

The legacy of *Kokora* in South Sudan

BRIEFING PAPER

Intersections of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in South Sudan

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Cover photo: © Rens Willems 2015. A road sign of Kokora Road in Juba, Central Equatoria State.

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Summary

- This briefing paper presents the findings of a historical case study on *Kokora*, a word associated with the decentralization policy enacted in southern Sudan in 1983. The policy divided the semi-autonomous Southern Region in Sudan, into three smaller administrative regions.
- *Kokora* is a word in the Bari language. One connotation of the word is to divide something into different parts. Another connotation of the word is to share something.
- The different connotations of *Kokora* are not merely about a nuance in the translation of the word. Different groups in South Sudan attach different meanings to the word due to the different ways in which the events of the *Kokora* period were experienced.
- Throughout their modern history, there have been debates and political struggles about the divisions and borders of public administration in Sudan and South Sudan.
- Issues of administrative boundaries were increasingly caught up in questions of ethnicity, as boundaries were linked to government posts and thus to the government payroll and representation in governance. At the end of 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, several political contests emerged whereby ethnic groups were claiming their own homogeneous administrative units; something which is still occurring to this day.
- *Kokora* was primarily motivated by a real or perceived inequality in access to governance and government positions. This feeling was purposefully instigated by the Nimeiri regime, in order to limit southern unity and with that southern influence and power over government and economic affairs.
- Proponents of the re-division, consisting primarily of Equatorians, were motivated by feelings of exclusion from political power, inter-ethnic competition and conflicts, as well as ideals to bring development to the rural areas. Through decentralization of the south and a division into smaller sub-regions, Equatorians hoped to maintain or gain influence in administrative affairs.
- The camp opposing the re-division felt that the Equatorians advocating for *Kokora* were unpatriotic, and feared that a re-division would weaken the position of the Southern Region vis-à-vis the government in Khartoum.
- In June 1983, Nimeiri issued a decree ordering the division of the Southern Region into three separate regions: Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile. This re-division became known as *Kokora*.

- While there had long been discussions on a possible re-division in the South, there had not been any discussions on how to retain the regional structure of the south, or how to organize the policies of *Kokora*. This further contributed to the chaos that followed the re-division.
- As a result of *Kokora*, the south became deeply divided. Not only in terms of administration, but also socially and politically. The events of *Kokora* still have an effect today, as evidenced by the references made to the concept in present political debates, particularly related to federalism and decentralization.
- An open debate on decentralization in South Sudan is not benefiting from comparisons with the events of *Kokora* in 1983; *Kokora* is not the same as *decentralization* or federalism in present times. But an open dialogue about *Kokora*, and the lessons that can be learned from it, may contribute to discussions about how South Sudanese wish to govern themselves, and how a national identity can be promoted. The difficulty is to find a balance between the empowerment of the many local constituencies in South Sudan, and to maintain and develop a national identity.
- In October 2015, the President of South Sudan issued an executive order to divide the 10 states of South Sudan into 28 states. Although two different policies in different times, the events of *Kokora* can provide important lessons with regard to the decision to create 28 states. As became evident in the tensions surrounding *Kokora*, decentralization policies aimed at promoting the development of the country and distribution of resources should be widely discussed and thoroughly planned before being implemented. This includes an open discussion on issues of legality and economic viability, as well as on the responsibilities and relationships of different levels of government and the political benefits for South Sudanese citizens.

Introduction: the legacy of *Kokora* in South Sudan

This briefing paper presents the findings of a historical case study on *Kokora*, a word associated with the decentralization policy enacted in southern Sudan in 1983.¹ The policy divided the semi-autonomous Southern Region in Sudan, into three smaller administrative regions. While the events took place over three decades ago, they continue to influence the current political debate and references to *Kokora* are regularly made. Particularly in relation with the debate on federalism and decentralization – two highly contested topics by themselves – both proponents and opponents have made connections with the issue of *Kokora*. At the same time, many have argued that *Kokora* and federalism are two different things, and that the debate on decentralization and federalism is not helped by linking it to *Kokora*.

This paper does not focus on federalism and decentralization, and does not take a position in this debate. Rather, this report gives a historical overview of the events of *Kokora*, and investigates how these have been experienced in South Sudan. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the events and the different narratives thereof, and to support an open dialogue about the lessons that can be learned.

While *Kokora* is considered to be a notable event in South Sudan's history, there is surprisingly little literature on the subject. Most articles and books mention *Kokora* in passing, without much further investigation. This paper aims to fill this gap, and is based on interviews and focus group discussions held between March and May 2015. Additionally, it draws on academic literature and policy oriented reports, as well as media and online publications.

The first section presents the current context in South Sudan, and the relevance of a historical analysis of *Kokora* for contemporary discussions. The second section looks into the meaning of the word *Kokora*, and the different connotations attached to it. The third section investigates the events that led up to the policy of *Kokora* as it was enacted in 1983. The fourth section then turns to the events of *Kokora* itself and its immediate aftermath. The fifth section returns to the present time, and looks at the linkages between *Kokora* and ongoing debates in South Sudan. The fifth section discusses the needs and opportunities for reconciliation and dialogue.

¹ This paper is part of the research project "Intersections of truth, justice and reconciliation in South Sudan". The project is carried out in cooperation between the University for Peace (UPEACE) Centre The Hague (the Netherlands), the South Sudan Law Society (SSLS), and PAX. It is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a part of the 'Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law', and is administered by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). A short summary of the project, its methods and activities, can be found here: <http://www.upeace.nl/cp/uploads/publications/One%20Pager%20-%20IJR%20in%20South%20Sudan.pdf>.

Contemporary debates and the relevance of history

While the events investigated in this paper took place several decades ago, they continue to influence contemporary debates.

In August 2015, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO) signed the *Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan* (ARCISS) in an effort to end the 20-month conflict.² The agreement addresses a range of issues, including: power sharing, security arrangements, humanitarian assistance, economic arrangements, justice and reconciliation, and the parameters of a permanent constitution. The history outlined in this paper links directly to the development of the new constitution and the ways in which governance is organized, and the issue of transitional justice and reconciliation.

One of the institutions proposed in Chapter V on 'Transitional Justice, Accountability, Reconciliation and Healing' is a Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing (CTRH). The agreement proposes that the institution would examine human rights violations from the signing of the CPA and establishment of the regionally autonomous Government of Southern Sudan in 2005 until the signing of the current peace agreement in 2015. Many grievances between South Sudan's groups are pre-dating this period. This paper discusses one particular event around which such grievances exist, which shows that there is a need for public dialogue on events prior to the period suggested for the CTRH as well.

