woman from Devon, England, who then passed out against a tree in a grim repetition of English nightlife (in London, it would have been a lamppost), all joined together by working for the UN.

I left the compound amazed that the UN works at all. Perhaps, I considered, wandering into the darkness, to get all those different nationalities to work together, the UN needs to separate itself out from the country in which it finds itself. Divorced from life beyond the barbed wire, as if in a holiday camp, or on a reality TV show, the intrepid contestants of *Game UN* find themselves as a single body, unified against an outside world that comes with safety warnings and curfews attached.

To help Sudan, UNMIS has decided to have as little as possible to do with it.

Haider is making some progress along the potholed road as I recall our evening together. Though he is going about five miles an hour, his hands grip the steering wheel as tightly as the best racing-car driver. He is surely hurrying to a UN compound, or a police station: one of the few places marked safe and approved by the UN lists. He lives in a matrix of timetables and regulations that stretch around the world: there are forms to be ticked, and reports to be written, and they do not vary by country, but change as the UN changes. The history of the UN in Sudan is not the history of Sudan. It is the history of the organization. As the UN goes from country to country, it takes its baggage with it. It exists *sui generis*. Or so it likes to think.

A Serbian working for the UN expressed this sentiment to me with admirable clarity. “What we need to do here,” he told me, “is learn the lessons of

Congo.” Learning the lessons of Congo in Sudan, I told him, is a recipe for having to learn the lessons of Sudan in the next country you deign to assist. What works in Congo (or, in the case of the UN mission in Congo, what didn’t and doesn’t work) has no guarantee of working in Sudan. The Serbian shrugged. The particular histories of the places they work in are of little interest to UN planners.

Haider is honking angrily at an old Dinka man who is leisurely crossing in front of his land cruiser, chastising a recalcitrant cow that lingers in the middle of the road, and whose mournful eyes look balefully at Haider. The Dinka are the largest ethnic group in Southern Sudan, and they dominate the government. A pastoral people, their lives revolve around cattle. A cow in Southern Sudan is a very big deal. For many of the people who live here, including the Dinka, cows are the currency of marriage, of religion, and of alliances between groups. The Byzantine intricacies of UN politics have nothing on a typical Dinka negotiation about cattle.

In the hierarchy of political players in Southern Sudan, the UN comes some distance below the cows.

Perhaps knowing its place, the UN vehicle grinds to a halt. Haider is new here, and knows nothing of the time of grazing, the vast seasonal movements that see the Dinka drive their cows long distances in search of water—nothing of the age sets into which people are initiated, and according to which events are remembered. Among the Dinka, one does not become a man at eighteen, but when one is initiated, an event dictated by patterns of grazing, the lives of your compatriots, and the rhythms of marriage. The diagonal slashes on the old man’s head mark his initiation and age set—lines as painful and as hard-earned as any internal UN classification. What does Haider know of the complex calculus of Dinka marriage: of cattle exchange and religion? How much does he need to know?

They have entirely stopped moving and stand looking at each other, absolutely still: Haider, the old man, and the cow, in a peculiarly Southern Sudanese version of the shootout at the end of a Western. Each waits for the other to make the first move. My money is on the cow. I watch with incredulity.

What is astonishing is not the fact that these two men (and the cow) are in one place. This is banal. The possibility of work and the displacements of war have been driving disparate peoples together for centuries. What I continue

to find incredible is that such geographic displacements intensify the coexistence of different senses of time.

Perhaps this is not particularly novel. Every street sees such coexistence. In one moment I can observe the age of the bricks in the wall of a café, coffee cooling down in a cup, words spoken silently between lovers—deepened with years, the demands of the marketplace, and the gestures that suggest the slow thought growing at the back of the businessman's mind (it is time to leave this town). But at their best—when a street is really being a street—they seem to come together as a whole, and they are all of a picture.

In Juba, a single street can contain centuries—something as new as today's orders, something as old as the movement of the cattle—and the years do not talk to each other.

3.

