REFUGEES ON THE MOVE

Displaced South Sudanese in Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda



EDITED BY

Leif Manger & Munzoul Assal

Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA)

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in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA)

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Published 2026
Printed in Ethiopia
ISBN: 978-99944-75-00-1

Copy-editing: *Woldie Belachew (PhD)*

Formatting and layout design: *Mikias Dawit*

Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa

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Acknowledgements

The funding that made this volume possible was provided by The Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD) through their program NORHED (The Norwegian Program for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development). The engagement of the staff members from NORAD from the very beginning of the project contributed to the smooth implementation of the project.

The University of Bergen, although a partner in the project, deserves special thanks. On the administrative side the Department of Social Anthropology with the Administrative Leader, Gro Aase and the Financial Officer, Marianne Soltveit, were always providing important advice and help. We also thank Pavla Jezkova who, despite her retirement from her position in the administration in the department, continued as a key person in the project, aiding in so many ways, and way beyond the call of duty. Her professional interventions when it comes to budgeting and financial reporting made our work easier. At the university level the administrative officers in charge of the NORHED projects, Kristin Svartveit and Margrete Bakstad Søvik in particular, also provided support and help in the internal administration of our project and also provided useful links between the university and NORAD.

We thank OSSREA (Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa) for their role in organizing our conferences as well as providing important help in the publishing process of this book. We would like to thank OSSREA's Executive Director, Truphena Mukuna and OSSREA's Regional Program Manager, Alemu Tesfaye for their contributions. Special thanks to Alemu Tesfaye for his valuable input in preparing the manuscript for publication.

The departmental project leaders of the project, Munzoul Assal (also overall project leader) in Khartoum and in Bergen, Fekadu Adugna Tufa in Addis Ababa, Eria Olowo Onyango and Stevens Aguto Odongoh in Kampala and Owen Ndoromo in Juba all deserve special thanks. They oversaw the implementation of the project at their respective departments, provided annual narrative and financial reports, organized and attended annual project meetings, and mentored students. Emeritus professor, Leif Manger has followed the development of the project and has together with Munzoul Assal edited this publication.

Finally, we are grateful to the contributors to this volume for their patience and readiness to revise their manuscripts. We are grateful to all our staff and students who at times did fieldwork in conditions that were not ideal and were keen to finalize their studies. The political situation in South Sudan made it problematic to do fieldwork anywhere, but still the people from Juba University managed to

carry out their studies. Due to the war in Tigray and unrest in many other places in Ethiopia, the staff and students from Addis Ababa University had to concentrate their studies on Gambella. In Sudan the war that started in April 2023 had dramatic consequences for all Sudanese. For the people engaged in this project it meant that both staff and students found themselves displaced and residing in different countries.

It is difficult to understand the kind of problems they all have had to and are still dealing with, and they all, staff and students alike, deserve our greatest admiration for having completed the studies they had planned.

Preface

On the present project

This publication builds on research undertaken by staff and students in departments in five universities. Four of them are anthropology departments, in Addis Ababa, Bergen, Sudan and Uganda. The last is The Institute of Peace, Development and Security Studies (IPDSS) at the University of Juba. The joint project relates to the NORHED-funded initiative and within the larger program area. It is part of the Humanities and Social Sciences sub-category, but also with links to other categories, generally to Education and Teachers Training and more specifically to the category on Political and Economic Governance. NORHED is now in its second period of existence. The first period, NORHED I, lasted from 2013 until 2019, and the present one, NORHED II, started in 2020 and will formally end in 2026.

The focus of our project was, and still is, as indicated by the title, on the current dramatic flight of people away from the collapsing new state of South Sudan into the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. As indicated, since the start of the project there have been dramatic developments in the region, developments that also affected our progress. The movement of refugees out of South Sudan continued as the conditions went from bad to worse, with the UN these days talking about the country yet again getting closer to all-out war. The conditions in some of the neighbouring countries have changed even more dramatically. Most extreme is the on-going war in Sudan since 2023, between the national army, the Sudan Armed Forces and the military organization RSF, the Rapid Support Forces. This war, which is about state power in Sudan, has unleashed a process of displacement that is among the worst we have seen for decades anywhere, and millions of Sudanese find themselves as IDPs within the country or as displaced on the run into neighbouring countries. In Ethiopia the fighting in Tigray lasted from 2020 until 2022, producing IDPs as well as Ethiopian refugees into eastern Sudan. Luckily, the project had not planned any fieldwork there. A year later, from 2023 onwards the direction of movement changed, with displaced Sudanese entering western Ethiopia, primarily in the Amhara region. Again, luckily, the project was not on the ground in that region. But our researchers did not avoid conflict. As Gambella was the chosen focus for our fieldwork our researchers met with and observed the violence in that region. In that area of Ethiopia, we see South Sudanese refugees being part of the conflicts, different groups bringing enmity with them from their home areas across the border, but also with new dimensions of the conflict emerging on the ground within Gambella, making them part of our studies.

Uganda is the country where we met with fewer problems. Of course, also there were many tensions brewing under the surface but without major violence producing problems for the project. Since the situation in Uganda and in Kampala and in Makerere University was relatively normal, we were able to send the displaced Sudanese MA-students to Makerere to finish writing their theses.

On the collaboration

The present NORHED project, "Refugees on the Run" represents a long history of collaboration built on the experiences from, and competences built in, earlier collaborative programs based on various forms of Norwegian development funding. The history of this goes back to the early 1960s, when the Bergen-Khartoum link started. The anthropology part of this link was considerably developed through the 1970s (the Savanna Project) and 1980s (through the wider Sudan Program that also included other disciplines). In the 1980s the Sudan-Bergen link was also joined by the Ethiopia-Bergen collaboration in anthropology, a link that was started and maintained by researchers at the private Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI). These links were made possible and were expanded in the 1980s through the academic parts of a larger SSE-program (Sudan-Sahel-Ethiopia Program). The academic part of this program was focused on the understanding of the African drought of the 1980s. The activities within the SSE-program continued into the 1990s within a new framework for Norwegian development funding for higher research and education; The Norwegian Universities' Committee for Development Research and Education (NUFU). Based on NUFU funding, the East African Dryland Program was set up in which all the collaborating partners mentioned above were linked in a regional program administered by OSSREA. The last incoming partner, the University of Juba, also belongs to this history. First as a university established in South Sudan in the late 1970s, then moved to Khartoum during the civil war that ended in 2005, and then again reorganized in Juba following the establishment of South Sudan as an independent country in 2011. In this collaboration the late professor Samon Wassara was always a close colleague and he was instrumental in developing the application for this project before his untimely death in 2019.

We elaborate on this history to make several points. First, to point towards the productive collaboration between universities and research institutions in Bergen and NORAD, the main agency for Norwegian development aid in which all parties contributed into a process that over time turned out to be very productive in terms of competence and capacity building in all participating institutions. For instance, during this period, the Department of Social Anthropology in Bergen established an M.Phil. Program (also based broader Norwegian development funding) in which participating students from the collaborating institutions could

study, some of them proceeding further for Ph.D. studies at Bergen. Second, the productiveness indicated was in the form of building of anthropological and broader social science competence on the East African region in Bergen, while at the same time Bergen could be a partner in the continuous building of academic competence in the four universities of Khartoum, Addis Ababa, Makerere and Juba. A third point relates to the long-term development of a tradition of applied anthropology and applied social science through the funding and competence building mentioned above. The work within the collaborative links has been characterized all the time by attempts to formulate important anthropological and social science research questions related to basic applied and developmental issues of the day. Students could then pursue studies in which they combined their own competence building as students within various disciplines, of social anthropology and others, with a contribution of knowledge on specific issues of relevance to broad developmental processes in their home regions countries and regions.

The fourth point follows from the first three and brings us to the current project. It is important that this new form of Norwegian funding, now brought together in NORHED, has made it possible to continue the above collaboration within the field of social anthropology as well as other social science disciplines. It is of further interest to note that three out of the five local project leaders have obtained their degrees in anthropology in Bergen, thus representing direct links back to the earlier years of collaboration.

The NORHED model has thus made it possible for the project to promote scientific research on social development issues in East Africa, to foster policy dialogue, to increase the influence of research on development planning and implementation, and to build the capacity of higher learning institutions for research and publication. The present project is the second NORHED funded project we have been engaged in. The first one, the so-called NORHED I-project was focused on border situations around the collaborating countries of Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. The findings and discussions are presented in the publication "Borderland Dynamics in East Africa. Cases from Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda" (Manger et al., 2019).

The present project, Refugees on the Move, focuses on the field of refugee and migration studies, with a special link to processes of displacement, with the aim of increasing competence on the specific aspects of these issues within the region. When we developed the project ideas, in 2019, the displacement of South Sudanese, both within South Sudan and into neighbouring countries was the dominant case, and we wanted to look at these processes. For this to happen we invited the University of Juba to join. The timing here is of importance. The project was formulated in 2019, and was funded in 2020, meaning that our studies

were planned and our fieldworks were carried out prior to the later disasters in Ethiopia and Sudan. This does not reduce the importance of our studies, but it means that the readers of this book may ask about these later wars and processes of displacement in Ethiopia and Sudan. To meet these expectations our project leader, Munzoul Assal provides a final chapter of the book looking into these more recent developments in the wider regions of the Horn of Africa and the Lakes region.

As with the NORHED I project, our NORHED II project that is to be discussed in this volume, our aim has been both academic and applied. And the benefit is not only measured by academic competence but also by the fostering of human relationships between researchers across the region. The capacity built through this project, with a regional focus of collaboration between South Sudan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda will also produce linkages of collaboration that may be of future use in the dealing with regional dimensions of the refugee problem in East Africa. The various chapters with case studies from individual countries, and the wider comparative discussions in this book provide examples of what such a collaboration has to offer.

CHAPTER ONE

REFUGEES ON THE MOVE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Leif Manger with Munzoul Assal

A Starting Point

Going back in time, to 2020 and the start of the project, the aim was to follow the South Sudanese refugees from their home areas into the neighbouring countries of Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda. Several aspects of this movement were to be studied. First, the factors affecting people in South Sudan to leave their homes and start on the movement away from home, first into IDP camps within their country, then onwards into neighbouring countries. The general stories from the different countries where displaced people were studied run as follows:

South Sudan

The civil war in South Sudan began on 15 December 2013. Although it was triggered by disagreements within the government, its roots are historical and relate to the failure to create inclusive modes of governance in the newly (since 2011) independent South Sudan. Fighting engulfed the capital, Juba, and rapidly spread to other parts of the country and affected all parts of the national territory. Poverty is also an important factor in the refugee crisis. South Sudan is primarily rural, characterized by a general lack of access to services, infrastructure, and economic opportunity. More than 85% of the 13 million South Sudanese reside in sparsely populated rural areas with very poor amenities. Little economic activity is conducted outside of the agricultural sector, and farming remains the primary source of livelihood for more than 8 out of 10 households. Contributing to the lack of economic opportunity is the fact that decades of conflict, both as part of former Sudan and following independence in 2011, have had a devastating impact on the national education system. South Sudan consequently has one of the lowest literacy rates in Africa, with only 4 out of 10 people being able to read and write. Infrastructure is also sorely lacking, and only about 2 in 8 people have access to adequate water and sanitation services. Many see no other alternative than to leave. Most of the refugees are women and

children, many of whom flee across the borders alone. With the rainy seasons, their needs are compounded by flooding, food insecurity, and disease. Although UNHCR and many other humanitarian agencies are doing all they can to provide relief and life-saving shelter with limited resources, displacement in the region is expected to rise until a genuine political solution is found.

The above sketches of violent war and general underdevelopment led to the exodus of people from South Sudan. Understanding these developments has thus become the first part of our work. Then, our second focus was to catch up with the fleeing groups of people as they arrived and settled in neighbouring countries. The three neighbouring countries were Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda, and we introduce each one in turn to give an impression of the complexities the refugees entered, and thus what our studies had to deal with.

Sudan

To the north the neighbouring Sudan hosts the second largest number of South Sudanese refugees (Uganda have the highest numbers). If we now focus on the new situation after the secession of the South Sudan in 2011, we see a peculiar situation in which the South Sudanese are coming as refugees into a country in which they until recently were citizens. Hence, the refugee problem contains many issues that are peculiar to this situation. Many South Sudanese refugees are in camps along the new national borders, especially in the White Nile State, in an area where some of them used to live, especially people from the Shilluk tribe, thus having resources such as land and a network of relationships with local populations on the Sudanese side. Other South Sudanese refugees, Shilluk as well as Dinka and Nuer, find themselves as destitute refugees living in camps being totally dependent on what the camps have to offer. Also, among the many South Sudanese who live in the capital city of Khartoum, we see the dilemma they face by on the one hand having a history as well-established Sudanese citizens, while after 2011 they find themselves treated as non-Sudanese by the regime of Omer Bashir. Sometimes they were seen as "brothers", other times as "guests" and, more rarely, they were called "refugees". Such labelling was part of regime policies, created both to keep the UNHCR physically away from the camps, but also more generally not to become entangled in the international legal regimes relating to how countries were supposed to handle refugees. While this changed over the years and Sudan eventually allowed the term “refugee” to be used again, the refugees from South Sudan all the time experienced an uncertainty

created by being in between legal systems, citizenships and countries of belonging.

Ethiopia

The situation in Ethiopia is again different. Most of the South Sudanese refugees are hosted in camps in Western Ethiopia (seven in Gambella and one in Benishangul Regional States) whereas some are found in urban centres, mainly in Gambella City and a few in Addis Ababa. The political and economic histories of the western peripheries of Ethiopia were always intimately linked to the Sudan and then, after 2011, more specifically to South Sudan. Ever since the first civil war started in Sudan, in 1955, developments were linked to developments in these borderlands, also involving successive Ethiopian regimes. This borderland tension produced mutual interventions in each other's national affairs, a situation that has continued until today and which all the time has been of key importance in shaping conditions for the refugees in the region of study. To capture some of the local dynamics of this situation we focused our studies in the Gambella region in which most refugees from South Sudan are from the Nuer and Anywaa tribal groups. Also, here we see the same situation as indicated for Sudan, that the local situations for the two groups are influenced by a historical legacy in which some Nuer and Anywaa have a historical presence in the region and are Ethiopian citizens, while new groups of refugees from the same groups are arriving into Gembella. These newly arrived groups of Nuer and Anywaa are legally to be seen as being refugees but they both become part of the existing political situation among the Nuer and Anywaa who are Ethiopian citizens and who are part of the national political developments in Ethiopia.

Uganda

In Uganda the relatively stable internal situation coupled with a progressive refugee policy and a traditionally open model of hospitality, makes the country stand out as a hub that has attracted many people from neighbouring South Sudan into camps in northern Uganda and West Nile region. Freedom of movement granted by the Ugandan legislation allows refugees to either live in towns or to stay in the settlements, where they benefit from humanitarian aid. Again, we see a border situation in which we find the same tribes on both sides of the border, but without seeing the violent conflicts we saw in the case of Gambella in Ethiopia. The primary response by the Ugandan authorities to all influx of South Sudanese into Uganda is primarily to locate them in refugee settlements and camps.

Uganda has more than ten refugee settlements. But despite the "open door" policy of Uganda towards refugees we also see challenges. Rising numbers have not only put a heavy toll on humanitarian aid delivery; but also, on Uganda's resources, such as land. In addition, there are South Sudanese refugees in Kampala, the capital, producing urban based problems.

Organizing the Studies

In approaching the complexities hinted at above we directed studies in different directions. First, we saw that a major focus would be on the poorest refugees, people we mainly found in refugee camps, and we also saw that many of these camps were found along specific border areas. This raised two important issues. First, we were interested in the internal dynamics in the camps, looking at how the camps solved the problems of various problems among the refugees, from health problems to educational problems to general livelihood problems. In general, the focus was to understand better the life of refugees within refugee communities and their imaginations of their future chances for a better life. An important starting point for the studies of these groups was an expectation that many of the refugees would be impoverished men, women and children, which then would bring in a strong focus both on general poverty and on the more specific gender-based problems among the refugees themselves. The second issue in such camps was the fact that many people in the camps belonged to the same groups that lived in the areas of the camps. This was of course a result of colonialism and the colonial processes of establishing borders between territories, borders that often cut across the territories of the same tribes, making them members of different colonial administrations and later citizens of different countries. In these situations, it was of interest to know more about the consequences of this situation in the general adaptation of refugees and compare it to situations in which the tribes on each side of the borders were not the same. Thus, the focus on refugees and their relationship to the local host populations in and around camp areas was of interest.

But we also intended to move beyond the level of the refugee camps and move into wider regional, national, and international contexts to deal with the arrival and stay of such high numbers of refugees. To understand such wider contexts, we needed also to understand the position of local, regional and national authorities in the handling of refugees, and to provide an insight into the various types of customary laws and civil state laws and legal practices that made up contexts that affected refugees.

Such insights could open a broader perspective on national issues in the different countries that would most certainly have strong feedback effects on how refugees were treated. Here the researchers were helped by contributions from an earlier NORHED project, in which the three anthropology departments in Khartoum, Addis Ababa and Kampala (Makerere) studied general border relations in the region. The results of those studies (from the NORHED I period, 2013-2019) were published in an edited book with the title "*Border Dynamics in East Africa. Cases from Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda*" (see Manger et.al., eds, 2019) and provided useful knowledge into the state-society relations along national borders. These border and borderland insights turned out to be very useful in bringing a focus into the project on the more general state - refugee policies and governance in those countries. A key here is the national level. We assume that a critical dynamic affecting the refugees is to be found in the various governance frameworks at the national level in the countries we focus on. It is necessary therefore also to point at macro perspectives that inject important dynamics into the national refugee processes under discussion.

This is the global dynamics and the dynamics of individual nation states, and how the two come together to create important dynamics in the refugee field. International law is one context that goes back to the early 1950s, and international systems like the UN and international NGOs have been pushing for improvements in the handling of refugees in the direction of such legal improvements. But we have also argued that individual countries become important for the actual handling of refugees within the countries, sometime following the intention of the laws, at other times not, in the latter case the reason is often linked to domestic governance issues. Over time we see many attempts at creating an improved international and global context for the handling of refugees, a recent one building on the 2016 New York Agreement mentioned earlier and initiated by the UN and UNHCR in 2018. This is the so called "Global Compact on Refugees." The Compact is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a sustainable solution to refugee situations cannot be achieved without international cooperation. Ideally, it provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives. It is supposed to constitute a unique opportunity to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them. In our case there are also regional efforts to follow up on these intentions. One key

example of this is IGAD's "Protocol on Free Movement of Persons". The protocol recognizes free movement to mitigate the effects of various types of disasters, giving the victims of such disasters certain rights while being displaced, for instance rights of residence and equal treatment about working conditions and other rights such as unfair recruitment conditions. The Protocol was adopted in 2020 and endorsed by Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia in May 2024. All these regulations aim at improving the protection of affected individuals in case of displacement and settlement outside their home countries. However, we know that in general, and also as we see from our studies, host countries vary in their follow-up on such normative principles. For instance, in many cases they opt to provide complementary or subsidiary protection to those fleeing conflict and violence rather than recognize them as refugees. The reasons vary from political considerations about the country of origin, to the practicality of processing large numbers of asylum claims, to concerns about setting precedents, to attempts to minimize obligations on the host country.

Thus, we see that pragmatism and political expediency make individual countries, through the state actors, deviate from the normative and ideal world described in the documents. In each country, national politics and priorities were expected often to be the primary source of what possibilities and constraints the different groups of refugees were met with, and which defined their immediate chances to create their own lives. A significant issue that is also related to the national level was the realization that we needed to focus on the legal contexts for the national refugee politics in different countries. It was assumed that such a legal focus would make us see better important differences in the treatment of refugees, treatment that related to the different understandings of what specific legal issues are important in the different countries we study. Such laws are found at different levels of scale, and we need to focus on the nation state level (defining citizenship, security laws etc.).

But there also was a level of international organizations like UNHCR/IOM and international NGOs, which also implied a linking of the UN defined international refugee laws with national laws regarding refugees. It is common knowledge that the nation states are affected by the international system of dealing with refugees, from the early beginning of such legal work and international agreements in the early 1950s to the more contemporary developments such as the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, in which the International Community sought to strengthen the protection of refugees. All the countries in which we carried

out studies had signed up to these declarations, but we expected that our studies also would uncover tensions and conflicts in the ways the countries dealt with the normative ideals of the declarations and their own struggle to maintain state power in their respective countries. The challenges in front of the states were huge. The crises that had to be handled were violent wars, droughts leading to loss of productive resources, leading to famines, and the many problems produced by flooding. Health issues also became important, as people left their home areas to avoid small and larger epidemics. All the causes mentioned represent challenges that national authorities had to deal with, and in this process the presence of refugees created a series of challenges that had to be handled.

Towards A Conceptual Focus: Assemblage Theory

The above reflections that guided the organization of our studies also called for a conceptual basis for dealing with all the complexities involved. Our choice here was to explore assemblage theory.

To anthropologists and social scientists in general, mass displacement presents a combination of challenges, from theoretical and methodological ones in understanding what is going on, to more applied and policy relevant challenges in terms of offering suggestions as to how to approach such processes. Situations of mass displacement may represent historical "laboratories" for experimenting with new ways of organizing space, delivering aid, managing host-refugee relations, governing and managing the displaced, and developing and testing new policies. On the background of such complexities, we start with two "warnings."

First, to catch the complexities, we need to be careful about using simplified language of "push and pull"-factors and "root causes", by which we end up with a rather static view of a linear process with a beginning and an end, and a homogeneous dynamic along the migratory routes. What we see empirically is that the refugees make different kinds of choices, and we should be interested in knowing more about why such choices are made. But there is more. Refugees are also met by different kinds of suspicions among the states and the citizens into which they move. In the general media, both on-paper and on-line, they are described as "terrorists" by some, and "economic migrants" by others, both stereotypes based on claims about refugees that they make use of the refugee status to hide their real identities and intentions.

A second "warning" relates to the views we find in reports issued by neoliberal institutions about how to understand refugees. For instance, in

World Bank reports (see e.g. World Bank Report 2023) observe the tendency to individualize the refugees. The World Bank seems totally focused on individual human beings as "migrants" and "refugees", being units seen as operating within external context of "states" and "markets". Both states and markets must, according to the World Bank, be developed in ways that make it possible for the individual refugee to make choices that help improve the situation for themselves as well as for the common good in the societies from where they came and to which they went. Here the basis is the neo-liberal belief in the entrepreneurial skills of the individual to create better chances for himself or herself.

Here we agree with Talal Asad' critique of this position, arguing instead that we need a more historical view on the human agency (Asad 1994, p. 78). The general point made by Asad is that human agency must not be reduced to a "Western" conception in which agency is understood as an attribute or trait inherent to individual subjects, and that individual agency is primarily circumscribed by external factors. Such "external circumstances" are (and, we argue, is implicit in the World Bank position) connected with "tradition," where people's autonomy is shaped by religion, their ethnic groups and families. Within such a framework, people are generally perceived to become more autonomous if they are more "individualized". Their capabilities of agency are thus increased through processes of individualization, through "de-traditionalization" and through integration into "modernity." In this view, the community, tradition and the family seem to operate as external constraints, and when these external constraints disappear, people are "free" to "choose" their identities and ways of life. Again, the individual is already there, being formed by the various types of relationships that help give it shape. This happens by way of individual choices. Here, Talal Asad objects to this notion about a decontextualized human agency. His alternative is to see agency as a historical capacity built into people by being members of specific "traditions". This capacity to act does not exist naturally in human beings but is obtained through temporal practices within a tradition.

With these two "warnings" we return to our preferred conceptual starting point. In general, the concept of assemblages identifies the dynamic combination and recombination of relationships between people, institutions and resources that shape emerging contexts of experimentation that do not neatly overlap or correspond with nation state political borders. Assemblage can help us bring new dynamics into old categories such as "society," "culture," "nation," and "globalization" especially now, in a neo-liberal world in which the global powershifts represented by President

Trump and the US cuts in the funding of refugee institutions and specific activities produce new types of developments in the wider refugee sector. This adds to the challenges faced by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, geographers, and others in their exploring of new ways to frame spaces of inquiry that capture the heterogeneity of elements involved in the making of spaces of living lives as refugees.

They all ask what the strengths of assemblages as a realm of theory are, politics, organizing, legal structures, and method (‘see for instance Puar, 2011). The concept is part of theories that stress diversity and various forms of intersectionality, and it is a relevant question to ask why not make use of such alternative conceptualizations. One point here is that these theories do not take the body into consideration; they only focus on identities. Here we enter the field of theorizing introduced by Donna Haraway and her groundbreaking 1985 essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs." This introduced the postmodern technologized figure of techno-human hybridity, of humans and animals, of humans and machines, and of physical and non-physical. What concerns us here is not the debate about cyborgs but rather that by this move Haraway also becomes an early voice in (implicitly) invoking a binary between intersectionality and assemblage.

Obviously, there are several understandings of how to operationalize the dynamics embedded in this concept but in general it points to processes of connections and to see such connections as “events”. Which makes identities constant processes of identification, groups into constant processes of group-making, states and nations into constant processes of state- and nation-making. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) who are the two French philosophers who introduced the concept, focus on processes of becoming and emergence, being multi-causal and multi-directional, all pointing at dynamic interrelationships and thus helping us avoid essentialism. What comes out of this is a change in social relations, by having their current organization and contexts altered, mutated, or destroyed. But it is not all movement; the halting of motion produces the demand to locate. The authors label social relations as a *territory*, and that assemblages come into existence within processes of territorialization and reterritorialization. Assemblage as a concept thus contains both movement and periods of non-movement, or between the tree and the rhizomic as are two other familiar concepts of Deleuze and Guattari.

Picking up on this, DeLanda (2016) sees in the concept of assemblage the empirical interactions between the various parts, an interaction in which the outcome is more than the sum of individual parts. Assemblages, he

claims, are formed from bottom-up, but when established they have a top-down influence on the various parts. The parts are not the same, they are composed of heterogeneous components, such as people, material and symbolic artifacts which could end up in material forms (persons, bodies, things), practices (action, activities, agencies), knowledge (epistemes, scientific statements, concepts, discourse), social organizations (capital, culture, politics, bureaucracies, institutions, organizations) and forms of expressions (gestures, words, music, affect, desire) (Elder-Vass and Rutzou 2017).

What we want to emphasize and pursue here is the very fact that the migrations and movement of people are processes that are affected by a lot of factors, from leaving home and what people meet along the routes, from borders that can be crossed in legal as well as illegal ways, then meeting a new reality on the other side of the border, formed by the political and bureaucratic developments of various institutions and groups, from state activities, to NGOs to the populations in the areas in which the migrants turn up. We have already indicated some of the complexities that were important in our formulating of the project studies themselves. Armed with such hypotheses, our researchers went out to look for the various arenas and institutional, political and legal contexts the refugees found themselves in. Such conditions may create positive as well as negative consequences for the refugees, and to learn about this we were particularly interested in understanding more of how such contexts affected the everyday lives of the refugees. Such arenas may vary, from huts and rooms in camps which migrants live in, to streets and shops in cities where migrants might stay, to official offices, in which immigrations authorities or labour market authorities or transportation offices are making decisions affecting refugees. In such arenas, we see social relationships among the refugee groups themselves, for instance effects on gender relations within families and relationships between groups in the camps, but also, moving outside the camps to observe how power relationships between nation states and global institutions play out, and again, what effects we could observe for the people at the centre of our studies.

It is such a complexity of factors that all work and produce effects in the refugee system that we can conceptually label "assemblages." The concept of assemblages will help us focus on these processes as a totality, as an ever-changing systemic dynamic, rather than the linear push and pull, root-causes for migration and migrants meeting the receiving society. Obviously within such a perspective there will be many types of focuses for study, also demanding inter-disciplinary efforts to study and explain

assemblages in the sending villages and camps, in the areas in which refugees stay for a while, or along the chains of migration as they move out of South Sudan. In this process we also may see that the people may not be refugees all the time but enter and leave different roles and do different tasks as they move, partly in order to collect money but also to get network connections that can bring the person to the next destination, moving closer to the final destination. In such situations it becomes problematic to define who is who, who is the refugee and who is the human trafficker, to mention a dramatic example, or to decide who is the legal worker and who is the smuggler and so on.

If we add a focus on institutions within such a perspective of assemblages, we see that in all the countries we find a mix of humanitarian organizations and human rights groups representing various non-governmental efforts to deal with the situation of refugees alongside a government-run apparatus based on a complex legal system dealing with quotas and visa categories based on immigrant, refugee and asylum statuses. This shows also that the problem of refugees is not only about the migrating population but also about the populations in the countries in which the refugees settle and about political and bureaucratic systems and their dynamics. Restricting immigration possibilities, sealing borders and checking on those who are within borders are some of the measures taken to control immigrant populations, which brings in the security institutions in a country. There are also legal systems at work, some based on international law, such as the Convention of 1951 and the Protocol of 1967, or national legal refugee systems, building international law of today but also diverting from those laws. Such deviations may be for economic reasons, that a country lacks financial strength to follow up on all demands but can also be related to a national governance system in which problems of various sorts can create effects that negatively affect refugees, directly or indirectly. Studies of such factors can help us understand how the refugees can adapt, create opportunities for themselves, or being constrained in pursuing their aims.

On a general level the issue of multiculturalism is part of this in that multiculturalism is an attempted answer to the challenge of how to allow people to maintain individual identities as members of minority groups while at the same time allowing them to feel as part of a wider society. The question of citizenship also belongs here, whether citizenship can have other foundations other than a national collective, thus opening for a broader understanding of the relationship between particularistic identities and universalized rights.

Generally, what we should be after in this project and in this publication is the contemporary interaction of dynamics of the public and private, the formal and the informal and the legal and the illegal and we can see institutions and their dynamics as part of the same migration process, also helping to shape it. From the states and their reception centres, detention camps, NGOs, or the UN system. And, to complicate further, such analyses from the individual countries should then be added together in processes of comparison, which produce an added challenge. Our next challenge is to develop a perspective on comparison in which the complexities established with the assemblages in different countries can be compared.

Regional Comparison – From Precariousness to Precarity

While we designed this project, an important focus was on comparison. We started out our collaborative work in the belief that there was a lack of regional perspectives on the problem of how refugees from South Sudanese adapted throughout the region. What we suggested was to carry out an in-depth, comparative academic study on South Sudanese refugees which we believed could contribute to the creation of a knowledge-based regional perspective on South Sudanese refugees and eventually a better basis for policy making, also in other cases than the one represented by South Sudanese refugees. The aim was ambitious. Dealing with all the factors indicated above and understanding how they played out, within a country and between countries, represents a major challenge for the project. A basic approach was to look for dynamics within specific assemblages, or fields of interactions that could be compared across our different cases. This provided us with a clearer view of dynamics on different levels of scale. We saw the universal tendencies characterizing refugee discourses and how nation states operated in their meeting with such global expectations and norms. But we also saw specific local forms of the articulation of normative principles and realities on the ground, within camps, between refugees in camps and the host populations, and between refugees and various types of national policies.

One comparative lesson stands out immediately. We find the national level to be an important field to us as it opens dynamics in two directions, downwards towards the national borders and towards refugees in their camps and upwards towards the international level of global refugee-related dynamics. But in handling the national state level as a comparative field of dynamics does not mean we are comparing "countries." It means we are comparing the ways the many relevant fields of interaction within assemblages mentioned above, from the camps upwards to the

international systems to come together in different ways in different countries. The results of our comparisons are therefore not the result of pre-given facts but are entirely a result of our analysis. To make sense of this, we needed to enter into a discussion about our basic conceptual comparative approach, an approach that could make such a comparison possible. As discussed above, a general starting point was the theoretical concept of assemblages. But to compare, we are also required to be more specific about the dynamics within the assemblages. But the question remains. Is there a concept that can help us provide a unified comparative view by which we can view the refugees as they live their lives within the different assemblages we have suggested? Concepts such as adaptation within contexts, based on choices based on various considerations, have all been part of our discussions. Is it possible to push this a bit further towards a more substantial process that cuts across the various challenges the refugees are met with? Our suggestion here is to focus on the concepts of "precariousness" and "precarity."

A starting point for our reflections here is associated with Judith Butler's work (2009) focusing on existential and ontological aspects of contingency. In clarifying this, Butler makes a division between the two concepts of precariousness and precarity. This difference links to what she calls the '*more or less existential conception of "precariousness" ', the 'vulnerability, injurability, interdependency' that constitute the human condition, to a 'more specifically political notion of "precarity"' whereby 'social and political organizations … have developed historically in order to maximize precariousness for some and minimize precariousness for others*' (Butler 2009: 2–3).

We argue that the concepts of precariousness and precarity in the way defined by Butler can help us bring together the empirical complexities presented above and allow us to see the challenges people have faced over time, across generations, come together. In this sense, precariousness becomes part of what Butler sees as part of the ontological human condition. What brings in the concept of precarity is the movement from such a general human, adaptations context, to a more special situation, produced by various types of crises, leading to processes of displacement.

To provide a general view on this, we can look at historical changes that have affected the types of societies from which the refugees are coming. It is easy to forget that refugee migration is only one type of human mobility, specifically produced by various types of forced displacement. But historically people have moved for a variety of reasons and defined by

characteristics within specific types of adaptations (see Sanjek, 2003). Looking at the groups in our studies, the groups we meet as refugees have themselves been part of societies that have been involved in different types of more "normal" movements. Some belong to pastoral societies, having lived lives in camps moving in search of pasture, others may have a history as traders, moving among different markets and so on. Others again might not have a history of moving around, but rather have a history as farmers, staying in their villages. And for all, by being in specific areas they have interacted with other groups, the pastoralists interacting with farmers, violently in competition about pasture or more peacefully in marketplaces, and men and women have different experiences from such encounters, as young people will differ in their experiences from elderly people. Some of these historical challenges may be labelled as precariousness, in Butler's understanding of that term, as general ontological situations of insecurity. What we are studying here is movement within a modern context in which nation states, citizenship, global rules about how states should interact and so forth become specific modern context that would move us towards the concept of precarity.

Comparing Specific Papers

Starting with the refugees, it seems clear that living the life of a refugee is only one of many different adaptive experiences that people may live in, defined by physical mobility, but also, as our studies have shown, showing great differences in terms of social, political and economic dynamics and embeddedness as people meet the reality of displacement. In the following, we discuss the various papers organized in ways that allow us to see the adaptation of the refugees in the three countries in a comparative light, the comparative theme indicated by the headline of each section. But we begin, of course within South Sudan, with some papers on the political crisis in that country that produces the displacement of people.

Section 1. Problems in the Homeland: The Politics of Violence in South Sudan

To capture the situation inside South Sudan the project focused on different dimensions of this crisis. One paper, by Angok Achuil Angok Achuil (Chapter Two) is presenting a study on the relationship between ethnic politics, displacement and security dilemmas in South Sudan since the country's independence in 2011. The paper focuses on capturing the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, including government officials, security personnel, and displaced community members, to

provide nuanced insights into these complex issues, the issues being how ethnic affiliations influenced perceptions and group behaviours often fuelling conflicts over political representation and resources. Methodologically, the study employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in key urban centres such as Juba, Malakal, and Wau. The findings revealed that ethnic identities significantly shaped political loyalties and resource control, fuelling grievances, revenge killings, and displacement. Over half of respondents perceived power as concentrated among specific ethnic groups, exacerbating societal divides and insecurity. Displacement was both a consequence and driver of ongoing tensions, with displaced persons experiencing heightened vulnerability to violence, economic hardship, and limited access to essential services. The study concludes that ethnic politics has undermined national unity, impeded effective governance, and perpetuated cycles of violence and displacement.

