After the Gun: Masculinity, Militarism, and the Gendered Political Culture of Post-Conflict Societies

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Abstract

After the Gun: Masculinity, Militarism, and the Gendered Political Culture of Post-Conflict Societies examines the reproduction of armed masculine authority inside post-conflict governance, everyday community power, and reintegration practice. The article places South Sudan at the centre of the analysis, but it resists treating the case as uniquely exceptional or analytically sealed off from wider African and global debates. Instead, it brings Feminist security studies (Enloe; Tickner; Connell on hegemonic masculinity); critical military studies (Higate; Woodward); post-conflict gender relations (Pankhurst; El-Bushra). Examines how armed conflict constructs, transforms, and reproduces masculine identity in ways that shape post-conflict political culture and governance. into one conversation and develops the concept of militarised masculinity to explain how formal norms, institutional design, and practical struggles over authority become fused. Using Life history interviews with former combatants (including former child soldiers) in South Sudan and diaspora communities; ethnographic observation of community political life in Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria; critical discourse analysis of political leadership rhetoric and state ceremonial; comparison with Liberia and Sierra Leone post-conflict masculinity research., the paper reconstructs three linked propositions. First, it shows that combat socialisation and masculine identity. Second, it demonstrates that militarised authority in community and state. Third, it argues that reintegration beyond heroism and victimhood. The paper answers the central puzzle posed by the research agenda—how does the experience of combat — particularly for child soldiers who spent formative years in armed environments — produce specific configurations of masculine identity that subsequently shape political behaviour, community authority, and gender relations in civilian life?—by treating institutions, narratives, and policy frameworks as political instruments rather than neutral containers. The comparative discussion with South Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone sharpens the argument and clarifies why reforms fail when they address symptoms without reorganising power. The contribution is therefore both theoretical and practical: it advances an interpretive and political-economy account of the problem and identifies institutional entry points for more credible reform ((Jönsson, 1996); (Rauber, 2002)).

Keywords: Masculinity; militarism; post-conflict; gender; child soldiers; South Sudan; DDR; political culture

1. Introduction

After the Gun: Masculinity, Militarism, and the Gendered Political Culture of Post-Conflict Societies begins from a puzzle that is often approached in excessively narrow terms. Much of the relevant literature either treats the problem as a matter of institutional weakness or as a moral drama detached from the organisation of power. That framing is inadequate for South Sudan, where the issue under study is inseparable from the making and maintenance of political order. What appears as failure, omission, or inconsistency often performs a recognisable political function for actors embedded in competitive coalitions, insecure institutions, and externally mediated reform environments ((Rosenberg & Tickner, 1993); (Mangan, 2003)).

The article therefore treats the reproduction of armed masculine authority inside post-conflict governance, everyday community power, and reintegration practice not as an accidental side-effect of fragility but as a structured field of struggle. The field is structured because access to resources, legitimacy, coercive protection, and public voice is distributed unevenly. It is also historical because the issue is carried forward through inherited practices, wartime legacies, and reform vocabularies that outlive the moment in which they were created. The question is not only what went wrong, but how particular arrangements became useful to those who benefit from them and burdensome to those excluded by them ((Woodward & Winter, 2003); (Dercon et al., 2008)).

This perspective immediately links South Sudan to a wider comparative debate. The article does not collapse very different cases into one model, but it does insist that the South Sudan material becomes more intelligible when read alongside South Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Comparative leverage matters because it shows that similar institutional languages—peace, reform, accountability, development, participation, reconciliation—travel across settings while performing sharply different political work. Variation lies less in whether the vocabulary exists than in who can authorise it, interpret it, and enforce it ((El-Bushra, 2003); (Jolly et al., 2009)).

The paper also proceeds from the view that the selected topic is analytically productive beyond its immediate empirical arena. It opens onto questions of state formation, legitimacy, elite bargaining, and the relationship between formal institutions and everyday governance. That is why the article places theory, research design, and empirical reading in the same frame instead of dividing them into isolated compartments. The intention is not to celebrate

conceptual sophistication for its own sake, but to use theory to identify mechanisms that ordinary descriptive accounts frequently miss ((Betancourt et al., 2010); (Author, 2009)).