Haider's encounter with the Dinka man reminds me of a photograph by Robert Capa, titled *Near Namdinh*. It is 1954. We are in Indochina, and it is war. In the background of the photograph, a French military convoy roars along a narrow road amid rice paddies, urgently trying to get through to Doia Tan. Even when frozen in a photograph, the convoy looks impatient. It certainly has a sense of time: orders to be received, places to get to, missions to be accomplished, battles to be won, and lovers to return to in France. In the foreground of the photograph, a man is plowing a field. His time is dictated by the seasonal rains, the demands of the rice, and his absorption in the rhythm of the plow, the way the strikes would flow so easily, if he would only allow the tool's weight to dictate the movements of his body.

Between the French convoy and the farmer, there is certainly interaction. Farms will be burned, and the farmer may soon join attacks on other convoys. The French and the Vietnamese are fighting for the same land. Yet between them, there is no conversation, no sense of values that might be commensurable. It is not just the absence of a shared language, but also the absence of a shared sense of time in which an encounter might unfold. The French fought, and asked: why don't they play by our rules? Like all games, war has a beginning and an end, and to play the game, one must agree on the rules—the strategic objectives, the play of forces—and on the sense of time inherent in the game. There was no start to this war, which knows both rice and commands, even if, for the French, there will definitely be an end.

Today, where there was once empire, there is now the UN. In an essay he wrote in 1994, the novelist Amitav Ghosh noted that while the UN represents the totality of the world's nation-states and seeks to re-create the image of its membership wherever it goes, in the contemporary world, sovereignty resides precisely where the peacekeepers do not.

Southern Sudan is full of peacekeepers.

4.

The temporary truce between the cow, Haider, and the Dinka man has been broken. Haider fired first. He is shouting in English, but the man does not even deign to turn his head, which is fully occupied with the recalcitrant cow. Finally, defeated, Haider stops, turns off the motor, and sits in his Land Cruiser, in the middle of the road, resigned to waiting for a time that is not his own.

Every NGO in town mumbles about intercultural understanding, capacity building in local environments, and various other phrases that ultimately mean bureaucracy. I am struck by how little these words cohere with the senses of time I see in Southern Sudan. Everyone speaks the language of the UN, a language of human rights and development. Everywhere this language obscures. It becomes an ideology: a way to compete for resources and gain precious dollars for one's organization or one's tribe. It is a language that floats on the surface of things.

One enterprising Dinka scholar has translated *nhialic*, the Dinka word for divinity, as "human dignity" (a fashionable phrase these days; don't ask me what it means). *Nhialic* is the sky; it is closely associated with the rain (*Deng*). It is a divinity that speaks to the elements and the seasons that structure the movement of cattle. I suspect it has little to do with the fashionable words of the UN, just as those words have little to do with Haider's life in Pakistan, just as those words, ultimately, have little to do with what the UN actually does—the millions spent on bureaucracy and paperwork. The language of the UN is one that masks and confuses the real stakes of every encounter, and it means that Haider and the old man in front of him struggle to find ideas with which—even if they did share a language—they could articulate the common core of their being.

Finally, the cow and the old Dinka man—his skin like a parchment on which the past can be read—cross the road, and Haider starts up his engine

and continues his passage across the potholes, giving me a bemused shrug as he passes.

5.

Since 1956 and independence from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium government, there have been only 11 years of peace, and not a soul has escaped war. Every Sudanese person I speak to has a story: home is violent rupture, exile, and for those who come back, a strange sort of return.

I am sitting at another roadside shack, with coffee now instead of tea. As night falls and the darkness gathers, dispelled occasionally by the warmth of charcoal fires, the city becomes a succession of villages. Small, insular settlements that dot the landscape, as people cluster around the glowing invitation of the tea shacks, looking out into the night.

In the gloom, I see only embers, and a small table crowded with mysterious powders: coffee is served here with sugar, ginger, and cardamom, brewed in murky pots on burning coals.

I have just emerged from the endless warren of government buildings that is collectively known as the Ministries, after fruitlessly trying to find the place where I am supposed to register as a foreigner. Sitting across the street, with my body turned towards the complex, I think I have found the answer. There is an enormous construction site in front of me, with a helpful sign barely visible in the half-light. Ugandan laborers are still building the Ministry of Immigration.