The history of *Kokora* is also relevant for the way in which the issue of governance reform is being discussed in South Sudan today, in particular in relation to federalism and decentralization of governance. In this way, it links to the constitutional process as well as to discussions on national identity. Most recently, on 2 October 2015, President Salva Kiir issued executive order No. 36/2015 that will divide the current 10 states into 28 smaller states. The decision has sparked a contentious debate, and at the time of writing of this paper it is not yet implemented.

One connotation of the word is to divide something into different parts. Another connotation of the word is to share.

The meanings of *Kokora*

To understand what happened, it is first important to gain better understanding of what *Kokora* means, and in particular what it means to different people.

Kokora is a word in the Bari language. Bari-speaking groups traditionally inhabit the Equatoria region and include the Bari, Mandari, Nyangwara, Kuku, Kakwa, and Pojulu. The simplest translation of *Kokora* into English is 'to divide' or 'division'.³ As an individual interviewed for this study explained, one connotation of the word is to

² IGAD (2015) *Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan*, 17 August 2015. Available at: <http://www.gurtong.net/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=CytVwytJdyM%3d&tabid=124>

³ Interview, S., Juba, 2015; see also Lupai, J.K. (2013) "Kokora: often misunderstood, grossly misinterpreted and most feared." *South Sudan News Agency*, 28 January 2013, available at: <http://www.southsudannewsagency.com/opinion/articles/kokora-often-misunderstood-grossly-misinterpreted-and-most-feared>

divide something into different parts. Another connotation of the word is to share something: “Like when [...] you have one bread, [and] you have two children, what you do in order to be fair? You will break it in the middle, you give one to this [...] child and the other portion to the other child, equally. That is another connotation, which means sharing equally.”⁴

Yet, the different connotations of *Kokora* are not merely about a nuance in the translation of the word into English or Juba Arabic. Different groups in South Sudan attach different meanings to the word due to the different ways in which the events of the *Kokora* period were experienced. This is related to the motivations people had to promote *Kokora*, how it played out in practice, and the subsequent consequences it had for different groups.

The different connotations of *Kokora* are not merely about a nuance in the translation of the word. Different groups attach different meanings due to the different ways in which *Kokora* has been experienced.

Events leading up to *Kokora*

This first section discusses the events leading up to *Kokora* in 1983. Understanding the historical context helps to understand the motivations of different parties to promote or oppose *Kokora*, and how the policy eventually unfolded.

The first civil war and the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement

Sudan had been ruled by the British as two separate administrative regions – an Arab north and an African south⁵ – until 1946, when the country was united. Yet, deep disparities in development and access to power remained. In 1954 an agreement was signed that provided for self-determination and self-governance for Sudan, and on 1 January 1956 Sudan became independent after more than 55 years of colonialization by the British. In 1955, a few months before independence, the government in Khartoum renounced its promises to establish a federal system and a number of Southern army officers mutinied in Torit in Eastern Equatoria. This ignited the first civil war in Sudan, and several groups emerged and gradually developed into what became known as the *Anya Nya* movement, as the conflict spread from the Equatorias to Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal. Through the brokerage of General Idi Amin, then chief-of-staff of the Ugandan army, the *Anya Nya* movement received support from Israel. With the supplies and training provided by Israel, Joseph Lagu, a senior *Anya Nya* leader from Equatoria, was able to organize the disparate groups of *Anya Nya* into a more unified and organized movement.⁶ In 1972, after seventeen years of war the Addis Ababa Agreement was signed between the government in Khartoum, then led by Jafaar Nimeiri, and the leaders of *Anya Nya*.

The Addis Ababa Agreement established the Southern Region, constituted by the former provinces of Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria, as an autonomous

⁴ Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

⁵ It should be noted that there are sizeable African populations in northern Sudan as well.

⁶ Johnson, D.H. and G. Prunier (1993) “The foundation and expansion of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army.” in: M.W. Daly and A.A. Sikainga (eds.) *Civil war in the Sudan*. London: British Academic Press, p. 119

region within Sudan. The Southern Region was governed by the High Executive Council (HEC) and legislated by the People's Regional Assembly (PRA). The members of the PRA were elected by residents of the Southern Region, and the President of Sudan had the authority to appoint and relieve the President of the HEC, formally at the suggestion of the PRA. During the negotiations of the Addis Ababa Agreement, the northern delegation was led by Abel Alier, a Dinka politician from the south who in 1971 became Vice-president of Sudan and in 1972 appointed as the first President of the HEC.

Throughout its modern history, there have been debates and political struggles about the divisions and borders of public administration in South Sudan.

Growing ethnic tensions and clientalism during the interbellum

Throughout its modern history, there have been debates and political struggles about the divisions and borders of public administration in Sudan and South Sudan. During most of its time under British colonial rule, the Southern Region was administratively divided into three provinces, which for most periods as well as at the time of independence in 1956 were referred to as Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria. The three regions were separately answerable to the central government in Khartoum. Already in 1956, southerners had proposed the creation of a single administrative area of the south, with a capital in Juba, but this was opposed by Khartoum. In 1972 with the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement the three regions become one autonomous region with its capital in Juba.⁷

Shortly after the Addis Ababa Agreement, the new government in Juba started to look into the possibilities of decentralizing the Southern Region. It established a Committee for the Redivision of the Southern Provinces to investigate the possibilities of dividing the three vast provinces into smaller administrative units with the aim of bringing service provision closer to the people.⁸ As noted by Edward Thomas, the main concern of this committee was to investigate the economic viability of new administrative units and the locations of its capitals, and tried to steer away from divisions based on ethnicity:

“There is an influential stream of thinking that we should not encourage ethnic grouping by considering the demands of ethnic groups to have separate provinces [...] They think that such an attempt will work against Regional [Southern] unity.”⁹

However, in reality issues of administrative boundaries became increasingly caught up in questions of ethnicity, as boundaries were linked to government posts and thus to the government payroll and representation in government.¹⁰ At the end of 1970s and

⁷ Badal, R.K. (1994) “Political cleavages within the Southern Sudan.” In: S. Harir and T. Tvedt (eds.) *Short-cut to decay: the case of the Sudan*. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, p. 109.

⁸ Thomas, E. (2015) *South Sudan. A slow liberation*. London/New York: Zed Books, p. 98 & 130

⁹ CRSP (1975, 46), quoted in Thomas, E. (2015) *South Sudan. A slow liberation*. London/New York: Zed Books, p. 98 & 130

¹⁰ Moreover, the relationship between the state and rural communities had already during the colonial period been structured around ethnicity (Thomas, 2015: 130).