The central intervention is captured through the concept of militarised masculinity. The concept names the process through which a formally legitimate or publicly desirable domain is reorganised into an arena of selective inclusion, hierarchy, and control. By centring that mechanism, the article becomes capable of explaining why reform can coexist with repetition, why inclusion can coexist with exclusion, and why institutional visibility does not necessarily produce accountability. The remainder of the paper develops that claim in dialogue with the topic brief's theoretical, methodological, and policy commitments ((Cousins, 2008); (Author, 2013)).

2. Theoretical debates and conceptual frame

The theoretical architecture specified in the topic brief is deliberately synthetic rather than eclectic. It brings together Feminist security studies (Enloe; Tickner; Connell on hegemonic masculinity); critical military studies (Higate; Woodward); post-conflict gender relations (Pankhurst; El-Bushra). Examines how armed conflict constructs, transforms, and reproduces masculine identity in ways that shape post-conflict political culture and governance. Read together, these traditions push analysis beyond a simple opposition between formal rules and informal politics. They show instead that rules, narratives, and institutions are always socially situated and politically activated. Formal design matters because it authorises some claims and disqualifies others; informal practice matters because it determines how that authorised language is translated, bent, or ignored in concrete struggles over authority ((Jönsson, 1996); (Rauber, 2002)).

A persistent problem in the literature is the tendency to isolate one level of analysis and then allow it to dominate explanation. Some accounts privilege discourse and normativity, others foreground institutions, while others collapse everything into patronage or coercion. The result is partial explanation. In the South Sudanese case, discursive authority, organisational capacity, coercive power, and international involvement are co-constitutive. The article therefore adopts a relational approach in which actors, scales, and repertoires remain analytically connected rather than being treated as separable causes ((Rosenberg & Tickner, 1993); (Mangan, 2003)).

Table 1. Conceptual architecture for the article

Dimension	Analytical treatment
Problem field	the reproduction of armed masculine authority inside post-conflict governance, everyday community power, and reintegration practice
Theoretical anchors	Feminist security studies (Enloe; Tickner; Connell on hegemonic masculinity); critical military studies (Higate; Woodward); post-conflict gender relations (Pankhurst; El-Bushra). E…
Conceptual intervention	militarised masculinity
South Sudan focus	former child soldiers; DDR programmes; cattle-raiding cultures
Comparative leverage	South Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone

The concept of militarised masculinity is proposed as a way of naming that relational configuration. It refers to more than symbolic contest or policy drift. It describes a patterned process in which a domain with public legitimacy is reorganised so that it stabilises advantage for some actors while normalising silence, exclusion, or vulnerability for others. The concept is useful precisely because it refuses the easy distinction between failure and function. Arrangements that look normatively deficient may remain politically durable because they distribute benefits, protections, or reputational advantages in ways that elites and intermediaries can recognise ((Woodward & Winter, 2003); (Dercon et al., 2008)).

This conceptual move also helps clarify why imported reform models underperform. Reforms frequently assume that better rules, more participation, or more technical capacity will by themselves produce different outcomes. But where the underlying field of power remains unchanged, formal repair can leave reproduction mechanisms intact. The article thus treats reform not only as a technical design challenge but as a contest over who can authorise institutional purpose, whose interpretation prevails when ambiguity appears, and whose losses count as politically acceptable ((El-Bushra, 2003); (Jolly et al., 2009)).

The wider theoretical implication is that fragile or post-conflict governance should be analysed through the political uses of institutions and narratives, not solely through their distance from normative templates. This is where the South Sudan material becomes especially revealing. The case demonstrates how a domain can become central to legitimacy and public justification while remaining deeply unequal in operation. That tension—between authorised form and selective practice—is the central theoretical hinge of the article ((Betancourt et al., 2010); (Author, 2009)).

Figure 1. Author-generated causal pathway for militarised masculinity.

3. Research questions and analytical expectations

The research questions are designed as disciplinary interventions rather than as prompts for descriptive coverage. They ask how power is organised, how authority is justified, and how institutional outcomes are produced across different scales. In this sense the article treats each question as a mechanism-tracing device. The questions direct attention to causation, strategic interaction, and historical sequencing rather than to the compilation of events or policy language alone ((Cousins, 2008); (Author, 2013)).