I sit staring as they work in the 100-degree heat, and gratefully drink the mineral water I just bought from the Syrian supermarket next to the roadside tea shack. It stocks Johnny Walker and mineral water, and the rest of its shelves are bare. I would say the place is deserted, if it were not for the presence of an enormous inflatable Santa in the middle of the shop, kept cool by glacial air conditioning.

The mineral water, like most things one can buy in Juba, is imported from Uganda. During the war, the city was isolated. Now, with thousands pouring into the capital, almost all the supplies come up from Kampala by land. As I drink my coffee, a man named Deng pulls up a plastic chair next to me, and we fall into conversation. He fled to Egypt during the war, and after enduring years of racism and abuse in Cairo, was finally settled as a refugee in America, where he has spent the last ten years. Now he has returned temporarily, to do

some business selling secondhand 4×4s to NGOs, and to vote for separation from the north in the referendum. Shortly, he will return to America. His new country is not for him.

In the meantime, Ugandans are building the capital. Mahmoud, a Ugandan friend of mine, arrives at the tea shack and boasts, “This city is Ugandan. The Southern Sudanese listen to our music, even if they don’t know what it means. All their goods are imported from Kampala, and we are doing all the work here.” Perhaps Mahmoud is right, but Deng became angry: this is the capital of his country, and even if Mahmoud is building the city—or, some whisper, stealing Southern Sudanese money—it is Deng who will decide its future.

6.

As I walk from the tent that is my home into the city that I am beginning to know, I pass Konyo-Konyo market, and just before that, on the side of a dirt road, Hakima’s Fast Food. Being a creature of habit, I already know I will eat at Hakima’s every day while I am in Juba, just as I know the tea shacks I will frequent.

At the front of the small complex in which the cooks prepare the food is a stern school desk, standing out against the pink and mauve wooden boards of the walls of the buildings. I come here to seek respite from the dust that covers me and makes my eyes sting. In Hakima’s fresh pineapple juice, my body finds an answer to the heat and the dust. My stomach finds solace in her dishes.

The food recalls West Africa. This isn’t simply chance. Huge numbers of West Africans settled in Sudan on their way to Mecca, during the epic pilgrimages that preceded planes and Hajj tours. One of the classic West African narratives is of the young man who spends ten years getting to Mecca, and lives a life full of adventure and misfortune, before he is saved by religious inspiration, completes the pilgrimage, and returns home as a prodigal son. The stories only remember those who return. Many don’t make it back.

My favorite dish is gumbo. Yes, gumbo. What slavery brought to New Orleans, pilgrimage brought to Sudan. I am not sure someone from Louisiana would appreciate the taste of the gumbo here, but they would surely recognize the consistency. Sudanese gumbo is a stew of dried fish and finely chopped okra and spinach; it is the okra that gives the dish its distinctive

texture, a gloopy stickiness, which, if I were not so hungry, I am certain would enable me to use it as glue. The gumbo is to be eaten with *kisra*, a Sudanese pancake reminiscent of Ethiopian injera, minus the flavor. Given that most injera does not have much flavor to begin with, you see why you might need a sauce.

The gumbo itself was excellent. I went to congratulate the owner of the restaurant, Hakima, who wears a beaming smile and a simple blue and white wrap. She answers my faltering compliments in Juba-Arabic with perfect English, delivered in a broad Australian accent. She has lived down under for 12 years, and came back to Southern Sudan two years ago to set up a restaurant.

Hakima divides her time between Australia and Southern Sudan. She had to come back, she told me. Life in Australia was a refuge during the war, and the country is the home of her children, but it was a life lived in abeyance. Hakima's dreams are of Southern Sudan. The possibilities that count for her exist in the villages around Bor, Hakima's birthplace. Australia is a frozen moment in which one builds up the materials (capital, contacts) out of which one creates real life. Southern Sudan is reality. Her children keep calling her back to Australia.

Longar, another returnee, told me a different story. When he talked, his gaze would drift out to the Nile, which flowed by our side. His humor was disconcerting; it was the black humor I have grown accustomed to in war zones, a humor that knows no punch lines. "Do you see that river? I saw corpses floating in it." And then Longar laughs, a long, hearty laugh, which points to the edge of what can be endured.