A second study, by Rachel Amina Cyrus (Chapter 3) expands the general study by Angok by focusing more specifically on insecurity in one state, in this case Upper Nile State. The paper identifies the causes of insecurity, consequences of insecurity, the structure on insecurity, and how this insecurity is causing panic and makes people run away from Upper Nile State. The paper considers attacks on people, institutions, and killings of vulnerable people by rebellious groups, ethnic militias, robbers, and looters. Security challenges obstructed the general progress of people in the entire Upper Nile Sate. Rachel's study first shows us what is the basis for the decision to leave "home"? Home may be villages or small towns, but many also leave from other IDP-camps to enter new ones within South Sudan. In such cases, the starting point is the camp life and the effects not of the situation in the home village, but rather the bureaucratically and politically defined ability of UNHCR and others to provide a decent life in the camps. In Rachel¨s paper the camps, such as the Protection of Civilian Camps (PoC) are at times still places of violence making people insecure and afraid.

This takes us directly to the third study, by Christopher Oringa Mark (Chapter 4), which was to focus on displaced people who for various reasons had ended up in IDP camps (Internally Displaced People). Such camps were better than what we saw in Upper Nile, and the discussion is more on how the internal refugees participate in various types of activities in and outside the camps. Chrisopher uses this case to both discuss how people adapt and to link this adaptation to the concept of resilience. Empirically the case studied shows that people do indeed seek adaptive

strategies that may be linked to what resilience is about, but that, again empirically, the issue of gender is highlighted to show that despite efforts to develop new adaptive strategies the gender inequalities remain. But instead of blaming people for lack of resilience the documented adaptations do indeed indicate efforts that are resilient but that the problem is rather the lack of follow up within the camps to consolidate these efforts into more viable strategies pointing towards sustainable developments. To develop this argument, Christopher develops a broader argument with a criticism of disaster relief and general development aid systems as being unable to follow up the documented efforts by people to develop resilient strategies. This is related to the problems in the larger systems of providing sufficient finance to provide staff and other resources to consolidate the efforts by local people to improve their livelihood situation.

Section 2. Entering the Neighboring Countries: National Policies, Institutions and Legal Systems

What the refugees face when entering into neighboring countries depends on what country and what region of that country they end up in. In the first paper from Ethiopia (Chapter 5), we meet people in Gambella Regional State, across the border from Upper Nile and Jonglei States in South Sudan. Here Fekadu Adugna describes how refugees end up in camps in which their everyday life is defined by a series of precarities and vulnerabilities varying with gender, age and what networks people have. Examples range from insecurities related to legal status, poverty, scarcity, safety, insufficient access to health, and education. Experiences of precarity and safety among refugees are thus closely intertwined with their general living conditions and what we see in our studies is that discrepancies exist between stated needs and what the refugees experience they receive from those who run the camps. This is a general observation also made by Fekadu, but he is hesitant to join the literature that makes references to Agamben and his discussion of the concept of "bare life" (Agamben 2003). This concept means that the refugees are living at the level of sheer biological existence (*zoe*) stripped of social and political qualities (*bios*) as in the Roman *homo sacer.* Fekadu argues that what he can observe is certainly a series of serious problems, but he also sees that the refugees through their own adaptations, or agency, can affect their situation. Such opportunities may be positive when the refugees share tribal identities with the local populations across the borders, when there are strategic intermarriages, or they can manipulate rules and relevant decision makers by corruption. But such strategies may also end up with negative results

for the refugees. Still, also in negative cases we fail to see proof of the kind of general violent sovereignty that Agamben is arguing for. Fekadu's paper leaves an impression of agency among the refugees that not always ends in positive ways but that they are involved in processes that contain both constraints and possibilities.

Two papers from Sudan speak directly to the issues in this section. Noha H.E. Hamza's paper (Chapter 6) sets the general tone by discussing international refugee laws in general and then also the governance framework in Sudan relating to how the Sudan has adopted to the international laws and by analysing the institutional practices affecting refugees. Three institutions are discussed, the Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR), the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) and UNHCR. By connecting all this to an empirical discussion based on fieldwork in two refugee camps in Khartoum she adds a third level to her analysis, a level which allows us to see in greater detail how South Sudanese refugees are provided with opportunities and constraints within the legal contexts and the wider governance context in Sudan. The refugees complain about a lack of social services provided, and what is available is mostly due to the international organizations working in the camps. But both these international organizations as well as the Sudanese institutions lack funding and should work together to make demands towards international donors. But such unity does not exist due to the differences among the various institutions in policies and aims. These problems are further discussed in the following paper.

Mohamed Bakhit's paper (Chapter 7) also provides a broad overview of national institutions, but he is building on fieldwork in the White Nile State, on the border with South Sudan's Upper Nile State. Compared to the overviews in Noha's paper, the work in the White Nile State produced a surprise which made fieldwork in the camps difficult, but which turned out to provide important information about the tensions between institutions. On entering the field, the team was informed about an ongoing strike affecting the relationships between institutions involved in the management of refugee camps. The strike itself was among employees in the institutions mentioned by Noha, the Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR). An important part of Mohamed Bakhit's paper focuses on this strike and thus makes up an interesting case that provides further information on dynamics introduced by Noha. To better understand the institutional dynamics involved in the strike the focus for Mohamed Bakhit is on the conflictual relationships between key institutional actors in the refugee field in Sudan, COR and HAC, both within Sudan, and then

UNHCR at the international level. The paper makes several important points. First it shows us the tensions between Sudanese institutions, with COR being critical of the dominant position of HAC in the refugee field, a field in which COR feel they have better competence than HAC, but the latter is dominant because they are supported politically by the regime of Omer Bashir. Such conflicts and the failure of HAC and the regime to control the international agencies, such as UNHCR, allows these foreign institutions to involve themselves in the camps and also generally in the refugee field in Sudan without any control by Sudanese authorities. But concludes Mohamed, the three organizations agree on the need to control the refugees, whether inside or outside the camps. To do this, authorities and institutions make use of "technologies of control" and in this Mohamed joins the critique in international literature on refugee management in general, pointing towards Agamben's "state of exception."

In Uganda a paper by Stevens Aguto Odongoh and Chris C. Opesen (Chapter 8) on The Geopolitics of Displacement picks up on the general point that Uganda seems to stand out in the region with its open and liberal refugee policies. In the 2006 Refugee Act, and 2010 Refugee Regulations, Uganda adopted a Refugee Policy of Open Door, that grants refugees not only freedom of movement but also the right to work, establish a business and own property including land. This generosity has made Uganda look like a haven for refugees and earned it various international recognitions including by the United Nations. The paper then critically explores Uganda's refugee liberalism where 'self-reliant' settlements are created, and refugee integration is part of the country's policy trajectory. The paper argues that there is need to see Uganda's refugee policy in geopolitical terms in which the country leadership historically has presented Uganda as an open place in which refugees were welcome. In later decades the country has used its international relations to benefit from its position as a supporter of the liberal international refugee policies formulated in the UN. By linking its policies on refugees and general development policies, the country has managed to obtain international support for a range of social services. How, asks the paper, has Uganda sustained this generosity amidst socio-economic and political challenges locally and regionally but also internationally? And what are the motives? Is Uganda playing the politics of generosity through assembling refugee suffering? Is this patronage? And lastly, are there pressure points being created as far as hosting refugees is concerned? Uganda has continued to open her doors to displaced persons in the region even in this era of delimitation when countries are increasingly pushing for border blockade. Unlike most

countries that prefer encampment, Uganda has opted for the second alternative which is self-supported settlements.

Section 3. The Problem of Integration: A Problem Everywhere

A recurrent problem in all cases is the processes that affect the possibilities of an integration of refugees in the countries in which they live. Which takes us beyond the camps and into the refugee-host relationship on a more general level. We see how feelings of injustice among refugees generally reduce interest in integrating with the host population. And visible signs of poverty or the circulation of stereotypes about refugees as criminals or violent people may reduce interest among the host population in accepting refugees. Stereotypes on both sides can function as hindrances of meetings in arenas in which closer relationships can develop.

Hika Dereje and Fekadu Adugna (Chapter 9) see this problem in Gambella and what they see is that a major problem is related to ethnic tensions between the groups in the region, the Anywaa and the Nuer, some belonging to the permanent residents as Ethiopian citizens, some being refugees in refugee camps. When the same group resides both outside and inside the camps things seem to move along smoothly, but when the group on the outside is different from the one inside problems arise. But the conflict also has national political dimensions as the Anywaa have a tradition of being the dominant group in the state, but that the Nuer are now in majority and with changes at the state level the Anywaa have lost their dominant position, putting them in a more defensive position and less likely to accept agreements with the Nuer.

The paper also points towards the national refugee policies in Ethiopia and how the country has embarked on policies of better integration of refugees into the Ethiopian society. But these policies did not bring the expected international financial support, and progress was halted. And as the paper shows, success is limited in Gambella.

Things also seem to vary in Khartoum. The paper by Salem Abdullah Adam Haroun (Chapter 10) focuses on processes of or lack of integration between South Sudanese refugees and local populations in Khartoum. Salem did not stay in camps but rather in regular areas inhabited with people with different tribal identities. The findings reveal positive tendencies of integration among women at the same level in the marketplaces where they work, while having difficulties with the authorities regarding licenses for their trading activities. Men are mostly engaged in construction activities and develop positive relationship with

colleagues but experience discriminations and exploitations from their bosses. Intermarriages also go on and are regarded as positive. Overall, the level of integration is considered more positive among women than among men.

A paper from Uganda by Eria Olowo Onyango and Brenda Birungi (Chapter 10) deals with integration as an effect of how refugees experience security. The paper focuses on urban refugees from South Sudan in Kampala and discusses how witchcraft has become part of understanding and dealing with insecurity among the refugees. The witchcraft is not only used in order to explain their position in the urban environment in Kampala but is part of their attempt to understand the entire refugee experience from leaving home in South Sudan as displaced, events that formed their movement towards Uganda and now, with their experiences within the urban context of the capital city of Kampala. The paper discusses the broader anthropological literature on witchcraft and ties it to the experiences found during fieldwork in Kampala. In this, the people are drawing on the cultural repertoire they have in dealing with general precariousness. What we see in the paper is how this cultural repertoire is being used in navigating in a new and modern context, the big city of Kampala, and in this we see witchcraft come to be a strategy in the navigation of precarity. The modern city does not appear as a safe place and a space of a possible better future. Rather, people experience insecurity. To understand this insecurity people's experiences and cultural backgrounds from home become a background source for such interpretations, a background of violence and war and betrayal, all explained by way of the interference by ancestral spirits in their lives as well as traditional "bewitchers" from other tribes. In Kampala the problems to be explained not only belong to the urban arena in itself but also to the fact that at times problematic relationships with groups of refugees from other countries in the region, groups with a longer history of adapting to the urban environment. And then, on top of everything, the sudden and unexpected experience of the COVID-19 pandemic hit people in ways difficult to understand. Overall, the paper shows how South Sudanese refugees had to change their residential areas several times to deal with their problems, seeking relationships with Ugandans as part of their strategies to create safety for themselves. In this complex situation, witchcraft worked both ways, both to create a certain amount of security but also insecurity. The paper ends with describing some relevant rituals that were used to deal with witchcraft. This move from general and ontological precariousness towards navigating precarity in a modern

situation is of fundamental importance to our studies and our comparative focus is on the latter.

Section 4. The Issue of Land: Ethnicity, Identity and Citizenship

Let me start here with an elaboration of the situation in White Nile State in Sudan. All the papers from there touch on the issue of land, and the issues of ethnicity, identity and citizenship also follow as a background issue. It is the background issue we want to present here, as it contains important comparative points. First, the secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011, both states passed new citizenship laws with serious implications for the protection of individuals on both sides of the border. With the political crisis in South Sudan, producing a civil war in that country from 2013, people ran away from the fighting and entered Sudan. In a paper by Rania Awad Madani, "*Strangers in their own countries: the problem faced by southerners who remained in the Sudan after the secession of the south in 2011,*" elaborates on this situation. (Manger et.al. eds, 2019). In this paper, the author discusses the coping strategies for people living in Jodah on the border between the Sudan's White Nile State and the Upper Nile area of South Sudan. The paper describes the complex situation of the Shilluk, some of whom were residents in the town before the division of the Sudan, thus considering themselves "locals" but being considered as South Sudanese by the government in Khartoum. Local Shilluk who have lived in Jodah for generations find their land areas taken over by Arabs and also find themselves working as wage labourers on the land they used to own. There is a better chance of saving the house through networks with Arab neighbours, especially if there is intermarriage between families, but in many cases, also the houses are confiscated.

We inject this case to strengthen the comparative issue involved in the issue of land; both land for refugee camps but also land outside the camps through which refugees can expand their cultivation. In all countries, the situation is complicated by the fact that the ethnic situation is complicated and interlinked with the issue of citizenship. Not only in Sudan.

In Gambella in Ethiopia Teshome Emana (Chapter 12) focuses on the Jewi refugee camp. He discusses both the feelings among the refugees about a lack of support from camp institutions but provides an interesting discussion about the problem of access to land outside the camp. In spite of productive land around the camp, the land is "filled with bitterness" and filled with the Nuer-Anywaa conflict. Talking to informants on both sides, Teshome uncovers the basic disagreement between the two groups, both

arguing that their livelihood strategies are undermined by the others. Talking to people from different institutions involved in the work with refugees, such as the Refugee and Returnees Services (RRS) and Gambella Regional State Rural Land Administration both from the government side and also NGOs related to churches engaged in education and also UNHCR with a broader mandate, they all refer to the basic conflict in the region and the land conflict in particular in which land outside of the camps are off limit for the refugees. In such circumstances the refugees seek alternative ways to earn a living. Life histories indicate that people have moved into Gambella city to avoid the land problem, opening various kinds of trading activities there. Inside the camps mutual aid exists and also remittances from relatives living in the Nuer diasporas around the world.

Ending the paper Teshome returns to his discussion on land and access to land and frames this within a comparative discussion with land policies of relevance to refugees in Kenya and Uganda. The focus is on the legal situation for the refugees in those countries, especially concerning land laws. Teshome asks the question to what extent the Ethiopian situation as we see it in Gambelle can be compared to the situations in Kenya and Uganda. This is an interesting top-down comparison about to what extent the different countries follow the various demands set in international laws and regulations concerning refugees' rights and regulations. What Teshome gets out of this comparison is that the national level of political interests trumps the carrying out of effective policies that safeguard the rights of refugees. The challenge can thus not be limited to the Anywaa-Nuer conflicts in Gambella but requires a more national take on policies of integration of refugees into the host country.

In Uganda a second paper, by Chris C. Opesen and Stevens Aguto Odongoh (Chapter 13) discusses the issue of land but now with a dramatic difference in the situation at the state level and hence national politics compared to what we saw in Gambella. The discussion in the paper revolves around how the liberal Ugandan refugee policy plays out with reference to land and the refugees' access to land. A case study on South Sudanese in Kyriandongo provides ethnographic information for the discussion and shows that experiences of refugees with the land policy in Uganda are varied and are shaped at different levels by a heterogeneity of actors and factors. Land can be distributed in land parcelling processes within the settlements, but often the size of plots is too small for families, which forces refugees to offer their cheap labour to Ugandan farmers outside the settlements. There is also corruption going on in the land parcelling processes by which refugee block leaders ask for bribes to

increase the size of plots for those who can pay. But also, there is the general problem that refugee settlements are placed in territories of low land productivity, thus making the size of plots even more critical. In all cases, the risk of conflict between interested parties is present. Land access outside the settlements is also an issue. One issue is that when girls marry Ugandan men from outside the settlement the in-laws in the camps may get access to land on the outside as part of the new relationship between in-laws. But these are informal processes. Legally land outside of settlements cannot, according to the 1995 Constitution and confirmed by the 2010 Refugee Regulations, be owned by refugees. However, sales of land are still going on, recognized in the local community but being illegal according to official law. The situation with in-laws mentioned above can also lead to the buying of land, but since the illegality in the transaction is well known the prices are often inflated directly by the seller or indirectly by bribes to be paid for local leaders who must agree to the sale. In any case, due to the lack of formality, the owners may experience trespassing and other problems that increase insecurity around the land "ownership". Central to the argument in the paper is that the land laws that seemingly are very open and welcoming create local processes that not necessarily are to the benefit of refugees. The implication of these realities is that while Uganda's refugee policy is presented as a global model, it is not void of problems. Among these are the need to reconsider increasing the size of plots given to the refugees and also the need to address the question of bribery to block leaders that is influencing allocations of larger and fertile plots. Such factors leave the refugees in situations that are unclear both legally and as victims of exploitation even within the settlements. The paper questions both the processes of access to land for refugees, that, on the basis of local fieldwork, seem less open than the normative laws seem to indicate.

Section 5. Problems within the Camps: A Complexity of Causes

In Gamebella a paper by Teshome Emana and Muluembet Semaw (Chapter 14) about the situation of women within a refugee camp the focus is on women. Cultivation stands out as important and local cultivation within the camp and the local markets, also within the camp seems to help to a certain extent. But it is stressed by the authors that any extension of this is needed, but such an extension can only be possible by moving outside the camp, thus becoming met by the problems over land we have mentioned. To deal with such problems the women help each other by entering and working together in local self-help institutions (*ider)* and a

rotating saving association (*ekub*). Also, the paper discusses protection and safety strategies for women within the camp, especially related to gender-based violence, in which the Refugee Community Committee (RCC) plays an important role.

One factor that is important to people residing in the camps is education, and a paper from Gambella by Getaneh Mehari (Chapter 15) focuses on this. The conclusions are several. First, the Anywaa hosts claim the schools for Nuer refugees, within the camps, are better than schools outside, thus privileging the refugees over the hosts. Similarly, the primary schools within the camps are based on the language of the refugees, which is mainly Nuer, while the hosts outside are being taught in Amharic. The paper also looks at higher education. This is done with the expectation that the situation in higher education might differ as the relevant schools are fewer and must consider everyone, whether refugee or host. We see that refugee students get support from international agencies in the form of scholarships to enter the university in Gambella. But the "privileged" refugee students also complain, especially as the teaching is in Amharic, which many refugees do not know sufficiently to enter academic reading and discussions. Food is also an issue in which refugees want alternatives in the cafeterias to the Ethiopian food that is being served. On campus, different groups organize themselves in ways that isolate each group from the others, thus making everyday life on campus also an arena producing divisions.

In a paper on the White Nile State, Khadeeja Salih (Chapter 16) discusses how such institutional problems affected health issues in the state. The issue was a hospital created by MSF (Doctors Without Borders) in 2019 which was used broadly by refugees from all camps in the area until it was transferred to the Ministry of Health in 2021. Refugees were upset by this as the hospital closed, leaving the refugees with a much-reduced health system, both in availability and quality, creating a health crisis among people. The case presented thus dramatized to people the tension between a foreign NGO's approach in helping the refugees and the approach of the local Sudanese health authorities. Lack of competence, funding and interest produced a health crisis after the Sudanese took over the hospital, a development that also severely undermined the legitimacy of the local health authorities in the eyes of the refugees as well as of the locals.

Ahmed Suliman Ahmed Fadl Alla's paper (Chapter 17) from the White Nile State also focuses on the level of integration between refugees from the south and the local populations. In the economic system, new

opportunities exist for people within and outside the camp, which creates a feeling of shared interests. But there are limitations. For example, in agriculture, in which South Sudanese refugees can only work as seasonal labourers receiving low wages. Women engaged in selling beer and liquor in the camps are discriminated against, but the trade in the camps also brings men from outside to drink inside. In their efforts to collect firewood, women are harassed and, at times, raped. And in general, there are sexual relations between men and women, but not many formal marriages. In both cases, there are signs of "integration" but also of integration that might not be regarded as positive.

In Uganda, several papers discuss specific aspects of the refugee experiences of South Sudanese. Nyiraneza Mollen (Chapter 18) discusses the masculine experience of male Dinka and Nuer refugees in a refugee settlement and finds that the men experience a serious loss of masculine values in the process of becoming refugees. While at home, they were household heads, with positions of authority as decision makers and protectors of their families. As refugees the men find that their wives have increasingly taken over as family leaders as they are the ones who provide the families with what they need. This has left the men in positions of idleness, and loss of direction and purpose. This development is also strengthened by the bias among camp leaders and among the refugee organizations themselves towards the problems of the women, thus making the problems of the men part of a broader gender related issue.

In the second paper Maria Dorah Nagawa, Rita Nakanjako, and Fred Bateganya (Chapter 19) pick up on this issue by focusing on the experience of women in another camp when it comes to household provision during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings indicate that the women made use of a variety of strategies to provide for their families, from engaging in casual labour, engaging in support networks, and further exploiting available aid within their camps. While detailing cases of how this evolved, the paper indirectly also comments on the position of the men by showing how women took over from the men as home care takers, household heads and as breadwinners.

The next chapter is also framed within the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the paper by Gaster Olowo (Chapter 20) on adolescent girls in the Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement in West Nile region of northern Uganda. The paper explores the terrain of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services for adolescent girls in this camp. It scrutinizes the vulnerabilities, barriers, and general disruption of SRH services during and after the COVID pandemic,

focusing on adolescent girls from 10 to 14 years of age. A key negative effect for the girls produced by the pandemic was that SRH services were disrupted, and their general mobility was more limited. In this situation we see how the problems are related both to general effects by the pandemic on the camp, but also how such negative effects were intensified by culture-based notions among the parent generation of the girls, problems about sexuality that negatively affected what choices the girls had in meeting their problems. The study underscores the urgent need for culturally responsive, youth-centred SRH interventions in humanitarian contexts, especially during public health emergencies. The study recommends integration of SRH into emergency response frameworks, strengthening community-based support systems, and positioning adolescent voices in SRH program design.

Comparison, One Last Time

What our discussion above shows is that we are looking at different types of actors dealing with their immediate contexts. In this move, we have suggested using the concepts of precariousness and precarity not only for the groups of poor refugees but also for the top leaders of states and state institutions. The powerless and the powerful are all equipped with different resources, allowing for different positions in systems of power and influence, but within their positions, they are all navigating various types of precarity. Here we are extending the dominant meaning of precarity from pointing only towards marginal and vulnerable life situations, to also include a totally different form of precarity, the struggle for and strategizing to maintain a position within the power of the state itself. Here we see interesting comparative differences between countries. And it brings South Sudan and the various crises in that country directly into our comparative story. The differences show how different the state leaders and the state systems are in their efforts to meet the problem of refugees. In these efforts, the state actors are also "navigating precarity". This brings us to a concluding point about our comparative exercise, which is to bring the various groups of actors into the same frame, not to argue that they are similar, but that they, as actors, deal with their own contexts. The way the powerful deal with their context creates contexts for what options the refugees have for dealing with their problems, and the reverse is true.

What we do here is to follow Judith Butler's lead and make a differentiation between precariousness and precarity. Her point about precariousness as being an ontological state of marginality is important as it points towards an ontological situation in our human lives, that we live

in a stochastic world in which anything can happen. This is as true for the people we discuss in this book as it is for ourselves. But we move from this level of ontological risks to bring in Butler's second concept of precarity. This brings our discussion down into the actual processes people are involved in as we speak, in a modern world with specific political, economic, technological and other types of contexts that also include uncertainty, as in Beck's "risk society" (1986), making the discussion more empirical. Empirical in the sense that our refugees have to deal with the challenges they meet on their way in different countries. Such a focus on precarity makes it into a concept pointing at processual and strategizing planning and behaviour based on any subjective feeling that one's positioning in any "game" may be insecure. But, as we see in Section 1, insecurity is felt by refugees as well as state actors, but the insecurities of the two are obviously of different kinds.

The state actors operate within context defined by historical and contemporary principles of international and national state making processes. State-actors mobilize state power upward against the international levels of nation state organizations and they use their position as leaders of sovereign states to defend their policies in the refugee field. In talking about refugees, we see references to national security, and to a more or less well-defined war on non-state actors, rhetoric in which refugees may become part of national problems that need to be dealt with.

Our papers in Section 2 document the dilemmas. One dilemma is a lack of coherence between what states and state actors are signing in international agreements and rhetorical support in their speeches, and what they do in their actual policies and law-making affecting refugees. In this we see that they are indeed navigating precarity and one aim of their navigation is to control the refugees which can lead to processes of further marginalization of refugees. But the lack of political coherence has a side effect which is to create spaces for the refugees to manoeuvre, leading to processes of mobilization and activism among refugees, as individuals or in groups.

This two-sidedness is also visible in the following sections, Section 3 and 4, the first on integration, the second on access to land. In Section 3, we see how the processes of integration vary across the cases, from violent relationships between refugees and host communities to more positive relationships in workplaces and in neighbourhoods. But again, the variation is closely linked to what was discussed in Section 1, the general political situation in the different countries, which also relates to the historical experiences both of state-making in the countries and how the

refugees are accepted or seen as a problem. Such differences produced through systematic nationalist rhetoric from above. But cultural heritage that is threatened by the refugees also affects the general public, affecting the interaction in different arenas.

In Section 4, on land, we also see variations. Here represented by the ethnic violence in Gambella blocking the refugees' access to land outside the camps in areas where the ethnic groups in the camps and outside are from different groups. Compared to more positive developments in areas in which the same ethnic group was found within and outside the camps. For the refugees caught in the first and most violent situation, many are pushed to settle in the capital town where they find more opportunities to secure a livelihood. This is then compared with the less violent situation in north-west Uganda. Here, the access to land outside the refugee camps for people inside the camps is affected less by large scale violence than by social factors. We saw marriages creating links between people in camps and outside, and economic factors allowing some to exploit a corrupt system, both to buy land and to get it formally registered. But in both cases the central authorities struggle with controlling the local realities, and a space is created for refugee manoeuvring also here.

Moving to Section 5 we see many cases that might look more familiar to the readers, as the various papers describe and discuss the many problems the refugees meet within the camps. There are too many to mention here but looking at them together they show a complexity that has to do with all the factors mentioned in our discussion in the earlier sections. An international refugee system producing normative aims that the system itself is unable to follow because of lack of funds. All the chapters show examples of such problems, in the life chances for women and in their abilities to provide for children, in access to education, in accessing healthcare in general as well as in specific cases related to reproductive health of young girls, to negative effects on men's experience of their masculinity in the camps compared to their situation back home.

Local problems are also common. Refugee camps are most often found in border areas in which tensions between the countries produce security situations that may directly and negatively affect camps. In many cases we find people from the same tribal groups residing on both sides of the borders and we see cases in which South Sudanese refugees belong to the same tribal groups as those living around the camps, a situation that allows for possibilities and adaptations that are not present if such a situation does not exist. But it might also involve the refugees in situations that make

them security threats to the countries in which they are refugees. The clash between their rights as refugees and their position as potential "terrorists" may have dramatic consequences.

All these problems are discussed in ways in which we see life in refugee camps as problematic. But the papers differ in how they see the camp problems being linked to the potential causes behind them. Are the problems related to internal dynamics in the camps or to wider dynamics outside? And what are the solutions? Should we follow what the World Bank argues, and as we have mentioned earlier, that the refugees must become their own entrepreneurs, developing a future for themselves. This is a neoliberal position in which refugees are seen as individualized actors who need to deal with the problems they face but who also need to free themselves from their "traditions" which constrain their potential careers as entrepreneurs. Or do we follow Talal Asad in his critique, which starts with an attack on the neoliberal position on "agency" as a decontextualized ability of people to make choices, a position which requires them to get rid of their traditions, as such traditions contain cultural elements that keep them stuck in their problems. Asad points in a different direction by arguing that traditions are basic, as it is through participation in a specific tradition that actors develop their capacity of agency.

We support Asad's position here, and it has direct implications for what applied lessons we can learn from our discussion. An important part of such lessons is to understand that the backgrounds the refugees come from are basic for how they operate as refugees. Yes, they have agency but not any kind of agency. If the institutions involved only look at neoliberal political and market contexts, they miss out on what resources the refugees have embedded in their backgrounds, as pastoralists or farmers, as women and men, as belonging to different ethnicities, and so on. And the comparative perspective shows us that what is true for one place might not be true for what goes on in another place. Yes, improved systems of governance are needed, but how to improve this in ways that allow for such differences between countries? Yes, better integration and work opportunities as well as easier access to land to improve food availability are both important, but how to deal with all the differences we see if we do not understand what is going on? And the same can be said for life in the camps, how can we improve things if we don't understand how individuals see themselves and how this affects their understanding of what they need?

We do not claim to be able to answer all these questions, nor do we think anyone else can. What we do believe is that it requires arenas in which

decision makers, practitioners and researchers can meet and the different ways to understand what is going to be discussed. This also requires willingness. But beyond this we also argue for a more basic claim as researchers. This is beyond our comparative efforts. We also learn, once again, that our fieldwork and our discussions based on those fieldworks demonstrate that being with people where they are and being attentive to one's hosts' concern, ways of talking and ways of being, produces rich and contextualized information that we think is indispensable for policy and practice. The value of knowledge produced by participants in this book is not simply because of the different locations in which it is generated, but it is about the enlightening challenges of looking at others' lives in particular places and times. This way, knowledge can be practically used to respond to specific contexts, while at the same time contextual differences create a regional constellation that allows practitioners to learn from each other and monitor their activities.

To further stress the importance of this, we end the book by an "Afterthought" in the form of a paper that shows that the focus on South Sudanese refugees into the neighbouring countries was indeed important, but in no way the end of the story of displacement and refugee flows in the areas we have studied. This final paper, by Munzoul Assal (Chapter 21), deals briefly with the situation in South Sudan since 2013, but is primarily focused on developments that occurred after the studies started on which this volume is based. We are talking about the Tigray war in Ethiopia that started towards the end of 2020, then the devastating and ongoing war in Sudan starting in April 2023, and finally, also conflicts and refugee situations in the Great Lakes region. As we finalize this volume the war seems to be returning to Tigray, with implications also for the war in Sudan. By drawing up this wider situation, Munzoul Assal points out several issues that bring our discussions in this volume to an end. One such conclusion is that the processes of displacement in these regions are continuous and represent a protracted humanitarian crisis, driven by structural developments along several dimensions. Many of the researchers involved in the present project have also contributed to earlier studies on border dynamics between Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, studies that now, in hindsight gave added understanding to the important border areas in which many of the refugee camps studied in this volume are found. These earlier studies were made by Ethiopian, Sudanese and Ugandan anthropologists and Munzoul Assal also adds important points on how anthropology may contribute to our understanding of these wider problems in the regions he focuses on, and also indicates some issues for further

studies, thereby strengthening some of the basic argument in the present volume as a whole as well as pointing to further challenges future researchers should be concerned with.

But this broader situation presented by Munzoul also points towards a world in which abnormal social conditions, produced through displacement, are increasingly becoming a basis for normal, everyday life for an increasing number of people. The lives presented in the chapters of this book are typical also for a larger region as discussed by Munzoul, but also to many other places in the world. Displacement producing refugees and thus pushing them into a new kind of nomadic life imposed by precarious conditions, such as violent conflicts, also produce a transformation of humanitarian aid, meant to be temporary, into a long-term substitute of the social security nation states should provide. The management of refugees is about more than waiting for a return to their homeland. The life in the camps, the different national strategies, and the global system for dealing with refugees we have discussed also point us towards a larger humanitarian and ethical issue, how we, in our increasingly insecure world, deal with a "surplus population" that is not only rapidly increasing but also which is here to stay.

Editors' Note: On the Use of Pseudonyms

To protect the anonymity of our informants, all personal names mentioned in the case studies in this book are pseudonyms.

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SECTION 1

PROBLEMS IN THE HOMELAND:
THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTH SUDAN

CHAPTER TWO

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF POST-INDEPENDENCE ETHNIC POLITICS ON DISPLACEMENT AND SECURITY DILEMMAS IN SOUTH SUDAN: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Angok Achuil Angok Achuil

Background of the Study

The interplay between ethnic politics, displacement, and security is a significant issue in the post-independence context across various global regions. As nations emerge from colonial rule, they often face the legacies of ethnic division that manifest in political conflicts, leading to humanitarian crises. This study investigates the dynamics of ethnic politics in post-colonial states and their implications for displacement and security dilemmas.

Displacement manifests both as a cause and consequence of ethnic conflict. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that by mid-2022, over 89 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, persecution, and human rights violations many of which are rooted in ethnic strife (UNHCR, 2022). Among these displaced individuals, a significant number are children, highlighting the profound effect of displacement on education and development.

Notably, humanitarian crises often arise from such displacements, leading to increased global costs and societal challenges. In 2020 alone, the global cost associated with displacement reached approximately $20.5 billion. Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa recorded the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, and Ethiopia are notable examples where displacements largely stem from inter-communal and political conflicts exacerbated by historical grievances and political manipulation.

The Syrian Civil War, which commenced in 2011, displaced over 13 million people, approximately half of whom fled to neighbouring countries (World Bank, 2021). The conflict has seen multiple ethnic and sectarian groups vying for power amidst government oppression. This environment has led to severe consequences, including ethnic cleansing and genocidal violence, illustrating the potential for escalated conflict rooted in ethnic politics.

Within Syria, organizations like International Conflict Dynamics work to address inter-party dialogues and governance to navigate the complexities of the ongoing civil war (International Conflict Dynamics, 2021). The involvement of external actors, such as the United States, Russia, and Iran, further complicates the political landscape and prolongs instability.

Similarly, the Ukraine crisis, escalated by pro-Russian separatists in 2014, displayed how ethnic and territorial disputes can devastate national security and lead to widespread displacement. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), persistent conflict poses challenges not just to the region but also to the international community, reinforcing the interconnectedness of ethnic politics and global security.

Ethiopia's conflict dynamics, particularly in the Tigray region, have led to alarming displacement and growing humanitarian crises. Following the onset of conflict, millions fled from Tigray and surrounding areas, with the United Nations reporting that around 5.2 million needing emergency assistance due to severe food shortages exacerbated by conflict (VOA News, 2021; Mosley, 2021). The Ethiopian government's restrictions on humanitarian aid have further worsened conditions, leading to dire predictions of famine and suffering among the displaced populations.

Many nations, particularly in Africa, have witnessed a resurgence of ethnic tensions, often exploited by political elites. In Rwanda, the colonial legacy heightened tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, culminating in the genocide of 1994, which led to the deaths of around 800,000 people (Kagwanja, 2017). This historical context underscores how ethnic identities can shape political allegiances and conflict patterns.

South Sudan, as Africa’s youngest nation, faced immediate challenges following its independence in 2011. Awash with the hopes of a new and autonomous state, South Sudan quickly descended into civil strife driven by factional politics primarily between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. The resulting civil war led to severe internal displacement, with approximately 1.4 million registered IDPs by late 2021 (UN OCHA,

2021). The political crisis was rooted in a historical context of colonial legacies and exacerbated by the absence of stable governance structures.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, which had facilitated South Sudan's secession, established a precarious power-sharing system that failed to address the underlying ethnic tensions. The internal political conflicts became evident in December 2013 when a leadership struggle within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) evolved into violent confrontations, manifesting ethnic undertones (2014; UN Security Council, 2015). The civil strife further exacerbated political instability and contributed to one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, resulting in one of the most significant numbers of IDPs globally.