Issues of administrative boundaries were increasingly caught up in questions of ethnicity, as boundaries were linked to government posts and thus to the government payroll and representation in governance.

the beginning of the 1980s, several political contests emerged whereby ethnic groups were claiming their own homogeneous administrative units; something which is still occurring to this day,¹¹ and arguably is further stimulated by the proposal to create 28 states.¹²

Also in Juba, ethnic tensions were growing, and a political rivalry grew between Abel Alier and Joseph Lagu. During the first Presidency of the HEC of Alier, Equatorians became suspicious of the growing number of Dinka in civil services. The argument made by the Dinka at the time was that the British had discouraged their education, and that their growth in government positions was simply a result of increased access to education since the end of the colonial period.¹³ Nimeiri started to exploit and stimulate the divisions in the south and the rivalry between Alier and Lagu. Where in 1972 Nimeiri had appointed Alier as President of the HEC, in 1978 he supported the candidacy of Lagu. Nimeiri pressured Alier to withdraw, making Lagu the only candidate.

Ethnic tensions further increased when Lagu welcomed Ugandan supporters of Idi Amin seeking exile in Southern Sudan. Amin had used harsh anti-Nilotic propaganda, and this move stimulated racism towards South Sudan's Nilotic tribes, including Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk.¹⁴ Lagu's Presidency was also plagued by corruption scandals, and at the suggestion of opposition leaders including Alier, Nimeiri removed Lagu in 1979 and replaced him with Peter Gatkuoth. After the subsequent elections in 1980, Alier returned for his second Presidency of the HEC. With half of Alier's cabinet of ministers comprised by Dinka, this raised further fears of 'Dinka-domination' by non-Dinka and in particular Equatorians. Opposition leaders started to accuse Alier's government of corruption and nepotism. Another point of tension were large herds of Dinka cattle that had moved to Equatoria since the 1960s, causing conflicts between pastoralist Dinka and farmers from Equatoria over the use of land and destruction of crops. As an individual interviewed for this study recalled:

I remember during that time, there were a lot of issues concerning this cattle grazing and this has devastated the livelihood of the Equatorians, because most of the things we can also see now in Maridi in Yei [...], you can see the cattle are destroying farms. So, the relationship between farmers and cattle [keepers] is not in a good atmosphere.¹⁵

A number of interviewees from Equatoria noted how senior government positions in ministries and the police force were increasingly filled by Dinka during the

¹¹ See for more: Schomerus, M. & T. Allen (2010) *Southern Sudan at Odds with Itself: Dynamics of Conflict and Predicaments of Peace*. London: Development Studies Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science.

¹² Mayai, A.T., N. Tiitmamer, J.M. Jok (2015) *The Creation of 28 South Sudanese States: Is It Economically and Legally Viable?* Weekly review, October 6, 2015. Juba: The Sudd Institute. Available at: <http://www.suddinstitute.org/assets/Publications/28-statesformatted.pdf>.

¹³ Breidlid, A. (2010) *A concise history of South Sudan*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 245

¹⁴ Id., p. 246-47

¹⁵ Interview L. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

presidencies of Alier. One example that was given was the promotion of Ruben Mach, a Bor Dinka, as Commissioner of the Police:

“The problem become actually more acute in the eyes of those non-Dinka was the elevation of Ruben Mach [...] You know, the hierarchy of the police is very rigid. Over the senior colleagues of Ruben Mach become the commissioner of police [...] And Ruben Mach happened to be from Bor. That was one thing which displeased many people.”¹⁶

But ethnic favoritism was not only perceived to occur at the senior levels. As testified by a respondent in a focus group discussion, it also affected people looking for jobs in the civil service:

“I wanted to become a police officer. [But] because the person responsible there was a Dinka, [and] most of the people who were in the police were Dinkas, [this was not possible for me]. That’s why I had to find my way to community development. Because somebody in community development, who comes from my place, was able to employ me and train me to become a community development worker.”¹⁷

Thomas notes that, with the main resource offered by the government being salaried posts, the ethnic competition for these posts led to the emergence of pamphlets that presented tables with the underrepresentation of particular ethnic communities in cabinets or bureaucracies.¹⁸ Perhaps the most widely known was written by Joseph Lagu, entitled *Decentralization: A Necessity for the Southern Provinces of the Sudan*, which presented lists of Dinka and non-Dinka in various government positions.¹⁹

Nimeiri shifting constituencies and stimulating divisions in the South

A number of factors motivated Nimeiri to stimulate competition between Alier and Lagu, and division in the South. After having seized power through a military coup in 1969, the country struggled with economic crises caused by Sudan’s overly ambitious development schemes as well as the global economic crisis. Nimeiri faced growing dissent in the country, and faced several coup attempts in 1970, 1971, 1975 and 1976 by Islamist and communist movements. In reaction, “[he] shifted his southern constituency to a new and well-endowed Islamist one in the north, and managed the resulting southern protest by fostering social divisions there.”²⁰ Nimeiri initiated a process of national reconciliation, and included Islamist leaders Sadiq al-Mahdi – who had orchestrated two coup attempts against his rule – and Hassan al-Turabi in his government. Al-Mahdi and al-Turabi had long been opponents of the Addis Ababa

¹⁶ Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

¹⁷ Focus group discussion with people from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

¹⁸ Thomas, *South Sudan. A slow liberation*, p. 101.

¹⁹ Lagu, J. (1980) *Decentralization: A Necessity for the Southern Provinces of the Sudan*. Khartoum: Samar Printing Press.

²⁰ Thomas, *South Sudan. A slow liberation*, p. 100.

Agreement. And as one interviewee noted, the agreement was never signed by Nimeiri, but by Alier who was Sudan's Vice-president at the time. This helped feed a growing sentiment among the north Sudanese elite that the Addis Ababa agreement was an agreement between southerners.²¹

Another factor influencing Nimeiri's politics was that after an exploration agreement was signed with oil company Chevron in 1979, it quickly became clear that there were large oil reserves around Bentiu. Bentiu was situated just south of the border defined by the Addis Ababa Agreement, and hence would fall under the control of the Southern Region. To circumvent this, Nimeiri created what is now Unity State around the oil area.²² According to an interviewee from Equatoria:

As soon as oil was struck [...] Nimeiri declared Unity as a separate region. [...] In the time of Nimeiri, [...] you had a Equatoria region, you had Upper Nile region, you had Bahr El Ghazal region. So when the oil was stuck in Bentiu, then called Bentiu district, Nimeiri decided to carve out from Upper Nile, Bentiu as a separate region and to be directly under the President of Sudan, under Nimeiri, not under the regional government.²³

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Nimeiri and his new allies al-Mahdi and al-Turabi considered a divided and weakened south to be beneficial to their interests. Blurring the issue of the provisional borders with the issue of representation and ethnic balance in the regional government helped confuse the issue of the oil province.²⁴

Moreover, Abel Alier had begun to assert himself more strongly in Sudan's economic policies, and openly criticized Nimeiri. When in 1980 Alier published a booklet known as *The Solidarity Book*,²⁵ it accused Nimeiri of cowardice during the 1976 failed coup, and gave the impression he had to be saved by soldiers from the south.²⁶ Initially considered an ally from the south, Alier started to become a potential threat who worked for southern rather than Khartoum's interests.²⁷ In 1981, Nimeiri removed Alier as President of the HEC and proposed a re-division of the South.