Longar waited in Australia. For 11 long years, he waited. For much of that time, he was waiting for word of his wife, with whom he had lost contact after walking the phenomenal distances that took him from the middle of Sudan to the refugee camps of Kenya. Life in Australia began with a date and a time: the moment he was separated from his wife. He did not want to study, Longar told me, because it would mean admitting he might never go home. He did not want to integrate, get a job, or find friends, or do anything that might give him roots in Australia. He waited. Sometimes, Longar would sleep all day. Longar had too much time in the world—time that was not full, but that served only as an index of what was missing, what was awaited when he

finally returned, and memories whose function was only to produce more memories.

Refugees are world-historical time travelers. They inhabit different worlds simultaneously, and separate these worlds out within themselves to ensure their distinction. Longar dwelt in memories. In Sydney, he visited a Sudanese restaurant every day and ate *kisra*. He wove from the past a present that reassured him and cut him away from his bleakness.

A year ago, Longar returned to the home about which he had dreamed for so long. Except Southern Sudan was no longer home. The dream was home, or rather, home is what he experienced when he was elsewhere. “People expect so much from me now,” Longar said. “I have been in Australia, and my family expects money.” He stays in Juba, too ashamed by his lack of success in Australia to return to his family in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state. His parents await him, and he stays in Juba, staring at the river.

Sometimes, Longar sleeps all day. His wife is dead.

The stories of Longar and Hakima are photographic negatives of the East Africans in Juba, who have come here from disparate countries in order to return home triumphant, established as successes in life. But again and again in Juba, I encounter situations, from Longar to the East Africans, in which a large part of people’s lives are mysterious to them. Their lives occur in countries the immigrants neither understand nor want to understand; they are lives lived in the waiting room, storing oneself up for a life that begins with a return ticket. Home is home, and the other countries people live in are as replaceable and functional as the arid mathematics of predictors and policy analysts. These countries are refuges, or banks. Yet it is in these countries that people spend the majority of their lives. Juba is made up of people waiting and accumulating—it is a place characterized by people who are indifferent to the place they inhabit.

Saad Zaghloul is in Malta, dreaming of Egypt. José Rizal is in Germany, passionately writing about the Philippines. Time and again, the anti-colonial imagination is founded in exile. Home is a place imagined from elsewhere; exile provided the perspective with which new nations could be dreamt. For so many Southern Sudanese, it is exile that provided the means of imagining a new country, and their place in it. What binds together this nascent country of hundreds of tribes? A country loosely governed for a century, a country with not even a language in common. Only, I suspect, a shared history of

struggle against the North. The history of the nation is the history of its forging; in the war that led to the exile of so many, there is the creation of a common bond—a recognition of shared suffering.

Perhaps. Nations are imagined abroad, and peasants and pastoralists fight wars—at least in this neck of the woods. But nations take root in cities. If Southern Sudan is to succeed as a nation, it will succeed here in Juba: in the connections forged among the disconnected, the slum dwellers, and the displaced, who must find a common language and purpose unmoored from life in the village. It is here a new nation will arise. Or it will not arise at all.

Hakima sits at that stern school desk, collecting money from the patrons of the restaurant. On this day, Roda, her sister, sits next to her, cutting the spinach for the next batch of gumbo. I learn the following facts in Arabic: She has five children. Two of them are dead. Her children are in Uganda, being educated. She lives in Uganda. She is from South Sudan.

“I am from South Sudan,” a necessary clarification in a world where there are so many Ugandans, and so many Southern Sudanese living uncertain lives elsewhere.

7.

I was first taken to Hakima’s by the accountant at the camp where I stay. She ate *shai* and *esh*, roast goat with lime and bread. It is the only Sudanese food she is willing to eat. She took me here reluctantly. The camp manager tried to convince me to eat a burger and chips (imported from Uganda), for the princely fee of 50 Sudanese pounds (\$15), but I was insistent: show me where the real food is.