Research indicates that the international community's involvement in ethnic conflicts can produce diluted results. While peacekeeping missions may temporarily stabilize regions, they often neglect the root causes of ethnic tensions, as seen in the DRC and South Sudan (Prunier, 2019). The complexity of these conflicts necessitates a multifaceted approach that addresses both immediate humanitarian needs and the long-term challenges of political stability and governance.

The background of this study illustrates the intricate links between ethnic politics, displacement, and security dilemmas across various regions. The historical context of these conflicts reveals the ongoing struggle between ethnic identities and political power. By examining case studies from Syria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Sudan, we can better understand the dire consequences of ethnic strife and displacement. This understanding underscores the urgent need for inclusive governance and collaborative international responses to mitigate the humanitarian crises arising from ethnic conflicts.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to address the complex relationship between post-independence ethnic politics, displacement, and security dilemmas in South Sudan, a country that faced profound challenges since gaining independence in 2011. Ethnic tensions rooted in political power struggles significantly shaped the nation's landscape, fuelling cycles of violence and mass displacement. According to UNHCR (2023), over 2 million South Sudanese were internally displaced, and more than 1.5 million sought refuge abroad, highlighting the severity of the crisis. This widespread

displacement not only deepened poverty and hampered development but also heightened community vulnerabilities and perpetuated insecurity.

Despite existing research on displacement and security in South Sudan, notable gaps remained in understanding how ethnic politics specifically influenced these phenomena. Prior studies addressed security concerns and power shifts but lacked a contextual focus on South Sudan's unique ethnic-political landscape, and explored resource competition and violence but did not sufficiently examine how ethnic political dynamics drove resource distribution and conflict.

This research aimed to fill these gaps by exploring how post-independence ethnic politics shaped displacement patterns and security challenges within South Sudan. By employing a qualitative methodology and engaging directly with local stakeholders, the study analysed how local people see the ways ethnic identities and political alignments influenced community interactions, resource allocation, and the experiences of displaced populations. The findings may help us better inform policy strategies and that may foster stability, promote reconciliation, and support sustainable peacebuilding efforts in the region.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of investigating the impact of post-independence ethnic politics on displacement and security dilemmas in South Sudan, Ethnic Identity Theory, rooted in the works of Henri Tajfel and John Turner provided a valuable framework for understanding how ethnic identities influence perceptions, behaviours, and conflicts within the region. Tajfel and Turner's development of social identity theory, particularly outlined in their 1979 publication *"An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict"* (in Hogg and Abrams, eds. 1997) emphasized how individuals' identification with their ethnic groups shapes intergroup relations and can heighten tensions.

Applying this theory to South Sudan, it became evident that ethnic identities significantly influenced community perceptions and interactions, often fuelling conflicts over political power and resources following independence. Ethnic identity served as a key factor in shaping group behaviours and interethnic conflicts, especially amid the fragile state-building process. However, while Ethnic Identity Theory illuminated how identity influences social and political conduct, it sometimes overlooked the broader economic and political contexts that also drive conflict. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, it was necessary to integrate

this identity-focused perspective with analyses of resource disparities and political power struggles, recognizing that ethnicity often intersects with economic and political interests in fuelling displacement and insecurity. I also make use of conflict theory and human security theory. The first adds insights on how struggles over control of land, resources, and political authority perpetuated cycles of violence and displacement. It highlighted the role of economic and social disparities in fuelling intergroup tensions. The second helped interpret the recurring pattern of escalating insecurity, where measures such as armed mobilization or border fortifications often intensified fears among ethnic groups, prompting retaliatory actions. Also, it points at a change of focus from state-centric notions of security to the protection of individuals' well-being, emphasizing economic stability, health, environmental safety, and personal security. In South Sudan, where displaced populations faced multifaceted threats, these approaches provided a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing their vulnerabilities.

The Field-Based Study

To test such theory-based predictions, the researcher carried out case studies within South Sudanese cities such as Juba, Malakal, and Wau. These urban centers were selected because of their distinct but interconnected experiences with conflict and displacement, providing rich contextual insights into the broader dynamics affecting the country. Data was collected mainly through in-depth interviews (25 in-depth interviews) and 2 focus group discussions, aimed at capturing personal narratives and collective perspectives regarding displacement and security challenges.

Results from Interviews

Ethnic Identity and Political Influence

The qualitative data reveals that respondents view ethnic identity as a fundamental factor shaping political behaviour and decision-making in South Sudan since independence. Participants emphasized that ethnicity is central to political engagement, as in this quote: "Ethnic ties determine who gets political power and who doesn't," highlighting the deep-rooted nature of ethnicity in governance. Respondents also noted that political participation is often driven by ethnic loyalties, which influence voting patterns and leadership selection.

Participants further argued that ethnic identity is not merely a background characteristic but actively shapes political behaviour. One respondent

remarked, “people vote along ethnic lines because they believe their community’s interests are best served by leaders from their own group.” This sentiment reflects a common view that ethnic affiliation is a key determinant of political engagement and influence. The tendency for certain ethnic groups to dominate political spaces contributes to perceptions of favouritism and unequal influence, fuelling ongoing debates about fairness and representation. Such perspectives suggest that ethnicity remains a defining factor in South Sudan’s post-independence political arena, often influencing policy directions and power struggles.

Inequities and Power Distribution

A dominant theme emerging from the interviews is the perception that political power is heavily concentrated within specific ethnic groups, leading to widespread feelings of marginalization among others. One respondent criticized the current power structure, noting that “a few ethnic groups control most of the resources and decision-making.” Such perceptions of inequity are seen as major contributors to ongoing ethnic tensions and conflicts, with some participants warning that “this imbalance will continue to destabilize the country unless addressed.”

Participants also highlighted that ethnic-based power imbalances contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement among minority groups. One interviewee explained, “When you see a handful of groups holding all the keys to political and economic opportunities, others feel excluded and frustrated,” emphasizing the importance of equitable representation. The data indicates a clear concern that unequal power distribution undermines national unity and perpetuates distrust among different communities. Respondents agreed that addressing these disparities through inclusive governance and reforms is essential to fostering reconciliation, reducing tensions, and building a more equitable political system.

Rising Ethnic Tensions and Displacement

Respondents also observed that ethnic tensions have escalated since independence A respondent remarked, “Since independence, ethnic conflicts have become more frequent and violent, and participants expressed concern that unresolved grievances and competition for resources continue to fuel these tensions. Several respondents emphasized that these tensions threaten the nation’s stability, urging policymakers to prioritize conflict resolution efforts rooted in inclusivity and fairness.

In addition, displacement caused by ethnic conflicts remains a critical issue. One participant noted, “Many people have been forced to flee their homes because of ethnic violence.,” Variations in responses suggest differing experiences based on proximity to conflict zones, but overall, the data underscores the urgent need for conflict prevention and reconciliation initiatives. Respondents called for strategies that address root causes of ethnic grievances, emphasizing that sustainable peace depends on inclusive dialogue and equitable power-sharing arrangements.

Displacement and Security Dilemmas

Increased Vulnerability to Violence

Displacement significantly elevates the risk of violence for affected individuals, creating unsafe environments where safety is constantly threatened. Respondents overwhelmingly agree that displaced persons are more exposed to threats such as armed attacks, exploitation, and communal conflicts. Many emphasized that "displaced communities are sitting ducks," with inadequate security infrastructure making them easy targets for violence. The respondents also argued that the lack of reliable security measures within camps and host communities further exacerbates these dangers, making safety a pressing concern for humanitarian actors and residents alike.

These perceptions underscore the critical need for targeted security interventions, including deploying sufficient security personnel, establishing protective zones, and implementing community patrols. Strengthening security measures is essential to protect lives and promote stability, which in turn allows displaced populations to focus on rebuilding their lives. As one respondent stated, “Without proper security, people are living in constant fear, which hampers their ability to recover and integrate into the community.” Ensuring safety not only preserves lives but also fosters an environment conducive to social cohesion and long-term stability.

Economic Insecurity and Livelihood Disruption

Displacement often results in the total loss of livelihoods, plunging individuals into severe economic hardship and dependency. Respondents highlight that displaced persons frequently lose access to their previous means of income, markets, and financial resources, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and further marginalization. One respondent pointed out that “people are forced to rely on aid because they’ve lost

everything no land, no work, nothing," illustrating the devastating economic impact of displacement. This economic instability can lead to increased tensions within camps, sometimes erupting into conflict over scarce resources or favouritism.

Addressing economic insecurity requires a comprehensive approach that includes livelihood support programs, skills training, and facilitating access to markets for displaced persons. Empowering these communities economically can help reduce dependence on external aid and decrease their susceptibility to exploitation. As one respondent observed, "When people have a source of income, they are less likely to fall into desperate situations that lead to violence or crime." Restoring economic stability is fundamental for fostering resilience, social stability, and enabling displaced populations to regain their independence and dignity.

Diminished Access to Basic Services

The disruption caused by displacement often severely limits access to essential services such as healthcare, sanitation, and education, creating immediate health risks and long-term developmental setbacks. One respondent emphasized that "many displaced people cannot access basic health services, leading to preventable diseases and suffering," highlighting the critical gaps in service provision.

Ensuring access to basic services involves investing in infrastructure, deploying sufficient healthcare workers, and establishing sustainable sanitation systems within camps. "When health services are available and accessible, communities are healthier and more resilient," a respondent noted.

Challenges in Social Integration

Social integration remains a significant obstacle for displaced persons seeking to rebuild their lives in host communities. Discrimination and social exclusion affect displaced persons worldwide, impeding their ability to participate fully in community life. The respondents in this study noted that barriers such as discrimination, cultural differences, and mistrust hinder their acceptance and full participation in local life. One respondent highlighted that "displaced people often face hostility and exclusion, which makes it hard for them to feel part of the community," leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. These social divides can foster resentment, increase tensions, and undermine efforts toward peaceful

coexistence, ultimately threatening the stability of both displaced and host communities.

Promoting social cohesion requires intentional efforts like community engagement programs, dialogue initiatives, and inclusive policies that recognize the rights and needs of both displaced and host populations. As one respondent explained, "building trust between displaced and host communities is essential people need to see each other as partners, not enemies."

Mental Health Concerns

Mental health issues are pervasive among displaced populations, reflecting the trauma, loss, and ongoing uncertainty they face. Respondents recognized that many individuals suffer from psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One respondent emphasized that "people are carrying heavy emotional burdens they've lost loved ones, homes, and stability, and it shows in their mental health." These issues are often compounded by difficult living conditions, social isolation, and the constant threat of violence, which hinder individuals' ability to cope and adapt.

Addressing mental health needs requires a comprehensive approach that includes psychosocial support, counselling services, and community-based mental health programs. As one respondent noted, "Mental health support is just as important as physical health care—without it, recovery is impossible." Providing safe spaces and trained mental health professionals helps displaced persons manage trauma and fosters resilience. Recognizing mental health as a core component of humanitarian response ensures that displaced populations receive holistic care that supports their recovery, well-being, and ability to reintegrate into society.

Inadequate Security Measures in Camps

Many respondents perceive security arrangements within displacement camps as insufficient, leaving residents vulnerable to external threats and internal conflicts. As one respondent pointed out, "The camps are supposed to be safe havens, but without proper security, they're often places of danger and fear." Such gaps can lead to incidents of theft, harassment, violence, and even organized crime, which further undermine residents' sense of safety and trust in the system. Improving security within camps involves deploying adequate security personnel, establishing clear protocols, and engaging residents in safety initiatives. "Security must be a

community effort—people need to feel they have a voice and stake in their safety," a respondent remarked.

Role of Community Support in Security

Community participation plays a vital role in maintaining and enhancing safety for displaced populations. Over half of the respondents emphasized that local networks, community watch groups, and social support systems are instrumental in preventing violence and fostering peace. These grassroots efforts create a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents, which can be more effective than external security measures alone. As one respondent explained, "When communities look out for each other, security improves naturally people feel empowered and less vulnerable."

Strengthening community support mechanisms involves empowering residents through training, dialogue, and resource provision. When displaced persons and host communities work together, they can create safer environments, reduce tensions, and promote social cohesion. As another respondent noted, "Community-led security initiatives are sustainable because they are rooted in local knowledge and trust." Recognizing the importance of community involvement underscores the need for inclusive approaches that leverage local networks to build resilient, secure, and peaceful displacement settings.

Effects of Ethnic Politics: A Broader View

As indicated in the responses above, the effects of post-independence ethnic politics in South Sudan are profound and multifaceted, shaping the country's social, political, and economic landscapes in ways that continue to challenge stability and development. One of the most significant consequences has been the fuelling of communal and ethnic conflicts, which have resulted in widespread violence, displacement, and loss of life. Ethnic identities have become central to political discourse, often exacerbating existing tensions and fostering a climate of division and exclusion. The emphasis on ethnic identities in politics has exacerbated tensions between different ethnic groups, leading to violence, displacement, and loss of lives. These dynamic hampers efforts to forge a cohesive national identity, as ethnic nationalism and identity politics deepen societal fissures.

Beyond the responses we see that rampant revenge killings exemplify the cycle of violence driven by ethnic politics. Conflicts involving groups such

as the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluk in regions like Malakal have perpetuated retaliatory acts that intensify ethnic divisions. A respondents noted that "the cycle of revenge killings fuelled by ethnic politics in South Sudan, such as those involving the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluks, perpetuates violence and deepens ethnic divisions within the country." These acts of violence not only cause immediate harm but also entrench mistrust among communities, further complicating reconciliation efforts. The escalation of revenge killings continues to undermine social cohesion and stability, making the path toward peace more elusive.

The humanitarian consequences of ethnic politics are equally severe, with widespread displacement emerging as a critical issue. A respondent emphasized that "the widespread displacement of populations within South Sudan, driven by post-independent ethnic politics and ethnic conflicts, has resulted in a humanitarian crisis characterized by immense suffering, vulnerability, and displacement." Communities are often forced to flee their homes due to ethnic clashes, leading to internal displacement and refugee movements across borders. This displacement has broader regional implications, as the influx of refugees strains neighbouring countries' resources and security, heightening regional instability. The displacement crisis exacerbates peacebuilding challenges within South Sudan, as it fuels a cycle of vulnerability and further marginalization.

Displacement caused by ethnic conflicts also has long-term socio-economic impacts. The disruption of livelihoods, education, and social networks leaves affected populations vulnerable to poverty and economic instability. Moreover, the influx of refugees into neighbouring countries strains local economies and infrastructure, hindering socio-economic development in host communities. The displacement and refugee crisis resulting from post-independent ethnic politics in South Sudan have long-term socioeconomic impacts on both the displaced populations and host communities. These disruptions threaten not only immediate stability but also long-term development prospects.

Political stability in South Sudan has been severely undermined by ethnic politics, which hinder effective governance and conflict resolution. Divisions along ethnic lines create a fragmented political landscape where competing interests often override national priorities. Ethnic tensions often fuel conflict and impede reconciliation, further destabilizing the nation. This persistent instability hampers the government's ability to implement cohesive policies necessary for sustainable development and peace.

Trust, social cohesion, and national unity are also eroded by ethnic politics, which foster mistrust and societal divisions. The emphasis on ethnic identities in political discourse creates barriers to dialogue and cooperation among different communities, weakening the social fabric. This fragmentation makes it increasingly difficult to build a shared national identity an essential foundation for long-term peace and development.

Finally, the dominance of ethnic politics results in a lack of national unity that impairs overall development and economic progress. The prioritization of ethnic interests over the collective national goals creates a fragmented agenda, hampering cooperation and resource allocation. This division not only slows economic growth but also exacerbates disparities, competition for resources, and societal fissures. Ultimately, ethnic politics challenge the consolidation of a shared identity, weakening the foundation for a cohesive, inclusive South Sudan and undermining prospects for sustainable peace and development.

A Final Note

The prominence of ethnic identity in shaping political behaviour in South Sudan aligns with broader theories of ethnicity and politics. Research by Laitin (1995) underscores that ethnic identities are malleable and heavily influenced by political narratives and state policies, which can either foster cohesion or deepen divisions. Our discussions with local people show that they believe ethnicity is central to political engagement. This aligns with studies suggesting that ethnic loyalties often drive voting patterns and leadership selection, reinforcing the view that ethnicity is a fundamental determinant of political behaviour in post-conflict societies (Mampilly, 2011). Such dynamics perpetuate patronage networks and favouritism, which can undermine democratic processes and threaten national unity (Wimmer, 2002).

The concentration of political power within specific ethnic groups further intensifies societal inequalities, a phenomenon extensively documented in conflict studies. Wimmer (2002) highlights how entrenched social divisions and state failure exacerbate ethnic tensions, often leading to violence. This perception aligns with Böhmelt and Bormann's (2013) findings that higher levels of political marginalization increase the risk of ethnic armed conflict. When a few groups dominate resources and decision-making, it feeds grievances that can escalate into violence, as observed in South Sudan's ongoing struggles for equitable representation and resource sharing (Wimmer, 2002).

Rising ethnic tensions and conflicts since independence are consistent with the literature on post-conflict societies. Kalyvas (2006) emphasizes that violence during civil conflicts is often strategic, driven by local dynamics and the desire to control populations. The displacement resulting from such conflicts is a common feature in ethnopolitical conflicts worldwide, with studies showing that displacement both results from and fuels further tensions (Wimmer, 2002). Addressing these issues requires conflict resolution strategies rooted in inclusive governance and equitable power-sharing, as emphasized by Laitin (1995).

Displacement in South Sudan has profound social and economic consequences, a pattern well-documented in refugee and displacement studies. The World Bank reports that over 80% of displaced persons worldwide have lost their livelihoods, a trend reflected in respondents' comments about economic hardship. Displacement disrupts social networks, intensifies poverty, and creates competition over scarce resources, which can exacerbate tensions and undermine social cohesion (Mampilly, 2011). The data underscores the necessity of economic empowerment and livelihood programs to foster resilience and stability (Wimmer, 2002). Without addressing these structural vulnerabilities, displaced populations remain at risk of further marginalization and conflict.

Access to essential services remains critically compromised for displaced populations, echoing findings from global health research. Lack basic healthcare, , sanitation, and education are deficiencies heighten health risks, especially for vulnerable groups like children and pregnant women, and can lead to outbreaks of waterborne diseases affecting up to 70% of camp populations (Wimmer, 2002). Improving infrastructure and health service delivery is vital for enhancing resilience and social stability. As noted by respondents, accessible health services support long-term community recovery and cohesion.

Finally, social integration challenges and security issues in displacement camps are well-documented in conflict and peacebuilding literature. Respondents' perceptions of insufficient security and social exclusion align with Wimmer's (2002) analysis that state failure and social divisions hinder peacebuilding efforts. Studies by Böhmelt and Bormann (2013) show that community-led security initiatives can significantly reduce violence, emphasizing the role of local engagement. Promoting inclusive dialogue and strengthening community networks are essential strategies for fostering social cohesion and safety, ultimately contributing to

sustainable peace. The literature supports the view that grassroots participation is critical to resolving ethnopolitical conflicts and building resilient, inclusive societies (Kalyvas, 2006; Mampilly, 2011).

Conclusions

The study concludes that ethnic identity plays a central role in shaping political behaviour, influence, and power dynamics in South Sudan, significantly contributing to ongoing conflicts and societal divisions. The perception that political power and resources are disproportionately controlled by certain ethnic groups fosters resentment and marginalization among minority communities, fuelling ethnic tensions and violence. These divisions are further exacerbated by rising ethnic conflicts and displacement, which threaten national stability, deepen social cleavages, and hinder efforts toward reconciliation and inclusive governance.

Additionally, the findings highlight that displacement caused by ethnic conflicts has severe social, economic, and security implications for affected populations. Displaced communities face heightened vulnerability to violence, economic hardship, and limited access to essential services, which undermine social cohesion and long-term stability. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive conflict resolution strategies, inclusive policies, and community-driven security and social integration initiatives. Ultimately, the study underscores that sustainable peace and development in South Sudan depend on tackling ethnic-based inequalities, fostering inclusive governance, and promoting social cohesion at the community level.

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CHAPTER THREE

INSECURITY IN UPPER NILE STATE, SOUTH SUDAN: REFUGEE MOVEMENTS TO SUDAN AND ETHIOPIA

Rachel Amina Cyrus

Introduction

This paper builds upon the work of Angok Achuil Angok (Chapter 2). While Angok examines insecurity and violence at the national level, my analysis narrows the scope to a single state in South Sudan: Upper Nile State. My perspective however is also inspired by earlier studies. The study that I used was a UNDP report (UNDP 1994) in which the issue of security was raised. What inspired me was that the UNDP argued strongly for a shift in attention from insecurity on the level of the state to a focus on people as the key referent of security. This shift came against a background of the dominance of a security concept that was defined in relation to the territorial state and in which threats to security were seen as primarily being external in nature. What UNDP suggested then was to shift the focus from the state to people and to make the latter the main referent of security. This was expanded by the UN Commission on Human Security (2003) by stating that human security was about "*freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to take action on one's own behalf*". Establishing human security, according to the UNDP report, requires overcoming economic, health, environmental, personal, community and political insecurities.

If we look at Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), we see that human insecurity has reached high levels. On type of insecurity is produced by poverty (Akokpari 2007). Over 40 percent of 800 million people live below the poverty line, and this percentage is predicted to rise. The ecological problems in Africa are also to be counted among the factors producing insecurity. A third factor and one that will be explored in this paper is the high occurrence in Sub-Saharan Africa of violent conflicts and instability, which also produce insecurity. The combination of all these disconcerting developments presents SSA as an indisputable region of high human insecurity.

While there is a great deal of consensus on the generality of human insecurity there has been limited analysis on its fundamental causes. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, the tendency has been to adopt the usual neo-classical formula and point to factors that are predominantly internal to the region. Internal causes of insecurity such as poverty, conflicts, environmental degradation, food, health and educational insecurities are, in fact, manifestations of the crisis. While all this is true we should also look for more fundamental causes, including endemic structures and practices within the state system itself, whether the national state or the international state system. Similarly, we need a historical perspective linking the contemporary state also to factors established during colonialism and the early post-colonial period. With such a perspective we shall also discover how linked the development of state power has been to global capitalism, in terms of trade systems developed or the search for investment opportunities in raw materials needed in the West.

In my analysis from the Upper Nile State, we shall see all these factors becoming important, but as I said, my focus will be on violent conflicts and the causes related to that situation in this particular state. No people in their right senses like to constantly live under conditions of violence and war that threaten their personal or community security. There are always deep-seated causes that spark or influence people to violence. It is therefore not enough to point to human insecurity without identifying its root causes, especially when the problem is threatening. Identifying the causes of a problem in a specific place is necessary for a fuller understanding of its implications. Above all, understanding and mastering the causes of a problem enhances opportunities for effectively addressing it. Thus, in order to recommend an effective solution to a problem, it is imperative to diagnose its root causes. A deviation from this standard practice leads to a diagnosis of the symptoms rather than the root causes.

Conceptual Issues

The academic literature shows a broad discussion and many suggestions as to how to understand the concept of insecurity itself, and how to link the concept to empirical phenomena. Here, I can only mention a few that I have found relevant for my own discussions. According to development scholar Otiv Igbuzor (2011), insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety. It is an unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation

of some misfortune. The political scientist Daniel Béland (2005) defines insecurity as the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection. Relating to the feeling of anxiety mentioned by both authors, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) argued that behind this feeling of anxiety is found the basic human fear of chaos, and that in general terms humans have developed "culture" in a broad sense to create a sense of control in their lives in a stochastic and unpredictable world. From this general starting point another anthropologist, Sherry Ortner (2005) argues that this must be empirically linked to the experiences of real people and their subjectivities. By such an empirical starting point we can see, for instance how cultural variations based on gender differences can help us understand the different ways men and women in a specific society understand fear and anxiety. Or how people in different age groups and different generations also understand insecurity in different ways, with parents feeling responsibilities for the safety of children, children challenging this "carefulness" of their parents. The cultural understanding that others suggest also may help us see how such attackers pick their victims and better understand why certain specific atrocities are carried out against them. To stay with the example of gender and age we see that often the raping of women is widespread, or the capturing of children is common, the first related to the reproductive capacity of women within their own communities, the second as a way to create child soldiers.

In this paper I shall relate to all of the above conceptual positions as I try to develop my empirical analysis. Empirically, however, I shall focus on certain kinds of insecurity, the one that is produced by violent conflicts. In the case of people in Upper White Nile State the analysis shows that physical insecurity is produced through direct violence creating devastation through the violent acts themselves, but also leading to processes of displacement, with people running away from the violence seeking safety in other places, in other localities within the state, or in refugee camps in different places, or also by moving across national borders, into neighbouring countries. Whatever strategy is followed by people; they experience continued insecurity.

Again, looking at literature, we learn that the state of insecurity itself has specific consequences. According to Robert Burrowes (2013), violence produces a kind of fear that destroys the integrity of the human mind itself. The disintegration of the mind is extraordinarily destructive and causes the individual to experience phenomenal levels of fear,

pain, anger and sadness. However, over time, the individual is terrorized into suppressing their awareness of these feelings and the destruction that caused them. The symptoms of destruction manifest in a variety of ways, psychologically as well as in general health developments, and in social behaviour (Stemberg and Dobson, 1987). Obviously, such insecurity produced by violence is also linked to and feeds into many other forms of insecurity people have experienced, such as economic and social insecurity in their daily lives, dealing with poverty and/or unemployment. Or it can relate to observing inequitable distribution of wealth around them, producing feelings of injustice, which again can produce anger, agitation and violent crimes against whoever is seen to bring about this injustice, from the state itself, or from other ethnic groups. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between different causes of insecurity as each may produce different results and may require different remedies.

My focus is, again, the insecurity that is related to direct violence, which brings me over to the concept of security and the important question about what it is that is important to secure, the security of what? Which again has to do with what values people have in each case? In my case, from the Upper Nile State, the empirical security problem appears to be close to what Chris Nwagboso (2012) links to the act of being safe from harm or danger, the defence, protection and preservation of the basic value of being alive. Said Adejumo (2011) takes a larger view and links the discussion of that basic value of staying alive to the problem of internal conflicts and civil wars in Africa, from the perspective of citizens' rights. Adejumo brings in the state and argues that security is the responsibility of the state and that the state should keep peace within the territories the state rules over, which clearly is not the case in South Sudan. Adebakin and Raimi (2012) also bring in the state, since they viewed security as freedom from danger or threats, and the ability of a nation to protect and develop itself, promote and cherish values and legitimate interests and enhance the wellbeing of its people. This can be maintained through internal security systems.

Internal security is also supposed to ensure freedom of people from any criminal disturbances and ensures the absence of criminal tendencies which can undermine internal cohesion and co-operation among various groups. If the state is unable to do this, it threatens the very existence of the nation and its ability to maintain its core values and meet the legitimate aspiration of the people. In general terms, security is

the act of seeing the survival of all in society. It is the search to avoid, prevent, reduce, or resolve violence and conflict in any society. Usually, general peace and security in any society is associated with lack of violence, absence of civil disorder and insurgency to mention but a few. However, this study attempts to discuss two dimensions of insecurity. First a broad overview of some key factors producing the insecurity was deriving from violent conflicts and the following displacement of people bringing them into displacement. And secondly, the effects of insecurity and violence in Upper Nile State as seen by its victims.

A History of Violence

Upper Nile State has seen many examples of insecurity, in different periods. The first civil war in the old Sudan goes back to before independence in 1956 and lasted until 1972. In this period the fighting between north and south produced violent consequences also in what was then Upper Nile Province. As did the second civil war, from 1983 to 2005, which eventually also led to the independence of South Sudan. Then after independence a new civil war broke out in the new country in 2013. It is of course impossible to go into detail here, but I can mention some types of conflicts that relate directly to the kind of violent displacements that are the topic of the discussion in this paper.

In the early 20th century violence came with the oil that was found in different areas along the boundaries between northern and southern provinces (e.g. Pedersen and Bazilian, 2014). Some fields were in Upper Nile Province, towards the north, in the Renk, Maban and Melut areas. The search for oil had started in the late 1970s and the first export of crude oil from Sudan started in 1999. This marked a turning point in the country's complex and on-going civil war that lasted from 1983 until 2005. Oil came to be used by the government to obtain weapons and ammunition that enabled it to intensify the war and expand oil development. Oil exploitation produced a decline in the rural population in parts of Melut and Maban Counties, largely due to forced displacement of the Dinka and Maban populations, pushing thousands of them into neighbouring counties (Belloni, 2011). The government of Sudan also mandated its troops and Nuer militants to forcefully evict people to enable the construction of roads in the same areas.

The large-scale exploitation of oil by foreign companies operating with government acceptance in the theatre of war in southern Sudan, in this case Upper Nile province (at that time) was a situation that led to the militarization of those communities. Again, drawing on Pedersen and Brazilian they also argued that the militarization of the Upper Nile State laid the foundation for a hostile environmental condition that converted a civic society to a battlefield. In their analysis, they also argue that this is the beginning in those communities of the formation of militia groups to protect their families from invaders (Pedersen and Bazilian, 2014). Over time the effect was an increase in human rights abuses both in the Upper Nile and elsewhere in the oil areas on the border between north and south, a conflict which itself was marked already by gross human rights abuses throughout the south, with recurring famine and epidemics adding to the tragedy of war.

Other conflicts were generated by politics in the newly independent state of South Sudan, and now Upper Nile province had become Upper Nile State. In areas along the White Nile, moving south from this oil area in the north there was an ethnic conflict going on that also produced disasters. What is important here is that the Padang Dinka-dominated new state government, supported by forces from the SPLM-based national government in Juba and communal militias all used their power to engage in complex and violent processes of demographic engineering and land-grabbing against ethnic Shilluk and Nuer along the eastern banks of the White Nile. This political-economic campaign frequently involved attacks by Dinka militias or government forces against civilians living, traveling, or working along the White Nile River.

These conflicts became particularly dramatic in Malakal. This is the traditional capital of the historical Upper Nile province going back to the period of a pre-2011 united Sudan. Malakal has always been seen as a Shilluk town but ever since independence this status has now been challenged by the Padang Dinka as well as the Nuer, pushing the Shilluk to the west of the White Nile, claiming the land on the eastern side for their own, and thus making Malakal city which is situated at the eastern bank of the Nile into a Dinka city. This development brought Dinka families to settle in Shilluk homes in Malakal town. Shilluk and Nuer communities, who were displaced during these violent clashes also ended up in refugee camps, including the so-called Protection of Civilians (PoC)-sites,

which were established and administered by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Thirdly, the national civil war between the President Salva Kiir and the then (2013) Vice President Rieck Machar started a violent conflict between the Dinka and the Nuer, each backing their own leader but also over time creating new alliances. These developments are still going on and also affect all states in the country. We see this also in the southwest of the Upper Nile state towards Tonga town and neighbouring areas in Panyikang County where fighting was going on especially in the period around 2022, fighting that was also ethnically based. As was the case also towards the southeast, towards Nasir town. In both areas the violence was linked to groups and dynamics in Greater Upper Nile, Upper Nile State, Jongolei State and Unity State. But in my discussion here I shall focus on the Malakal situation, also because this security situation limited my fieldwork to camps in Malakal. In all camps Shilluk and Nuer internally displaced people (IDPs) face deprivation and contestation in the crowded, under-resourced displacement camps. And violence also occurred within the camps themselves.

The problems in the state as well as in Malakal are involving militias as well as government troops. The tribes are Shilluk (Chollo), Dinka and Nuer, and the militias are the Shilluk based *Agwelek*, then groups from the Padang Dinka and various Nuer militias such as *Kitgwang* and also the *White Army*. Battles between the *Agwelek* and the *Kitgwang*, for instance in Tunga in 2022, produced major displacement processes into the UN camps (PoC) in Malakal, but also within the camps themselves attacks and atrocities went on (For details on the conflict in 2022 see Joshua Craze (November 2022), These localized wars were all characterized by gross human rights and humanitarian laws abuses, massively forced displacement, and life-threatening violence against civilians. The systematic raping of women and girls, but also the burning of boys alive linked was by Human Rights Watch linked to deliberate acts of genocide and ethnocide, with the intention to destroy the existence of those communities (Human Rights Watch, 2015). With such aims the raping of women and girls by soldiers and several militia groups became a motivation to sustain the conflicts themselves (Meger, 2011).

This was a situation Friedrich (2016), believed led to psychological mental distress among the civilian population. A remarkable number of these are women and children (UNICEF, 2009). Women and girls are vulnerable

groups during war times and in South Sudan there is next to nothing in terms of relevant health institutions that can offer relevant assistance. This unbridled civil war has gone rampant over the years and has reached many areas and decimated families, disrupted the economy and infrastructures while the intransigence of belligerents does not seem to end. Efforts to mitigate this violence have failed and the destiny of the country is left at the mercy of the providence. A specific problem is that "what starts a war may not be what sustains it" (Maitre 2009: 53).

In summary let me end this section by pointing at two major types of problems coming out of the violent conflicts in Upper Nile that directly affect have effects on the long-term survival possibilities for people and their communities. The two are related to loss of land, and the rape of women.

Land Issues and Violence

With South Sudanese independence, ownership and accessibility to land has led to armed conflict, particularly in the capital city Juba (McMichael 2015), but also in other zones at the periphery where arable land, pastures and property remained a concern. For instance, land in Juba has shifted the conflict dynamics when newcomers, mostly the ruling elites, expropriated local populations of their private properties (McMichael, 2014:390). Different groups, particularly ex-combatants who thought themselves entitled to plots of land after years spent fighting for the country's liberation perpetrated expropriation, while absence of effective governance and rule of law exasperated the phenomenon. This greed culminated into dispossessing the peasantry often by using the power of the gunnery, for the most part in juba. As result, militias were formed along ethnic lines and social status making the outskirts of capital Juba a no man land.

What this implies is that the dynamics of South Sudanese armed conflict has shifted to accommodate land ownership aspect. Partly, this was due to absence of structural measures pertaining to land as Sefa-Nyarko demonstrates that "*in an environment where land rights are not well-specified and a huge number of small arms are in circulation, violent conflict becomes pervasive*" (2016:202). Thus, the absence of equitable access to land for sustenance of life has resulted in armed conflict.

All this could also be said about the land conflicts in Upper Nile State but part of the general problem in the case in that state is related to the changes

carried out by the President of South Sudan himself. He directly contributed to the confusion and the resulting conflicts around the borders of the South Sudanese States, changing from 10 States in 2011 at independence, then 28 in 2015 and again 32 in 2017. In 2020 this situation was returned to the 10 states of 2011, with the additional "Administrative Areas" of Ruweng and Pibor Administrative Areas, and then the special administrative status area of Abyei. These wider changes affected Upper Nile as they helped produce a general destabilization of the situation in all states resulting from these changes brought many problems. Especially as the changes changed the borders within states of the territories the various ethnic groups of tribes understood as their areas, thus, to be defended against attacks from other ethnic groups who argued that the new situation allowed them to reorganize borders according to their own understandings. The interference by the President and thus the state and its military forces on the side of the Dinka in Upper Nile, against the Shilluk and the Nuer produced precisely that kind of outcome. For the losers, in this case especially the Shilluk, these processes put their total existence at risk not only material survival but also their identity as a people.

