



Buoi is standing to my right.

Buoi Dut Kiir

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"Akuei," I said to the CSI field worker, "I would like to see the lady sitting by herself away from the group under the Kuel Tree. Something is wrong; otherwise she would be with the group. Perhaps she is sick. Please invite her to come next."

Over the years I have observed that when a woman or a man separates herself or himself from the group and sequesters under the shade of the tree, that something is wrong. Sometimes it is because the person has malaria or a high fever. Once I saw a young woman seclude herself and her dying baby under the quall tree holding the infant gently as his breathing labored and then stilled.

It is never good news when a man or woman leaves the group and sits or lies silently under the shading canopy of the tree. Akuei brought the young woman to me. She had on a yellow blouse with multicolored skirt and a gray and black wrap the South Sudanese women call a Lawa. I looked gently into her face and noticed her pain.

"Do you have a fever?" I asked. "Yes," she whispered. That's when I noticed that her right hand was wrapped in a torn piece of green and yellow cloth. "May I see your hand; do you have an injury?" Buoi (pronounced Boy) unraveled her multicolored bandage, revealing a swollen hand and swollen fingers. I turned her hand over and saw that the skin had peeled away in the palm of her hand. She had a nasty abscess. I don't know how she endured the pain.



“Come with me,” I said. “Let's go see Paulino, the nurse, to give you medicine and treat your hand. He will bring you back to me.” Buoi Dut Kiir was relieved and pleased.

When she returned sometime later, I looked gently into her face once again.

In the interview, I learned that Buoi is 34 years old, taken into jihadi Slavery into the North of Sudan in 1994 when she was 12 years old.

As I looked at her more closely, I noticed her saffron blouse was held together by three safety pins. I suspected that her life itself is held together by safety pins. It also showed me that she is resourceful. Buoi; had also placed a large nail horizontally through the button of her turquoise flip flop to keep it together on her 14 day journey walking to freedom.

Buoi whispered, “I remember the executions and the beatings on the way North. Two men from my village were taken into slavery with us; when they requested water from the Arabs, they were slaughtered. We were forced to watch.”

At this point Buoi took a stick and began to draw rather intricate designs in the sand next to her right leg. When she was ready to speak she would sweep away the drawing to make room for additional haunting memories. “On the way to the North,” she whispered, “I was raped. When I fought the men with my strength, I was bound with rope like an animal. When they raped me again, some of the other Baggara Arabs watched, laughed, and cheered. I was twelve years old.”

She fell silent and drew a large fan shaped design in the sand with her fingers. As she turned her face to the side I saw knife etchings on her lower right cheek cut with precision, on the other cheek she was branded as well, leaving no doubt to whom she belonged.

She fell into a pregnant silence once more. I gave her all the time she needed even though four others persons returning from slavery were seated together waiting to share their stories of jihadi slavery with me.

After a while, Buoi was ready to speak. This time she surprised me. She was animated. "I worked so hard both grinding sorghum (grain) and fetching water for the master's families. I survived because I wanted to come home. When I worked hard the master and his wives didn't punish me and I would get a little more to eat for me and for my five children."

"Five children?" I asked. "Yes, pray for my children." "Are they with the Arab and his families?" I asked. "No." She replied. "All of my children were taken away from me when each was three years old. I never saw them again." And then she whispered. "I do not know where they are." This time it was I who fell silent.

"Pray for my children." She repeated. "Pray that God would bring them back to me so we can all be free."

CSI fact-finding visit to South Sudan, November 2016 by Pastor Heidi McGinness and Markus Weber. Akuei Gabriel Deng , Translator