Kesha, the accountant, has magnificent poise. There is a constant easy smile that breaks open across her face—a smile that indicates the ease with which she seems to cope with the demands of living in Juba. She came here a year ago, after finishing a degree in project planning. The idea first came to her after a friend began coming to Juba to work as a waitress in order to fund her studies. Salaries, like prices, are high in Juba. A waitress here gets four times the wage of a primary school teacher in Uganda. Kesha’s family were totally against the move, she told me, but she had looked for jobs in Uganda, and nothing could compete with Juba in terms of salary.

Her professor at university always told her, it is important to have dreams. Kesha wants to remain here until she can go back to Uganda as a success,

which means having projects and managing them: not having to work. There is a line between possibilities and such dreams. Possibilities are dreams with stakes, dreams broken down into concrete plans and actions. Dreams are not possibility's poor cousin, however. Possibilities first begin in dreams; it is these moments that create our expectations and hopes, and for which we might suffer, risk, and maybe, at the end, even triumph.

And what are Kesha's dreams? She tells me. Friesian cows that she would rent out to the dairies, an Internet café, and chickens.

As Kesha talks, I find myself thinking again of those West African pilgrims. Religious inspiration, and perhaps a thirst for adventure, seems very far away from the unifying cry of the East Africans I meet in Juba, who in chorus tell me, "I am here for the money." I want to argue with them. The money is not the goal, the Friesian cows are not even the goal—the goal is the family, the respect your success engenders in your community back home. But I am not certain of myself. The pilgrim can find his dreams of discovering more about Islam confronting him in every instant, whereas Kesha's dreams are held apart from the life she lives—if anything, it is Kesha's dreams that strike me as transcendental.

I am reminded of the hundreds of Americans with office jobs, from whom I recoiled in California. When I first moved to America, I struggled to understand these people who spent all day doing work they hated, in the name of a retirement that will never arrive. I was nostalgic and lived in my head, back in Paris, where people had time to spend a weekday afternoon with friends. Now, here in Juba, I am not so sure. Perhaps retirement is the name given to a hope that will make life bearable, and it is a life that one, anyway, must live; dreams can color the present and transform necessity into choice by giving it a name, a place, and an ending. Perhaps Kesha's dreams are similar, and they make a life of hardship in Juba part of a narrative of future success. Perhaps. Except Kesha can return home, and the Americans are exiles in their own houses.

8.

Dreams are not houses. We do not dwell in them. They exist as other houses we could live in, places we could go, women we could be with. Dreams are tents. We put them down, and at the first sign of trouble, pack them up, leaving only the traces of past desires marked on the ground.

9.

I am drinking tea again near Konyo-Konyo market. The tea shack stands just in front of four, small, concrete storerooms, rented by some brothers from Kerala. After ten years in Saudi Arabia, they decided to seek their fortune in Juba. The storehouses are piled high with tightly bound bundles of second-hand clothes. Jamal Muhammad, an amiable man with impeccable Arabic, explained to me that he bought the clothes online from two wholesalers in Dubai. One of them sells Canadian clothes; the other gets his secondhand clothes from Thailand. Canadian secondhand clothes are much better, Jamal Muhammad explained, and cost much more. From Dubai, he ships the clothes to Mombasa, Kenya, from whence they begin their arduous overland journey to Sudan.

During the referendum, Jamal Muhammad was worried. People were taking money out of the country, fearing violence. The black-market dollar went sky high; you could trace the nervousness of the city by looking at the daily fluctuations of the exchange rate. The rates destroyed Jamal Muhammad's business. He buys his secondhand clothes in dollars and had to raise the prices in Sudanese pounds to cover the changed exchange rates. The market sellers who buy the clothes, Jamal Muhammad complained, don't understand. Worse was to come. During the referendum, the supply of dollars began drying up as rumors swirled around that the new southern state would change its currency, and people began moving funds out of the country.

If trouble starts, Jamal Muhammad told me, I will leave. Just like that. And what can I do with Sudanese pounds? They will not get me anything in Kerala.

Dollars are transportable dreams—small segments of an alienated America that give birth to Keralite family businesses and Ugandan Internet cafés.