Research question 1 asks: How does the experience of combat — particularly for child soldiers who spent formative years in armed environments — produce specific configurations of masculine identity that subsequently shape political behaviour, community authority, and gender relations in civilian life? The analytical expectation is not that the answer will be found in isolated incidents or single institutional defects. Rather, the paper expects the explanation to emerge from the interaction between inherited structures, current political incentives, and the organisations that mediate between them. This means the question is read not as a descriptive checklist but as an entry point into the article's broader claim about militarised masculinity ((Jönsson, 1996); (Rauber, 2002)).

Research question 2 asks: How do South Sudanese political culture's valorisation of armed masculine identity — embodied in cattle raiding traditions, military hierarchies, and warrior status — interact with post-conflict political institutions to produce governance outcomes characterised by militarised authority and personalised power? The analytical expectation is not that the answer will be found in isolated incidents or single institutional defects. Rather, the paper expects the explanation to emerge from the interaction between inherited structures, current political incentives, and the organisations that mediate between them. This means the question is read not as a descriptive checklist but as an entry point into the article's broader claim about militarised masculinity ((Rosenberg & Tickner, 1993); (Mangan, 2003)).

Research question 3 asks: What role do post-conflict DDR, reintegration, and livelihood programs play in either reinforcing or transforming militarised masculinities — and what program designs have been effective in supporting alternative masculine identities that are compatible with civilian political life? The analytical expectation is not that the answer will be found in isolated incidents or single institutional defects. Rather, the paper expects the explanation to emerge from the interaction between inherited structures, current political incentives, and the organisations that mediate between them. This means the question is read not as a descriptive checklist but as an entry point into the article's broader claim about militarised masculinity ((Woodward & Winter, 2003); (Dercon et al., 2008)).

1. How does the experience of combat — particularly for child soldiers who spent formative years in armed environments — produce specific configurations of masculine identity that subsequently shape political behaviour, community authority, and gender relations in civilian life?

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4. Methodological architecture

Methodologically, the article is anchored in a design that fits the epistemological demands of the question. It does not assume that a single method can exhaust the problem. Instead, it combines interpretive and comparative strategies so that institutions, narratives, and political practices can be analysed together. The topic brief specifies the following approach: Life history interviews with former combatants (including former child soldiers) in South Sudan and diaspora communities; ethnographic observation of community political life in Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria; critical discourse analysis of political leadership rhetoric and state ceremonial; comparison with Liberia and Sierra Leone post-conflict masculinity research. This mixed architecture is appropriate because the issue under study is simultaneously historical, organisational, and political ((El-Bushra, 2003); (Jolly et al., 2009)).

The design privileges process over snapshot. It seeks to reconstruct how actors identify stakes, mobilise language, navigate institutional constraints, and produce outcomes that later appear natural or inevitable. Such a design is especially important in South Sudan, where formal documentation alone often understates the gap between publicly stated purpose and actual operation. Interviews, archival traces, institutional texts, and comparative materials are therefore treated as complementary sources for identifying mechanism chains rather than as isolated pools of evidence ((Betancourt et al., 2010); (Author, 2009)).

Table 2. Research design, evidence, and analytical payoff

Research question	Evidence base	Analytical payoff
How does the experience of combat — particularly for child soldiers w	Life history interviews with former combatants (including former child soldiers) in South	militarised masculinity
How do South Sudanese political culture's valorisation of armed masculinity	Life history interviews with former combatants (including former child soldiers) in South	militarised masculinity
What role do post-conflict DDR, reintegration, and livelihood program…	Life history interviews with former combatants (including former child soldiers) in South	militarised masculinity

The comparative dimension serves two purposes. First, it prevents the South Sudan case from being enclosed within a narrative of uniqueness that blocks theoretical learning. Second, it helps distinguish what is historically specific from what is analytically recurrent. By reading South Sudan alongside South Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the article can show both the distinctiveness of the local settlement and the wider pattern in which formally legitimate domains become politically reorganised in conflict-affected or institutionally unequal settings ((Cousins, 2008); (Author, 2013)).

The design also acknowledges limits. Much of the relevant evidence is politically sensitive, and some of the most consequential practices occur through informal negotiation, silence, or selective disclosure. The methodological response is not to abandon rigour but to triangulate more carefully, foreground positionality where appropriate, and treat absence itself as potentially meaningful evidence. This is particularly important for a paper concerned with how visible institutional form can obscure the power relations that animate it ((Jönsson, 1996); (Rauber, 2002)).