Gender Violence

The term violence against women includes a multitude of abuses directed at women and girls over their lifespan. The UN declaration on the elimination of Violence against Women (defines violence: any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'' (United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Geneva, 20 December 1993). This statement defines violence as acts that cause, or have the potential to cause harm, and by introducing the term ''gender based'' emphasizes that it is rooted in inequality between women and men.

Violence is the chief source of fear for displaced women and girls. Researchers have begun to focus attention on the long-term effects of living under the threat of violence. Conflict situations such as the ones in Upper Nile State greatly increase the violence inflicted upon them; at no other time are women and girls more vulnerable. During conflicts, women often not only lack the protection of their families and spouses, but also are under threat by armed soldiers, who may regard them as spoils of war. Even when abuses are not aimed at them personally, women suffer violations of their human rights disproportionately when the normal codes

of social conduct are ignored because of conflict. In many cases women have sole responsibility for their households. Certain responsibilities of women's gender roles put them at greater risk of injury, such as their gender-defined task of searching for water and firewood exposes women to special risks, including sexual attacks. Gender-based violence may be manifested in several ways: domestic violence, rape, and forced prostitution and marriages. As part of this rape is a deliberate tactic used in war to dehumanize and dishonour not only the woman but also her husband and the entire community. This makes it part of processes of ethnocide and genocide.

Turning to the Field Material: Methodological Issues in the Context of Violence

The security situations outlined above put severe limitations on where I could carry out studies without exposing myself to insecurity. My original intent was to focus on the northern communities in the state, where oil was a factor in producing insecurity but as it turned out the only site where I could work in relative safety was in Malakal. But also, while being in the field in 2023, I experienced an attack on a UN Protection of Civilian Camp (PoC), when displaced Shilluk and Nuer clashed using small arms inside a PoC-camp. With such limitations I decided to limit my study to the 10-year period from 2013-2023 which made the focus on the northern part of the state, related to the oil exploration less relevant, while the developments in the land related conflict between Shilluk, Dinka and Nuer, and in Malakal in particular, took on an increased importance. But the period also indicates the tragic development in South Sudan with the enthusiasm of independence in 2011 to the break-out of the civil war in 2013. In December 2013 the outbreak of violence in the capital Juba quickly devolved into widespread civil conflict. Originally a political struggle within the governing Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) party, the violence played out along ethnic lines between the Dinka and Nuer tribes, causing massive displacement and a major humanitarian crisis. The crisis affected all ten states in South Sudan, although fighting has centred primarily in the Greater Upper Nile states of Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile State. During early days of the violence, tens of thousands of South Sudanese fled to bases of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which established Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites that continue to shelter people until 2023, which is the end of my fieldwork, not the end of the crisis.

Two peace agreements, one in 2015, Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS), and in 2018, Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) have not helped stop the violence. The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in 2018 only brought a temporary lull in large-scale hostilities. However, the peace remained fragile, with sporadic clashes continuing in Upper Nile State. Ethnic militias and splinter groups engaged in localized violence, often fueled by unresolved grievances and competition over land and resources. The security situation remained precarious, hindering humanitarian access and development efforts. And as I write this paper, in 2025, South Sudan seems once again to be on the verge of war. A war that in certain places, such as places in the Upper Nile State never stopped. The people I met are all victims of these sad developments and it turned out to have direct consequences on my research.

In carrying out my research I planned to use different methodologies, but it turned out to bring unexpected problems. One method was to run a questionnaire with general questions that people could respond to. Obviously, the people were informed about my use of the data, including the anonymity of them as respondents. I found that this strategy was successful, as people agreed to respond to my questions in the questionnaire.

Then I also intended to carry out more personal in-depth interviews of individuals and group-based interviews. Both, of course, standard methodologies used for fieldwork. But my requests about participation were quite different from what I experienced when I introduced the general questionnaire. Most people I approached declined to participate. When I asked why they refused two responses turned out to be common. One was the "what is in it for me"-kind of response, in which people argued that in-depth interviews would be a waste of time since they did not gain anything in return. A second response was tied to their understanding of insecurity. One factor that brought this insecurity to the surface was that tribal fighting broke out in the camp (PoC), which triggered a sense of insecurity that also made me and my interviews a potential threat. As for the focus group discussions I did manage to establish some groups and did get some discussions going, but the participants were quite direct in refusing videos or photos to be taken. Again, they explained their refusal by pointing at their own security in the general situation of the tense insecurity within the camp itself.

For these reasons the following summary of responses mixes the results from the questionnaires and the information gained in the more limited direct discussions with people. For a complete overview of the results, I refer to my Master thesis in which the detailed results of a questionnaire are presented in tables and figures. Here I only present a summary of those details, but also include the responses obtained in primarily the focus group discussions I managed to establish. Overall, the responses I obtained generally correspond to what might be expected compared to the general causes of insecurity in the Upper Nile State discussed above and can thus be seen as confirmation of what people talked about. But due to the problems it is also important to be aware of the problems that I experienced during the fieldwork, which were directly produced by people's feeling of insecurity. The topic of my research, on insecurity, turned out, in the end, to also directly affect the type of data I could obtain relating to that very insecurity I was studying.

Responses from the IDPs in the questionnaire

1. Insecurity in Upper Nile State has led to the displacement of thousands of people, putting a tension on neighbouring countries. Addressing the root causes of this conflict and promoting peace and stability in the region is crucial in mitigating the impact of this crisis.
2. The research shows that insecurity has adversely affected Upper Nile State in many ways. Communities in Upper Nile State suffered insecurity as shown by the flight of many people to other countries like Sudan and Ethiopia.
3. The conflict, lack of economic opportunities, and natural disasters has all played a role in driving people away from Upper Nile State.
4. The consequences of insecurity in the Upper Nile State are due to economic hardship, loss of investments, poverty, violence, loss of lives and displacement.
5. Rampant killing of human beings and looting of civilians let to increased mortality and mobility or forceful displacement of civil population from their homes to other locations and even to migrate to other counties.

6. The majority of people in Upper Nile State strongly agreed that the insecurity is attributed to political factors, historical factors, economic factors, land Issues, ethnicity and tribal factors.
7. The impact of insecurity in Upper Nile State on migration is not limited to the immediate flight of people to neighbouring countries. It also has long-term implications for the socio-economic and political landscape of the region. The loss of human capital and the disruption of livelihoods can have a wave effect on the local economy and social framework.
8. The mass departure from Upper Nile State is a complex issue with multiple factors contributing to it. The lack of economic opportunities, conflict and violence, and environmental degradation has all played a role in driving people away from the region.
9. It is crucial for the local and international communities to address these issues and work towards creating a more stable and prosperous future for the residents of Upper Nile State.

On a general level this datatype gives me an impression of insecurity in Upper Nile State as being one of the biggest challenges facing the people I met. Everyone is affected regardless of age, gender, religion and race.

Some specifications based on personal conversations and group discussions

The responses from people in the questionnaire showed that insecurity has adversely affected Upper Nile State in many ways. All communities in Upper Nile State suffered insecurity and all respondents had relatives or people they knew who had moved into other countries like Sudan and Ethiopia. As I moved on to the general conversations with people and also the group discussions that I had, I was of course interested in following up some of the information the questionnaire produced. As for the consequences of insecurity, people also pointed to a broad range of factors. Lack of means needed to meet basic needs such as food and shelter were common. But the factors that had forced them to leave the home area were the effects of direct violence, with killing and looting of civilians which again led to displacement. As to the background causes of this violence, respondents agreed that the insecurity in Upper Nile State was attributed to political factors, historical factors, economic factors, land issues, ethnicity and tribal factors. What people need most is

security in their home areas, support for voluntary return, and durable solutions—including resettlement and livelihood support.

Summarizing these Responses Suggest the Following List:

The displaced people in the PoC camp in Malakal that I talked to mainly came from surrounding areas in Upper Nile State and other conflict-affected regions of South Sudan. The majority of whom I met came from towns and counties within Upper Nile State such as Baliet, Panyikang, Fashoda, and Renk. Regarding my questions about the key sources of displacement, they included the following:

Many people were displaced due to violent clashes between government troops (SPLA) and opposition forces (SPLA-IO), especially during the civil wars that erupted in December 2013 and July 2016. Which meant two things: that they had been staying in the camp for a long time and that's some of them also arrived from neighbouring states like Jonglei and Unity, driven by broader regional instability and food insecurity. People also referred to inter-communal and ethnic violence within the state itself, particularly among the Shilluk, Dinka, and Nuer communities. People had stories about fleeing to avoid targeted killings and retaliatory attacks. Civilians were deliberately targeted for their ethnic identity. Looting, arson, and sexual violence were used as weapons of war.

Sexual and gender-based violence was reported to be widespread during raids and displacement.

Some talked about attacks that were carried out by local warlords who were known to be related to government-aligned forces. Going back or returning was impossible. While parts of Upper Nile could be calm at times, returnees risked facing continued insecurity, with lack of basic services, and land disputes especially in areas destroyed by past fighting. Moving to Sudan or Ethiopia was a possibility but was seen as difficult. Crossing the border illegally was risky, and from what people knew refugee integration in other countries was also limited.

Thus, in reality, the majority of people in Malakal camp were stuck. There was no easy or safe choice. Talking about life within the camp itself, people talked about life in the camp in Malakal Protection of Civilians (PoC) site as being extremely difficult. Conditions were crowded, resources limited, and insecurity persisted, especially from inter-communal tensions. People also pointed to the following:

- Limited access to healthcare, clean water, and education
- Insecurity from ethnic conflicts, especially between Shilluk and Dinka groups
- Dependence on humanitarian aid was not sufficient, which forced people to rely on alternative sources of income, such as small-scale trade. The lucky ones got paid jobs within the camp itself.

Asking about who people related to within the camp people referred to relatives, fellow villagers or more distant acquaintances, the latter relating to people forming new networks of connections.

Conclusion

Looking back at these responses as well as the lessons from the study as a totality I come to see that the displacement in Upper Nile State, particularly during and after the civil conflicts in South Sudan, reveals several critical lessons that resonate across the broader African context and informs the role of the UN and international community. They also point towards more general lessons from other studies. I will end by briefly commenting on both.

Some local lessons learnt from my study

First of all, it seems obvious that conflict-driven displacement requires integrated, long-term solutions. Several points echo what Angkor discussed in the earlier paper. For instance, the situation in Upper Nile shows that in the absence of strong governance and inclusive political institutions, local conflicts escalate rapidly into humanitarian crises. This also mirrors conditions in other African regions such as the Central African Republic and eastern DRC, where weak state structures fail to protect civilians. A second point is the negative effects of ethnic and political rivalries. Displacement in Upper Nile was often driven by ethnic tensions manipulated by political elites. A key lesson is that peace building efforts must address underlying grievances—ethnic, historical, and socio-political—not just focus on ceasefires or elite-level peace agreements. A third point is that there is a need for regional cooperation. This is so because displacement does not respect borders. The crisis in Upper Nile State is therefore also part of the crises across the borders into Sudan and Ethiopia. This shows that regional bodies like the African Union (AU) and IGAD must play more proactive, coordinated roles in

early warning, conflict prevention, and refugee management. Such regional initiatives seem to be lacking, or they come too late. As is the case also with the UN and the International Community. The UN and its partners often arrive after displacement peaks. One obvious lesson here is to give increased help and resources to local civil society organizations that understand ground realities.

Connection of Upper Nile State case to the African context

My second concluding observation is to point out the obvious. The Upper Nile displacement is not an isolated event but part of a broader pattern where governance failures, exclusionary politics, and armed conflict fuel cycles of displacement. It seems to be a long way from the AU's "Silencing the Guns" initiative which underscores the urgency of addressing root causes through continental strategies. The Silencing of the Guns initiative is built on the belief that a peaceful African continent is possible. This aspiration is expressed in the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063, formally launched in 2017, that aspires to end all wars, conflict and gender-based violence, and to prevent genocide.

Measured against such African aims the displacement crisis in Upper Nile State indicates that Africa, let alone South Sudan, is some distance away from those future aims. But the Silencing the guns-initiative might highlight the urgent need for integrated, long-term responses to conflict-induced displacement across Africa. It underscores how fragile governance, ethnic tensions, and exclusionary politics can escalate local conflicts into widespread humanitarian emergencies. This reflects broader patterns seen across the continent, where unresolved grievances and weak state institutions perpetuate cycles of violence and displacement. The Upper Nile State experience reinforces the importance of addressing root causes and background factors rather than signs and symptoms to achieve lasting stability. This is so because the conflicts in Upper Nile State are not just a short-term humanitarian problem, but a prolonged, repeated crisis rooted in total governance failure, ethnic divisions, and militarization of local grievances. Furthermore, the inability of national and state governments to prevent or manage violence shows a deeper conceptual failure in state-building and local governance structures. As for the international community, the UN and other public or private NGO agents, the crisis reinforces the understanding that aid dependency without long-term peace building or development strategies only temporarily relieves suffering without resolving root causes.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESILIENCE, DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOODS IN FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTH-SUDAN

Christopher Oringa Mark

Introduction

This chapter has two goals, one conceptual and one empirical. The first goal of the paper is to discuss the recent emergence and widespread use of the concept of resilience in development processes. The concept of resilience is originally from ecological studies and seeks to explain how systems bounce back following periods of shocks, such as droughts. When the concept now emerges more frequently in contexts of shocks such as droughts, floods and wars it signals a departure from earlier types of protection of people in which the aim was to help everyone to a realization that everyone cannot be helped and that the best way to help is to develop a resilience through which as many as possible can be helped, primarily by helping themselves.

The second goal, which is empirical, is to bring the concept of resilience into a dialogue with empirical material from a field-study that I undertook in IDP camps in Bentiu, the capital of Unity State in South Sudan. My point in linking the two parts of the chapter is to provide a basis for further discussion of how the notion of resilience can be seen to play a role in the choices made by displaced people in those camps, that people in fact do help themselves. My fieldwork data allows me to discuss this along two dimensions, a general dimension in which we see the adaptation of all people in the camps, and second a special focus on women to see whether there are gender differences in the ability of women and men in their possibilities of developing such a resilience.

The results of this will be discussed in what is then the third and concluding part of the chapter in which I shall return to the concept of resilience and offer some ideas about how the information gathered in the IDP camps in Bentiu can indicate an answer to the question about how resilience plays out. There is of course a large literature on the concept of resilience, especially starting from the global crisis in 2008, how it works

and how to measure it. Here I also need to add a third factor, which is *where* to measure it. This third factor is important since my information is not from the home places of people but from their adaptation within IDP camps. But as we shall see, the adaptive strategies of people in the camps may also be seen in the light of resilience, not telling us about the ability of people to bounce back to the same condition from before their displacement but rather what are the actual strategies employed by people in response to and recover from, and adapt to new conditions in the camps. Of course, this is related to the socio-cultural traditions of people involved but it also brings in the IDP-camps themselves as important contexts for how processes of resilience play out. This makes it possible for me to comment not only on how people themselves show resilience and thus "bounce back" to an earlier adaptive situation but also how the IDP camp and thus the general emergency and developments system becomes a factor affecting the ability of people to "bounce back".

The Empirical Picture – IDP Camps in Bentiu

Let me start at the empirical end, with the data from the IDP camps to see what answers we can find to this question about resilience among the displaced. The research was conducted in Unity State, in particular Bentiu which is the capital of the Unity State. The state was hit by flooding in 2019 and again in 2021, leading to the establishment of IDP camps, but displaced people from the ongoing violent conflicts between the President Salva Kiir and his opponent, Rieck Machar has also produced displacement and made people seek the safety of the camps.

These different factors led to variations in number of people in the various camps in Bentiu but at the time of my study Between 1st February – 31st March 2023, Rapid Flow Monitoring (RFM) at points of entry in Bentiu Town Sites (A, B, C, D, and E) indicates a decrease in new arrivals (43%). Fifty-seven per cent were found leaving the sites. Most of the increased new arrivals during this period were recorded in Site C (62%), Site A (13%) and Site E (11%), most of whom came from locations within Unity State (99%), with Rubkona County (63%), and Mayom (13). IDPs arriving at the sites travelled using boats (81%) or came by foot (11%), and other means (8%). At the end of March 2023, 137,864 individuals (31,071 households) were biometrically registered as active beneficiaries in the site, representing an increase of two per cent of individuals since January 2023 following the latest biometric registration maintenance in Bentiu IDP Camp (IOM 2023). As per March 2023 population count findings, the Bentiu IDP camp population stands at 102,436 individuals (17,440

households) in 12,038 inhabited shelters (on average of 6 individuals per shelter). This represents a two per cent increase compared to January 2023. There were five IDP sites in Unity State, with a total of 71,424 IDPs individuals and 9,976 households as of March 2023(IOM 2023).

During my fieldwork all participants were identified and contacted through leading organizations, specifically the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and ACTED. With the support of these organizations, the researcher encountered minimal challenges in engaging with participants. A staff member from one of these organizations acted as a point of contact between the researcher and the participants. The livelihood support team was responsible for selecting potential participants, after which the staff members communicated with camp committee members to check participants' availability and to propose suitable meeting times. Once the participants were confirmed, the researcher visited the camps directly to conduct interviews (Creswell and Clark 2018).

Research Results

Turning to the actual research I start with an overview of the primary livelihood activities among the people in the camps with the question in mind whether we could establish from such data that the adaptive choices people made could be characterized as strategies building resilience.

Table 4-1: *Distribution of Primary Livelihood Activities*

Activity Type	**Percentage**
Small retail trading	27.6
Casual labor	21.4
Agriculture/farming	16.7
Food processing/vending	15.2
Handicrafts	10.5
Livestock keeping	8.6
Total	**100.0**

Source: *fieldwork, 2024.*

Table (1) presents the distribution of primary livelihood activities among respondents in the study, and it represents a baseline for what kind of activities people are involved in and thus what kind of interests they most likely would have. Which again would be a sign for the camp management as to what activities they needed to be concerned with in building such resilience.

The table reveals significant patterns in how internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Unity State adapt their livelihood strategies in response to displacement. Most notably, IDPs demonstrated remarkable resilience through diversification of income sources, with combining small retail trading, casual labour, and agricultural activities. This diversification proved to be the most effective coping strategy, with 80% of respondents actively pursuing multiple income streams. Other parts of the research highlighted the crucial role of social networks and community support systems in enabling livelihood adaptations, with religious groups emerging as particularly effective support structures. Interviews also confirmed that this pattern was also common back in the villages where the displaced came from.

Information on several other factors was also collected to develop a more comprehensive picture of these adaptive strategies, and they are available in my Ph.D. thesis (Oringa 2024) Here I only present my final overview of those factors and the role they played in the adaptation strategies.

Priority Areas

Table 4-2: *Analysis of Implementation of Priority Areas*

Priority Area	Urgency Rating*	Impact Potential**	Resource Availability (%)	Std. Deviation	Tolerance Value
Livelihood diversification	4.52	4.45	62.4	0.812	0.856
Capacity building	4.38	4.32	58.6	0.834	0.845
Market development	4.25	4.18	52.4	0.845	0.823
Infrastructure support	4.15	3.95	48.2	0.867	0.834
Financial inclusion	4.42	4.28	45.7	0.823	0.856
Gender equality	4.35	4.22	55.2	0.845	0.867

Source: *fieldwork, 2024.*

The analysis of implementation priority areas points at the critical focus areas necessary for enhancing economic development initiatives. Each priority area is assessed based on urgency ratings, potential impact, resource availability, standard deviations, and tolerance values, providing a structured framework to guide decision-making and resource allocation.

The table confirms that livelihood diversification is identified as the most urgent area, which indicates that addressing livelihood challenges has both immediate importance and the potential for significant long term positive outcomes. Resource availability in this area suggests a relatively better capacity to implement necessary interventions compared to other priority areas. In the context of my discussion on resilience this strong resource backing can facilitate effective programs that enhance the economic resilience of target communities.

Capacity building also emerges as a crucial priority, and this area underscores the need for skill development and training to empower individuals and enhance their capabilities. Investing in capacity building can create a substantial foundation for other initiatives, ensuring that beneficiaries are equipped to take advantage of economic opportunities.

Other important areas include market development and infrastructure support. While both areas have potential for significant impact for market development and for infrastructure, they both face challenges with resource availability. These gaps highlight the importance of strategic investments in improving market access and infrastructure, which are essential for enabling sustainable economic growth and development.

Financial inclusion is an additional priority area of concern. The impact potential is high, but resource availability remains limited. A critical finding here was the identification of limited capital access as the most severe challenge affecting almost 90 percent of respondents. Addressing this area is thus vital for fostering comprehensive economic participation. The analysis of this priority area emphasizes the need for coordinated efforts and targeted resource allocation to maximize impact and effectively address the pressing challenges faced by communities.

The final priority area in the table, gender equality, could be described in ways similar to what is said above for financial inclusion, but here I move gender equality out of this table and discuss it separately. This is to answer the second question I asked - whether the general resilience strategies discussed above for the total survey population are available to

women, thus also enhancing women's ability to develop resilient strategies for themselves and their children.

Resilience and Gender Equality

In general, and not unexpectedly, gender emerged as a significant factor influencing strategy adoption, with women facing distinct challenges such as childcare responsibilities. The following tables gives an impression of these gender differences as far as they relate to the ability of women to participate in the activities outlined above.

Table 4-3: *Analysis of Gender-Specific Challenges*

Challenge Type	Female (%)	Male (%)	Mean Severity*	Std. Deviation	Tolerance Value	Challenge Type
Childcare responsibilities	85.2	24.7	4.45	0.765	0.845	Childcare responsibilities
Market access restrictions	72.4	38.2	4.12	0.823	0.834	Market access restrictions
Security concerns	78.6	45.3	4.28	0.789	0.856	Security concerns
Skills gap	68.9	52.8	3.95	0.845	0.823	Skills gap
Time poverty	82.3	35.6	4.32	0.812	0.867	Time poverty
Social restrictions	65.7	28.4	3.86	0.834	0.845	Social restrictions

Source: *fieldwork, 2024.*

Here we see demonstrated the disparities between female and male experiences. The data indicates that female IDPs encounter significantly higher challenges across all categories, particularly regarding childcare responsibilities and time poverty. Specifically, 85.2% of women report challenges related to childcare, compared to just 24.7% of men, reflecting a considerable burden placed on women in fulfilling these responsibilities.

In addition to childcare, market access restrictions are notably more pronounced for females, with 72.4% of women affected, compared to 38.2% of men. Security concerns also disproportionately impact females, with 78.6% reporting significant concerns versus 45.3% of males. These results highlight a broader pattern of challenges that female IDPs face, which not only limits their economic opportunities but also contributes to their overall vulnerability.

Overall, the analysis presents a clear indication of the heightened difficulties encountered by female IDPs relative to their male counterparts. The significant gender disparities highlighted in this analysis call for targeted interventions to address the specific challenges faced by female IDPs, particularly in areas related to childcare, security, and access to resources. This is vital also in the context of my discussion in this chapter, as it directly affects the possibilities of women to engage in strategies that might enhance their own resilience as well as those of the children. This is shown in the following table.

***Table 4-4**: Gender-Based Analysis of Opportunity Access*

Opportunity Type	Female Access (%)	Male Access (%)	Mean Disparity*	Std. Deviation	Tolerance Value
Skills training	45.2	68.4	3.85	0.845	0.823
Credit facilities	38.6	72.3	4.12	0.812	0.856
Market participation	52.4	78.6	3.95	0.834	0.845
Employment	42.8	75.2	4.28	0.789	0.867
Leadership roles	35.7	82.4	4.45	0.823	0.834
Technical training	48.3	76.5	3.92	0.856	0.812

***Source:** fieldwork, 2024.*

Table 4 provides a gender-based analysis of access to various opportunities, illustrating significant disparities between female and male participants. The data indicates that women have lower access rates across all opportunity types, with the most pronounced gaps observed in leadership roles and employment, but also in terms of employment opportunities and credit facilities the findings highlight systemic barriers that limit women's economic and professional growth, which could further entrench gender inequalities within the community.

Skills training and technical training present slightly better access rates for women but is still lower than male participation. Additionally, market participation suggests that women face challenges in fully engaging in market activities, which are essential for economic empowerment.

The overall analysis reveals a consistent trend of gender disparities across various opportunity types, with men enjoying significantly greater access. These findings underscore the urgent need for interventions aimed at promoting gender equality by enhancing access to skills training, employment, and leadership opportunities for women, thereby fostering a more inclusive environment for all.

Table 4-5: Gender Analysis of Resource Control with the IDPs

Resource Type	Female Control (%)	Male Control (%)	Joint Control (%)	Std. Deviation	Tolerance Value
Household income	32.4	45.7	21.9	0.823	0.845
Business assets	28.6	52.4	19.0	0.856	0.834
Production tools	25.7	58.1	16.2	0.812	0.867
Savings	38.1	42.9	19.0	0.845	0.823
Land use rights	22.9	62.8	14.3	0.878	0.856
Livestock	26.7	55.2	18.1	0.834	0.845

Source: *fieldwork, 2024.*

Table 5 provides a gender analysis of resource control, revealing significant disparities between female and male control over various resources. The data indicates that women consistently have lower control percentages across all resource types compared to their male counterparts. This trend points to entrenched gender inequalities in resource management, as women are largely excluded from decision-making processes regarding vital economic assets.

In the domain of household income, the data reflect a predominance of male authority in this crucial area. Similarly, business assets show inequalities. These statistics highlight the barriers women face in managing economic resources and indicate the need for interventions to support female entrepreneurship. The analysis of production tools presents an even starker disparity which then presents significant challenges for women's participation in production and economic activities. While the control of savings is slightly better, the discrepancy still reflects an underlying imbalance in financial autonomy.

Perhaps the most alarming figures emerge around land use rights, where female control is just 22.9% versus 62.8% male control, highlighting a critical gap in access to a resource essential for livelihood and economic stability. Control over livestock mirrors these trends. Overall, the findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted strategies to empower women and enhance their control over resources, which is vital for achieving economic equity and improving the well-being of women in the community, in short, their resilience. Which is also reflected in women’s influence on decision making power.

As we see below, the analysis of gender-based decision-making power reveals nuanced dynamics in various areas of authority within the household and community. In the domain of household expenditure, the result indicates that women possess a slightly higher level of control in financial decision-making, though the figures suggest a significant role for men as well, reflecting a collaborative approach in expenditure decisions.

Analysis of Gender Differences in Decision-Making Power

Table 4-6: *Gender-Based Decision-Making Power*

Decision Area	Female Authority (%)	Male Authority (%)	Shared Authority (%)
Household expenditure	45.2	38.1	16.7
Children's education	52.4	28.6	19.0
Business management	35.7	48.6	15.7
Asset disposal	28.6	55.2	16.2
Livelihood choices	32.4	51.4	16.2
Community participation	38.1	45.7	16.2

Source: *fieldwork, 2024.*

When it comes to children's education, women demonstrate a stronger influence, a trend that underscores the critical role women often play in educational decisions, potentially indicating societal perceptions that prioritize women's involvement in nurturing and educational aspects of the family.

In business management, the scenario shifts as male authority is more pronounced, suggesting that traditional gender roles may persist in entrepreneurial settings, where men are often seen as primary decision-makers. Similarly, in asset disposal and livelihood choices, male authority is notably higher, which highlights the gender inequities that exist in ownership and decision-making related to resources.

Community participation sees a more balanced division, but although women participate, male authority remains more significant, showing that while there is some level of inclusivity, men still dominate in decision-making roles within the community context. Overall, the analysis points to a complex interplay of gender dynamics, where women's authority varies significantly across different decision-making areas, reflecting broader societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles.

Putting the information from the above tables together we get the following overall indicators of gender empowerment situation.

Table 4-7: *Gender Empowerment Indicators*

Indicator	Female Score*	Male Score*	Gender Gap	Std. Deviation	Tolerance Value
Economic participation	3.45	4.28	0.83	0.823	0.845
Skills development	3.68	4.15	0.47	0.845	0.834
Asset ownership	3.25	4.32	1.07	0.867	0.856
Leadership roles	3.12	4.45	1.33	0.834	0.823
Community influence	3.48	4.18	0.70	0.856	0.845
Financial autonomy	3.35	4.25	0.90	0.812	0.867

Source: *fieldwork, 2024.*

Summarizing the impression from the various tables provides us with the following general conclusions. The analysis of gender empowerment indicators highlights substantial disparities between women and men across various dimensions, illustrating persistent gender inequalities. Women scored lower than men in all categories, with the most significant gaps observed in leadership roles and asset ownership. These indicators suggest that women face systemic barriers that limit their empowerment relative to men, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Specific gender-related challenges emerge prominently from the analysis. Women bear a disproportionate burden regarding childcare, furthermore, security concerns and time poverty are more acute for women, indicating that their daily lives are heavily impacted by these issues. These challenges contribute to economic disparities and affect women's ability to engage in workforce opportunities and decision-making processes effectively.

Access to opportunities presents another area of inequality, with men enjoying greater access to credit facilities and prominent leadership roles. Additionally, disparities in access to skills training further entrench economic inequalities. This lack of access adversely affects women's ability to improve their economic situations and leadership prospects, thereby exacerbating the existing gender gap.

Resource control is overwhelmingly dominated by males, particularly evident in land use rights. Furthermore, joint control over resources remains persistently low. Although women demonstrate higher authority in specific decision-making areas like household expenditure and children's education, men dominate in business and asset-related decision-making, with shared authority consistently low across the board.

The General Situation

Overall, the study of the situation in the IDP camps in Bentiu concluded that successful livelihood adaptation requires multiple income streams, strong social networks, and gender-sensitive support mechanisms. These findings strongly align with existing academic discourse on IDP livelihood adaptations while offering new insights specific to the South Sudanese context. My key general recommendations based on the study include strengthening market linkages, enhancing skills training diversity,

improving monitoring systems, developing sustainable community ownership models,

Turning to the gender-related problems and my recommendations, the study affirms the need for strategic actions to close the gender gap in economic participation, resource control, and decision-making power, which highlights the general need of implementing comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategies.

Broader Discussion – A Focus on Resilience

The findings presented above strongly align with existing academic discourse on IDP livelihood adaptations while offering new insights specific to the South Sudanese context. They particularly reinforce Chambers and Conway's (1992) framework emphasizing the triumvirate of capabilities, assets, and activities in livelihood construction. The research results substantiate (Jacobsen, 2002) findings regarding the crucial role of social networks in enabling livelihood adaptations in displacement contexts.

The study also provides empirical support for Scoones (2025) observations about the critical importance of livelihood diversification in unstable contexts. Furthermore, it validates and extends Maxwell et al's (2016) research on context-specific livelihood strategies in South Sudan, offering updated insights into how these strategies have evolved in response to prolonged displacement.

The issue to be discussed here, in concluding the chapter, is to what extent these findings are useful in making conclusions about the relevance in development policies in general from an aim to help everyone to a focus on developing the resilience of local people, meaning that local people to a larger extent should be able to help themselves. The literature I mention in the beginning of the chapter points towards conceptual clarification and methodologies for how to study resilience. Here I want to argue that we also need to expand such perspectives by also including discussions on the underlying ideological basis for this kind of thinking. This basis for the new and modern forms of resilience is linked to and are aligned with neoliberal modalities, with access to markets, access to education, thereby cultivating neoliberal subjects who are prepared to engage with the developmental framework, becoming so to speak "developmental". And according to neoliberal ideology, it is the resilient who shall inherit the world. But the thinking is not new. One version is from ecology (Holling 1973) in which the focus is on the ability of nature to bounce back

following crises, such as droughts. Today, however, the concept is part of a neoliberal understanding of security in the 21st century. Hence, it represents a development of Foucault's (2003) understanding of biopolitics, focussing on "populations" that needed to be protected and advanced, as in the later welfare state ideologies. Within such paradigm planning, prediction and risk avoidance were developed. What is emerging now is a new concept of bio-politics in which we cannot save everyone, nor can we predict all the risks. Rather than saving people, we need to develop resilience, through which people can help themselves in crises that cannot be avoided. And such crises are not all bad. For some such crises may emerge as new possibilities for entrepreneurial activities (e.g. Zebovski 2016).For my argument here, this ideological basis means that individuals should carry responsibility for their futures, which also implies that those who fail can only blame themselves for this. But for successful individuals the future offers a broader and more long-term possibility for sustainable livelihoods. To evaluate such claims, it is necessary not only to examine the empirical evidence from displaced populations in the IDP camps in Bentiu, but also to broaden the perspective beyond the internal dynamics of the camps, situating these developments within the wider context of South Sudan's development policies and general political trajectory. I will discuss both.

Resilience as Part of A New Development Thinking.

For the general development perspective in South Sudan, I refer to the place resilience is given in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus. Here it occupies a central role in the developmental discourse. Here the concept is related to the peacebuilding element but is also closely related to development. With this, resilience comes to serve two purposes for development practitioners, on the one hand looking back towards preventing a relapse into conflict and crisis, while simultaneously looking ahead, preparing the ground for sustainable development. The focus is on the resilient portion of the population, those who survived the crisis. Since they are resilient, that are considered capable of receiving sustainable development. Resilience here is an inherent quality within communities that becomes critical in contexts of fragile and conflict-affected situations. It is this "raw" type of resilience that must be transformed into a kind of "developed" resilience that can fit with developmental aims and sustainable development programming.

This approach is exemplified by the terms of reference found in the UN-led "Reconciliation, Stabilization and Resilience Multi-Donor Trust Fund

(RSRTF) in South Sudan", where, under its resilience pillar is stated "the Fund aims to invest in community capacities and resources to promote equality, agency and self-reliance to ultimately reduce vulnerability to future shocks and stresses. Resilience activities are not standard initiatives. They are linked to identified conflict drivers at sub-national and national levels and empower communities in conflict hotspots to reap tangible socioeconomic peace dividends" (MPTF 2025).

Resilience as Seen Through The Experience From IDP Camps in Bentiu

What I conclude from the way I saw the developments in the IDP camps in Bentiu is that the focus on resilience may make sense to the extent it provides a focus on adaptation and also in focusing on the ability of individuals and communities to withstand disruptions and effectively bounce back from crises. In this sense the concept of resilience may take us in the right direction. It points us in the direction of studying the adaptive capacities that can foster successful coping strategies in the face of adversity. Also, the interdisciplinarity built into the concept, with contributions from ecology, psychology and social sciences enriches the framework of the concept. Thirdly, the concept allows a perspective not of a predefined and fixed reality but allows us to look at variable processes that can evolve over time, based on changing circumstances and contexts.

So far, we can say that my findings from Bentiu agree with such general starting points. I showed resilience expressed in seeking a multitude of income possibilities. But when we add a perspective on the camps themselves as environments for the resilience games going on, we saw that the agencies running the camps had problems creating contexts that would help furthering these resilience-based strategies among people to develop into further patterns of sustainable developments. My discussion on gender differences showed that gender inequalities were not significantly different from what is reported from other camps and other development contexts. Hence, the new thinking of developing and building on resilience can be improved in the concrete and everyday life of IDP camps in Bentiu.