At home, Jamal Muhammad told me, there is tradition. And abroad? He laughs. Abroad, there is only money. Money buys safety, it buys food, and it buys a return ticket home. Jamal Muhammad has a seven-month-old infant in Kerala.

10.

Emma works at one of the riverside tent camps that hug the Nile. He washes male underwear, a job that the Sudanese women tasked with washing the

rest of the clothes refuse to perform. He is saving up to start a business back home in Uganda. The moment he earns enough Sudanese pounds, he converts them into dollars. “Dollars you don’t touch. Dollars are for home.” He talked with scorn of the Ugandans who hang out at the bars, drinking away their money, spending evenings with women. “And for what? Nothing. They will return as failures.” Emma’s business plans changed with each day. After a month, I almost stopped listening.

11.

Churches are springing up all over Juba. Last Sunday I visited one just behind the market: four wooden poles and a corrugated iron roof. There were no walls. The altar was a box upon which a cross was painted in red. On Sunday, amid the shacks surrounding the market, the church was packed with Ugandan, Congolese, and Sudanese worshipers. It is an Evangelical church. Here home is a faith—a vertical home that offers you mooring under any sky. But it was more than that.

On Monday, the church blesses the CVs of job hunters. There is a weekly group for businesswomen. God, the preacher told the congregation, wants you to be rich. Under the corrugated iron roof, amid the rubbish and the squalor, the church promises you reassurance: away from your family, pursuing money, your life is not adrift from your roots; God wants you to be here. Unmoored, and at home. Your dreams are the dreams that God dreamt for you. God wants you to be rich. I went to the church with Kesha.

12.

Kesha shares the complaints of the rest of the East African population in Juba: it is too hot here, too expensive—and the Sudanese? Wild, crazy people, hard and hot-tempered. But despite that, she said, as I ate gumbo and she looked on, life is good here. It is fine. Her sister knows her very well. They speak all the time. She cannot hide anything from her sister. Her sister always said, that man would be bad for you. Her sister was right.

They had been together since she arrived in Juba a year ago. She had seen him through sickness and unemployment. She had forgiven him when he ran

off and tried to marry a Kenyan woman last December, even though he pretended nothing happened. Three days ago he came back from a holiday in Rwanda and summoned her to a meeting. He told her that his family wanted him to marry a Rwandan, and broke off the relationship. “In this day and age,” Kesha told me, “that was just an excuse; he was hiding his real feelings.” The Rwandan had come there with his uncle, Kesha said, and even his uncle was horrified. The uncle told the Rwandan, “You cannot run away from a woman who is five months pregnant with your child.”

He promised to support her, but it was Kesha who had always supported him in the past, and she didn’t think he would do much for her in the future. She told me that she will work in Juba until one month before she is ready to give birth, return to Uganda, have the baby, and then come back and carry on working, leaving the baby with her family.

Those dreams.

Really, Kesha said, the problems between her and the Rwandan had only started when she was sent to prison.

13.

After the 2005 peace agreement, Juba was caught up in a housing boom created in large part by the influx of the UN and relief organizations. At first, the boom didn’t result in houses. In 2007, when I first visited Southern Sudan, Juba was a tent city, a city of nomads.

Unlike the largely egalitarian nomads of the Southern Sudan–Sudan borderlands, however, Juba had two classes of tent: \$150 a night got you air conditioning and electricity. These days it also gets you wireless Internet. Seven dollars a night gets you—or at least, got me—a ripped tent in a camp of Kenyan immigrant laborers, without access to running water, let alone electricity. There are two UNs, Humphrey, the Kenyan owner of the camp, told me: the UN, and US. US referred to the foreigners who poured into Juba to take advantage of the oil money now flowing to a semi-autonomous Southern government in need of a capital, and the donor money extravagantly distributed to an alphabet soup of NGOs and UN organizations.

Not enough, I suspect, has been said about the UN as an agent of globalization. Not simply because it brings Pakistanis to Juba, but because of all the

people that trail in its wake. What type of economy, at the end of the day, does the UN produce?

Imported Camembert, whores, and wine. Bars with whisky. Tent cities and clubs.