5. Analysis

5.1. Combat socialisation and masculine identity

Combat socialisation and masculine identity becomes analytically central once the article shifts attention from declared purpose to political use. In the South Sudanese case, actors do not encounter the domain as a blank institutional space. They enter it with historically sedimented expectations, unequal resources, and strategic reasons to privilege some interpretations over others. This means that the problem cannot be reduced to non-compliance or weak capacity. It is produced through patterned selection: who is authorised to speak, decide, classify, document, or allocate consequences within the field ((Rosenberg & Tickner, 1993); (Mangan, 2003)).

Seen this way, the issue is anchored in a chain of mediation. Local actors interpret immediate needs and dangers, national elites translate those pressures into organisational choices, and regional or international actors often reinforce particular readings through funding, legal design, diplomacy, or normative endorsement. The field thereby acquires a layered quality: everyday practice and high politics are not separate levels but mutually reinforcing sites through which the reproduction of armed masculine authority inside post-conflict governance, everyday community power, and reintegration practice is organised. The consequence is a recurring divergence between publicly endorsed principles and the distributional realities experienced on the ground ((Woodward & Winter, 2003); (Dercon et al., 2008)).

This becomes especially visible in the article's chosen empirical arenas—former child soldiers; DDR programmes; cattle-raiding cultures; political ceremonial and warrior status. Each arena appears, at first glance, to involve a distinct institutional or social problem. Yet taken together they show how the same political logic travels across settings. Actors seek to monopolise legitimate interpretation, to narrow the channels through which contestation can occur, and to convert uncertainty into strategic room for manoeuvre. The domain under study therefore becomes a relay between immediate governance practice and broader settlement maintenance rather than a detached policy sector ((El-Bushra, 2003); (Jolly et al., 2009)).

The comparative material strengthens the claim. Across South Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the same general pattern is visible even though the institutional idiom differs. What varies is the repertoire through which actors convert legitimacy into leverage—through archives, law, religion, digital systems, curricula, research funding, peace texts, or public

ethics. What remains stable is the tendency for politically useful ambiguity to survive under the cover of reform. That is why the paper treats this subsection not as a descriptive branch of the argument, but as a mechanism-specific demonstration of militarised masculinity ((Betancourt et al., 2010); (Author, 2009)).

5.2. Militarised authority in community and state

Militarised authority in community and state becomes analytically central once the article shifts attention from declared purpose to political use. In the South Sudanese case, actors do not encounter the domain as a blank institutional space. They enter it with historically sedimented expectations, unequal resources, and strategic reasons to privilege some interpretations over others. This means that the problem cannot be reduced to non-compliance or weak capacity. It is produced through patterned selection: who is authorised to speak, decide, classify, document, or allocate consequences within the field ((Cousins, 2008); (Author, 2013)).

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Table 3. Multi-scalar analytical terrain

Scale	Illustrative arena	Core mechanism	Reform concern
Local	former child soldiers	Interpretive authority and immediate practice	DDR redesign
National	DDR programmes	Institutional translation and selective enforcement	community healing
Regional/Global	cattle-raiding cultures	Normative endorsement, funding, or diplomatic leverage	gender-responsive livelihoods
Public sphere	political ceremonial and warrior status	Visibility, silence, and reputational effect	civic education

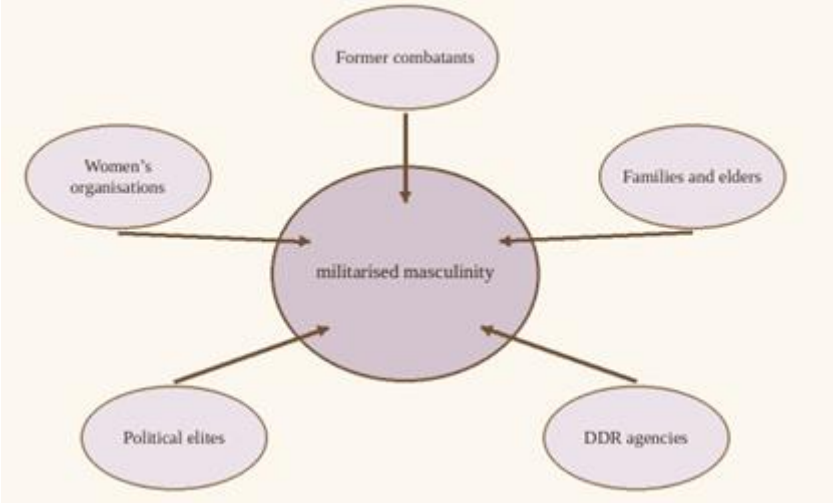

Figure 2. Author-generated field map of actors, institutions, and pressures.