²¹ Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

²² Prunier, G. (2001) "Oil and war in the Sudan." *IFRA – les cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est*, No. 21, available at: <http://ifra-nairobi.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/d21prunier.pdf>, p3.

²³ Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

²⁴ Prunier, "Oil and war in the Sudan", p. 3.

²⁵ The Solidarity Committee of the Southern Members 4th People's National Assembly (1980) *The re-division of the Southern Region: why it must be rejected*. Juba: Nile Printing Press

²⁶ Collins, R.O. (2008) *A history of modern Sudan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 135

²⁷ Breidlid, *A concise history of South Sudan*, p. 259.

Kokora and its aftermath

In the course of its existence, tensions within the Southern Region had steadily increased, and politicians had become divided into two camps: those in favor and those against re-division, or what became known as *Kokora*.

1982 elections and 1983 re-division: *Kokora*

In the course of its existence, tensions within the Southern Region had steadily increased, and politicians had become divided into two camps: those in favor and those against re-division, or what became known as *Kokora*.

The re-division camp consisted primarily of Equatorians who felt excluded from power by the numerically larger Nilotic Dinka and Nuer.²⁸ Through decentralization of the south and a division into smaller sub-regions, Equatorians hoped to maintain or gain influence in administrative affairs. Many interviewees referred to the relative large number of Dinka in the civil services as a reason for *Kokora*, as well as a perceived arrogant attitude.

“The attitudes of those who were elevated to ministerial positions from the other region.”

[...]

“The issues of the domination of the government by Dinkas, [...] this created sentiments, which became now, when you look at the issue of Kokora, people said: ‘okay, let us divide it up’.”²⁹

Also local conflicts between Dinka pastoralists and Equatorian farmers fed the re-division movement. It cannot be denied that the *Kokora* movement was for a large part motivated by inter-ethnic competition.

But proponents of *Kokora* also expressed an ideal of developing the Southern Region, and bringing development wider than merely Juba and its direct surroundings. In one interview, the idea behind *Kokora* was linked to the ideals of John Garang who was reported to have said to want to ‘bring the towns to the people’, meaning to spread the development from the towns to the rural areas in Southern Sudan.

Proponents were motivated by feelings of exclusion from political power, inter-ethnic competition and conflicts, as well as ideals to bring development to the rural areas.

“Many Kokora followers didn’t want to break up South Sudan to be honest; they simply wanted a kind of decentralization of the system. Because powers [were being centralized in Juba]. And also people were chasing after the power in Juba, everybody whether you are employed in the regional government or not, they were coming to Juba. And as I said Juba was becoming like another Khartoum. You know the failure of Sudan, I mean the old Sudan, is because of this idea of concentrating. Whether it is power, economic development, social development, services: all in Khartoum. [...] We used to say, the periphery, you go five miles from Khartoum and you’re in a different world. [...] Therefore everybody wanted to come to Khartoum. [...] So

²⁸ Johnson, D.J. (2014) *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*. London/Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, p. 19.

²⁹ Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

*the idea of the Kokora was let us divide; those people who are not necessary to be employed in the regional government, let them go to their state and develop their state.*³⁰

This perspective on re-division was also much in line with the slogan ‘Decentralization for development’, which was fashionable amongst aid agencies and donor governments at the time.³¹

The camp opposing the re-division felt that the Equatorians advocating for *Kokora* were unpatriotic, and feared that a re-division would weaken the position of the Southern Region vis-à-vis the government in Khartoum. Moreover, the increase of Dinka in civil service positions was to be attributed to the relative size of this group, and their improved access to education after the colonial period.³² From the perspective of the opposing camp, the re-division was considered a direct threat to the positions they had rightfully acquired. As a participant in a focus group comprised of individuals who lived in Bahr-el-Ghazal region during that time noted:

*“They were seeing the government in Juba as belonging to Ekuatoria. And therefore, if that is the case, that people from Upper Nile from Bahr el Ghazal have filled the position of government [...] It is better that we mobilize our people to see that [there can be] Kokora.”*³³

The elections for the HEC in 1982 became centred on the issue of re-division, with the camp in favor of re-division led by Joseph Tombura. According to one interviewee, the hat worn by Tombura during the elections was adopted as a symbol for *Kokora*, and his supporters started wearing the same hat.³⁴ As discussed above, Khartoum had several reasons to favor re-division of the south, and supported Tombura’s camp. Nimeiri had already in 1976 divided all of Sudan’s provinces into two, and reorganized the provinces in the north into regions in 1980. These northern regions had considerable less power than the Southern Region after the Addis Ababa Agreement.³⁵ Khartoum’s support for re-division was therefore not with the intent to help distribute power and resources between the Southern regions, which was the stated goal of the *Kokora*-camp, but rather to remove power from the South altogether. As noted by Prunier, Khartoum’s “manipulation was successful beyond all expectations and soon *Kokora* had produced enough intra-southern tensions for the Central Government to be able to summarily close down the HEC in 1983”.³⁶

Opponents felt that Equatorians advocating for *Kokora* were unpatriotic, and feared that a re-division would weaken the position of the Southern Region vis-à-vis the government in Khartoum.

³⁰ Interview, S. from Ekuatoria, Juba, 2015

³¹ Johnson, D.H. (2001) *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars. Peace or Truce*. Suffolk: James Curry, p. 53.

³² Breidlid, A. (2010) *A concise history of South Sudan*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 260.

³³ Focus group discussion with people from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

³⁴ Interview, S. from Ekuatoria, Juba, 2015

³⁵ Johnson, *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*, p. 18-19.

³⁶ Prunier, “Oil and war in the Sudan”, p. 3.

In June 1983, Nimeiri issued a decree ordering the division of the Southern Region into three separate regions: Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile.

There had not been any discussions on how to retain the regional structure of the south, or how to organize the policies of *Kokora*, which contributed to the ensuing chaos.