The above idea shows a weakness in the on-the-ground practice and promotion of resilience in specific camps and among specific groups of people. This shows that if the policies are not followed, the camp system or the general development system itself may produce constraints on people's agency. This leads me to conclude that the problem is not

people's lack of resilience, but rather that the problem is to be found in the development system's ability to provide resources and personnel to follow up on the promises contained in the concept of resilience itself. Thus, we need to expand our perspective. This is not denying that any lack of resilience on the side of people may still be constrained by local socio-cultural factors, for instance, producing gender differences. But when seen in the context of IDP camps, we need to link the discussion on resilience to wider aspects of socio-political life. One such link is to point at the fact that IDPs are not entitled to certain rights and protections that relate to the international status of refugees. Thus, displacement plays out in different ways for the two groups, not so much in what they have lost but in what rights they have. But other aspects of displacement place the IDPs and refugees in a similar situation, and this is, for instance, the critical situation in which people from both groups should return to their home areas. Such a process of returning people to their home areas certainly depends on many factors, but the key to most of them is the political situation in the country, and the situation of war and peace. This has certainly been the case in South Sudan.

Links to the National Situation

Here the history of the 2013 civil war and the two peace agreements produced as attempts from the International Community, here represented by IGAD, to promote peace becomes important. The two agreements are, first, The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) of 2015 and then The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) of 2018. Both seek to bring peace by suggesting improved ways of governing South Sudan and by pointing at who should be the legitimate parties to such an improved system of governance. For local people, key improvements in the 2018 version include freedom to travel; spending time on farms or attending to livestock with less fear; fewer checkpoints; reducing human rights violations; and generally, improve livelihoods. But the agreement and all the promises are at best uncertain as the planned election of 2024 kept being postponed. However, as the promises in the peace agreement also speak to the situation to IDP camps around the country, also the ones I have discussed in Bentiu, it is interesting to find that the people I interacted with in those camps had little to no information about the status of the peace agreements, and thus had no basis for evaluating how the agreements could impact on their situation, not least the ability to return home. What information goes around is based upon

IDPs talking informally to lower-level politicians, state authorities, as well as listening to the better informed among their fellow IDPs. Common for these contacts is that the information is more in the form of rumours than in the form of trustworthy information.

Conclusion

One conclusion to the discussion in this chapter is that we need to expand the discussion on resilience from a focus on local people in isolation to a broader perspective, including both the wider emergency and development systems which make up the international aid system, and also to discuss the ideological underpinning of such a larger system. The IDPs I have discussed, as well as the South Sudanese state itself, are both regarded by the International Community and by the providers of development aid as in need of transformations. Such transformations are to move both of them closer to the type of neoliberal framework within which the concept of resilience has come to play such a central role.

In this wider perspective, resilience programming seems to be less about addressing immediate needs but more about preparing the ground for the further integration of individuals, within IDP communities and within the state itself, into the hegemonic neoliberal developmental order. What this chapter is that we can return the demand for transformations back towards the actors within those larger international systems. What my discussion has shown is that the IDPs in Unity State have shown resilience capacities that certainly have the potential of improving the well-being of families and family members. And my discussion has also demonstrated what those resilience capacities are. What seems to be lacking is not the resilience capacity of people but rather the aid agencies, from the UN downwards, to follow up with sufficient personnel and resources to further promote such capacities. What the chapter demonstrates then is that yet another solution to the various types of development problems, this time represented by the concept of resilience, seems to work better on the level of ideology than in the real world. And the problem here is not the lack of willingness by people to pursue resilience-promoting strategies, but rather the constraints within the large and resourceful organizations in following up their ideologies with substantial resources.

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SECTION 2

ENTERING THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES: NATIONAL POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS, AND LEGAL SYSTEMS

CHAPTER FIVE

PRECARITY AND AGENCY: SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES, INTRACTABLE CONFLICT AND POLITICS IN GAMBELLA, WESTERN ETHIOPIA

Fekadu Adugna Tufa

Introduction

In the morning of the 7th of July 2024, we arrived at Jawi refugee camp situated 18 kilometers from Gambella city to conduct fieldwork. On our arrival, however, the camp was under the Ethiopian federal security forces protection and going inside the camp was forbidden. We were told that it was not safe to enter the camp due to what happened the previous day. Three refugees were killed in agricultural plots close to the camp by 'unidentified armed group'. The deceased were given the plots by the local host community members based on their close individual relationship. While the refugees belong to the Nuer, the host were the Anywaa, the two major ethnic groups in Gambella. The killing was reportedly perpetuated by armed group who wanted to contain the mobility of the Nuer refugees out of the camp and involving in livelihood activities. This hostile refugee-host relationship and violent practices are common in Gambella. However, explaining this in terms of a usual discord between refugees in the camp and the surrounding host community risks over-simplification of a complex situation. This rather should be elucidated by considering broader regional, national and local identity politics by taking a historical perspective, which this chapter set out to do.

After over five decades since the first refugee camp was set up, the Gambella region of Ethiopia is still deeply immersed in a violent refugee phenomena explained in multiple displacements, refugee-host conflicts; contestations over the identity and citizenship of refugees overlaid by the ongoing policy initiatives by the Ethiopian government. The first refugee camp was established in 1969 in Itang, about 45 kilometres west of Gambella town, with about 20,000 refugees, most of them Nuer (Markakis, 2011). The camp was short-lived as it was closed in 1972 following the

Addis Ababa peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Southern rebels (Bayissa 2010). Most of these Nuer refugees, reportedly, remained in Gambella (Markakis, 2011). It was the second Sudan civil war (1983-2005) that had caused a massive displacement of people from southern Sudan and left its lasting imprint on Gambella. In the mid-1980s, Itang refugee camp, re-established in 1983, was one of the biggest refugee camps in the world (Bayissa, 2010, p. 93; Feyissa, 2013, p. 116). In 1990, the number of registered southern Sudanese refugees in Gambella reached around 355,000 and the majorities of them were hosted in Itang and Pinydu camps (Kurimoto 1997).

As of June 2025, Gambella is hosting 395,613 refugees (90% of South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia) in seven camps. The eighth camp was under establishment during the writing of this chapter, in the summer of 2025, due to the new influx caused by conflict erupted in several districts of South Sudan. Over the last half a century, hundreds of thousands of people from southern Sudanese (now the Republic of South Sudan) have suffered from multiple and protracted displacement situations struggling precarious livelihoods, intractable phases of waiting, immobility and insecurity. On the other hand, this has also caused a complex and multiple socio-political and economic challenges to the people and the region that has been hosting them. Thus, understanding the situation demands going beyond the common refugee-host relationships. It rather requires a deep grasp of the assemblage of historical, complex and intertwined politics of identities, changing policies towards refugees and state buildings in this peripheral region of Ethiopia and across the national borders.

The Ethiopian government has been actively participating in the global initiatives in refugee governance. It co-hosted the 2016 New York Declaration, and the country was selected as a pilot case for the comprehensive refugee response framework (CRRF). In 2019, Ethiopia adopted one of the most progressive refugee proclamations (UNHCR 2020) with provisions such as refugees can enjoy employment and property rights that will help them to become self-reliant. They have the right to employment in agriculture, industry and small and micro-enterprises such as handicrafts. After some delays, in 2024 and 2025, the Ethiopian government has made tremendous progress in the implementation of the Proclamation, including providing work permits to over 16,000 refugees and resident permits to over 4000 refugees and

asylum seekers at the national level[1]. It has also made multiple pledges, including transforming selected refugee camps into urban centres and socio-economic inclusion of refugees to the national system[2]. On the other hand, contrary to global promises, the humanitarian regime and development financing from the Global North have suddenly declined. In the face of this complex, multiple and sometimes contrasting developments, the refugee phenomena in Gambella has been trapped by intractable local political contestation and violence. In other words, this is a source of impediment to implementing some of the initiatives and keeps both the refugees and the host community in socio-political uncertainty and livelihood precarity. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the refugee phenomena in Gambella, taking historical perspective and broader political complexity of the region into account. Following brief methodological and conceptual explanations, the chapter discusses historical contexts, precarity and uncertainty in the face of multiple displacement; refugees' agencies and finally the emerging policies and the Anywaa's concern.

Methodology

The chapter is based on two rounds of fieldwork in Gambella and Addis Ababa in 2023 and 2024. Qualitative approach to data gathering has been utilized. We conducted unstructured and life history interviews with refugees in different walks of life and members of host community. We interviewed and held informal discussions with students, teachers, civil servants, government officials, and experts both in the government and non-government organizations. Focus group discussions with groups of refugees in Addis Ababa and Gambella were also quite helpful to grasp individual differences and arguments besides the categories and groups. Observations and traveling in Gambella town and to a camp helped to grasp the situations in the region.

Conceptualization

Conceptually, displacement, migration and situations of refugee is complex and dynamic engaging a combination of multiple "ambiguities and subjectivities" (Oesh, 2017: 110). It involves assemblages of factors where some are historical and 'traditional', and others are institutional. In

[1] Discussion with an expert from refugees and returnees service (RRS) in Addis Ababa in July 2025 and UNHCR expert in Gambella in July 2024.
[2] See pledges Ethiopia made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum for the latest ones.

Gamella, understanding the current refugee situation requires complex and multiple factors including the 'traditional' Nuer territorial expansion, history of southern Sudanese war of independence and Ethiopian state and nation building and local politics of ethnicity. South Sudanese refugees, on the one hand suffers from vulnerability caused by structural factors causing multiple and protracted displacements, indefinite period of encampment and uncertainty about their future pathways to self-reliance. On the other hand, they have for long time been actively involved in regional, national and local politics and issues related to identities. Restricting our analysis to currently registered refugees vis-à-vis the surrounding hosts may also risk distorted impressions of a very complex situation[3].

This chapter further argues that lives in displacement situations and even in camps in Gambella have not been 'stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life' as claimed by Agamben (1998, p. 171). Rather, camps in Gambella have been a space of political, social and economic activities, and the refugees always have had agencies. However, these agencies have been constrained by legal and political factors that have been dynamic in the changing political landscape. At a certain point in the late 1980s, the camps were, indeed, overwhelmed by SPLA's political and military activities and were part of the broader political contestation and disputes between the military dictators in Addis Ababa and Khartoum (Bayisaa 2010; Feyissa 2011; Kurimoto 1997). In other words, the paper challenges the characterization of the refugee camps as a space of 'pure' bare life (Agamben 1998) and tries to understand the refuge phenomena in Gambella as part of the complex regional and national political history and contemporary policy landscapes.

Marginalization and exclusion are commonly used to explain the situation of the refugees. However, a close examination of the refugees shows the co-existence of exclusion and inclusion where some camps are designed to exclude their dwellers and others are made to include them (Katz, 2015, 2016) showing the ambiguity of the system (Oesh, 2017). The refugees are excluded from the 'formal' politico-legal aspect of the citizenship. However, inclusion to the local community can be accessed through other means which includes memberships to ethnic groups. Ethnicity plays a dual role: exclusionary and inclusionary. Membership to local ethnic groups could make refugees a threat to the non-members. On the other

[3] In May I presented a draft of this work at the Centre for African Studies and strongly criticized for such a distorted impression of the Anywaa host as perpetuators and the refugees/Nuer as victims, which was not my intention at all.

hand, the same membership could be used to penetrate the local government based on specific socio-political and historical context and the ingenuity of the individual refugee. Marginalization and exclusion might also happen to the host community based on specific political regime in place. In this regard, refugee politics in Gambella is shaped by the assemblage of several factors including historical, micro-inter-ethnic relations, national and regional macro-political processes which this chapter tries to elucidate.

The Historical Context

The refugee regime in Gambella is part of the assemblage of the complex whole rather than isolated event that can be addressed by separate refugee response plans.[4] In other words, in a complex socio-political situation such as Gambella, understanding the historical and broader geo-political context is quite essential. The current tension between the "refugees" and the "host" is part of the complex process including the historical and traditional Nuer mobility structure, the legacy of the SPLA and the current politics in South Sudan, and the interactions with the different Ethiopian regimes and the politicization of the Anywaa-Nuer competition which I will briefly outline here with the objective of historicizing the contemporary problems in Gambella.

The Nuer expansion and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) factor

The recent history of the Nuer is dominated by their eastern expansion into the Gambella plain that is rich with water and pasture. In the early 19th century, the Nuer were mainly confined to west of the Bahr Jebel River in southern Sudan, and by early 20th century they reached the Ethiopia-Sudan borderlands forcefully engulfing the Anywaa grazing land (Markakis 2011). When the international border was signed in 1902 between the expanding Ethiopian empire and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the majority of the Anywaa were included into Ethiopia while most of the Nuer were demarcated in Sudan.

The other most important historical period that left significant impact on the political and social dynamics in Gambella were the two civil wars in

[4] The historical reconstruction is not considered neutral. The Nuer elite always want to focus on the contemporary dynamics such as politics of demographic majority, the global initiatives around refugee governance and the Ethiopian government's refugee policies, the Anywaa always call for historical and broader contexts.

the Sudan (1955-1972 and 1983 to 1905). During the wars, Gambella served as the military base for the Sudanese fighters, and as a place of refuge for those fleeing the war. Both had tremendous negative impact on the Anywaa community. The first refugee camp was established in Itang followed by Pinyudo (Fugnido), both were in Anywaa land (Kurimito 1997). In 1990, the officially registered refugees in Gambella reached over 355,000 - most of them Dinka and Nuer under the political and military control of the SPLA. The SPLA military command and training centres were also established in Itang, not far from the refugee camp, and the boundary between the two – SPLA military camp and the refugee camps – was in practice quite fluid. Until 1991 when the SPLA had been supported by the Ethiopian military government (also called the Derg) the boundary between refugees and the insurgents was quite blur. Not only were the refugee camps used as a recruitment ground for the SPLA, but also the SPLA was running the administrative responsibility of the refugee camps and their surroundings. Kurimoto stated:

In reality Gambella was put under a kind of joint administration by the Ethiopian government and the SPLA, in which the latter was particularly in charge of security in and around the refugee camps and the border area (Kurimoto 1997: 800).

In Gambella town, too, according to Kurimoto, SPLA shared compound with the Ethiopian security forces (Kurimoto 1997). According to our informants, Newland, a big neighborhood in Gambella town, almost exclusively inhabited by the Nuer, had developed out of refugee settlements surrounding the UNHCR Gambella office, a symbolic connection between the Nuer community in Gambella town and 'refugeeness' that the Anywaa elite usually allude to. Even in terms of access to service the refugees' life was much better than the hosting community (Feyissa, 2010;). The camps had much better infrastructure such as schools, water and medical services than the surrounding community (Meckelburg 2005). Almost all Nuer officials in Gambella were educated in the camps giving them advantage over the Anywaa, the host (Feyissa 2011), which is still taken as a factor in the academic performance in the region.

Even worse, in retrospect the Anywaa elite still reiterate the accusation that the SPLA had committed gross and multiple abuses on the local Anywaa including looting, killings and rapes. (see also Kurimoto 1997). Of course, the Anywaa elite usually draw equivalence between the SPLA and the Nuer. They commonly argue that this period had significantly contributed

to laying the ground for the Nuer political influence in Gambella including in increasing the demography of the Nuer. According to them, many of those fleeing the war had resettled in the Gambella, mainly in Nuer inhabited territories, without any official registration, and became Ethiopian citizens (see also Kurimoto 1997: 799). Becoming an Ethiopian citizen requires only getting a local identity card from *kebele*, which is the smallest administrative unit in the country, and that can be accessed locally through kinship relationships.

Resettlement and pressure on the Anywaa

As if the pressure from the Nuer was not sufficient, in the 1980s, the Ethiopian military regime came up with a plan to resettle people from famine stricken and land short northern and south-central Ethiopia to regions it labelled as regions that have 'underutilized' fertile lands (Meckelburg 2005). Accordingly, between 1984 and 1986, the regime relocated nearly 600,000 people from chronically food-insecure and drought-affected areas in the northern highlands and south-central Ethiopia to southern, southwestern and western parts of the country (Mberu, 2006; Megerssa, 2012). Out of these, 60,000 resettlers were brought to Gambela. They were mostly from Wollo and Tigray in the north and Hadya and Kambata provinces in the south-central Ethiopia. Of course, the resettlement did not take place on 'unutilized' 'no-man's land'. Rather, they all settled on Anywaa land, and indeed in some cases the local inhabitants were displaced due to the resettlement project (Kurimoto 1997).

The resettlement agenda was not just a temporary socio-economic solution to the famine in northern Ethiopia, but it was part of the Ethiopian government's nation building process – the expansion of the state to the periphery. For the Anywaa, it was part of the Ethiopian state's social engineering of Gambella with a long-lasting impact in diminishing the demographic, economic and political role the Anywaa could play in the region they claim their own. According to the 1984 census, the Anywaa were 28,044, which means they were outnumbered by the resettlers from the highlands. Even more, the highlanders' presence has been felt beyond their demography. Connected to the Ethiopian power centre through language, phenotype and history vis-a-vis the Nilotic lowlanders inhabiting the periphery such as the Anywaa, the resettlers became politically dominant in Gambella. Many of them involved in administrative and security apparatus including in the local militia stretching the Ethiopian state control to the borderlands. Indeed, in

Gambella the Ethiopian state and the settlers from the highland Ethiopia perceived as the same entity. The settlers also controlled the economic activities – trade, agriculture and services in the region. The Anywaa lost to the highlanders who were experienced entrepreneurs (Feyissa 2011). In other words, the Anywaa were dispossessed of their land and faced political, social and economic marginalization (Omod and Meckelburg 2018).

Trapped between the Ethiopian state planned grand resettlement of people from the highland on their land and the expanding Nuer, supported by the SPLA fighters, the Anywaa elite established a political party called Gambella People Liberation Movement (GPLM) and took up arms in the 1980s. Alike other rebel groups such as the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), GPLM was also supported by the Sudan[5]. The GPLM managed to engage in attacks on the settler's villages, the Ethiopian government military posts and refugee camps in the late 1980s (Feyissa 2011; Kurimoto 1997).

Change of government in 1991 and impacts on refugees

When the Derg collapsed and the TPLF (under the new coalition, Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)) came to power in Addis Ababa in 1991, the Anywaa elite took credit for their contribution in the military regime in Gambella. This paid off in the post war Ethiopia allowing the Anywaa elite to control Gambella. On the contrary, the major losers due to the change of government were the Nuer elite, refugees and the SPLA fighters. The three groups were forced to flee across the border into southern Sudan. Most of the refugee camps were forcedly closed by the Anywaa dominated government in Gambella and the EPRDF run federal government. New camps were established for the remaining small number of refugees far away from the border areas. This was an attempt to separate the refugees and the SPLA fighters, which had been the concern of the Sudanese government and the Anywaa elite.[6] One of the camps was established in Bonga, outside Gambella regional state, mainly for the Uduk who complained dominance by the Nuer and Dinka

[5]While Ethiopia was supporting the SPLA, Sudan was supporting Ethiopian rebel groups including Eritrean People Liberation Front, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Tigray People Liberation Front.

[6] Interviews with James, December 2024.

and exploitation by SPLA (James, 1992). In 1993, Pinydo camp was re-opened, but far away from the Anywaa villages (Kurimoto, 1997).

Even though the change of regime was a big political gain for the Anywaa, the demographic significance of the Nuer was already established on a firm ground evidenced in the 1994 census. According to census report the population of Gambella was 162,397 of which the Nuer were 64,473 (40%) and the Anywaa were 44,581 (27%) (CSA, 1994). As the result, the Anywaa were officially outnumbered by the Nuer in Gambella for the first time, making them feel 'a minority on their own land'. Writing about this, a Japanese anthropologist, Eisei Kurimoto wrote:

For the Anywaa the Nuer expansion was a threat in particular because, being trapped in-between the Nuer and the highlanders, they have 'no other place to go'. If the process of Nuer expansion should continue, it would mean an extinction of the Anywaa (Kurimoto 1997:807).

This frustration was repeated by Anywaa elite in 2000 as quoted by Feyissa (2011):

"In the years to come, there will be no Anywaa left in the Gambella region. Nasser was ours; the Nuer took it. Jikaw and Akobo were ours, again the Nuer took them. Wherever we go they will follow us. They take our land, they take our rivers, they take our people. Now they want to take Gambella town. … The Nuer behave like that because they think that they are many and because it is their nature to be aggressive …" (Feyissa 2011: i).

The extracts show the historical depth and the intensity of the politicization of the refugee phenomena and identity-based contestations in Gambella. The 1995 constitution of Gambella Regional State recognized five ethnic groups namely: Anywaa, Nuer, Majangir, Opo and Komo as 'indigenous groups' of Gambella with the right to officially 'own' the Region. This had two crucial implications: firstly, it was an official exclusion of the previously dominant highland settlers from the politic-administrative positions in the region – reverse exclusionary measures by the historically marginalized groups. Secondly, given the fact that the other three are quite small minorities, the recognition, on the other hand, intensified competition between the two biggest groups: the Anywaa and the Nuer over the administration of Gambella. In the new government, the Anywaa assumed the position of the president, regardless of their demography, and the headship of most of the districts in the region until 2003.

Anywaa's relationship with the central government and the ruling EPRDF changed for the worst after a decade due to their worsening conflict both

with the refugees and the highlanders. In 2003 an armed Anywaa group killed eight staff of the administration of refugees and returnees' affairs (ARRA), all of them from highland Ethiopia, who were "on their way to open a new refugee camp for southern Sudanese refugees in an area that the Anywaa considered as their territory" (Feyissa, 2011:210). In return, on the 13th of December 2013 a mob of people from the highland supported by the Ethiopian security forces massacred hundreds of Anywaa community in Gambella town.[7] This left the Anywaa at odd with the highlander community, the Ethiopian government and the Nuer at the same time. For the Anywaa it was back to the pre-1991 situation when they were in confrontation with the Ethiopian government, the highland settlers, the Nuer and the SPLA. This shows the complex and intricate relationship between violence in Gambella and the refugee phenomena. The deep-seated identity based political contestation involving refugees and local ethnic groups we currently observe in Gambella region has been a longstanding problem, but also dynamic with the changing of governments and policies.

Multiple Displacement, Precarity and Uncertainty

Millions of thousands of South Sudanese refugees have been stuck in refugee camps; faced protracted and multiple displacement situation suffering from social and physical immobility in neighbouring countries. Situation of displacement is usually precarious as it intensifies the feeling of livelihood insecurity due to long term unemployment and ever declining humanitarian and development support and uncertainty about the future pathways to self-reliance. Our previous studies showed that "displacement becomes protracted if no solution to one's individual situation is in sight and if options that provide a pathway towards a better future, such as sustainable livelihoods, permanent residency, resettlement or onward mobility, remain blocked" (Tufa et al, 2021: 15). Most of the life histories of individual South Sudanese refugees are experiences of vicious circle of violence, displacement, hope and return, another round of displacement and despair. Most of them experienced several decades of vulnerability, precarity and intractable violence leading to multiple displacements. Gatlak, a refugee in his sixties, I met in Addis Ababa in January 2023 stated his situation:

[7] Human rights watch reported the death of 424 Anywaa in the three days massacre starting on 13 December 2003 and several thousands flee Gambella. See Ethiopia: Targeting the Anuak: The December 2003 Massacre

My father spent many years in Itang refugee camp, until he returned to Malakal in 1991 following change of government in Ethiopia. I was born almost one year after my father's return to Malakal, by then Malakal was experiencing war…. I was admitted to Dima camp, in my turn, in 2000… I went back to Malakal in 2005 [following the peace agreement]. In 2009 I got educational opportunity at Gambella Health Science College. While I was still in Gambella the 2013 war started in South Sudan, and I was re-registered as refugee again in 2015 when I finished my study.

Gatlak inherited displacement from his father and continued life in protracted displacement over a quarter of a century. He was born in a war, admitted to a refugee camp when he was less than ten years old. He got relief following the signing of the peace agreement that led to the independence of South Sudan. However, that was short lived as many South Sudanese had to flee following the start of the civil war in 2013. David, another refugee who also arrived in 2000 in Pinyudo camp and currently lives in Jawi camp, in Gambella, narrated a similar story:

After five years I managed to return to South Sudan in 2005, but I left my wife and kids in the camp as I was not certain about the situation in South Sudan and collected them only in 2007. In 2010, I got scholarship at Adventist College in Kuyera [located close to shashemane, south central Ethiopia], I brought my family and put them in the camp as I was not happy with the development in my locality [in South Sudan]. My hope was to study business and leadership and serve my country. Before my graduation, war again broke out and I came back to refugee life.

David's experiences show that the precarity and uncertainty continued even in a situation when they returned to South Sudan following the peace agreement. David was able to understand the situation of uncertainty even amid the happy moments due to independence they had been longing for. In the camps, refugees live on a very small and ever decreasing food ration from the humanitarian organizations. However, the uncertainty in the political and security situation in South Sudan made the refugee camp an alternative space for safety. David brought his family back to refugee camp in 2010, three years before the outbreak of the civil war, as he felt uncertain about what will happen in his country. After narrating and reflecting on his life in the last twenty-five years, David regrettably asked:

"…. Do you know what it means when you do not have a land to plough, a house of your own to live in, or you do not live in the same neighbourhood with your extended family for twenty-five years?"

This is a story shared by many South Sudanese refugees. That is the indefinite period of uncertainty, precarity and waiting – life in limbo. They wait for the day they lead a stable life, a life without fear of another round of violence and displacement, freedom of movement and the day they compete for job freely. In this situation protracted displacement is not only being confined in camps or stuck in informal settings under precarious conditions in urban areas (Rudolf, 2020; Schewel, 2019; Tufa et al, 2021) but also a vicious circle of violence and multiple displacements.

Beyond Precarity: Refugees' Agencies

In the above sections we discussed the structural factors: broader historical and socio-political factors that created some collective losers and gainers and the precarity and uncertainty the displaced people have suffered from. Here we discuss the collective agency and individual ingenuity of the refugees within the structural constraining factors. In other words, while the structural factors perpetuate refugees precarity and uncertainty, the collective agency and individual ingenuity help the refugees navigate the political and economic marginalizing forces and to move on in their political, social and economic aspirations and everyday lives. Membership to local identities play both inclusionary and exclusionary roles. While the tense relationship between the Anywaa and Nuer explains the exclusionary roles ethnicity plays the relationship between the similar ethnicity regardless of their legal status such as between the Ethiopian Nuer and the Sudanese Nuer (refugees) in Ethiopia shows the positive role ethnicity plays in promoting local solidarity and social integration.

In such intensely politicized and highly precarious environment local identities such as ethnicity and clan help to navigate the challenges including those in their places of displacement in South Sudan. In the Nuer dominated part of Gambella town, Newland, it is difficult to differentiate between the 'refugees' and 'host'. Many of the Nuer host had experienced displacement at a certain point in their lifetime and are sympathetic towards the refugees. Many of those registered as refugees in one of the camps engage in informal petty businesses in the town. They commute between the camps and Newland, regardless of their registration as encamped refugees or no official permission to leave the camps. The ethnic and clan networks help them to access employment and businesses licenses. Some of them have established businesses that hired a couple of individuals among the Ethiopian citizens but ethnically related to them/ refugees. They send goods to the camps even during violent conflicts

bridging the camp and the town. Individuals might take shifting position between refugee and citizen – between Ethiopian and South Sudanese.

Like many refugee hosting borderlands, 'refugeeness' and citizenship are fluid in Gambella creating a perception that one could easily move between the two statuses. Those running businesses or employed in the civil services or bureaucracies using their local networks could easily turn into Ethiopian citizen – by using the same networks – if they consider it more advantageous than their refugee status in the long run. Thus, many young refugees living in Newland calculate their future balancing between 'refugeeness' and citizenship. Young students who managed to get scholarship opportunities in universities in Ethiopia using their refugee status would take jobs as citizens through their networks. This created the perception that, "to be Ethiopian or refugee in Gambella is a matter of choice" as my informant Gatlak stated. On the other hand, the Ethiopian Nuers could also take jobs or political positions in South Sudan. While discussing about this fluidity of citizenship, Palik, a young Nuer high school teacher in Gambella stated:

"My brother was Ethiopian and educated here, and he was among the very good experts in the Gambella Regional State until he left for South Sudan in 2011. When conflict broke out in South Sudan he came back [to Gambella] as a refugee and he got a resettlement to the UK within a short period of time".

In the post "CPA period", i.e. following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan in 2005, many Nuer elite left the civil service and the bureaucracy in Gambella and migrated to South Sudan to look for opportunities in the new country with petroleum economy. The Anywaa elite did not get similar opportunity as they lacked similarly powerful ethnic networks in South Sudan. An aggrieved Anywaa elite in Gambella characterized such Nuer elite as "those who eat by two knives"- referring to the double opportunities they access in Ethiopia and South Sudan at the same time[8]. In this regard, post-independence South Sudan has created differential access to resources between the two ethnic groups and intensified the dispute and conflict in Gambella. This has reinforced the Anywaa appeal to the Ethiopian government to tighten border control to contain the Nuer's movement using sovereignty as an argument. An

[8] Discussion with a young Anywaa University professor in Gambella, July 2024. This has been used in different contexts. According to Feyissa (2011:202) the Anywaa used this saying to refer to how the Nuer get access to opportunities both as refugees and as Ethiopian citizens.

Anywaa academics at Gambella university argued, "… for a country, its citizens are crucial, and citizenship is respected through strengthening border control"[9].

Thus, the contemporary violent interactions between the 'refugees' and 'hosts' in Gambella requires understanding the refugee phenomena as part of the broader regional and national political context in a specific geographical location -in this case the Ethiopian, Sudanese and South Sudan borderlands. Looking from that broader perspectives would help us understand the refugees' agency beyond camps as 'bare life'. Regardless of the precarity and uncertainty of lives described above, people in a displacement situation use the available opportunities in specific politico-social and geographical contexts. Regardless of the protracted uncertainty, refugees still plan and work on their future pathways, including supporting their extended family members. When we met David, cited above, a refugee in Jawi camp who has been in a protracted displacement situation for the last twenty-five years, including multiple displacements, he was supporting over ten family members in the camp. Four of them are his nephews who came recently from Malakal, South Sudan, and joined him in the camp to pursue their studies. They came due to the deteriorating security situation and disruptions of schools in South Sudan in the last five years, not to interrupt their studies. One of them joined a university in Ethiopia in the last academic year. Thus, living in limbo or waiting the refugees undergo during displacement does not mean everything stops. Rather, they use their collective agencies and individual ingenuity to navigate the multiple constraining factors.

Emerging Policies and the Anywaa Elites' Concern

Fieldwork in Gambella took place in 2023 and 2024 at a time when the Ethiopian government was developing a roadmap for refugees' inclusion into the country's national system in line with the country's pledges during the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 and in response to the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR). The stated objective of the framework was "to strengthen Ethiopia's multi-sectoral inclusion of refugees and host communities, ensuring self-reliance, resilience, and socio-economic integration of refugees and host communities…"[10]. In some regions, mainly in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia, works to transform some

[9] Interview with an Anywaa scholar in Gambella, December 2023.

[10] Makatet roadmap: Ethiopia's multi-sectoral refugees & host communities inclusion approach, a bulletin by RRS accessed

selected refugee camps into urban settlements and attempts to help refugees to access land and irrigation schemes have been underway in the last few years (Tufa, 2023). The pledges include improving local food security, supporting climate adaptation and economic empowerment of refugees and host communities. Though the progress has been slow, the Ethiopian government and the UNHCR claim to have started taking some measures. Around sixteen thousand refugees have been given work permits nationally and over three thousands of them were South Sudanese based in Gambella. UNHCR also claimed to have started preparation to begin a farming project initially on three hundred hectares to be used jointly by the refugees and the host community members in Gambella. This is part of the implementation of the national economic inclusion of the refugees.[11] Given the precarious situation of the refugees described above, this is a very much desired-for initiative. Nevertheless, given the contested history outlined above, its process requires socio-political sensitivity to the local situation. An Anywaa civil servant I interviewed in December 2023 reacted to this as follows:

These Nuer refugees have always taken advantage of us. They took our territory and our people …. SPLA supported them to expand. International aid is always for them. The camps offered better education, and the university is now dominated by them. This time, they are going to displace us in the name of local integration more than ever before …. (A civil servant turned businessman in Gambella, December. 2024)

This invoking of historical injustices and experiences of abuses in the hands of the Nuer, supported by the SPLA, in order to oppose the emerging refuge related policies in general and the local integration in particular is common among the Anywaa population including officials at key bureaucratic positions in the implementation of the initiatives. Among the Anywaa history is used to justify their resistance to the emerging initiatives. The following extract is from an interview with an Anywaa government official who was very familiar with emerging policies and local initiatives,

…. On whose land are the RRS and UNHCR going to establish a farm? Let me be very clear. The two worst phrases our community does not want to hear are local integration and CRRF. By the way, why should refugees engage in farming? Are they not returning home? We asked our

[11] Interview with UNHCR and RRS officials in Gambella, July 2024.

government to keep refugees in the camp until their country becomes peaceful, and they return [to their country].

These are not just discourses and arguments made by the elite. They are public discourses shared by many of the members of the Anywaa community. Even worse, the discourses are supported by armed groups who cause insecurity to the refugees on the ground as a means of containing them within the camps. For decades, the Anywaa elite argued for the containment of the Nuer expansion through border control and 'national sovereignty' as their main argument. They called on the Ethiopian government to tighten the border control regime for many years (Feyissa 2011). That did not stop the Nuer from expanding geographically and from becoming the demographic majority in the region. Now, the new call, which the above extract from an interview with Gambella regional state official echoed, is a call for strict encampment and control of the movement of the refugees. Following the 2019 proclamation, the Ethiopian government has eased restrictions on the refugees' freedom of mobility, which is contrary to the call by the Anywaa elite. As a result, an unidentified militia group seems to have been working violently to impede the refugees' mobility out of the camps. I started this paper with the killing of three refugees on July 3 at Jawi refugee camp on days of our visit to the camp. That was not an isolated incident, rather it was part of the Anywaa elite's containment strategy. Of course, as I outlined above, this was not the first of its kind. Between May and November 2023, the USAID and the World Food Program suddenly suspended aid distribution in Ethiopia due to suspicion of food aid diversion by officials. The major victims of this were the refugees and IDPs. In several parts of the country, they were forced to leave camps *en masse* to look for wage labour and food for survival. In Gambella, dozens of the refugees who left their camps were killed reportedly by the Anywaa armed groups with the intention of containing them in the camps and at the same time sending messages to the Ethiopian government that the region is not safe for the refugees. According to an Anywaa young elite, "this was simply part of the local resistance to the government planned local integration by the people who are afraid of 'being swallowed' by the Nuer refugees".[12] According to Anywaa informants, in the context of Gambella, not only the refugees but also the host live in a state of deep uncertainty and concern about what will happen in regards to the local integration of the refugees – in other words

[12] Interview with young Anywaa district official July 2024.

this long awaited policy initiatives requires open consultation with the local communities.