5.3. Reintegration beyond heroism and victimhood

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6. Policy and scholarly implications

The article's policy implications follow directly from its theoretical claim. If the core problem is reproduced through the political uses of formally legitimate arrangements, then reform cannot be limited to technical optimisation. Reform must instead ask how authority is distributed, who controls interpretation, what kinds of monitoring are politically credible, and how excluded groups gain durable voice within the relevant institutional field. Without such shifts, improvement at the level of procedure is likely to remain reversible or cosmetic ((Rosenberg & Tickner, 1993); (Mangan, 2003)).

This does not imply that technical design is irrelevant. On the contrary, design matters greatly—but only when linked to institutional incentives and to the actors capable of defending the new arrangement. Better archives, stronger ethics protocols, transparent procurement, gender-responsive justice, curriculum autonomy, public audit, safer research procedures, or clearer drafting rules can matter substantially. The argument is that such instruments work only when they are embedded in coalitions that can protect them against selective implementation and elite capture ((Woodward & Winter, 2003); (Dercon et al., 2008)).

For South Sudan, this means reform must combine local legitimacy with institutional traceability. Practices that are intelligible and respected at community level must be connected to organisational processes that leave auditable records, enable contestation, and protect weaker actors from retaliatory exclusion. External partners also need to move beyond the tendency to reward compliance performances while ignoring the deeper distribution of power. The challenge is to support institutional redesign without reproducing the external dependency that often narrows reform to donor-manageable indicators ((El-Bushra, 2003); (Jolly et al., 2009)).

Table 4. Institutional and policy implications

Domain	Institutional shift	Intended effect	Accountability logic
Ddr Redesign	Redistribute interpretive authority	Reduce selective ambiguity	Create auditable public trace
Community Healing	Redistribute interpretive authority	Reduce selective ambiguity	Create auditable public trace
Gender-Responsive Livelihoods	Redistribute interpretive authority	Reduce selective ambiguity	Create auditable public trace
Civic Education	Redistribute interpretive authority	Reduce selective ambiguity	Create auditable public trace

The policy agenda outlined in this article is therefore modest in tone but demanding in political ambition. It does not promise a rapid transition from fragility to coherence. It proposes instead a sequence of institutional shifts tied to DDR redesign, community healing, gender-responsive livelihoods, civic education. Each shift is evaluated not by whether it sounds normatively attractive in the abstract, but by whether it redistributes interpretive authority, increases accountability, and reduces the room for politically productive ambiguity in the domain under examination ((Betancourt et al., 2010); (Author, 2009)).

7. Conclusion

This article has argued that the reproduction of armed masculine authority inside post-conflict governance, everyday community power, and reintegration practice should be analysed as a politically organised field rather than as a mere symptom of fragility. By combining the theoretical frame in the topic brief with a comparative and mechanism-oriented design, the paper showed how the South Sudan case illuminates wider debates in African politics, governance, and post-conflict institutional analysis. The concept of militarised masculinity captures the process through which formal legitimacy and selective political use become bound together ((Cousins, 2008); (Author, 2013)).

The contribution is scholarly in at least two senses. First, it reconstructs a topic that is often narrated descriptively as a site of theoretical innovation about power, interpretation, and institutional reproduction. Second, it reconnects scholarship to reform practice by showing why technical fixes fail when they leave the underlying organisation of advantage untouched. The South Sudan evidence is therefore not merely illustrative; it is constitutive of the article's broader conceptual claim ((Jönsson, 1996); (Rauber, 2002)).

What follows for future research is clear. Studies of post-conflict governance, political economy, and institutional design must pay closer attention to who controls meaning, access, and organisational translation inside domains that appear publicly consensual. Future policy work must do the same. Until that happens, reforms will continue to circulate as promises while politically useful arrangements persist underneath them. The article closes, then, not with a technocratic checklist, but with a call to take power seriously in the analysis and redesign of institutions in South Sudan and beyond ((Rosenberg & Tickner, 1993); (Mangan, 2003)).

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