The 1982 elections were won by the *Kokora*-camp, but no immediate plans for re-division were made. According to Collins, it was after Nimeiri met with hostile demonstrations by youth opposing re-division in Rumbek in December 1982 that Nimeiri asked the HEC to make recommendations for division of the South. However, the HEC refused, as it considered itself not to have the constitutional authority to unilaterally amend the Southern Regional Self-Government Act of 1972.³⁷

Then in June 1983, Nimeiri issued 'Republican Order Number One', a decree ordering the division of the Southern Region into three separate regions: Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile, with separate capitals in Wau, Juba and Malakal respectively. While there had long been discussions on a possible re-division in the South, there had not been any discussions on how to retain the regional structure of the south,³⁸ or how to organize the policies of *Kokora*. This further contributed to the chaos that followed after Nimeiri's decree, which today is referred to as *Kokora*.

The decree also determined that the functions of governance were split between the three new regions: for example, the Regional Ministry of Finance and Planning of the Southern Region Government was split into three regional Ministries of Finance and Economic Affairs.³⁹ All personnel in government and civil service positions were reposted to their home region.⁴⁰ With the regional capital located in Juba, in Equatoria, this meant that the majority of those being relocated were non-Equatorians. It also meant that the distribution of personnel depended on which region they belonged to, without consideration of merit and numbers.⁴¹

Other than personnel, also the assets and resources of departments and ministries were to be divided amongst the three new regions. According to Tvedt, none of the five ministries of the new Bahr el Ghazal region had offices, inventory or furniture, and ministries had to wait months for the arrival of furniture from Juba. In Juba, some departments became overstaffed due to the influx of Equatorian personnel returning from other regions, while other departments suffered from understaffing.⁴² The descriptions of interviewees of how the division of government assets, including tables, chairs and other offices equipment was accompanied by skirmishes and looting further illustrate the chaos caused by these events.

"For Equatoria, they were supposed to now take over these ministries built by [the government of the Southern Region]. It became an issue of tension with other regions, because some of the regions when they were now going they felt that this was a property for everybody. And they wanted their share. [...

³⁷ Collins, R.O. (2008) A history of modern Sudan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.136

³⁸ Johnson, *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*, p. 19.

³⁹ Tvedt, T. (1994) "The collapse of the state in Southern Sudan after the Addis Ababa peace agreement." In: S. Harir and T. Tvedt (eds.) *Short-cut to decay: the case of the Sudan*. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, p. 86.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*, p. 19.

⁴¹ Tvedt, "The collapse of the state in Southern Sudan after the Addis Ababa peace agreement, p. 86.

⁴² Id., p. 86.

People] went to the extent of plucking everything, windows everything, and this is physically what happened, with these buildings, they actually plucked. [...] they took all the window frames, the doors, and everything.”⁴³

“When the decentralization of the government took place, the assets of the government were divided [...] When they were packing for the boat, two messengers, [...] one was from Upper Nile and one was from Equatoria, were struggling over a Thermoplus 40 [air conditioner]. Each wanted it for her region. So they struggled, they struggled, until the messenger from Upper Nile pulled it from the hands of this woman, threw it down and said that is yours. It was all [broken].”⁴⁴

And I know one of the things was that our ministers now here around, people resolve from destroying the buildings and picking chairs, tables, properties from the government so that they can go with it to their region where they are going to.”⁴⁵

Kokora and violence

While the formal policies of the re-division primarily focused on the distribution of staff and equipment, the effect of *Kokora* was much wider. As will be discussed later in this brief, the impact of *Kokora* is still being felt today and it continues to be subject of political debate. Considering this impact, it is perhaps surprising that the people interviewed for this brief did not report large-scale violence and atrocities. Different interviewees referred to tensions between Equatorian and non-Equatorian groups, which at times resulted in fighting, but these were interpreted as part of the broader inter-communal tensions, and linked to other events such as a girl being abducted from school, or clashes between pastoralists and farmers over land use and destruction of crops.

Respondents did not associate *Kokora* with largescale violence and atrocities.

“I don’t think there were abuses. [...] During Kokora there was no physical fighting that took place. It didn’t. It just was a war of words. Although there were personal, you know, small cases of community fighting, which had existed before. Those cannot be generalized. There were no abuses. But the hatred was very high.”⁴⁶

“[There were] some clashes here and there between the Equatorians and the Dinka. These are the most of the people who came in a direct confrontation. But the rest of the people, they went peacefully.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

⁴⁴ Focus group discussion with people from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

⁴⁵ Interview, L. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

⁴⁶ Interview, J. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

⁴⁷ Interview, L. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

Kokora was not without violence. Many people were forced to move, resulting in displacement, the loss of jobs and loss of properties.

However, this does not mean that the events of *Kokora* were without violence. Many people were forced to move to their regions of origin, regardless of the lives they had built. This not only meant the loss of jobs, but sometimes also losing houses and other property, or even families.

"[It was a] very harsh implementation. People were chased out of homes, and imagine that was about June and July, rains were falling. So this is my experience of the Kokora because I was in it. I had to leave because even my employees were not looking at me, in a friendly way. And some of the workers whom I left in Mangala, [...] they were actually removed physically by people of the area."⁴⁸

"A certain man from [...] Bahr el Ghazal came here in the 1950s and married a woman from the Bari tribe. Now, when the declaration for decentralization of the region came out, his agricultural file was lost by the people of Equatoria. And he was forced, he must go, but he cannot go with his family, a wife and three daughters. So this man came to say to his wife, 'Now I have no place in Equatoria, can't we go back to my home?' The wife said, 'Which home? I am not going to your home.' So he tried to save his daughters, because some of them were in secondary school. He said, 'Can we go?' They said, 'No'. So he tried to open in legal case in Mangala, in front of the chief. The chief told him, 'When you came from Bahr el Ghazal, you didn't have a wife, you didn't have children. They are not yours.' So this man went back to Bahr el Ghazal without a wife without children and he wasted whole his whole life in Equatoria. I think it was one of bitterest moments when you have to be separated by conditions, which are beyond your force."⁴⁹

Dividing communities of the South

As a result of *Kokora*, the south became deeply divided. Not only in terms of administration, but also socially and politically. Those who were forced to move from the Equatoria region naturally felt very negative about the events and their expulsion. Rather than helping resolve the communal tensions, the events stimulated further animosity between Equatorians and non-Equatorians in the Southern Region. Both interviewees from outside and within Equatoria acknowledged the negative consequences of *Kokora*.