One factor worsening the Anywaa elite's view towards the refugees is their exclusion from how much the Anywaa and the Nuer elite have been excluded from engaging with refugee related opportunity such as accessing job opportunities created due to the presence of the refugees. Almost all international and local NGOs working with the refugees do not hire from the two communities: Anywaa and Nuer. One example we observed was a high school in Jawi refugee camp. Out of the 28 teachers teaching in the high school, there was only one Nuer, and the remaining were hired from highland Ethiopia. Their explanation is clear but simplistic: due to the hostility, Anywaa staff cannot deal with the Nuer refugee students and vice versa, a Nuer staff cannot deal with the surrounding Anywaa host. This exclusionary practice alienates elites of both ethnic groups from the refugee-related employment opportunities, which are perceivably well paying. In other words, the broader elite and particularly the youth lack incentive to support the refugee phenomena; rather consider it an alien and exploitative system.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tried to outline the complex and multi-layered nature of the refugee phenomena in Gambella, situating it within regional, national and local identity politics. I tried to historicize the contemporary tense situation, showing the importance of macro, meso and micro contexts. Refugee phenomena in Gambella is part of the state and nation building in the region that has been peripheral both in its geographical and politico-administrative meaning. The multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature of the challenges of refugee governance could be understood only by taking the broader historical developments into account.

On the other hand, regardless of the complex political problems, the South Sudanese refugees suffer from a protracted displacement situation. They have been waiting for the time when they live without violent conflict and displacement; the time when they cultivate in their ancestral land and live with their extended family members; the time when they send their children to school with some level of certainty about their safety; and the time when their children freely compete for jobs.

While the emerging refugee policies are encouraging, the situation in Gambella where displacement is protracted and violence is vicious refugee governance needs to be contextualized. Every intervention should

prioritize local consultations, and it should practically benefit both the refugees and host communities. Local integration should be built around "less visible everyday work carried out by people affected by displacement" (Zaman et al, 2026), and not only by enforcing the legal regime from above.

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CHAPTER SIX

REFUGEE LAWS, INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN SUDAN: A CASE OF SOUTH SUDAN REFUGEES IN KHARTOUM STATE

Noha H. E. Hamza

Introduction: Law between theory and practice

This paper deals with refugees from South Sudan in Sudan, particularly those living in camps in Khartoum. South Sudanese are a unique case; they were citizens in their home country, Sudan, and at independence in 2011. They returned to independent South Sudan to become citizens there. But in 2013, many of them were again displaced because of the civil war that started only two years after independence. Some of them had not gone to South Sudan in 2011 at all but were still living in the north. But with independence in the south, their status as citizens in Sudan also changed. Formally, they were still citizens but were now seen as belonging to the "enemy" in the south.

The Southern Sudanese I met during my study were thus a multitude with great internal variation. My focus was on the group that had to flee the new country in the south, coming back to the north, this time not as citizens but as refugees. It is people with this identity that I shall discuss in the paper, as it brought with it something new to the refugee regime in Sudan. We see this in the way they were met at the border between Sudan and South Sudan, and also in the confusion related to documents with origins both in Sudan and in South Sudan. For those who have made it into the camps studied, we see that access to shelter, food, clean water, and health services are examples of their daily struggle to obtain things that, in refugee laws, should be guaranteed. These types of dilemmas are what I want to discuss further in the paper, and to do that I need to not only focus on the refugees themselves but also look at their total situation. One important actor deciding the fate of the refugees is the government of Sudan, which had to recognize them as refugees and declare its responsibility for their protection within these unusual conditions. To understand this process, I

need to look into two important frameworks: first, the Sudanese institutions relating to the handling of refugees, and second, the legal basis that defines how the Sudanese authorities should deal with refugees. The people I met as refugees in the camps in Khartoum were registered when they came by the office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in accordance with the provisions of the Refugee Regulation Act of 2014 in Sudan, which again was referring back to the 1951 Geneva Convention for Refugees. This registration brings the refugees ID cards and other documents that are needed to obtain assistance. For the government, this act of registration means that they accept the legal responsibility set down in the acts and conventions mentioned above, like, the basic responsibility of providing protection and social services for the refugees. But things turned out to be more complicated than this, and it is this complexity that brings me into the wider focus of this paper, which is to have a closer look at "law between theory and practice." I shall do this in three steps. First, by presenting the international field of refugee laws as a field with a legal history that has evolved throughout the 20th century. This part is based on general source material. Second, I shall discuss the ways these laws have affected the ways the Sudanese state has dealt with the issue of refugees. Sudan has signed and ratified these laws, and it is of interest, therefore, to look at how the Sudanese authorities have created institutions and policies to deal with the issue of refugees within the country. For this second part, I depend on documents as well as observations of government agencies and agents during fieldwork. Thirdly, and this is where the refugees from South Sudan enter the story. I also need to look at how the Sudanese authorities have dealt with a particular group of refugees, the South Sudanese, precisely to evaluate to what extent this practical handling of those refugees reflects the normative conditions set by the laws. To do this, I shall use information collected in anthropological fieldwork in two selected refugee camps in Khartoum, in which South Sudanese refugees live. The camps are Naivasha and Dar es Salaam.

International Refugee Laws, a Historical Overview

It is a well-known fact that the international protection of refugees is based on the 1951 Convention and the so-called 1967 Protocol. Grounded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries, the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, is the centrepiece of international refugee protection today. The Convention entered into force in 1954, and it has

been subject to only one amendment, which was the 1967 Protocol. This protocol removed the geographic and temporal limits of the 1951 Convention. Which was necessary as the 1951 Convention was originally limited in scope to persons fleeing events occurring before 1 January 1951 and within Europe. Which means that initially the 1951 Convention was based on the realities created by the Second World War and that the 1967 Protocol corrected this. But there were also earlier legal attempts at dealing with the issue of refugees, attempts that evolved following the First World War. In the aftermath of WWI, millions of people sought refuge, prompting governments to create international agreements, for instance, about the issuing of travel documents for displaced people. This process began with the League of Nations, and it continued and was brought forward in 1933 when the League of Nations approved the Convention on the International Status of Refugees, which created committees for refugees and handled administrative concerns.

As the number of displaced people increased significantly during and after World War II, new efforts had to be made on an international level, leading to the development of a comprehensive framework of guidelines, laws, and conventions to protect refugees' human rights. These efforts resulted in, as mentioned, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in Geneva, later to be expanded by the 1967 Protocol. As indicated, the initial focus was on refugees in Europe, and as the problem was understood to be an effect of wars, the issues were handled by Ministries of Defence. But over time the refugee problems were also linked to other causes of displacement, and this brought about new understandings and new solutions. The new understanding was that the refugee problem was a global one, linked in general to processes of global displacement with various causes, which meant that the problem linked to how to define refugees' rights and obligations had to be dealt with on a global level, which put the United Nations at the centre of developing efforts to protect refugees (UNHCR, 2011, p.1). Many efforts have seen light in the following decades, but the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol remain the foundational legal frameworks for refugee protection, with their provisions still highly relevant today, as they continue to guide international efforts to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees.

The conventions dealt with many issues. Policies on refugee status determination, legal status, and rights and obligations were clearly outlined and aligned with international and regional standards. These policies were easily accessible and well-known to refugees, authorities, and national stakeholders. Legal stay arrangements should be secure and predictable,

and any expulsion of asylum seekers or refugees could, if not justified, violate international law. Refugees were to enjoy security, have access to civil, administrative, and criminal justice systems, and also enjoy freedom of movement. They could choose their place of residence, move freely, and access the labour market, education, and healthcare. Protection and care were available for unaccompanied and separated refugee children, victims of trafficking, and survivors of gender-based violence. All refugees, regardless of their characteristics, should benefit on an equal basis from relevant policies, including access to services and economic opportunities.

The UN has remained a key institutional focus for the various developments in the refugee field, and the institutional developments are well known. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) works with national governments to ensure refugee protection and find lasting solutions (UNHCR, 2017). UNHCR is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for worldwide protection. It is responsible for national and international law. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees as stated in the conventions presented above. In its efforts to achieve this objective, UNHCR strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state and, if they so wish, to return home voluntarily. UNHCR also works to protect former refugees who have returned to their homeland, as well as internally displaced people and those who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed.

The Legal and Institutional Situation in Sudan

UNHCR's operation in Sudan started 50 years ago in Gadarif, and the institution has remained important in the ways refugees have been dealt with in Sudan. Today, to provide protection and aid to the current population of over a million refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan, UNHCR is still playing a central role, dealing with Sudanese institutions that are responsible for refugees and their situation. These Sudanese institutions are, of course, operating within the context of the Sudanese laws relating to refugees which makes it necessary to start with an overview of the legal field in Sudan relevant for the handling of refugees.

The legal field

Sudan is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which define the rights of refugees and the obligations of host

countries. Sudan is also a member of the African Union Refugee Convention (AURC) and adheres to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which emphasizes broader protections for refugees. The convention provides a broader definition of a refugee than the 1951 Refugee Convention. While the 1951 Convention defined a refugee as someone fleeing persecution based on specific grounds (race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group), the African Refugee Convention also includes people fleeing external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, or events seriously disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2019).

The legal framework governing the rights of refugees in Sudan and the granting of asylum is the Sudanese Asylum Regulation Act of 2014 (Sudan Government 2014). It is divided into seven chapters, covering preliminary provisions, asylum organizations, refugees' rights, commission establishment, deportation, contraventions, offices, penalties, and final provisions, covering various aspects of refugee management. Also, in the law, refugees are entitled to protection from refoulement (forced return to a country where they may face persecution) under Sudanese law. It does not, however, mention how asylum seekers can appeal negative decisions, and it also forbids refugees from taking part in or exercising any political activity or from leaving the place of residence that has been specified for them without permission. The 2014 act superseded the 1974 Regulation of Asylum Act.

An important consequence of the act was the establishment of the Commission for Refugees (COR) with the added "Protecting Rights, Restoring Hope, Rebuilding Lives" as part of the title. COR is the primary agency for managing refugee affairs. It outlines the processes for applying for refugee status, the rights and duties of refugees, and the roles of government agencies in managing refugee affairs. The process of meeting incoming refugees is as follows: Within 30 days of arriving in Sudan, asylum seekers must appear in person at the commissioner's office or another designated location. Depending on the specifics, late submissions could be permitted. While their case is being reviewed, asylum applicants are issued a temporary identity card that is valid for three months and can be renewed. People who have committed significant non-political crimes outside of Sudan, war crimes, crimes against humanity, crimes against peace, or activities that go against the goals and ideals of the UN, African Union, or Arab League are not granted refugee status under the Act. A person's status as a refugee may end if they voluntarily return to their home country, obtain a new nationality, or the conditions that led to their

designation as a refugee no longer apply. Large groups may collectively be granted refuge by the commissioner after conferring with the relevant minister if information from their home country suggests that they require international protection and individual evaluations are not feasible. While staying in Sudan, they have the right to access relevant social services.

The institutional field

As we see, the law and governance systems relating to refugees in Sudan encompass a complex framework shaped by international, regional, and national legal standards, as well as the political and humanitarian dynamics in the region. A key institution is the Commission for Refugees (COR), which again is working closely with the UNHCR. Together the two institutions work on analysing the trends in legal, political, and institutional Sudanese responses to refugees; the reasons behind the policy responses of neighbouring countries; the history of the establishment of institutions; and their functions in putting laws and legislation into effect to ensure acceptable living conditions.

A second Sudanese institution of great importance to how the dynamics in the refugee-related fields evolve is the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC). HAC is a governmental body that, from its establishment, managed and organized all humanitarian work carried out in Sudan along with the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs. Initially, it was established in 1985 to organize and facilitate humanitarian aid after Sudan had experienced a major drought. HAC organizes the international organizations' work in Sudan through what are called technical agreements. HAC monitors and ensures the enforcement of laws concerning the composition and operation of local and international NGOs, as well as UN agents and other multilateral aid agencies. The explosion of international and national NGOs in Sudan following the various types of disasters that have occurred, from violent conflicts and wars to droughts and famines to health-related crises such as different types of epidemics, has led to an increase in the number of NGOs, and following the coup in 1989 and the following Islamist regime, there has been a constant tension between the ruling regime and the international NGOs, leading to the establishment of national NGOs to counter the influence in the field of humanitarian assistance. In this context, HAC became, as the quote indicates, a control mechanism for the government in its handling of NGOs and other foreign-based institutions.

A Focus on South Sudanese Refugees

With these overviews of the international and national legal and institutional fields of importance for the refugee situation in Sudan I can introduce my third focus, which is the focus on South Sudanese refugees in Sudan in general but more specifically in some selected camps in Khartoum. I am not alone in making such investigations, of course. I draw on several studies that have provided focus for my discussions, both in general and more specifically on the Sudan situation, including the works of Assal (2007), Almustafa (2021), Bakhit (2016, 2022), Barnett (2002), Elhassan (2016), Arnold (2019), Ferris (2020), Kulo and Refworld (2014), Ille (2022), Johnson (2016), Kuol (2018), Longan (2019), Reyhani (2020, 2022), Mencutek (2020), Sarah et al. (2020), as well as a series of UNHCR reports (2006, 2011, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023). Generally speaking, these studies have addressed a number of issues relating to refugee situations, some of which will be revisited in my discussions in the paper. My specific focus is to examine how the actual adaptation of South Sudanese refugees can illuminate the extent to which the Sudanese authorities' approaches toward these refugees reflect the obligations the government has undertaken by signing international legal instruments and by permitting UNHCR and other international institutions to operate freely. This includes assessing the ways such institutions collaborate both within refugee camps and with relevant Sudanese bodies, particularly COR and HAC. However, because of the special relationships between Sudan and South Sudan, I need to start with some historical background information.

Historical preface

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 provided southern Sudanese with the right to self-determination through a referendum vote that took place January 9–15, 2011 (Assal, 2011). Before the referendum that led to the separation of South Sudan, the South Sudanese people living in Khartoum were advised to assemble at 41 departure points. UNHCR launched a voluntary repatriation program to assist South Sudanese in Khartoum in relocating to their new nation. The remaining individuals at the nine Khartoum-based displacement centers were awaiting deportation. After the conflict in South Sudan began in 2013, the situation worsened, leading to the transformation of these makeshift departure points into unofficial refugee communities.

As a result, the departure points in Khartoum have gradually evolved into so-called "open areas," where South Sudanese people are now living as

refugees in poor conditions. Khartoum's ‘Open Areas’ are informal sites prepared to host South Sudanese refugees. There are nine ‘Open Areas’ distributed between Um Badda locality, Jabal Awlia locality, and Sharq El Nile locality. They make up approximately 55% of the overall South Sudanese refugee population in the state, and they represent the most vulnerable group all over Khartoum State. In addition, of course, we have the organized refugee camps to be discussed later.

With this as a background, we see that the broader issue of governance becomes important in understanding the way the Sudanese authorities deal with refugees from South Sudan. Governance frameworks are the legal, administrative, and policy instruments used by refugee-hosting governments to determine the degree to which refugees can control daily life and make choices involving resources, livelihood, family, and future. Thus, also in situations in which the law specifies rights of refugees, such rights may be ignored or overturned by the state if the political side of the governance interests indicates otherwise. Such political national governance frameworks can then interfere with refugees’ ability to live safely, move freely, work, and access state and private services (education, healthcare, banking, and justice, among others) (Arnold, 2019, p. 188). Historically, Sudan has maintained an open-door policy for South Sudanese refugees, recognizing shared ethnic, cultural, and historical ties. Following South Sudan’s independence, Sudan initially granted South Sudanese citizens "special status," allowing them freedom of movement, residence, and work. However, this status has been inconsistently applied and sometimes revoked amid political tensions. At one point, this “open door” policy changed, with direct effects on the refugees. I shall point to two such problem areas that directly relate to the special situation of South Sudanese refugees: one concerns labelling, the other concerns personal identification documents.

The issue of labelling

Given this complexity of the South Sudanese refugee situation, the Sudanese state had difficulties with defining who was a refugee and who was not. We are, of course, familiar with scholarly debates on the issue of definitions of who are “refugees,” “asylum seekers,” “IDPs,” “emigrants,” and/or other types of “migrants.” Such debates are important for governments in their decisions about how to deal with the different categories of people. The different categories mentioned will also imply that their handling and follow-up processes might belong to different institutions, governance principles, and legally defined rights and duties.

But given the special situation with the South Sudanese, the government at first tried to define the arriving refugees in ways that sought to avoid the international legal and institutional contexts and thereby opening for an internal Sudanese handling without international interference. An example of this was the process of border crossing between Upper Nile State in South Sudan and White Nile State in Sudan. In a study from 2016, Idris Salim Elhassan at the University of Khartoum made a study that was published as a Working Paper at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen (CMI: Sudan Working Paper No.7). The study was part of the ARUSS (Assisting Regional Universities in Sudan and South Sudan) project, a collaboration between the University of Bergen and Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen and various universities in Sudan, sponsored by the Norwegian Embassy in Khartoum. The paper was entitled "South Sudan "arrivals" in the White Nile State (Sudan). Not citizens, not IDPs, not refugees: What are they"? In 2022 Enrico Ille revisited the same problem, confirming the findings of Idris Salim in that earlier working paper.

In 2022 Enrico Ille stated: "*When South Sudanese started to enter Sudanese territory after the outbreak of war in December 2013, they found themselves put into an uncertain grey area of definition. Lingering between aggressive rhetoric of Sudanese officials before the separation in July 2011 and the nominal bilateral agreement on four freedoms in September 2012, they were denied official refugee status until August 2016. This gap between their de facto and their de jure status added to their uncertainty and confronted humanitarian organizations with a number of intertwined semantic and logistic dilemmas*" (Ille, 2022).

What the papers by Idris Salim Elhassan and Enrico Ille show is that the implementation of the principles stated in various laws of relevance to refugees is compromised when such principles clash with interests and priorities within that state. What we see in this example is that Sudan's refugee policy was influenced by state security concerns that made the state authorities develop policies and strategies that were not in the interests of refugees. This happened despite the normative legal obligations the Sudanese state has in protecting refugees.

The issue of documents

Another example of the confusion is related to documents. To recapitulate, the Commission of Refugees (COR) is at the centre of the Sudanese way of handling refugees. It is the official national entity that is responsible for first registering refugees and then issuing official documents such as the

refugee card and the fact sheet. These documents are supposed to help refugees access their rights to education, healthcare, and other services. However, my own fieldwork has shown that these cards are both problematic and ineffective, and again, in many cases this confusion relates to the problems of dealing with the shift in categorization of these people, from former citizens of Sudan, then of South Sudan, and now as refugees in Sudan. Many people in displacement sites lack identity cards or birth certificates, which produce uncertainties about their legal status. In other cases, the new situation between Sudan and South Sudan produces confusion. The refugees in Dar es Salaam Camp in the Jabal Awlia area such as Abdelaziz, who is working as a teacher, has two wives; one of them belongs to South Sudan, and the other one belongs to the Noba tribe. For instance, he is a good example. Most refugees in this camp were earlier (before South Sudanese independence) state employees with Sudanese identification papers and nationality. After being fired from their jobs, they worked in informal and seasonal activities. But they still had documents from their period as Sudanese citizens, and since they were considered to be "southerners," they obtained a foreign ID card and even South Sudanese identification papers, such as nationality and passport, from the South Sudanese embassy-papers they now use also in their new role as refugees.

The above problems with documents are clearly related to the difficult situation the South Sudanese refugees are in as having been citizens of the "old" Sudan, then relocating to South Sudan at independence in 2011, and then again returning as refugees when South Sudan exploded in a civil war in 2013. An informant commented on this with the following statement:

"*There is a contradiction in dealing with South Sudanese refugees; sometimes they are viewed as Sudanese citizens and at the same time deprived of the proper rights of citizenship (ownership of land and houses, access to education, and health services"* fieldwork2023.

To further explore the implications of this situation, I shall turn more directly to my fieldwork, which I carried out in two refugee camps, Naivasha and Dar es Salaam. My intention was the same as discussed earlier: to observe and document to what extent the situation for and the treatment of refugees in the camps were following the legal principles discussed earlier in the paper, and if not, what the problems were.

Turning to the Refugees Legally Staying in Khartoum

The camps studied

In 1991, Yusif Abdel Fattah Mahmoud, who is the deputy governor of Khartoum State and known as Rambo due to his strictness in implementing decisions, especially those related to the organization of Khartoum State, relocated displaced southerners from different areas in Khartoum and settled them in Jabarona in the Umm Badda locality and Wad Al-Bashir in the Abu Saad locality. The southern residents of the Jabarona camp were forced to relocate to the Naivasha and Dar es Salaam camps by authorities when the Jabarona camp's operation ended in 2016. The Southerners agreed to this deportation because they expected to be granted citizenship, asylum privileges, and access to services.

Naivasha Camp

Naivasha Camp, located in Khartoum State's Umm Badda Locality, was established by the government, the Umm Badda local commissioner, and the landowner. The camp is made up of five sectors: Juba, Aweil, Wad Albashir South, Wad Albashir North, and Wau. Wad Albashir South is the smallest sector, and Aweil is the largest. Residents of the camp include South Sudanese newcomers, deportees from Jabarona camp, and other regions of Khartoum State. The Juba sector is inhabited by a varied population from Western and Central Equatoria, including Yambio and Torit, while the Aweil quarter is inhabited by Dinka people from Bahr el Ghazal and the Upper Nile.

Dar es Salaam camp

This camp is located in the south of Khartoum in Jabal Awlia locality. The nearest place to it is Jabal Awlia Dam along the White Nile, forty kilometres south of Khartoum. To distinguish it from the Dar es Salaam camp, which is situated west of Omdurman, it is known as Dar es Salaam Jabal Awlia. After the second Sudanese civil war the area became a refugee camp. It shares borders with the Fur region to the south, the White Nile travel road to the west, the Al Salaam region to the east, and Bantu Camp to the north. It is divided into two blocks, 7 and 8, with a total of more than five thousand registered refugees. The two competitor ethnic groups at the camp are the Danka which is the largest ethnic group followed by the Nuir. These are besides Shilluk, Anuak, Zande, Bari, Toposa, Acholi…etc.

Looking at both camps, Naivasha is more than two times that of Dar es Salaam. Moreover, the services are better in Naivasha; even the buildings are more modern. In the two camps there are some persons from the northern Sudan tribe, Fulani and noba mountain tribe. They are working in trade with a big capital. During my fieldwork in Nivasha, I talked to the owner of a Supermarket "Dukan". He belongs to the Fulani tribe and is around 55 years old. He talked in full detail about his relation to the camp people, which is good. Even he participated in their ceremonies. Always, in the day of Eid, he comes to the camp to pray with the Muslims. The south Sudanese residents borrow from him until they receive support from the organizations, and there is great trust between them.

Internal organization

In the context of the administrative system in the camps, a hierarchical structure exists with the sultan at the top, followed by his deputy and secretary. Various committees manage services such as health and water, with volunteers selected by the Sultan. Since the secession of South Sudan in 2011, sultans have been appointed to oversee the deportation of southerners to South Sudan, further strengthening their authority.

After coming to the camps, the Sultans became administrative officials, and their relationship with security services and organizations strengthened. This created a distinct inequality between sultans and ordinary camp members, as the sultans had control over the camp's administration and resource distribution. Many sultans resided outside the camps but maintained influence through representatives like secretaries.

Despite some opposition to the sultan's practices, his role is still considered crucial for social functions like ceremonies such as marriages and funerals. Also, in situations of conflict, sultans played a role and could arrest and place people under guard, and in such cases, people could not be released without the sultan's direct involvement.

Related to the two camps I worked in, it was evident that sultans in the Naivasha camp were more powerful than the ones in Dar es Salaam. Such differences in authority were linked to the strength of a sultan's relations with the government authorities. And the sultans and their families could acquire benefits that others did not have access to. For instance, in the Dar es Salaam camp, I found that one of the women was the Sultan's wife, that she was living in Alhaj Yousif outside the camp, and that she just came to the camp to collect the support that was made available for camp residents.

As for the refugees in general, the dominant type of family found in the camps was the extended family. Informal and non-permanent work was widespread. In the Dar es Salaam camp, families depended on men who spent long periods outside the camps. Women in both camps were important in providing incomes from various types of activities. Some of these activities are considered illegal, such as beer and liquor manufacturing and engaging in black market activities.

Social relation as a tool of control in the camps

Looking at social relations between camp residents, the community is characterized by social bonds, everyday interaction, and general solidarity among its members. Conflicts do occur, for instance between the many refugees of Dinka and Nuir identities, carrying their historical relationships from their home areas into the camps. But in general, the refugees were relating to each other as South Sudanese, not stressing local and tribal identities within the camp. Thus, the camps represent an integrated social system, characterized by social solidarity among members who share shelter, food, and water, as well as subsidies provided by organizations. They also participate in various social occasions such as marriage and death. This solidarity played a great role in maintaining security and solving problems without the need for legal assistance. The unity was also evident in cases of conflict with the Sudanese tribal groups that lived in areas around the camps.

In relation to various forms of conflict and the prospects for dispute resolution, the sultans played a significant role—not only within individual camps but also in mediating relations between camps. Sultans in Jabal Awlia, for instance, coordinated with Fur neighbourhood committees to resolve conflicts affecting the area.

The services available in camps

Turning to the services available in the camps, the most important are social services, which are mostly provided by international organizations working in the camps. Refugees are entitled to seek asylum and protection in Sudan under international and domestic law. Under the same law, they have rights to education, healthcare, and work. To meet these rights, the Sudanese government needs assistance from international organizations that play an important role in providing refugees with the services they need. Thus, it was important for me to document those international and national non-state institutions that I also met with during fieldwork. They

all provided important assistance in various fields, but in my interviews with them, they all agreed that their efforts to meet the needs of the refugees were limited by constant underfunding. The table below shows the active organizations during the period of fieldwork. The organizations are many, both international and Sudanese.

Table 6-1: *Active Organizations during fieldwork (2021/2023)*

Organization	**Role involved**
UNICEF	Builds and maintains Schools
Almanar Medical Orgainization	Treatment clinics+ Nutrition Centers
MSF Swiss	Treatment Clinic 2 days per week for under 22-year-old
Mujadidun Organization	Toilets construction (Built 198)
Canadian Aid Organization	It provides psychological support. It has 20 volunteers cooperate with Ahfad u niversity
Italian International Cooperation Org	Non-food items + water project + solar energy + building Houses
CARE Organization	Water tanker construction
Norwegian Refugee Council	Financial Support + Awareness raising programme + Birth Certificate+ legal assistance + Refugees Registration
Children Development Organization	Working on children affairs
Mutaewinat Organization	Legal support
Hope and Friendship Organization	Organizing development programme

Source*: fieldwork, 2023.*

These organizations started their work inside the camps after signing what is called a technical agreement between UNHCR as an international body, HAC, which represents the national partner, and the specialized organization as mentioned before. The organization concerned must submit a budget and a work plan according to its specialization. After reviewing and studying them, an agreement is signed for implementation on the ground. The agreement, of which I quoted a general example earlier in the paper, is usually for one year, after which the project is handed over to relevant national authorities; for example, if the project is in the health field, it is handed over to the Ministry of Health, and so on. COR is responsible for granting permission to enter the camp and conducting only field supervision. This has been one of the factors leading to emerging conflicts between these different entities, as COR perceives itself as marginalized despite what their representatives argue is its significant role.

Services offered in the camps by various organizations

Education

In the Naivasha camp, there are two basic schools with 502 students, while in the Dar es Salaam camp, there are three basic schools besides many private pre-education schools (fieldwork 2023). There the Sudanese school curriculum is taught besides Christian education. UNICEF establishes and maintains schools. Moreover, it provides educational materials for schools and students. Teachers' salaries are paid by the Sudanese Ministry of Finance, in addition to some allowances from the organizations. Some teachers have complained about salary delays. They have indicated that dual responsibility affects the stability of salary payment. Also, they pointed out that schools are crowded because they include some students from the host community.

There are no secondary schools or any form of higher education inside the camps. Those who want to continue their education must enrol in Sudanese schools under difficult conditions. At the university level, South Sudanese refugee students are treated as foreign students, so they should pay the fees in dollars or the equivalent in local currency.

Interviews showed that respondents prefer the English language over the Arabic language. This is why they send their children to private schools such as Comboni, as well as protect them from harassment by some Sudanese students in public schools. There are different points of view

regarding language issues. First of all, it's difficult, especially for new arrivals. So, in Dar es Salam camp, they established a school where they use the local language (*Rotana*) in the teaching process. This school belongs to the Dinka tribe, which reflects the wealth and power of this ethnic group. Respondents explain that COR only provided them with 60,000 ($105) in help, whereas the annual registration fee for a single student is 120,000 ($210). Consequently, two of the interviewees said that their children are not attending school this year (2023) and that they were unable to supply the remaining sum. The cost of the high school certificate exam is $300, and COR does not assist them with that. At the university level, they treated them as foreigners (fieldwork 2023).

Health

Regarding healthcare services within the camps, there are two ways of handling medical cases. The first one is "Mobile Clinics". Here, some organizations provide healthcare services through mobile clinics on specific days of the week. The health committee prepares a list of patients to be seen by the doctor. However, it is crucial to note the authority of the Sultan and the importance of having a strong relationship with him, as this can determine a patient's priority in receiving medical care. These organizations are Almanar Medical Organization and Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, MSF Swiss). While the Canadian Aid Organization provides psychological support. It has twenty volunteer cooperators who work inside the camp and transfer the cases to Ahfad University.

The second is "Emergency Healthcare Services". In urgent cases, the Sultan or his assistants seek help from hospitals and health centres in the host community, such as Omdurman Teaching Hospital. One of the major challenges in this area is transportation and the refugee's financial situation, as the refugee card provides little assistance in this regard. In Naivasha camp, there is one health centre with mobile clinics. During my fieldwork, I had a tour with the Awils' Sultan. Around this sector in Naivasha, he showed me the starting of construction of a small hospital from traditional materials such as wood. There are more than 20 midwives, while in Dar es Salaam there are mobile clinics.

Water, electricity, and other services

Boreholes are the only source of drinking water in camps. These water points are constructed by some organizations, such as the Italian

International Cooperation, UNHCR, and CARE. Women and children are responsible for maintaining the family's water needs, while some families depend on carts in this matter. Also, the Italian International Cooperation Organization provides non-food items, solar energy, and building houses. The Mujadidun Organizatio*n* focuses on toilet construction, and it succeeded in building 189 toilets. Legal and financial support and assistance in obtaining official documents are provided by the Norwegian Refugee Council, *Mutaewinat* Organization, Hope and Friendship Organization, and Children Development Organization. The camp is not connected with the national electricity network, so residents provide their needs for electricity by paying money to some private electricity generator owners. Also, some of them owned solar panels.

Some Concluding Discussions: Law Between Theory and Practice Once Again

This paper has examined the relationship between international refugee law and its incorporation into the Sudanese legal system, as well as the institutions established to address refugee-related issues. These legal and institutional frameworks are then connected to the actual treatment of South Sudanese refugees, both in general and more specifically within certain camps in Khartoum. Such a discussion is important, as the existing refugee rules in the place where a refugee seeks safety in general determine the treatment such a refugee can expect. Again, whether the refugee can live safely, move freely, work without exploitation, send children to school, access healthcare, open a bank account, rent habitable accommodation, rely on state protection from violence, participate in civic life, and much more. Such rules are expressed in international refugee laws and in the national laws that are or are not based on those international laws. This national level is important, as it is on this level that laws become policies and are given meaning through the practices of institutions. Together, these laws, policies, practices, and institutions constitute governance frameworks—and these governance frameworks govern refugees' lives (Arnold, 2019).

In general, what emerges from my study is an impression of a general adherence of the Sudanese authorities to the different legal documents, legal principles for rights and duties, and finally, to their relative willingness to follow up on these principles as observed in fieldwork in actual refugee camps. But the picture is varied and needs to be discussed.

From the empirical studies in the camps, I can first conclude that refugees often face barriers when attempting to access healthcare, education, and employment, and furthermore, those barriers should not be there as they are against the prescriptions in the refugee laws I have presented. For the Sudanese authorities, the reasons are partly to be found in a lack of resources and political will to help people who just a few years ago had become "enemies." This led to a clear underfunding and lack of investment by the government in services that would benefit South Sudanese refugees. Without international organizations, the situation would be worse. But also, these international organizations complain about underfunding. And, when I talked to the local refugees about this, they were also complaining.

Here is a statement by Buk, who is the women's representative in Naivasha camp. She said, *"Organizations come to collect information, but projects don't appear. As the women's representative, I write papers and make demands to organizations and the government to improve the camps' environment, but the requests do not reach the effective authorities, and this, in my (Buk's) opinion, is the fault of COR*". Moreover, she said, *"Inside the camp there is inequality and marginalization, and not all services are provided to the citizens*" (fieldwork2023).

In interviews many other South Sudanese refugees mentioned similar things. Despite their complaints, no improvement occurred. Some respondents also have conjectured about the underlying causes of the problem. Several connected issues of this nature—such as restricted access to services—to what they perceived as the Arab and Islamic biases of the regime. Thus, when they compared what aid they received with what Arab groups got, they could clearly see such biases. And, mentioning the Syrians, they also noted that they were allowed to enter business and labor markets in ways not available to the South Sudanese. But they were also aware of how the historical problems between Sudan and South Sudan, often resulting in violent confrontations, also affected aid, in those cases, direct humanitarian aid. The example that was mentioned was about the authorities directing aid in Favour of some refugee groups that supported the regime in such violent conflicts while hindering or directly blocking it from reaching other groups, groups that fought against the regime.

Another bias the refugees noted was in cases of conflict between refugees and the host communities on whose land the camps were situated. In such cases, the authorities most often acted in favor of the Sudanese local community. Thus, instead of seeking solutions and compromises, the authorities accepted the arguments from local people living around the

camps that the presence of the camps created a feeling of envy and even enmity, feelings that were based on their strong belief that refugees got support from international and national organizations while the people around the camps had to make do with what they got from their own government, which was limited. Such feelings were often turned against the refugees. For example, during the fieldwork in Dar es Salaam camp, we went to the market one day. This market is close to the camp without being within the camp itself. While being there, we started chatting with people as usual, but some men came and started asking us for the reason for being there and why we did not carry special permission to visit this place. We showed them the letter from COR. In response to the COR document, they said*, "This is not the camp*." Moreover, they said that they don't even want the camp to be here, as the camp spoiled their youth with prostitution and alcohol, and that "*they get all the support without giving us our share*."

At other times the tensions and conflict were directly between the refugees and the authorities themselves. Such conflicts did not occur during my fieldwork, but it is generally argued that such tensions occurred, especially at times the government came to see the refugees as a security risk, which at such times could result both in actual razzias by police and army involvement in the camps. To deal with such risks, the authorities also issued laws that limited freedom of movement and job prospects among the refugees. Such actions by the government have the potential to aggravate the suffering of the refugees and restrict their capacity to make constructive contributions to their host communities. And as we have seen in the earlier discussion on refugee laws, such limitations are clearly against the intentions stated in those refugee laws.