Most of the most desirable tent camps were located near the Nile and stretched in a long line along the river, all of them powered by generators, and all of them offering music (hip-hop) and food (burgers).

It is in one such camp that I now stay. Four years on, Juba has a few real hotels, and the camp I live in has had to cut its prices.

14.

Two Ugandans set up the camp in 2005. It was the first camp on the Nile, the owners tell me. But then all the camps on the Nile say that. Initially, they raked it in. One Ugandan, known to me only as The Engineer, was instrumental in setting it up, but now resides back in Kampala. The other owner, Moses, is here at the moment.

Back in 2005, right after the peace deal, the camp was a purely theoretical idea for Moses. He is a small, chubby man, powerfully built under his ill-fitting shirts: a wrestler in an off-the-rack suit. His face initially seems twitchy. Built with a powerful chin and small, deep-set eyes, he has a shiftiness that I later reflect is merely the effect of a certain femininity. In a wrestler, downcast eyes and furtive smiles are not seductive; they are dangerous.

Up until a couple of months ago, Moses had never even set foot in his own camp. He has spent the last thirty years working in Yorkshire, England, for the local council, and his accent has picked up a Yorkshire twang. He started the business with The Engineer and Mr. Three Percent, as the Ugandans know him: the legally required Southern Sudanese partner, who owns exactly three percent of the company.

A couple of months ago, the problems really started piling up. The manager, another Ugandan, had run off with \$7,000. At the same time, Mr. Three Percent had been causing problems. His family and entourage were turning up and drinking the bar dry, claiming it as their right. They also demanded free housing. Kesha, as the accountant and generally most able member of

staff, repeatedly told Mr. Three Percent that he could not bring guests onto the premises if they weren't going to pay.

Finally, Mr. Three Percent had enough, and accused Kesha of stealing all the money the place had made for the past six weeks. Justice in Southern Sudan is a slow affair, often premised on who one knows, and definitively unfriendly to both foreigners and women. Kesha was locked up—despite, she insists, having provided detailed accounts for the camp showing that there was nothing missing.

Only after long discussions with Moses and The Engineer, who were both called to Juba, was Kesha released (with, I suspect, a pay-off to Mr. Three Percent). Admirably, or perhaps stupidly, while she had been offered another job (she was good at what she did), she returned to her old post, shaking hands with Mr. Three Percent the very next day. She claims that the job makes sense for her: she doesn't have to move much, as she lives in the camp (a concern for someone increasingly and evidently pregnant), and given that food and lodging are free for her in a city where both of these things are very expensive, all the money she makes is a direct deposit for her dreams. The owners were even nice enough to offer her maternity leave.

Moses is about to return to Yorkshire and prepare to leave England. “My wife, she likes her house and her job, but my children [he has four], they speak with an accent I can't even understand. What are we doing? I am bored of this nine-to-five. My children don't know Uganda. Why should I make such small money in England when I can be here, where the big profits are.”

A confusing rush of reasons. Moses embodies both sides of Juba. He sees this place as a source of money, but also, as an expatriate African living in Europe, he sees this as a way to return to his home, even if it means going via Sudan. And honestly, after so long in British local-council bureaucracy, I think he likes the hint of danger.

15.

Moses is scared. He is going back to England for good. Everyone is worried in the run-up to the referendum. The UN and the NGOs convene endless discussions about what to do if war breaks out.

Moses is also facing problems in his camp. In 2005, the south of Sudan was still effectively a war zone. The tents that now squat under the mango trees

were taken from Kampala to Juba with an army escort. After arriving, the soldiers decided they would stay. That was 2005 and they have been there ever since. They do not pay rent. Until Moses's arrival, they received electricity, but Moses cut them off. He had arranged a meeting with them, to tell them they must leave, and for a price brought three members of the SPLM, the ruling party, to convince them.

The meeting did not go well, and the soldiers insisted that they would stay. Moses decided to have all the keys to their tents seized. At two o'clock in the morning, Brigadier Johnson, as he likes to be known, walked into Kesha's tent with two other soldiers and very drunkenly pistol-whipped her while demanding the keys to their tents.

They got their keys.