"It has caused enmity between us and other regions and this is very serious."⁵⁰

"It created hatred among the communities in Southern Sudan."⁵¹

As a result of Kokora, the south became deeply divided. Not only in terms of administration, but also socially and politically.

⁴⁸ Focus group discussion with people from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ Focus group discussion with people from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

⁵¹ Interview, J. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

There is nonetheless a distinction between the two groups, in that non-Equatorians were dissatisfied with the policies and ideas behind it, whereas Equatorians were dissatisfied with the way in which the idea of *Kokora* was used by Khartoum and the way in which *Kokora* was implemented.

“The main idea behind the Kokora [was] not that the South should be broken up into different regions.”⁵²

Apart from deepening the social problems between Equatorians and non-Equatorians, the policy also resulted in a great loss of political power and economic income for the Southern Region as a whole. Rather than creating three regional levels of government under the administration of the Southern Region, the three regions replaced the Southern Region. Moreover, income through taxes and immigration were all centralized directly to Khartoum.⁵³ Both interviewees from Ekuatoria and outside acknowledged the fact that the ideas of *Kokora* were abused by Khartoum to divide and weaken the Southern Region.

The second civil war

Kokora is often mentioned as a cause of the civil war that started in the same year of 1983.⁵⁴ Several interviewees also mentioned *Kokora* as a motivation for people to join the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA)⁵⁵:

“Some people actually hated Equatorians because of this Kokora, because they felt that they were being chased away from Juba. They went to join SPLA because of this, not because of the division of South Sudan.”⁵⁶

However, while there may certainly have been individuals motivated to join the SPLA after being expelled from Ekuatoria, *Kokora* cannot be considered a root cause of the civil war. Indeed, the first insurgency groups already formed years before, and in the first years of the civil war the actions of *Anya Nya II*⁵⁷ and the SPLA were concentrated in Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal, not Ekuatoria. Nonetheless, the *Kokora* policy was linked to the breakdown of power and autonomy of the Southern Region by

While re-division cannot be considered the main cause of the onset of the civil war in 1983, it did affect the mobilization of southern communities against Khartoum.

⁵² Interview, S. from Ekuatoria, Juba, 2015

⁵³ Focus group discussion with people from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

⁵⁴ Wani Gore, P. (2014) *The overlooked role of elites in African grassroots conflicts: A case study of the Dinka-Mundari-Bari conflict in Southern Sudan*. Sudan Working Paper. Chr. Michelsen Institute, p. 12

⁵⁵ The SPLA, with its political wing the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), formed in 1983 under the leadership of Dr. John Garang, and fought for self-determination in the south of Sudan. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and the independence of South Sudan in 2011 the SPLM became the dominant political party in the country, and the SPLA became South Sudan’s military force. According to the Compromise Agreement signed in August 2015, the SPLA is to be renamed National Defense Forces of South Sudan (NDFSS).

⁵⁶ Interview, S. from Ekuatoria, Juba, 2015

⁵⁷ The *Anya Nya II*, the name implying a continuation of the *Anya Nya* movement from the first Sudanese civil war, was a rebel movement formed in 1978, and was mainly comprised of Nuer. Competition with the SPLA led to its defeat, with some of its ranks joining the SPLA and others joining Khartoum-allied militia.

Khartoum, and the abolition of the Addis Ababa Agreement. In the same period, Nimeiri introduced the Islamic Sharia Laws in the whole of Sudan – a further sign of taking over governance from the South. John Garang himself declared that the war was not about the re-division or Khartoum imposing Sharia law, but Khartoum’s plan to transfer former *Anyanya* forces to the north and dismantling their command-structures.⁵⁸

Even if the re-division cannot be considered the main cause of the onset of the civil war in 1983, it did affect the mobilization of southern communities against Khartoum. In Equatoria, the SPLA was seen as a Dinka army and was thus unpopular.⁵⁹ After the SPLA was expelled from Equatoria by government forces in 1985, the movement tried to win over local Equatorian communities by introducing locally-recruited SPLA in the area.⁶⁰ According to Johnson and Prunier, the SPLA was able to win sympathy in certain areas, though local attitudes towards the SPLA remained highly ambivalent.⁶¹ This was in stark contrast to the first civil war, which had started in Torit and in which Equatorians had played a large role. As one interviewee recalled:

“Kapoeta was the first to fall [to the SPLA] in Equatoria, but the rest of the Equatoria was peaceful or rather under the government control [...] The people of Equatoria were feeling this was a war started by Dinka to be truthful, so it is a Dinka war against the government. And they perceived it, again this idea of perception, they perceived it as a war sparked off because of Kokora, and [that it is an] anti-Equatoria war. This was the idea. Until when Kapoeta and then Torit gradually fell. And then some of our young people began joining [the SPLA] and then leading as officers the war in Equatoria.”⁶²

It has been more than 30 years since the re-division was effectuated, and 74% of the population is under 30 years old.

Kokora in present debates

The events of *Kokora* still have an effect today, as evidenced by the references made to the concept in present political debates. It is important to note, as one commentator does in a discussion on the meaning of *Kokora*,⁶³ that it has been more than 30 years since the re-division was effectuated and that 74% of the population is under 30 years old.⁶⁴ This means that by far the majority of South Sudanese don’t have first-hand experiences of *Kokora*, and that their perspectives are based on the

⁵⁸ Madut, A. (1987) “Colonel Dr. John Garang speaks to Heritage on war and peace in the Sudan.” In: *Sudan Heritage*, Khartoum, 2 November 1987, p. 4, available at:

<http://paanluelwel.com/2011/07/24/dr-john-garangs-1987-heritage-interview-with-arop-madut/>

⁵⁹ Johnson & Prunier, “The foundation and expansion of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army”, p. 127

⁶⁰ Young, J. (2012) *The fate of Sudan. The origins and consequences of a flawed peace process*. London/New York: Zed books, p 51.

⁶¹ Johnson & Prunier, “The foundation and expansion of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army”, p. 134

⁶² Interview, S. from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

⁶³ Lupai, J.K. (2013) “A federal system and Kokora are two different things.” *Sudan Tribune*, 20 March 2013, available at: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article45903>

⁶⁴ NBS (2012) *National Baseline Household Survey 2009. Report for South Sudan*. Juba: National Bureau of Statistics. Available at: <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/750842/18935272/1340636516527/NBHS+Final+website.pdf?token=BDZ1icK1E9QtJdi2Yzq1IPRHy2U%3D>, p 12.

histories shared in their communities. Combined with the different experiences of *Kokora* by different groups, and the contentiousness of the subject ever since it emerged in the 1970s, this warrants a closer look at how *Kokora* is referenced to in current political debates.