But the authorities should also be given a voice. A leading supervisor and head of the technical office of HAC in Khartoum State, Abd Elal refused that South Sudanese refugees were discriminated against. They get the same treatment as everybody else, he said, but while staying in Sudan, they are under Sudanese law and must respect that. They are provided with legal aid by the *Mutaeawinat* organization, which shows that they are assisted by the authorities. But interviews in the camp showed me that the South Sudanese insisted they were discriminated against. For instance, an informant denied that they had been provided with legal aid. There were rumours that said such services were available, but this informant never saw such legal persons in his camp. And as far as legal protection was concerned, the refugees expressed that rather than feeling safe under the law, they worried more that they at any time could be detained or deported.

Lastly, it is also a general fact in Sudan that in the various complaints coming from the refugees, they are also supported by the international NGOs working with them. Such organizations do not only help on the ground but also operate as advocates for refugees and their rights, both in their meetings with the government and also in the media. This produces tensions between the international NGOs and the government, placing HAC in the middle of these tensions as the controlling unit. Such NGO interventions were largely focused on the lack of democracy, good governance, and human rights, thus making political accusations that created the tensions and distrust between the government and NGOs; the government, of course, defending their actions by referring to "matters of state." Apart from such instances, the government would argue that their refugee policies and activities are fully in agreement with existing laws. As the HAC representative Abd Elal quoted above stated, refugees from South Sudan are treated in the same way as other refugee groups and, while staying in Sudan, are subject to the same laws as everybody else. As explained in the text, the information collected and presented in this paper makes it possible to question such conclusions.

However, the authorities also make a legitimate point. Which relates to a lack of resources. Thus, they do admit that they, as is the case in many other countries, lack the resources necessary to adequately execute refugee legislation or offer refugees proper protection and assistance. This is particularly relevant as Sudan is a country that is not only hosting refugees from South Sudan but also a sizable refugee population coming from the neighbouring countries. Sudan then joins many other nations in finding it difficult to handle the demands made on their asylum systems because of the rising number of refugees. For such reasons, the authorities argue, refugees in certain areas are held in overcrowded camps or detention facilities.

On this point the authorities can meet the international organizations that are also complaining about lack of financial support to carry out their projects in the way they want. Here the Sudanese authorities, NGOs, and also the UN system through UNHCR can come together with international campaigns directed at donors to improve funding for the refugee sector as such. At the time of writing, it seems rather that the direction is the opposite, that the interest in helping refugees is declining, both politically and financially. If this continues, the normative aims stated in the international and national refugee laws will remain merely on paper, not bringing about sustainable solutions.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES' REGIME ON SUDAN BORDERS: NEGOTIATIONS OF POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND AID ACTORS IN WHITE NILE STATE, SUDAN

Mohamed Bakhit

Introduction

The start of our research in the White Nile State brought a surprise. My colleagues and I travelled[13] to conduct fieldwork in the refugee camps along the border between Sudan and South Sudan in September 2022. First, we travelled to Kosti town[14], which is one of the main towns in the White Nile State. On the second day, we headed to the headquarters of the Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR), located in a new and wealthy neighbourhood in Kosti town. But as we arrived, we were surprised to find that the Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR) officers were in the middle of a union strike. There was perhaps not much reason to be surprised. At that time in Sudan, the regime of Omer Bashir had collapsed, and the country was governed by a transitional government. In this transition period, many public employees went on strike, raising demands that were aimed at improving their situations during the deteriorated economic conditions. So, the strike in Kosti was part of a wider pattern, but at the time of our arrival in the field it had an immediate effect on the progress of our work.

In the beginning, the people we contacted informed us that there was no way that they could help us get permission to conduct fieldwork in the refugee camps in the White Nile State. The strike was supposed to last for one week, and they asked us to come back at the beginning of the following week. After some deliberations with my colleagues, we decided to start by visiting local and international NGOs where people were not on strike,

[13] The research team travelled to the White Nile state comprised of one postdoctoral researcher and three MA students from University of Khartoum.

[14] See Map No. 1.

which we did, but we were also lucky enough to be able to visit the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC[15]) and get an interview with the White Nile state director of HAC.

One week later we came back to COR headquarters again, only to find that the union had extended the strike to another 72 hours, starting from the same Sunday we had decided to contact them. However, this time we managed to talk to one officer, who informed us more about the strike. He told us that they had established a caretaker committee from all the different offices of COR. Every office elected 2-3 representatives that should help establish the caretaker committee, and work with this committee in organizing the strike and to formulate the demands, not only on behalf of local staff in White Nile State but also from all offices of COR throughout the Sudan. The main demands for the striking employees were increasing the wages to be comparable to UN employees, improving the working environment, and providing food and services for refugees and host communities. Remarkably, most of their demands were not directed to their national employer (the government of Sudan, with the Ministry of Interior) but were directed to UNHCR-Sudan. This required negotiations with representatives of the UN organization, while the committee members selected also sought to review the agreements previously established with UN agencies.

Seeing this complexity, I decided to shift the focus of my planned study to emphasize governance and power relations among international and government institutions working with South Sudanese refugees. I was already familiar with existing literature on organizational behaviours in the humanitarian industry. Writers such as Harrell-Bond (1992) and Kibreab (1989) have shown that, in many cases, internal struggles among humanitarian actors themselves can be more significant than relations between agencies and, for instance, refugee communities, or even their relationships with national governments. I was also aware of the literature that discussed how the refugee communities could suffer from such kinds of organizational and institutional conflicts. For example, Mark Duffield argued that the actions of aid agencies for South Sudanese (IDPs at that time) were complicit with broader systems of exploitation and domination imposed by the Sudanese government, including state methods of socio-cultural imposed changes, combined with the economic needs for cheap

[15] The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) is the government institution that supervises the activities of the NGOs. In addition, HAC is also coordinate the works between government authorities and NGOs.

agricultural labour in rural areas (Duffield, 2002). What Duffield demonstrated was that even after more than a decade of commitment, through the 1990s, all NGOs and UN agencies had failed to improve the living conditions of displaced Southerners living in North Sudan (Duffield, 2002, p.84). In addition, Duffield raises the question whether aid, as a technology of governance, can ever be an adequate vehicle for a collective humanity and shared burden of care (Duffield, 2002, p.84).

This is part of an even broader critique of international aid. One critical perspective points at the "humanitarian encampment" in Africa, calling Africa a "continent of camps" (Agier 2002, P.3). Critical camp studies are concerned with exposing the power geometries that construct refugee camps as spatial technologies of control and immobility (Agier, 2002; Brankamp, 2022). Camps in Africa are considered abnormal entities and have been given different labels to contrast the reality within camps with the ideal and normative principles that were behind the establishment of the camps. Labels that are meant to characterize the camps are many, such as "a naked city" (Agier, 2002), a "surrogate state" (Slaughter and Crisp, 2008), a "country of UNHCR" (Kagan, 2011). This labelling and the analyses behind the labels have emerged as a way of finding relevant terms that can describe the contradictory life forms found in camps, in which processes of restructuring, identity formation, emerging humanitarian economies and politicization take shape (Jansen, 2015, P.151). Refugee studies have for many years argued that the study of the processes of social change going on within camps are not merely processes of transition within a cultural enclave but also show dramatic context of uprootedness in which people's quest for survival becomes a model for social change" (Grabska, 2014, P.190).

Looking back at this literature, we see that some of the anthropological focus has also shifted from studying populations affected by forced displacement to the study of humanitarian agencies and the processes involved in those agencies. However, this engagement with humanitarian actors has not been translated into the development of social theory. Grabska (2014, 191) claims that many studies focus on refugee communities in camps, or they focus on displacement processes, but very often they appear as a series of case studies with little theoretical advancement to connect them together to form a basis for further theorizing.

In this paper, I argue that the strike among officers in the Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR) underscores the unequal power relations

between COR and UNHCR, with inequality reflected not only in COR staff demands for higher salaries but also in their calls for greater participation in decision-making and in the allocation of funding. The strike also signals a broader inequality, reflected in the deep frustrations of COR officers as they confront the unequal power structures embedded in Sudan's institutional framework—particularly the authority and roles of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC)—as well as the Sudanese government's overall policies toward refugees.

The paper concludes that the strike exposes how COR and HAC prioritize organizational interests and institutional competition over fulfilling their fundamental responsibility of managing Sudan's obligations toward South Sudanese refugees. One consequence of this is that external, non-Sudanese actors in the refugee field, such as UNHCR and other INGOs, can benefit from these rivalries and ambiguities. One benefit is that these non-Sudanese institutions can follow and execute their humanitarian plans unchecked by any significant control by the Sudanese institutions that are supposed to carry out such a control.

A Brief Background of South Sudanese Refugees in Sudan

It is possible to attribute the massive scale of forced migration of South Sudanese to neighbouring countries[16] to the fact that this new nation's history[17] is filled with violent conflicts pushing people to leave their homes and their communities. For instance, the 2013–2015 civil war between President Silva Kiir and Vice President Rick Mashar is still continuing to spread instability and lack of effective governance everywhere in South Sudan (Rolandsen and Kindersley, 2017). Instability was already there, also in the period before the secession from the north in 2011. Two civil wars between north and south had produced a history of mass migration and displacement among South Sudanese communities, a history that plays an important role in producing this high degree of instability (Deng, 1995). When South Sudan gained independence in 2011, an estimated four million of its roughly ten million citizens had already experienced displacement across international borders. These populations were scattered across neighbouring countries, moving back and forth in

[16] By April 2024 according to (OCHA, 2024) there were 2.3 million South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, about 2 million IDPs in South Sudan, 43,000 IDPs in Protections of Civilians Sites (PoC), beside about 448,000 refugees mostly from Sudan.
[17] South Sudan become independent country in July 2011, seceding from Sudan after decades of civil wars.

response to shifting security conditions in South Sudan and the opportunities available in host states.

The new civil war in the South that began in December 2013, and which started again in Juba in July 2016, forced at least another 1.5 million South Sudanese citizens to flee again. Most of them chose to flee to Sudan, which now had turned into a new neighbouring country to the north. In 2021, the total number of refugees in Sudan was 1,139,547; South Sudanese refugees estimated to be about 803,634 (UNHCR, 2022). Officially registered by UNHCR/COR as refugees from South Sudanese origin were 435,181, the majority settled in Greater Khartoum about 283,895, and in White Nile State in the camps about 282,000, while about 100,000 are out of the camps in different towns across White Nile state[18].

The way these people were received in the north further added to their problems. In the beginning the Sudan government considered South Sudanese refugees as a security threat, and as unwelcome guests. This reality existed despite the many official statements to the contrary, in which the regime in Khartoum tried to represent South Sudanese as "brothers". After the eruption of the armed conflict in South Sudan in 2013 the Sudan government failed, or refused, to apply the legal terms "refugees", "IDPs", "asylum seekers", and the "stateless", or "other people of concern" to these new displaced southern migrants. Instead, Sudan's government officially called these refugees "arrivals", largely to deny them any legal rights and protections (El Hassan, 2016, P.7). Thus, in Sudan, South Sudanese refugees were not entitled to enjoy the benefits that were usually granted to ordinary refugees as stipulated by international conventions[19]. They were settling among or nearby host communities with people who had their own interests in protecting their various resources. The "arrivals" could not deal with the host communities as equals or on a legal refugee basis. In terms of practical policy, the Sudan government did not have a strategy to deal with this situation. After long and difficult negotiations, the UNHCR reached an understanding with the government of Sudan in which the government agreed to mitigate the hardships to which the "arrivals" were subjected. What they did was to treat the southerners as "other people of concern"—a term which, once again, could

[18] An Interview with Hago a Camps manager, and a deputy of commissioner in COR office-Kosti, 29/09/2022.

[19] For instance, UNHCR estimated about 116,980 refugees registered in 8 refugee camps in East Sudan, populated by mainly Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees (UNHCR, November 2020).

be manipulated as it was a term that was not well-defined in UNHCR's conventions (Ille, 2022).

Despite such agreements, progress was slow. The final "joint" identification of South Sudanese residing in Sudan as "refugees" started only in August 2016, which also saw the beginning of the Commissioner of Refugees (COR) and UNHCR to establish and lead the humanitarian involvement. This change was completed when a Joint Assessment Mission to the White Nile State declared that the situation of South Sudanese refugees in the state was to be considered as one of continuous residence, thus also describing the 350,000 South Sudanese who had permanent residence in the area as refugees (Ille, 2022). The irony in this was obvious. For most people who were living in South Sudan's border regions (close to the Sudan border) and who had previous experiences of living in the earlier united Sudan, especially from Upper Nile region, decided to move back to Sudan when the civil war of 2013 reached their areas. These are the people who became labelled as "refugees" and who ended up in refugee camps.

So much about the background. In this paper, I now turn to describe the situation my colleagues and I encountered during fieldwork, beginning with an introduction to the general field area in White Nile State as we found it upon arrival.

Into the Field

The fieldwork was conducted between September and October 2022. We managed to visit three localities (Rabak, Al-Jableen, Al-Salam). We were based in Kosti town where most humanitarian actors' offices are located, and we commuted to refugee camps whenever it was possible. During the six weeks fieldwork we visited the Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR), Sudan Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, Plan-Sudan, and Jismar (national NGO). Also visited four refugee camps located in Al-Jableen and Al-Salam localities (Daba Bosin camp, Al-Alagaya, Al-Redis1, Al-Redis2). We managed to conduct 12 interviews, and 6 focus group discussions with COR and HAC officers, refugee representatives, INGOS, and national NGOs. Besides that, we had numerous conversations with the participants during our visits to the refugees' camps or agencies' offices in Kosti town.

Although the union strike by COR officers disrupted the fieldwork and limited our ability to visit all refugee camps in White Nile State, it nonetheless provided an opportunity to observe firsthand how refugee

governance is largely shaped by power relations and competition among the various agencies controlling Sudan's refugee regime.

Refugee Camps in White Nile State

The establishment of camps in White Nile State for South Sudanese started in 2014. But we must remember that at this time the people were not "refugees". At that time, camps were supervised by HAC only and run by the Sudanese Red Crescent organization. The first camp established in 2013 was called Al-Alagaya and hosted 441 families with a total of 1301 individuals. After that came Kilo Ashra (Kilo 10) camp in Al-Salam locality, which hosted 8217 families with a total population of 13161 individuals (Musa, 2018). Later, after the official designation of South Sudanese as refugees was accepted, the responsibilities for administering the refugee camps in the White Nile state were handed over to COR in 2017.

Al- Alagaya and Kilo Ashra (Kilo 10) were both located near the border between Sudan and South Sudan, and it was not difficult for refugees to adapt to life in the camps, as many of them had lived in the area in the years before the separation. Thus, they had both economic and social contacts with the villagers that made up the host communities around the camps (Musa, 2018). For instance, Kilo 10 camp was designed to accommodate 28,000 refugees, but in 2017 only 5600 refugees were living there. Most of the rest who had registered their names and got certificates had left the camp and moved either northwards to Kosti or Khartoum, or eastwards to the Gezira or Gedarif states. Those who stayed at camp were mostly women (36%), children (62%), and a few old men (2%). Each tent was allocated to five families, and each family was composed of 5-6 persons, making a total of 30-35 people in each tent. The refugees in the camp came from the Dinka and Shiluk ethnic groups. The camp was supplied with water every day, which was brought from the White Nile River. There was a medical center in the camp, and usually there were three medical officers available every day, one from the Ministry of Health and the others from the Spanish branch of Sudan-Plan. In addition, there was a midwife and a number of nurses, and basic drugs were given to the patients free of charge.

Al-Alagaya camp was placed on the eastern side of the river, a few minutes east of an asphalt road. The children constitute 64% of the population in 2017; Males constituted 14%; and women represented 22%. While many aspects of the two camps were similar, there were also some differences.

Al-Alagaya camp was smaller and had a sizable male population compared to Kilo 10 camp. And there were more opportunities for the refugees to find seasonal work in the area around Alagaya camp than there were in Kilo 10 camp (Khogali, 2015).

Following the handing over of the camps to COR and the increasing number of South Sudanese refugees crossing the border, new camps were established. The number of camps increased to nine camps, but the camps are disputed. Some COR officers think that the acceptance of South Sudanese refugees in the current geographical places is wrong and signals complete incompetence on the side of the planners. The reason is obvious to them as the refugee camps are located in fertile agricultural areas, which immediately resulted in frequent dispute with host communities over land. The officers think that the refugee camps hosting South Sudanese refugees should be placed in areas far away from the Nile[20].

By February 2023, White Nile state hosted 287,000 refugees from South Sudan and about 17,000 IDPs from Blue Nile (OCHA, 29/03/2023)[21]. A UNHCR report showed that 60% of the refugees lived across the nine camps, in Al-Jabalain locality two camps, and seven camps in El-Salam locality, and about 100 000 of the camp refugees had settled in the main towns in the State, like Kosti and Rabak (COR Interviews). The remaining 40% of refugees were integrated into host communities and lived outside these camps.

In 2021, an estimated 49,300 South Sudanese refugees crossed the border, with more than 10,500 new arrivals between January and May 2022 (NRC, 2022)[22]. During our fieldwork in the White Nile refugee camps, there were constant new arrivals of refugees, and we observed registration and settlement also in a new camp called Al Ghana'a.

As of September 2022, the nine camps hosted 11,500–38,000 individuals each. These camps operated at full capacity and were all falling considerably short of basic humanitarian standards, as they consistently suffered from inadequate support. They also faced the severe impacts of decreased funding (ACAPS, 2022)[23]. As a result, South Sudanese refugees faced the highest level of need. They had high needs for permanent shelter

[20] An Interview with Hago a Camps manager, and a deputy of commissioner in COR office-Kosti, 29/09/2022.

[21] www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/countries/sudan

[22]Report from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), August 2022- Source: www.nrc.no

[23] www.acaps.org/en/

with sufficient levels of privacy, security, and protection from exposure. Problems such as overcrowding, the unsafe location of shelters, the distance to water sources, and a lack of family privacy were frequently reported to us. A lack of sufficient infrastructure and public services also obstructs access to basic services (ACAPS, 2022).

The 2022 Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS) conducted in White Nile revealed that the nutritional situation among refugees was of great concern. The global acute malnutrition prevalence across the nine camps ranged from 15.2–18.6%, falling into the critical category and exceeding the 15% threshold. Similarly, severe acute malnutrition prevalence exceeded 2%, which is considered critical for refugee populations by UNHCR standards (ACAPS, 2022).

Another report from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)[24] showed that only five per cent of the surveyed households could meet all their needs with the income they earned (NRC, 2022)[25]. The first source of income for refugees comes from selling humanitarian aid, followed by other petty trade activities (e.g. tea and food selling, running small kiosks, and selling crafts) and engaging in casual labour related to agriculture activities. More importantly, seventy-six per cent of the refugees had poor (45 per cent) or borderline (31 per cent) levels of food consumption, while only 24 per cent of them have an acceptable food consumption score. According to UNHCR, 45 per cent of refugee children living in camps were enrolled in schools, while 55 per cent are out of schools. While 90% of teachers complained of delays in payment of salaries and non-payment of incentives, such as transportation allowances, etc. 70% of schools reported a lack of trained teachers and of in-service training opportunities.

Health facilities were available in the camps, but they faced many challenges, including a lack of medication (92 percent) and lack sufficient medical or trained medical personnel (38 percent). Also, health facilities in the camps were unable to conduct laboratory tests (34 percent). They charged high prices for medical consultations (23 percent), they lacked adequate specialized facilities (17 percent), and they had unavailable or non-functioning facilities for sexual reproductive health (SRH) (15 percent) (NRC, 2022).

[24] NRC conducted a multi-sectoral needs assessment (MSNA) in the White Nile camps from May to June 2022. In total, NRC conducted 424 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), ten technical observations and 32 focus group discussion (FGDs), across the nine camps.
[25] www.nrc.no

The Effect of April 2023 War In Sudan on Refugee Camps in White Nile State

On April 15th, 2023, violent clashes erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan. This new crisis resulted in the displacement of more than 11 million people, including internally displaced people (IDPs), asylum seekers, and refugees. Sudan's displacement crisis has been called the world's worst since the partition of India in 1947 and displaced at least 15 million people (Tubiana, 2024)[26].

The fighting has not directly affected the White Nile state, but its relative safety and proximity to Khartoum have made it a main pathway for people fleeing Sudan, providing a critical access point to South Sudan. The state also provides shelter for people with limited options for outward movement. For this reason, the White Nile State faces overcrowding and high humanitarian needs, especially with disease outbreaks and floods in the months following the outbreak of the crisis. As of 22 August 2023, over 144,000 pre-crisis refugees who were unable to flee Sudan had been displaced to White Nile from Khartoum (UNHCR, 2023).

Most of the refugees in White Nile state arriving from Khartoum are South Sudanese, with another group of around 17,000 IDPs fleeing from Blue Nile state following intercommunal clashes in the state earlier in 2022. These arrivals add to the over 283,000 IDPs who have fled other conflict affected states, resulting in a large, displaced population facing massive challenges such as shelter, food, healthcare, and WASH needs (MSF, 2023).

For example, Um Sangour camp, planned to host 30,000 people, was actually hosting 70,000 (MSF, 2023). The capacity of other camps was not provided to us, but it was clear that they were hosting beyond their capacity (ACAPS, 2023). There was already a reported lack of funds and capacity to meet the humanitarian needs in White Nile even before the conflict (UNHCR, 2023). Despite the different crises affecting White Nile state, there were only four INGOs and six UN agencies present in White Nile as of July 2022 (NRC, 2022). These INGOs need to establish a technical agreement with the government's institutions for each humanitarian project, with validity of up to 12 months. Administrative delays normally happened in getting government approval, which slowed down programs'

[26] www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2024/9/22/refugee-chronicles-the-long-and-lonely-road-from-sudan-to-northern-france

delivery. In addition to that, seasonal floods in White Nile usually make roads unpassable, hindering humanitarian access into the camps (ACAPS, 2023).

As there are two other papers on the situation in the White Nile State, I stop here and turn to the focus I introduced at the beginning of the paper: the situation that emerged as a consequence of the strike in the key refugee institution in Sudan.

Refugee Regime in Sudan: A Technology of Control or Open System of Navigation?

I indicated earlier that many scholars of forced migration in Africa consider camps as political technologies of care and control designed to contain the 'undesirables' population (Agier, 2011 p.153,) and to produce 'spatial effects of immobility, exclusion, and exception' (Brankamp, 2021, P.67) for refugees. Politically, camps are means for delivering aid and holding mobile bodies 'in place'. While some scholars refer to the repressive manner in which refugee and migration situations are managed as a "humanitarian regime of detention" (Chkam, 2016, P.80), refugees would seem to have no alternative than to accept the new social contract of encampment whereby they must give up their freedom in exchange for international assistance and protection.

The attempt by NGOs and government institutions to help the refugees to strengthen their capacity for survival and security, also involves a relation of governance, at least with INGOs and government institutions dealing with refugees. Looking at the humanitarian industry from this perspective draws out its ambiguity and complexities, and possible inequalities involved toward the refugee communities (Duffield, 2002). Many scholars argue that the encampment policy and funding structure of international aid have contributed to the endurance of camps, leading to a quasi-permanent state of emergency and the absence of alternatives to encampment (Chkam, 2016, P.81).

In Sudan, the formal COR polices regarding the movement of the South Sudanese refugees stipulate that they are obliged to stay in camps, where they were not formally allowed to work or move outside the camps, and to receive food rations monthly from WFP. In reality, the camps have a history of violent clashes and gender-based violence, and many refugees find themselves excluded from essential human and refugee rights, and from the host communities. For example, during our fieldwork, we witnessed an incident of clash between the refugee community and the host

village in Daba Bosin camp. What happened was that a man from the host community was killed after he had an illegal sexual affair with a woman from the refugee camp. This tragic outcome produced attacks from the host village, and more people were injured in the clashes. As a consequence of this the market was closed for several days, and movement between the two communities was prohibited, and there was a heavy presence of police forces around the market[27].

But mostly things are better. In fact, refugees can move rather freely in the camps but also in the city, such as Kosti and on to Khartoum, or they can also cross the border back into South Sudan. This kind of complex relations of refugees moving in the camp and out of camp has been explored recently by many researchers (Jansen, 2015; Chkam, 2016; Brankamp, 2021). In these studies, they revealed the ways in which refugees seek and maintain access to the camps, and how the camps become a part of livelihood options available in the Horn of Africa region. In these different cases, the camps become an alternative shelter, a point of transfer to other destinations, a centre of facilities such as education and health care; an emerging livelihood opportunity, governed by a functioning bureaucracy based on humanitarian ideas. After all, depending on how different refugees approach the camp settlement, the camp is one option for securing a livelihood, but there are also other options, allowing refugees to move in and out of humanitarian domains (Jansen, 2015, P.150).

For example, in Sudan, COR officers regard the camps in Eastern Sudan as being much stricter and more tightly controlled than the camps in the White Nile State. They often pointed to the fact that control of the movement of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees was much stricter than what was the case with refugees in White Nile State. As one officer stated: "*I have started my professional work with COR in Eastern Sudan. There you would find real refugee camps; no refugee can go out of the camps without the permission from the COR protection officer responsible. All agreements and projects are discussed and approved by COR's different departments. In Eastern Sudan, you feel the strong authority of COR offices. But in White Nile State it is a different case. All UN agencies and National NGOs are repeating the same projects with the same objectives, and in the end, nothing goes to the refugees, without any consultations or participation for us as camp managers*"[28].

[27] Our observation, a focus group discussion with the leaders of the refugee camp, 29/9/2022, interviews with COR officers in the camp.

[28] An Interview with Hetham, a camp manager in COR office-Kosti, 30/09/2022.

There are many aspects of similarity for South Sudanese refugees in Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. In Sudan and Kenya, officially, refugees cannot move beyond the camp's boundaries, yet informally that is what many are able to do. Although there are forced encampments, and a history of cracking down on refugees who stay outside the camps, especially on Somali refugees in Kenya and for Ethiopian and Eritreans in Sudan. Nonetheless, there is also some tolerance, not out of goodness but more out of a corrupt system in which people can make deals with the police guarding the camps. Such relationships represent a grey area that creates space for refugees to manoeuvre (Jansen, 2015, P.157)

Some refugees also have their private means that open for possibilities outside the refugee regime. Many refugees in the camps we visited and who had the social or financial capital to be able to sustain themselves or be sustained by others, preferred to stay in Khartoum. At least for some periods, and they could always return to the refugee camp as long as they retained their refugee status. In this way, families were spread over several places, some individuals due to intermarriage with host communities, other members because of education elsewhere or they had just blended into the informal refugee enclaves. We see the same in Kenya, for instance in the Kakuma camp, as in the White Nile state camps. In both places many refugees are mobile and travel between towns and the camps or otherwise making use of networks of different sorts to maintain such links (Jansen, 2015, P.158).

In Uganda there is, despite a liberal refugee policy, a settlement system that denies refugees the freedom of movement, which undermines their socioeconomic and other rights. Refugees in Uganda who remain outside the formal system of refugee registration and settlement are deprived of the refugee status to which they are entitled under international law. These situations suggests that the Ugandan government and UNHCR's Self Reliance Strategy (SRS) has not yet managed to overcome the contradiction inherent in denying people freedom of movement, without supporting them effectively to meet their needs in the places to which they are restricted (Kaiser, 2006, p.597).

Power Structure between UN Agencies, Ingos, Local Ngos, Government Institutions: Hiding Inequalities Behind Double Narratives

In this section, I consider the governmentality of the refugee regime as including institutions, procedures, actions, and reflections that have a

refugee population as an object and possess tools that lead to the subjugation and subjectivation of individual refugees. Behind this we find the power and administration of the state, a state that relies on aid industry politics, political economy and policing technologies (Kaiser, 2006, P.214). Using this powerful conception of governmentality of the specific refugee regime in Sudan, it is possible to analyses the hierarchical structure of humanitarian agencies in the country. In Sudan this includes the following: UNHCR (UN agencies, INGOs, local NGOs) at the top, the government institutions (COR, HAC, other ministries, localities), then South Sudanese refugees at the bottom.

The actual coordination of aid work in White Nile State generally builds on "the clusters framework", which is a new general approach and contains new things, such as methods of mapping, new mandates and new protocols for aid coordination. Each sector contains the aid actors involved (excluding the refugee representatives), and they have monthly meetings. The leading body of any sector is usually the relevant UN agencies- for health: WHO, for emergencies: OSHA, WASH: UNICEF, and for protection: UNHCR.

Along with the UN agencies there are governmental bodies that are part of the different sectors, and they should also participate in any new interventions[29]. But the design for aid projects and most activities depends on the call of UN agencies and also one their assessments of what is needed. Again, at bottom we find the communities of refugees restricted by the UN agencies guidelines. Government institutions on their side might try to put restrictions on how activities should be implemented, for instance institutions like COR, HAC, or the Ministry of Education. This means, again, that the design and executions of aid projects are mainly decided by UN agencies and other INGOs in negotiations with government institutions involved in the specific project. The involvement of Sudanese NGOs comes at the stage of implementing the projects, which leaves Sudanese NGOs as just cheap labor recruitment agencies for implementing INGOs aid projects. One consequence of this is that many national NGOs try to be active entrepreneurs in the aid system (Assal,2008, P.11).

This system shows clearly how unequally the cards are distributed in this system. Still INGOs staff and local NGOs view the unbalanced power as something acceptable, even necessary to maintain the flow of humanitarian work. As expressed by one of INGO's employee: "*I am working in an*

[29] Interview with the Director of Plan-Sudan NGO in Kosti, 27/09/2022.

International NGO, for me I would compare myself with other international NGOs, but not with UN agencies, because there are differences in job descriptions, and capacities. While there are also differences in levels between UN agencies, International NGOs, national NGOs, and government bodies. Even if people are doing the same jobs, on the same subjects, still there are differences between the organizations, and their capacities and abilities"[30].

Clearly, these pieces of evidence confirm that humanitarian aid agencies and government institutions are working together and collaborating to further marginalize and dispossess people to whom aid was supposed to be provided. What we sense here is that humanitarian aid serves the political objectives of Western donors and national governments and not the interests of people who are in need of assistance. Often, UN agencies and INGOs justify their involvement through the "lesser evil" argument, in which they argue that faced with the inability or reluctance of African States to provide refugees with effective legal protection and assistance this is the only way to move forward. Thus, international aid agencies see themselves as having few choices apart from fulfilling the gaps in the international refugee regime, even if it involves the unintentional and occasional violation of refugee and human rights (Chkam, 2016, P.81). This seeming contradiction is a profound management dilemma at the heart of the humanitarian regime of refugees and is only set to intensify as larger numbers of people migrate and flee conflicts, especially in Africa and Horn of Africa region.

One reason for the perpetuation of encampment, keeping refugees in camps, is the international shift to a "containment policy" in the refugee regime. This was confirmed by Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, when he proposed that UNHCR had revolved into a massive relief agency, as "part of a containment strategy by which this world's more fortunate and powerful countries seek to keep the problems of the poorer at arm's length" (Chkam, 2016, P.89). This approach has taken place against the background of the "north– south" divergence on priorities in the refugee regime, in which the "north" seeks to contain refugees in the "south". More precisely, in which industrialized states, which are normally the largest donors to UNHCR's programs seek to contain "the floods of

[30] Interview with Alnair Mohamed Nor, 3/10/2022, Officer of Gender Based Violence, Plan-office in Kosti.

refugees" in developing countries, which already host the overwhelming majority of the world's refugees.

Thus, the encampment regime serves the interests of powerful national States rather than refugees. This method of aid regime leaves little opportunity for refugees' requirements, visions, perceptions, feelings, and choices to be heard, which has prompted some voices, including within UNHCR, to demand for "alternatives to camps" and a move away from a stagnant and inappropriate minimum standard perspective of encampment, and towards one that accounts for evolving human needs (Chkam, 2016, P.96).

The Local Politics Of Refugee Regime In Sudan (UNHCR Vs Government Institutions)

While COR officers addressed the unbalance of their power against UNHCR as one of the main reasons for the union strike, they still view UN and its agencies as the main entity responsible for refugee protection and providing social services. But the view is not necessarily positive. An officer states: "*I think the problem of COR comes mainly from UN agencies who exploited the lack of responsibilities and knowledge and weaknesses of Sudanese government dealing with refugees' issue. For me, UN agencies are planning and implementing projects and funding in countries according to the possibility of exploitation of these countries. When they realize a country is weak, they would give less commitments to their mandates"*.

However, the issue of wage difference is still the main demand for the striking COR staff. Actually, it is seen as the main manifestation of unbalanced power. Many studies have noted that the establishment of parallel services by humanitarian organizations often undermines local institutions, primarily by attracting the best staff to earn higher salaries (Goyen et al, 1996).

In many different departments of COR office in Kosti, the majority of employees insisted that the problem of COR comes mainly from UN agencies who exploited the lack of responsibilities and knowledge, and weaknesses of Sudanese government dealing with refugees' issues. For them, UN agencies are planning and implementing projects and funding in countries according to their ability to manipulate that country. When they realize a country is weak, they will be less committed to their mandates of protecting the refugees. One officer estimated that there were about 9 billion USD of funds that were missed or not offered to Sudan, even though

Sudan deserves the money. The reason the money never arrived, so the argument goes, was that the government is weak and fails to put pressure on UN agencies to fulfil its duty in providing services to refugees. Many COR officers believe that UN agencies are treating different countries differently; for example, they say that Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda are getting far better services than Sudan, all because of the weakness in the government leadership when they were dealing with UN agencies.

One of the main demands from the striking caretaker committee is reviewing all agreements with UN agencies and other national NGOs, and the point is that any of them that do not sign agreement with COR would not be allowed to work in the refugee camps. The demands are backed by the argument that the technical responsibilities of refugees in Sudan is left to COR offices according to refugee law. This means that HAC has no responsibility over refugees' issues. The mandate for HAC is only for the coordination of the humanitarian works in Sudan.

Many officers argue that the lack of real mentoring of humanitarian works in the refugee camps leads to inefficiency of implementing the humanitarian project. One officer claimed that NGOs implement only 20-30% of the original plans presented to HAC offices or agreed upon in sectors meetings.

The lack of coordination among humanitarian actors and between INGOs and government institutions are seen as the reason for some of the local level problems that negatively affect humanitarian work in many parts of Sudan. The presence of NGOs certainly led to changes in many structures, but this is not reflected positively in the livelihoods of the refugees (Assal,2008, P.1), or in providing basic services for them.

So, bureaucratic processes, repetition of activities and aid programs, lack of coordination between government institutions and INGOs, and between INGOs and national NGOs, are some of the local problems that render the engagement of aid agencies less effective in the different activities they undertake in the many parts of Sudan. Problems of priority and vision are also crucial. The priorities of the government are not consistent with those of the INGOs. The government would like to see NGOs engaging in infrastructural activities and funding complete package of social services, while INGOs see this as the responsibility of the government (Assal,2008, P.1).

When there is a lack of parallel between the humanitarian activities offered and the urgent needs of refugees, then the interventions might end

up creating structures that have little synergy with local needs (Assal,2008, P.16). In such situations, benefits of aid projects tend to benefit employees, not the communities where such projects are implemented. This is especially so when NGOs' wages exceed the normal wages of public employees[31]. As a consequence, this inequality becomes one of the reasons for the tension between INGOs and the government institutions involved in the aid activities in White Nile state.