The next day, the camp staff is huddled together in whispered discussions. Moses wants to go to the police. And indeed, the police arrive. "The problem," the drunk police officer tells Moses—who speaks neither Arabic nor Bari, the language of the local group—"is that you don't understand procedure." The officer protests that he must speak to Brigadier Johnson, who happens to be out, before an investigation can begin. The police then spend many hours drinking for free, waiting for Brigadier Johnson, who does not appear. Appropriately drunk, the police curse these troublesome girls that men place in positions of authority, and wander out of the camp bar with consoling words for Moses. "It is just a woman."

16.

Perhaps what joins all of the inhabitants of Juba together is that we have no place. We are the unsettled people of the world. Everyone is moving constantly. Nothing is still. Sudanese returnees who lived in Cuba during the war have opened a popular bar called Havana, where the expats spend the night dancing to salsa—a small taste of the Caribbean in dusty Juba.

It was there I met Jean-Paul. Small and nervous, with a hairline that is already receding and a face like a weasel, he had quit his job as a photographer at a small town paper in France to come to Sudan and take a chance as a freelance photographer. He is one of maybe twenty journalists in town. Not many, really, but they are remarkably similar. In Africa, he told me, you can

take the best pictures in the world. It is easy to take beautiful pictures here. I pressed further, and asked why. “It is just *trop*”—and the *o*, which was also the lingering edge of the *r*, hung in the air—“scenic,” he said. He is not worried about whether he sells his images immediately. He loves documentary photography. He wants to make a book. Jean-Paul is not really in Africa. He is collecting images, much as tourists take snapshots of themselves before the Great Wall of China, dreams of home already in their eyes. Jean-Paul is not here; he is living in an anticipated future. No one is here to be here; everyone is elsewhere.

Jean-Paul, whether he realizes it or not, exports images. I export words and ideas. The relief-agency people export money, status, and benevolence, the latter of which is definitely transportable and profitable: just ask the donors.

17.

Juba is a city of unwanted gifts and difficult dreams. Southern Sudanese return here from abroad, finally beginning life again, just as Ugandans and Kenyans come here to suspend life. Southern Sudan functions as a miniature Europe for many—the possibility of actually getting here, and the large amounts of money floating around, make it an affordable and conceivable London.

What is Europe? For the majority of the world’s population, if they have a conception of Europe, it is as the elsewhere in which one can realize one’s dreams. Not by living in Europe, but by suspending yourself there while you transform limbo into dollars, which can be transplanted into the dream of home.

Juba is Europe only because it is Africa, and Europe has come here, full of unwanted gifts, underwriting the economy and the high prices alike.

18.

Southern Sudan is not here. This is Juba, world city. Southern Sudan is the idea around which the world of Juba turns, but the idea is empty. Juba knows little of cows, of grazing, of the deathly stillness of the rainy season. Only

seldom do I glimpse it: in the tea shops, in the old Dinka man, and in the cows as they come to market.

Capital cities have always been where nations are imagined. Brasilia, Brazil's modernist capital, is full of clean lines and wide avenues. Built off the backs of thousands of laborers (who would find no place in the official urban plan for the city), it was supposed to represent a new, forward-looking Brazil. Brasilia is not exceptional. Juba is to be the capital of a new state, yet its hallmarks—foreign laborers, UN workers, and an educated, English-speaking elite—are to be found nowhere in the rest of the country. In the capital you dream up a nation, but you do not find the nation in the capital. The capital is its own form of exile. It makes sense to me now that this is where Longar still lives, suspended. Juba will never be Southern Sudan.

19.

Perhaps it is better that we never achieve what we dream. Perhaps it is better to hold our dreams apart from life, so what is there is always haunted by what could be. Perhaps we can only think about our dreams in terms of the uncertain present in which they place us. I cannot think of any other way to live with them—with their disappointments, their absences. Their fullness.

20.

The morning after she was pistol-whipped, I spoke to Kesha. She is staying. I told her she is insane, that the soldiers will continue to attack her. She said she cannot go back without her dreams, bound up in dollar bills.

Friesian Cows.

An Internet café.

Chickens.