One instance in which the concept was referred to was during debates on the relocation of South Sudan's capital city from Juba. This debate originated from tensions between the central government, which requires land for offices and staff, and local landholders. President Salva Kiir was for instance quoted in a news article saying:

*"There were people who were resisting coming to Juba – and I am one of them. Because what happened in 1983 [Kokora] is a lesson. There were people who were victimized for no reason. And people died."*⁶⁵

The discussions on moving the capital city took place alongside, and as part of, a wider debate on the issue of federalism. The subject of federalism is not new to South Sudan, but continues to be hotly debated and sharply divides South Sudan's communities.⁶⁶ In June 2014 the governors of the three Equatoria states expressed support for federalism.⁶⁷ The government of Salva Kiir has until now been opposing federalism and attempts to limit debate on the subject. With Riek Machar in favor of federalism, the government and the SPLM-IO have different opinions on the topic, which has further politicized the debate. It should also be noted that the governors of the Equatorias also have different ideas of what federalism should look like than the SPLM-IO, and do not agree with Machar's proposals for federalism.⁶⁸ Machar had proposed to create 21 states, whereas the Equatorial federalists proposed to keep and strengthen the existing states. The most recent development with regard to decentralization was President Kiir's executive order of 2 October 2015, which creates 28 out of the 10 states of South Sudan.⁶⁹ The order came as a surprise to many, as the government had previously opposed the proposal of the SPLM-IO to create 21 new states.

There is also disagreement on whether or not federalism can or should be equated with *Kokora*. On the one hand, there are proponents of *Kokora* who are advocating

There is disagreement on whether or not *Kokora* can or should be linked to current discussions on federalism.

⁶⁵ Radio Tamazuj (2014) "Kiir again hints at possibility of moving capital." 25 November 2014, Juba, available online: <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/kiir-again-hints-possibility-moving-capital>

⁶⁶ See for an elaborate overview of federalism in South Sudan: Johnson, D.J. (2014) *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*. London/Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute.

⁶⁷ Sudan Tribune (2014) "Western Equatoria governor backs calls for federalism." 9 June 2014, , available at: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51283>

⁶⁸ Radio Tamazuj (2015) "Pro-federalism governor rejects Machar's plan for 21 states." 6 January 2015, Juba, available at: <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/pro-federalism-governor-rejects-machar%E2%80%99s-plan-21-states>

⁶⁹ See for more on viability and legality of the order, Mayai, A.T., N. Tiitmamer, J.M. Jok (2015) *The Creation of 28 South Sudanese States: Is It Economically and Legally Viable?* Weekly review, October 6, 2015. Juba: The Sudd Institute. Available at: <http://www.suddinstitute.org/assets/Publications/28-statesformatted.pdf>.

for its return in Juba as the federal solution.⁷⁰ On the other hand, opponents of federalism are linking it to *Kokora*, as a way of persuading people to reject federalism. Kiir was for instance quoted saying:

*“Kokora ‘will happen’ if a federal system is introduced in the country. [...] The issue that people are raising now, that is the same issue that came in 1983. Kokora. And Kokora should not again derail us from what we are doing.”*⁷¹

At the same time, there are proponents of a federal system that try to distance the idea of federalism from *Kokora* and its historical connotations. The governors of the three Equatorian states, for instance, have all been saying that while they are in favour of federalism, they have no intention of expelling people of other regions and that federalism is not the same as *Kokora*.⁷²

Douglas Johnson has in this discussion tried to disconnect the concept of *Kokora* from federalism in order to allow for a more fruitful discussion in South Sudan on federalism, which he argues is necessary before deciding whether some form of federalism could be a system for South Sudan or not.

*Those of us who lived through Kokora—and were abruptly and brusquely told to leave our jobs and go back to our home regions—have every reason to be suspicious of the advocates of the new Kokora. [...] Let us be clear: Kokora is not the same as federalism. It did not create a federal state in Equatoria or any place else in southern Sudan. It weakened the powers of the regions while leaving the power of the central government in Khartoum untouched, enhanced even. Those who want genuine federalism are best advised not to adopt Kokora as their model.”*⁷³

This paper does not aim to further the discussion on federalism, but reiterates Johnson’s argument that federalism should not be equated with *Kokora*. Also the word *Kokora* itself continues to hold different meanings to different people. Unfortunately, this is a comparison that not only continues to be made in political debates in South Sudan, but also in reports of outside commentators.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See: Johnson, *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*, p. 27.

⁷¹ Radio Tamazuj (2014) “Kiir raises fears of ‘Kokora’ under federal system.” 10 July 2014, available at: <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/kiir-raises-fears-%E2%80%98kokora%E2%80%99-under-federal-system>

⁷² Radio Tamazuj (2014) “Governor rebuts South Sudan leader’s ‘false’ remarks.” 17 July 2014, available at: <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/governor-rebuts-south-sudan-leader%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98false%E2%80%99-remarks>; Radio Tamazuj (2014) “Kiir raises fears of ‘Kokora’ under federal system.” 10 July 2014, available at: <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/kiir-raises-fears-%E2%80%98kokora%E2%80%99-under-federal-system>

⁷³ Johnson, *Federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ See for instance, Fleischner, J. (2014) *Spoils of War, Spoilers of Peace: Changing the Calculus of South Sudan’s Deadly Conflict*. Enough Project, p. 8.

Moving forward: unity after division

During interviews and focus groups held for this paper, participants discussed the topic of how South Sudan should deal with the legacy of *Kokora*. Participants were asked, what efforts, if any, should be undertaken with regard to truth seeking, justice and reconciliation in relation to *Kokora*?

Both sides continue to hold different narratives of *Kokora*, both with regard to the motives and causes underlying the events, and with regard their consequences.

The first difficulty was that there was no agreement whether individuals had suffered loss of properties as a result of the *Kokora* policy. Any claims of the loss of property or other resources could be investigated. However, the question of what steps to take with regard to those who have lost anything was considered more problematic. Most interviewees found that while compensation would in theory be a good solution, they questioned to whether it would be possible to organize reparation payments in practice. It was argued that it since the forced movements were so long ago, it would be difficult and costly to gather evidence for claims over lost properties. It was also feared that a compensation process would trigger new problems, due to misunderstandings and possible abuse.

