

Dinka Panaru and Dinka Alor, cattle-rearing people. While there have always been pressures on the Dinka in the Heglig-Ruweng area, with Arab nomads driving their cattle south and fighting with the Dinka for grazing areas and dry-season water, pushing the Dinka against the Nuer, the situation worsened with Chevron's arrival in 1976.

In February, 1992, GOS began planning for oil exploitation, and military offensives caused the deaths of 35 people (mostly civilians), the theft of about 500 cows, some tukuls burned and people forced out. In November 92, and until April 93, the GOS and Arab murahleen allied to it conducted a 5 month offensive with looting, burning, abduction. In all, 57 hamlets were burned. A new offensive began in December 1993, when 26 people were killed in hamlets near to Heglig (Panlok, Kwok, Nhorjal, Panagwit); it was after this that the area around Heglig was more or less deserted except for GOS forces. The Dinka village of Athonj was renamed El Toor, and the GOS deployed troops in Maper, renaming it Munga. In October 1996, the GOS and its allies launched a further offensive, displacing many thousands of people, some into the "peace camps" in Pariang and Athonj, where coping mechanisms were limited because cattle were stolen and seeds lost. December 97 into 1998 saw the burning of tukuls in Panlok-Kwok, Mankuo, Aloual, & Ngoniak. Drilling was underway in Athonj (El Toor) in 1998; in October, people were displaced.

On 9 May 1999, a new offensive was launched from the Nuba Mountains and Pariang. Antonovs and helicopter gunships supported troops using armoured personnel carriers. Roads built by the oil companies enabled these to reach their destinations more easily than before. The village of Biem 1 was destroyed, and the burning of tukuls and theft of cattle ranged as far as Padit. Biem 2, which we visited, was badly damaged.

The offensive lasted almost two months, not the ten days mentioned by Leonardo Franco, who may have been thinking only of the use of ground troops, and the movement of these was stopped by the rains in June. The offensive was characterized by bombing runs and helicopter gunships flying low enough to kill people, and stop cultivation. From April to July 1999, the decline in population in Ruweng County seems to have been in the order of 50%.

The Athonj - Pagoi line of villages closest to Heglig have been gradually displaced at least 1996 onwards to May, 1999. The displacement from these villages has been permanent with exception of Athonj/El Toor. The areas further east of Heglig have been subject to periodic attack, bombing, looting, killing, abduction, burning out etc., including the May/June 1999 offensive.

It is difficult to avoid Leonardo Franco's conclusion that a "swath of scorched earth/cleared territory" is being created around the oil fields. Over the years, the series of attacks and displacements are leading to a gradual depopulation, as only a percentage of people who flee return after each displacement. Franco's conclusion may well be correct.

The people of Ruweng County have never been free of inter-tribal conflicts and pressures, but they have been particularly insecure for the years since 1983, when the resumption of civil war at least coincided with, and some say was due to, oil activity in their area. For Talisman, so very