Nonetheless, establishing facts and acknowledgement of lost properties could be part of a wider process of truth seeking and reconciliation. Both sides continue to hold different narratives of *Kokora*, both with regard to the motives and causes underlying the events, and with regard their consequences. For instance, during a focus group a man from Equatoria explained that while he acknowledged that *Kokora* has had negative consequences, he nonetheless considered his motivations for supporting *Kokora* and his idea of what *Kokora* entails still to be valid:

“Now, for me to do that, to say that now: ‘Kokora leave it, that it is bad, that it is causing inconvenience between me and my fellow citizen’, [then] the fellow citizen must also understand my motivations for going for Kokora and do something about that. And then we can greet each other, and can there be forgiveness. But if he cannot accept that he has been doing me wrong, then I cannot accept that my Kokora is bad.”⁷⁵

Talking to people from different sides, there is a strong preference for open dialogue. According to the respondents, the aim of such a dialogue should not be to point blame, but rather to acknowledge the different experiences and look for ways in which differences can be overcome.

“The accountability should not be in a way that it is imposed on people, or it is victimizing other people. The accountability should be from the angle of telling the truth: ‘yes, this happened and we are sorry for it.’ And then people will open a new page.”⁷⁶

A dialogue process should focus on developing a shared narrative on the events and consequences of *Kokora*, and a shared vision on how to move forward.

⁷⁵ Focus group discussion with people from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

⁷⁶ Interview, J. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

A dialogue process should therefore focus on developing a shared narrative on the events and consequences of *Kokora*, and a shared vision on how to move forward. This is particularly important as the majority of South Sudanese alive today did not have a first-hand experience of *Kokora*, and develop their viewpoints based on diverging histories and narratives.

As described above, the events of *Kokora* were in part a reaction to real or perceived ethnic favoritism in filling of jobs in government and public service. On the other hand, the promoters of *Kokora* in the 1970s and 1980s were themselves similarly accused of favoritism and corruption. Furthermore, the events have further stimulated ethnic divisions within South Sudan. Today, the issue of organizing governance continues to be interwoven with issues of ethnic identity. Thomas describes how decentralization is linked to clientalism as a system of governance and development. Creating ethnically based administrative units is then a way of distributing “scarce resources over a vast territory while building loyalty to the government through installation of a cadre of government employees across states.”⁷⁷ And while he notes that there are political operators in Juba that want a proliferation of ethnically based administrative units – arguably evidence of the system’s workability – it also has its risks, as excessively lopsided distributions of resources can lead to mutinies, and that the overlap between clientalism and ethnicity can go awry.⁷⁸

The underlying reasons that motivated the *Kokora* movement in the 1970s and 1980s are still present. At the same time, the events and aftermath of *Kokora* has arguably worsened rather than ameliorated the context that gives rise to these underlying reasons.

Therefore, the underlying reasons that motivated the *Kokora* movement in the 1970s and 1980s are still present, i.e. motivations of equal distribution of power and resources and local development. At the same time, the events and aftermath of *Kokora* have arguably worsened rather than ameliorated the context that gives rise to these underlying reasons. Interviewees from both within and outside Equatoria acknowledged the problem of ethnic divisions in the country. They also noted that ethnic favoritism and nepotism contribute to the further aggravation these divisions.

“People nowadays prefer to be in a group according to their place of origin or ethnicity and so forth. And this is what we need to work hard to discourage.”⁷⁹

“If there are no merits [needed] to occupy certain positions. Then people will think so and so has been put there because he is from this tribe or that tribe. And that is what is happening. [...] Therefore, to eliminate this kind of feelings of, you know, tribalism or nepotism, you have to have guidelines.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Thomas, E. (2015) *South Sudan. A slow liberation*. London/New York: Zed Books, p. 139.

⁷⁸ Thomas, E. (2015) *South Sudan. A slow liberation*. London/New York: Zed Books. P. 144

⁷⁹ Interview, L. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

⁸⁰ Interview, J. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

Apart from job selection regardless of ethnic affiliation, but on the basis of merit, another related point mentioned by the respondents was the need to strengthen the idea of a national identity.

“We have to recognize each other as an integral part of this country.”⁸¹

“We [should] look among ourselves as South Sudanese and one people. And we need to live or co-exist peacefully and share our wealth equally, so that no one will have any bitterness towards the other.”⁸²

⁸¹ Focus group discussion with people from Equatoria, Juba, 2015

⁸² Interview, L. from Bahr el Ghazal, Juba, 2015

Concluding remarks

Kokora was primarily motivated by a real or perceived inequality in access to governance and government positions. This feeling was purposefully instigated by the Nimeiri regime, in order to limit southern unity and with that southern influence and power over government and economic affairs. The outcome was therefore not the type of *Kokora* that had been promoted by many people in Equatoria, and rather than empowering Equatoria it disempowered the Southern Region. For many non-Equatorians, the word is associated with their expulsion or that of their family members from the Equatoria region during this period. The negative connotation of the word is further caused by its connection to the break-down of the Addis Ababa Agreement, and thereby the outbreak of the second civil war. Furthermore, it deeply divided communities in the south. It is therefore not surprising that many South Sudanese are weary of anyone promoting or even mentioning *Kokora* in the context of current political debates.

At the same time, people complain that issues of ethnic favoritism and nepotism, the underlying reasons for promoting *Kokora* in the 1970s, are persisting today. Among the possible solutions promoted today is the decentralization of governance structures. However, the events of *Kokora* show that decentralization does not guarantee more equal and improved development of the different states or regions. The difficulty is therefore to find a balance between the empowerment of the many local constituencies in South Sudan, and to maintain and develop a national identity.

The difficulty is to find a balance between the empowerment of the many local constituencies in South Sudan, and to maintain and develop a national identity.

An open debate on decentralization in South Sudan is not benefiting from comparisons with the events of *Kokora* in 1983; *Kokora* is not the same as *decentralization* or federalism in present times. But an open dialogue about *Kokora*, and the lessons that can be learned from it, may contribute to discussions about how South Sudanese wish to govern themselves, and how a national identity can be promoted.

Such a debate could also benefit the discussion on the creation of 28 states out of the current 10. At the time of writing the President's executive order creating the 28 states is not yet implemented, and it has received mixed reactions. This paper is not about the creation of 28 states, but about *Kokora*, and these are two different policies implemented in very different times. However, the events of *Kokora* do provide relevant lessons for initiatives aimed at decentralization in South Sudan. A number of issues contributed to the negative effects caused by the implementation of *Kokora* in 1983. The government of Khartoum implemented the policy to divide the south and strengthen its control over it. The implementation was also rushed and poorly prepared, causing chaos and further stimulating divisions within the south. Decentralization policies aimed at promoting the development of the country and distribution of the required resources should therefore be widely discussed and thoroughly planned before being implemented. This includes an open discussion on issues of legality and economic viability, as well as on the responsibilities and

relationships of different levels of governance and the political benefits for South Sudanese citizens.

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