The Power Relations Between COR and HAC: The Elephants' Clashes

The relationship between the government institutions may be tense, and it also has its local dimensions. For example, most COR officers stressed that the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) is playing a big part in creating the problems in refugees' interventions in Sudan. For them, HAC has been doing things that are defined to be among the core responsibilities of COR. While HAC established by Al-Ingaz[32] government to control the humanitarian and refugee regime in Sudan, in fact many Al-Ingaz supporters were working in HAC sometimes without proper qualifications, and furthermore a new refugee law was passed by Al-Ingaz government, a law that benefitted HAC[33]. Nevertheless, even with this new Refugee Law a lot of responsibilities of mentoring and implementing of NGOs activities were granted for COR, not HAC. Still these responsibilities are not executed in reality, and this failure is what gives UN agencies the loopholes they need to avoid many of their responsibilities of protecting and providing services for South Sudanese refugees in Sudan.

Sudanese Commission of Refugees (COR) staff are directly blaming the failed refugee system on actors at higher government levels, including the leadership of Sudan HAC. In fact, a majority of COR staff think their subordination to UNHCR is the result of the government weakness and HAC disruptions. As one officer declared: "*I consider the system of camps*

[31] One COR officer highlighted the differences by insisting that the salary of a car driver in UN agencies is higher than the salary of the COR director in Kosti office.

[32] Al-Ingaz government refers to the ruling of Omar al-Bashir (1989–2019) in Sudan, formed by the Sudanese Islamic movement, and subsequently transformed to the National Congress Party (NCP).

[33] The President signed the "Organization of Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act," in March 2006. The Act presents serious concerns for humanitarian actors in the Sudan. These concerns range from procedural issues to the implications of the increased levels of government control over NGOs activities including regulating funds through a governmental approval system, and the government's ability to close organizations and seize their assets (Assal, 2008, 13).

management as a failure caused by the inability of government of understanding the importance and complexity of refugees issue"[34].

Even many COR officers consider HAC as a political instrument for demolishing COR and replace it by HAC. As one officer pointed out: "*For HAC is part of the problem, it has been doing things that are the responsibilities of COR. HAC empowered by Al-Ingaz government, a lot of Al-Ingaz cadres working in HAC, but with the refugee law which was put by Al-Ingaz, a lot of responsibilities of mentoring and implementing NGOs activities are for COR. But this is not executed in reality, and that is what gives UN agencies a loophole to avoid many of their responsibilities*"[35]

The strike of COR officers came after the fall of Al-Bashir government (April 2019) which is viewed as opportunity for COR officers to regain its diminished power[36]. As stated by one COR officer: "*Until 1992 COR was responsible of all programs and interventions in the refugee field, there were offices responsible on all sectors of services, but because of the government conflicts, there were an intentional dismantling of COR, which makes it not able to deal with aspects regarding the refugees' issue*"[37].

The technical capability, knowledge, and long experiences of COR staff in working with refugees in Eastern Sudan led them to believe in their ability to lead the refugee regime in Sudan. This knowledge advantage was very crucial in making COR officers able to encounter HAC officers, even if the government was backing the latter. As expressed by one COR officer: "*I was able to encounter the HAC commissioner in several sector meetings to maintain the technical responsibilities of COR for the refugee's issues*"[38]

These narratives of internal conflicts between COR and HAC point to a fundamental shortcoming to the limited understanding of what defines a refugee life. What is not understood is that refugees as members of forced migrant communities neither just reproduce the social structure of their

[34] An Interview with Hago a Camps manager, and a deputy of commissioner in COR office-Kosti, 29/09/2022.
[35] Interview with Abdelwahab, The NGOs administrative unit in COR office-Kosti, 3/10/2022.
[36] One of the objectives of the transitional government formed after the fall of Al-Ingaz government was to dismantle the Islamist regime, mainly from different government institutions.
[37] Interview with Sayed, 30/09/2022, Camp manager COR office in Daba Bosin camp.
[38] Interview with Abdelwahab, The NGOs administrative unit in COR office-Kosti, 3/10/2022.

previous residence, nor simply accept the organizational principles that aid agencies management tries to implement. The dealings between organizations and refugees, as well as between refugees themselves, construct a new social structures and new forms of governance. The collective lives of refugees are transformed through unique processes that we as researchers need to disentangle to avoid taking social structures or categories of management for granted (Ille, 2022, P.27).

South Sudanese Refugee Positioning Against Ngos, Government Institutions: Fluid Mobilities, and Free Navigations

South Sudanese refugees are generally stereotyped negatively by both NGOs and government bodies. In fact, Sudanese staff belong to NGOs or COR were very harsh in evaluating refugees. In conversations it seemed like they did not conceive of refugees as the primary and deserving receivers of what the aid regime had to offer. Rather they were seen as troublemakers to be monitored and occasionally 'disciplined'. The imaginaries that inform this system of knowledge are not mere by-products or effects of the camp as a technology of control, instead, the aid system produces the camp by performing, reproducing and upholding the power relations of difference that constitute its functional core (Brankamp, 2021, P.159).

The list of criminal activities in White Nile camps was long and included informal trade in goods to South Sudan, the fabrication of food ration cards, which resulted in the recent introduction of biometric technology, selling home-brewed alcohol and also prostitution[39]. Several scholars have tried to explain what drives these activities in most refugee camp settlements in the Horn of Africa, explaining them as methods for coping with resource scarcity and the harsh conditions of camp life or as reactions to aid bureaucracies with limited downward accountability (Brankamp, 2021, P.160).

COR and HAC officers share the view that South Sudanese refugees are affecting the host communities negatively. Anywhere South Sudanese were found they were imagined as the 'other,' a category of people that has "moral disorders," opposite to what is the qualities of the host communities. As one officer clearly stated it: "*There is appearances of negative effects of refugees on host communities, like drinking alcohol, rising numbers of divorces in host communities, because men spent most*

[39] Focus group discussion with South Sudanese community leaders in Daba Bosin camp, 5/10/2022.

of their time in the camp, and they start having sexual relations in the camp"[40].

The moral subordination of South Sudanese refugees to the Sudanese people, as mentioned in the above statement, is not just a way of confirming their 'otherness'; it also depicts fellow Sudanese people as superior citizens, without any social and moral disorders. Still, the prolific stigmatization of refugees in the camp is hardly surprising, considering the imaginative power that disease, infection and trauma continue to have in current debates on refugee camps (Brankamp, 2021, P.165).

In Sudan, the subordination of South Sudanese is part of wider culture of discrimination against non- Muslim and non-Arab ethnic and cultural identities. There were many studies that pointed to the government policies that establishes such a discrimination (Bützer, 2011), through squatter demolitions in urban areas, through population relocation in rural and urban areas in Sudan, through the physical layout of resettlement areas for South Sudanese in different parts of Sudan. In addition, in the humanitarian regime I discuss here, there were also many policies that point towards similar underlying imaginations, such as the need for food aid, the need for basic health care and to primary education, all signal what the refugees lack and such a lack can then be transformed into attempts to disregard, dehumanize and ultimately suppress Southern cultural histories (Duffield, 2002, P.92).

If such stereotypes are "correct" it follows that the management of refugee camps by COR and HAC has always needed and been centred around monitoring and controlling the refugee communities. The institution through which such a control is carried out is through an appointed system of Dinka '*sultans*'[41]. Such individuals are invariably COR/HAC allies, usually having no connection with historic ethnic leadership in South Sudan or titled families. Some of them convert to Islam and can usually speak Northern Arabic and wear a turban and a jellabiya[42]. As middlemen between the refugees and government officials, COR/HAC officers, aid agencies, such sultans occupy an influential position (Duffield, 2002, P.96). They play the role of local leaders, and aid or government assistant on behalf of the refugee communities and, by controlling access to such things, they are able to accumulate authority. This authority creates a

[40] Interview with M. Ali- Protection Manager at COR office- Kosti-24/9/2022.
[41] This is the local term for chief or headman usually representing an ethnic group from South Sudan.
[42] The common dress for men in North Sudan.

guarded atmosphere of dependence and internal divisions between refugee communities and allow for more control and intimidation for COR/HAC officers.

The main problem faced by the refugees from South Sudan is that they are caught in an ethnically structured aid regime of exploitation and appropriation. In which aid agencies and host communities are part of the wider system of dominance in which Southerners struggle to survive (Duffield, 2002, P.86). In terms of livelihood opportunities, the combined returns from aid ration, farm labour, casual urban employment, domestic service and other available activities fall well short of what is needed for basic survival[43] for refugee communities.

Conclusion: COR Strike as "Political Technology" for Refugees' Subordination

The unexpected explosive beginning of the fieldwork in Kosti, when we found COR officers in the middle of a union strike, led me to change my plan of conducting a fieldwork about the structure of the refugee regime in the refugee camps of South Sudanese in the White Nile state, and how refugee's communities are participating in and are viewing it.

The union strike of COR officers disrupted the fieldwork, which limited our ability to visit all refugee camps in the White Nile state but nonetheless, it provided me with an opportunity to see from the bottom up how the refugee governance in large part is shaped by power relations and competition between different agencies controlling the refugee regime in Sudan.

This power contestation among COR- HAC-UNHCR confirm the fact that strategies and actions of aid agencies are complicit with wider systems of exploitation and oppression to which South Sudanese refugees are subject. The overall objective of the aid regime is to maintain power and resources by controlling and exploiting powerless refugees inside camps.

The paper concludes with two important insights. First, that COR and HAC prioritize their organizational interests and competitions in carrying out their basic role of managing the responsibilities of Sudan government toward the South Sudanese refugees. At the same time UNHCR and other INGOs benefit from these rivalries and ambiguities as they are left to

[43] Focus group discussion with South Sudanese community leaders in Daba Bosin camp, 5/10/2022.

execute their humanitarian plans unchecked or at least by their own visions without government oversight. The two still meet each other in their shared interests in constraining the participation of local refugees.

The case, and the strike then, also make us see how the aid industry remains a technology for governing the global margins (Duffield, 2002, P.103). Despite these unequal structures refugees constantly demonstrate the ability to be far more innovative than aid agencies, and many refugees have reached a point of economic and social integration despite the adverse policies at national and international levels. To achieve such results, refugee communities in White Nile State have deployed diverse coping strategies that allow them to live, to work, to farm, to establish families, to trade (Hovil, 2014, P.6). However, to do this, they have to split their families, diverse their livelihood means, more importantly keep trans-local connections with homeland and other places of exiles[44].

I don't have the space to develop such arguments here but the information on the refugee camps and the violent history that brings the refugees to arrive and settle in camps should also suffice to make the claim that there are also real losers among the refugees, and that there are internal processes of differentiation going on among the refugees themselves. We are therefore well advised to continue following the complex developments within the refugee field and the many consequences of displacement.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GEOPOLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT: ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS INTO UGANDA'S REFUGEE POLICY IN THE GREAT LAKES VOLATILE CONTEXT

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Introduction

The study situates Uganda's refugee policy within the broader regional landscape of the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa, a zone historically characterized by recurrent conflict, fragile statehood, and persistent cross-border displacement. This volatile context has been shaped by successive civil wars and political instability especially in South Sudan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Ethiopia. The cumulative effect of these crises has produced a regional environment of chronic insecurity and mobility, within which Uganda's liberal refugee stance must be understood. Uganda has emerged as one of Africa's most prominent refugee-hosting nations, adopting a liberal policy framework that has earned it international recognition. Since 2006, the country's open-door policy has granted refugees freedom of movement, the right to work, and even the ability to own property, including land (UNHCR, 2024). This approach has positioned Uganda as a "safe haven" in a volatile Great Lakes region, where conflicts continue to drive mass displacement[45].

Eastern Africa has experienced a protracted history of conflict, characterized by the persistent presence and operations of armed militias and insurgent groups. Uganda itself has faced insurgency, most notably through the Lord's Resistance Army between 1986 and 2008, but in recent years has experienced relative stability compared to its neighbours

[45] For more information on Uganda and Greatlakes, see: Sultan, R. (2024, June 25). *Uganda's U-turn on refugee policy leaves Sudanese asylum seekers stranded*. OpenDemocracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/uganda-refugee-policy-sudanese-asylum-seekers

(Branch, 2011). By contrast, states such as the DRC and South Sudan remain in turmoil, producing waves of displacement across the region. Repeated attacks by militia groups have forced many communities to cross borders in search of safety, with Uganda emerging as a primary destination (Hovil, 2018).

Uganda is among the East African countries hosting the highest number of exiles, including both refugees and undocumented migrants. In 2006, the government adopted an open-door refugee policy, codified in the Refugees Act, which grants displaced persons freedom of movement, the right to work, and the ability to establish businesses and own property, including land (Refugees Act, 2006; UNHCR, 2017). This liberal framework has not only positioned Uganda as a safe haven for refugees but also earned it international recognition, including commendations from the United Nations (UNHCR, 2017). Central to this approach is the creation of "self-reliant" settlements, where integration into local communities is not only encouraged but embedded within the country's policy trajectory (Omata, 2018).

This chapter focuses on South Sudanese refugees displaced into Uganda, as part of the broader theme *Refugees on the Move – South Sudanese in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda*[46]. It argues that Uganda's refugee liberalism must be understood in geopolitical terms, rather than solely humanitarian ones. Key questions guide this inquiry: How has Uganda sustained its generosity amidst socio-economic and political challenges locally, regionally, and internationally? Is Uganda engaging in politics of generosity by assembling refugee suffering as part of its international image, and does this amount to patronage? Finally, are there emerging pressure points that threaten the sustainability of hosting refugees in such large numbers?

In an era when many states are increasingly closing borders and favouring encampment, Uganda's choice to maintain open doors and promote self-supported settlements stands out. This study situates Uganda's refugee policy within the volatile Great Lakes context, highlighting the intersection of humanitarian ideals, state interests, and regional geopolitics.

[46] Refugees on the Move: South Sudanese in Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda (ROM) is a NORHED II -Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development which is a NORAD funded project.

The Case of South Sudanese Displacement

South Sudan has consistently ranked among the most fragile states globally. In 2014, it was identified as the most fragile state in the world, and it has remained within the "Very High Alert" category according to the *Fragile States Index Annual Report 2021* (Fund for Peace, 2021). The outbreak of civil war in 2013 and its subsequent escalation led to widespread societal destruction: countless lives were lost, homesteads were burned, and survivors were forced into displacement. The repeated attacks by armed militias have compelled many South Sudanese to abandon their homes, either becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living under precarious conditions or crossing international borders to seek refuge. Current estimates suggest that more than two million South Sudanese have fled their homes, creating one of the largest displacement crises in Africa (UNHCR, 2022).

Uganda has emerged as one of the primary destinations for South Sudanese refugees. Hosting displaced populations from South Sudan is not a new phenomenon; since the 1990s, Northern Uganda has accommodated refugees fleeing the protracted war between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). At that time, Uganda itself was grappling with internal instability, particularly insurgencies such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which posed significant challenges to the government of President Yoweri Museveni (Branch, 2011). Despite these domestic struggles, Uganda's relative stability in the 2000s and its adoption of a liberal refugee policy in 2006 positioned it as a sanctuary for South Sudanese exiles (Hovil, 2018).

The Uganda–South Sudan border remains porous and has historically been a site of violence, raiding, and militia activity. While Uganda has attempted to pacify its side of the border through both military confrontation and negotiation with armed groups, South Sudan continues to experience recurrent civil wars and localized conflicts. Rebel and militia groups terrorize communities, undermining state institutions and embedding violence into everyday life. This persistent insecurity has placed immense strain on South Sudan's fragile governance structures and contributed to the mass displacement of its population into Uganda and other neighbouring states (Hovil, 2018; Omata, 2018).

South Sudan's displacement crisis cannot be understood in isolation. The country's instability is deeply intertwined with broader regional dynamics. By extension, South Sudan can be situated within the Horn of Africa or at least seen as profoundly affected by the political and security challenges

emanating from the region. As Manger (2023) observes, "The Horn of Africa is an extremely complex region, in which layers upon layers of potential problems are piled one on top of another, all possible drivers of displacement of people" (p. 2). This observation underscores the need to conceptualize the Horn of Africa and more broadly the Great Lakes region as an assemblage of overlapping threats, where armed conflict, fragile governance, economic marginalization, and cross-border violence converge to produce chronic displacement. Uganda's role as a host country must therefore be analysed not only in humanitarian terms but also within this volatile geopolitical landscape. The influx of South Sudanese refugees reflects both the failures of state-building in South Sudan and the broader regional assemblage of insecurity that perpetuates cycles of displacement.

The Greatlakes Region – An Assemblage of Threats

To expand on Manger's idea of the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes as an assemblage of layered threats, we can frame the region not as a set of isolated crises but as an interconnected system where multiple drivers of instability overlap and reinforce one another. Manger's (2023) observation that the Horn is "an extremely complex region, in which layers upon layers of potential problems are piled one on top of another" (p. 2) suggests that displacement must be understood as both a humanitarian crisis and a social process. Refugees are not merely victims of conflict but actors navigating overlapping threats - violence, poverty, environmental stress, and fragile governance. Uganda's liberal refugee policy thus operates within this assemblage, where hospitality and integration are shaped by regional volatility. By conceptualizing the Horn/Great Lakes as an assemblage, we move beyond linear explanations of displacement. Instead, we see how multiple forces intersect to produce chronic instability, and how Uganda's policy of openness is both a humanitarian gesture and a geopolitical strategy in managing these layered threats. These dynamics have produced chronic instability and recurrent refugee flows, which scholars argue are increasingly perceived as existential security challenges requiring extraordinary measures (Stephenson & Stivachtis, 2023).

The instability of Eastern Africa is rooted in a long history of protracted conflicts, militia activities, and geopolitical rivalries. Foreign capitalist demand for cheap raw materials particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, and South Sudan has exacerbated violence and resource exploitation. As Manger (2006) demonstrates in his study of Sudan, resource conflicts in Darfur extend beyond local struggles over land and water, becoming intensified by external economic interests that

transform adaptive community practices into arenas of violent contestation. At the same time, authoritarian rulers have entrenched political repression, further destabilizing fragile states (Autesserre, 2010). To conceptualize these dynamics, Buzan and Wæver (2003) introduced the notion of the Regional Security Complex, which describes regions where security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analysed in isolation. The Great Lakes region exemplifies such a complex, with Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and the DRC forming a web of interdependent insecurities.

Uganda has increasingly positioned itself as a pivotal actor in the Great Lakes region, often described as a "kingmaker" within this turbulent geopolitical landscape. Situated at the heart of the region, Uganda has sought to project itself as both a peace broker and a security provider. The Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) has played a significant role in peacekeeping missions across South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Somalia, thereby extending Uganda's influence beyond its borders (United Nations, 2013). Kampala has also served as a diplomatic hub, hosting and mediating negotiations between warring factions, most notably between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) (International Crisis Group, 2015).

More recently, Uganda's leadership has been formalized through its assumption of the chairmanship of the Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM)[47] under the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the broader Great Lakes region. President Museveni's stewardship of this mechanism underscores Uganda's ambition to consolidate its role as a regional stabilizer, leveraging both military intervention and diplomatic initiatives to shape outcomes in neighbouring states[48] Uganda's efforts have also been recognized internationally, with external actors such as the United States acknowledging its contributions to regional stability through both peacekeeping and diplomatic engagement (Uganda, U.S. Envoy Discuss Strengthening Regional Peace and Security, 2025).

Taken together, Uganda's refugee hosting policies, military interventions, and diplomatic initiatives reveal a broader strategy of regional statecraft.

[47] See https://ungreatlakes.unmissions.org/en/regional-oversight-mechanism-rom

[48] See: Museveni Assumes Regional Peace Leadership, 2025; Leaders of the Great Lakes Region Convene in Kampala, 2025.

By combining humanitarian rhetoric with security provision and peace diplomacy, Uganda has cultivated an image of a stabilizing force in the Great Lakes, even as its actions simultaneously advance national interests and regional influence. Uganda's engagement with regional displacement dynamics is deeply rooted in its historical experience of both hosting and producing refugees. Since the 1960s, Uganda has consistently received Sudanese refugees escaping the protracted north–south civil conflicts, embedding refugee hosting into its national trajectory of borderland governance and humanitarian response (Hovil, 2018). Conversely, the 1970s marked a reversal of flows, as political repression under Idi Amin and subsequent instability compelled large numbers of Ugandans to seek refuge in Sudan, highlighting the cyclical nature of displacement in the region.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 initially promised stability, culminating in the independence of South Sudan in 2011. However, renewed factional fighting within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), particularly between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy Riek Machar, reignited conflict and triggered fresh waves of displacement. These dynamics produced significant refugee flows into Uganda, with thousands of South Sudanese crossing the border and adding to Uganda's already substantial refugee population (UNHCR, 2022).

This historical trajectory underscores Uganda's dual role as both a site of refuge and a source of displacement, situating its contemporary refugee liberalism within a broader regional assemblage of conflict, migration, and humanitarianism. The cyclical nature of displacement between Uganda and Sudan/South Sudan illustrates how refugee hosting cannot be understood in isolation but must be contextualized within overlapping histories of political repression, civil war, and regional insecurity.

The Great Lakes region thus exemplifies the characteristics of a regional security complex, where overlapping threats armed conflict, authoritarianism, resource exploitation, and forced migration create a persistent cycle of instability. Uganda's dual role as both a host of displaced populations and a regional peace broker underscores its centrality in managing this assemblage of threats. Understanding Uganda's refugee liberalism and peace diplomacy within this broader geopolitical framework is essential to grasping the dynamics of displacement and security in the Great Lakes region.

Assemblage Thinking in Perspective

Assemblage thinking, as articulated by DeLanda (2006) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), provides a productive lens for analysing new social formations, cultural problems, and spatial dynamics. Assemblage idea captures the movement of refugees across borders and highlights how newly formed relationships alter the lived realities of displaced populations. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) underscore the dynamic interrelation between constituent elements and the larger systems they form, arguing that such relational structures illuminate complex social processes. Applied to Uganda's refugee management, this perspective highlights how the interplay between localized practices, institutional frameworks, and broader national policies generates a multifaceted approach that cannot be reduced to isolated components. Instead, the Ugandan model emerges as a relational assemblage, where parts and wholes continually shape and redefine one another, offering deeper insight into the country's adaptive strategies for refugee governance. These processes are not unified or linear; rather, they involve diverse dynamics such as class, gender, ethnicity, and political economy, which must be analysed together to grasp the complexity of displacement.

By privileging ethnographic insights over abstract international discourses, assemblage thinking allows us to foreground the existential realities of places where displacement unfolds. This perspective illuminates not only the current situation of refugees in Uganda but also the broader East African context. Refugee presence in the region sheds light on both the immediate conditions of instability and the imagined futures of displaced communities (Manger, 2014). When individuals are subjected to violent social settings over extended periods, their lived worlds undergo profound transformations. Assemblage theory offers a framework for understanding Uganda's responses to refugee experiences as shaped by dynamic processes, including societal perceptions, media representations, political discourses, migration policies, and everyday practices.

Refugees are affected by diverse and ever-changing systems such as border controls, state policies, economic fluctuations, and humanitarian interventions. Uganda's liberal refugee policy granting freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to land, has contributed to a steady rise in displaced persons entering the country. Today, Uganda ranks among the top three refugee-hosting nations globally (UNHCR, 2022). In an era of increasing border securitization and restriction, Uganda's open-door policy creates an assemblage shaped by its migration legal framework,

local politics, regional geopolitics, and humanitarian commitments. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), "an assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections" (p. 8). In the Ugandan case, the assemblage of refugee suffering, humanitarianism, and political interests generates an emerging dilemma: the tension between generosity and geopolitical strategy. Assemblage theory thus helps us to understand the fluid, ever-changing identities of displaced persons and the complexity of power relations that structure migrant lives (Wiertz, 2020).

Uganda's Refugee Hosting: Historical Context and Geopolitics

Uganda's history of refugee hosting stretches back to the colonial period and reflects both humanitarian gestures and geopolitical positioning. During the Second World War, Uganda hosted Polish refugees fleeing the European frontlines, traces of which remain visible in Nyabyeya village in Bunyoro and Koja in present-day Mukono district. Hosting refugees of European descent challenged the racial hierarchies of British colonial Africa, where white supremacy structured social relations. As Polish refugees interacted with local Ugandans, intersections of race and class disrupted colonial stereotypes and revealed the fluidity of social boundaries (Lingelbach, 2020). The Polish presence, later memorialized through the construction of a community health facility financed by the Polish embassy in Kenya, marked one of the earliest episodes of Uganda's engagement with refugee hosting.

Shortly after WWII, Uganda again became a site of refuge during the first Sudanese civil war (the Anyanya rebellion, beginning in 1955). This was followed by the Rwandan Revolution of 1959, which produced mass displacement and ethnic tensions that foreshadowed the 1994 genocide. Uganda's role as a host country was further institutionalized during the International Conference on Refugees in Africa (ICARA) in 1981, when President Apolo Milton Obote appealed for international funding to resettle refugee populations. Obote's government subsequently encamped Rwandese refugees in Kyaka II settlement, a site that remains in existence today.

Under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) led by President Yoweri Museveni, Uganda has continued to employ humanitarian rhetoric in managing refugee crises. This rhetorical framing allows Uganda to escape dehumanizing narratives of refugees as burdens, while simultaneously mastering donor language to attract international funding. Such funding

has been used to galvanize local support and enhance Uganda's regional and international recognition (Hovil, 2018). However, Uganda's humanitarianism has not been without controversy. In 2018, allegations surfaced that the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) was inflating refugee numbers. One explanation offered was that Uganda's policy of free movement made accurate accounting difficult, as refugees often registered multiple times due to their mobility (UNHCR, 2018). Critics argue that refugee presence has been instrumentalized to attract international aid and to generate local popularity by linking refugee hosting to development projects.

Uganda's geopolitical positioning has also been shaped by global security discourses. Following the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the events of September 11, 2001, the United States redefined its war on terror. Uganda positioned itself as a regional peace broker, offering military support to counter terrorism and instability. Ugandan forces have participated in peacekeeping missions in Somalia, while also intervening in conflicts in South Sudan and the DRC (International Crisis Group, 2015). Uganda's dual role as both a host of displaced populations and a regional military actor reflects its strategic alignment with Western donor rhetoric. In contrast to most African states that rely on refugee encampment, Uganda has promoted self-supported settlements, framing refugee hosting in the language of development (Kaiser, 2006).

Uganda's refugee policy can be seen as an assemblage shaped by humanitarianism, donor funding, local politics, regional geopolitics, and global security discourses. The interplay between refugee suffering, humanitarian rhetoric, and political interests creates a fluid and ever-changing landscape. Refugees themselves embody shifting identities, navigating complex power relations that integrate migration policies, border controls, economic conditions, and international aid regimes (DeLanda, 2006; Wiertz, 2020). In this sense, Uganda's refugee hosting is not merely a humanitarian gesture but part of a broader assemblage that links local realities to global discourses. The historical trajectory from Polish refugees in WWII to South Sudanese displacement today, illustrates how Uganda's role has continually evolved within overlapping systems of race, class, geopolitics, and humanitarianism. Assemblage thinking thus illuminates the multiplicity of forces shaping Uganda's refugee politics, revealing both its generosity and its strategic engagement with international recognition and funding.

Refugees as Developmental Assemblage

Uganda's framing of refugees as a development issue can be understood through the lens of assemblage theory, which emphasizes the dynamic interplay of heterogeneous elements- human, institutional, and discursive- that come together to form new social realities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; DeLanda, 2006). In Uganda's refugee landscape, humanitarian aid, donor funding, local governance, and refugee agency do not operate in isolation; rather, they intersect and reshape one another, producing a fluid assemblage that continually evolves. International humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, the World Bank, and bilateral donors, provide critical resources for education, health, and livelihoods in refugee-hosting districts. Programs such as ReHoPE and DRDIP exemplify how aid is embedded within development frameworks, promoting peaceful coexistence and self-reliance (World Bank, 2017). These interventions expand the "dimensions of multiplicity" that Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 8) describe, as new connections between global institutions and local communities alter the nature of refugee hosting.

The Ugandan state, particularly through the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), coordinates refugee-related development projects, manages donor funds, and integrates refugee issues into district-level planning. Local officials, such as district education officers, mediate between donor-supported schools and government institutions, highlighting disparities in resources and salaries. This governance role illustrates how state institutions are woven into the assemblage, balancing humanitarian imperatives with political and economic considerations.

Refugees themselves are not passive recipients of aid but active participants in shaping the assemblage. Their mobility, livelihood strategies, and engagement with host communities influence how policies and programs unfold on the ground. Refugees navigate multiple systems - border controls, donor-funded services, local politics while simultaneously reconstituting their identities and imagined futures (Manger, 2014). Their agency adds another layer to the assemblage, complicating the neat categories of "beneficiaries" and "hosts."

Taken together, Uganda's refugee landscape is a developmental assemblage. Humanitarian aid introduces resources and discourses of protection. Donor funding embeds refugee issues within global development agendas. Local governance mediates and institutionalizes these interventions. Refugee agency reshapes the lived realities of displacement and integration. This assemblage is not static; it shifts as new

actors, policies, and crises emerge. It reflects both generosity and geopolitics, humanitarianism and patronage, development and dependency. Assemblage theory thus illuminates how Uganda's refugee policy is simultaneously a humanitarian project, a development strategy, and a geopolitical manoeuvre, producing a complex and ever-changing refugee landscape.

Empirical Case 1: Palabek Refugee Settlement

Palabek Refugee Settlement, located at Uganda's remote northern border with South Sudan, was historically part of Kitgum district before the creation of Lamwo district. Situated approximately 560 kilometres from Kampala, Uganda's capital, Palabek occupies a frontier zone long associated with insecurity. For decades, the area was considered a "no-go" region due to militia and rebel activities, particularly those of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Its proximity to South Sudan has also made it vulnerable to incursions by violent militia groups from across the border. Following the signing of the Juba Peace Accord between the Ugandan government and the LRA in 2008, relative peace was restored, enabling new forms of settlement and development.

At the time of writing, Palabek remained administratively part of Lamwo district, though discussions were underway regarding its elevation to district status. Historically, Palabek was marginalized, cut off from basic social services such as roads, health centres, and schools. It was also deeply affected by the twenty-year LRA insurgency and continues to lie within a "militia corridor" terrorized by armed gangs and warrior groups from South Sudan. The establishment of a refugee settlement in such a location has produced multiple benefits: pacification of a previously insecure area, extension of state services, and opportunities for both refugees and host populations. Situated close to the South Sudan border, Palabek settlement functions as Uganda's principal site for hosting South Sudanese refugees, reflecting both its geographic significance and its central role within the country's refugee management framework. As Kaiser (2006) notes that Uganda's refugee policy mandates individuals to formally register with state authorities upon arrival. Following registration, refugees are required to reside within government-designated settlements, which are typically situated in peripheral and underdeveloped regions near the country's international borders.

Over time, Palabek has undergone significant transformation in response to the administrative and commercial demands of refugee settlement.

Kitgum town remains the nearest urban centre, but Palabek itself has developed into a vibrant trading hub. Approaching the settlement from Kitgum, one encounters a growing commercial landscape: an array of merchandise ranging from household items, small shops, shanty restaurants, little fabric stores and a bus station. Prior to the establishment of the settlement in 2016, residents trekked long distances to access basic services or transport. As one resident, Gimo, explained: *"…we can now get the things easily. It was not like this before. You can now buy sugar, soap, even clothes without moving very far. We now have electricity and roads have been opened up, local farmers have where to sell their produce in the trading centre..."*

Palabek exemplifies the broader refugee economy that has emerged under Uganda's progressive refugee policy. Betts et al. (2016, p. 115), in their studies of Nakivale and Kyangwali settlements, note that "over decades of hosting new waves of refugees, the geography of both settlements has been gradually transformed, taking an increasingly 'city-like' features." Similarly, Palabek demonstrates how humanitarian interventions and refugee presence reshape local geographies, producing new forms of urbanization and economic activity.

The settlement's establishment also generated employment opportunities for host populations, including casual labour, construction work, and trade in foodstuffs. Infrastructural development, especially roads, electricity, and schools has further altered the socio-economic landscape. As the Chairperson of Palabek LCIII observed: *"…when the settlement was started in Palabek in 2016, it created employment opportunities for refugee host populations as casual labourers, construction works, sale of food stuffs during to settlement dwellers and visitors, roads have been opened up and we now have schools…"*

Empirical Case 2: West Nile Region

The West Nile region of Uganda provides another illustrative example of how refugee hosting has been framed as both a humanitarian and developmental issue. Settlements such as Pagirinya, Nyumanzi, Ayilo, and Bidibidi have become focal points for donor-led development initiatives, often presented as gestures of appreciation for Uganda's hospitality toward displaced populations. In Adjumani district, for instance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded the construction of a stadium as a symbolic recognition of the community's role in hosting refugees. Similarly, in Paridi, a small village in West Nile, UNHCR

handed over a sports facility to support refugee-related activities. This project formed part of the ReHoPE Strategic Framework, financed by JICA, and reflects Japan's broader diplomatic appreciation of Uganda's refugee policy.

Beyond recreational infrastructure, the region has also benefited from rural electrification projects sponsored by the World Bank. According to an official from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), "Rural Electrification for refugee settlements of Pagirinya in Adjumani district, Bidibidi one zone in Yumbe and Imvepi refugee settlement in Arua district are all in appreciation to the refugee hosting communities for peaceful co-existence" (Interview with OPM official).

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) plays a central role in Uganda's refugee response, particularly in the northern and West Nile regions where the majority of settlements are located. Its interventions combine immediate humanitarian relief with longer-term developmental support. On the humanitarian side, NRC provides shelter, education, and water and sanitation services to address urgent needs. At the same time, it invests in livelihood opportunities and resilience-building initiatives designed to foster self-reliance among both refugees and host communities (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023).

In Adjumani district, NRC supports education through temporary learning spaces and teacher training to ease overcrowding, while in Mungula settlement it collaborates with UNHCR on agricultural projects that allow refugees and hosts to jointly cultivate land for food security. NRC also improves access to clean water and sanitation facilities in settlements where infrastructure is limited. In Yumbe district's Bidibidi settlement, one of the largest in the world, NRC provides shelter construction and upgrades for vulnerable households, vocational training for youth and women to reduce dependency on food aid, and legal aid services to help refugees navigate documentation and land disputes. In Arua district's Imvepi settlement, NRC delivers emergency shelter and water points for new arrivals, alongside longer-term resilience programs such as agricultural training, small business support, and community dialogue platforms that promote peaceful coexistence between refugees and host populations. Such initiatives highlight how refugee presence catalyses development interventions that extend beyond humanitarian relief to include long-term infrastructure and service delivery.

The South Sudan refugee response in West Nile is delivered by a complex assemblage of actors national and local government institutions,

international organizations, UN agencies, and bilateral partners. At the time of fieldwork, nearly one hundred partners were engaged in refugee-related programming in the region. This multiplicity of actors underscores the assemblage nature of refugee hosting in Uganda: humanitarian aid, donor funding, local governance, and refugee agency converge to reshape the socio-economic landscape of host communities.

Palabek and West Nile as seen in cases 1&2 above, exemplify how Uganda's refugee hosting practices can be understood through assemblage thinking, each case highlighting distinct yet interconnected dynamics of humanitarianism, governance, refugee agency, and local development. Palabek, situated near the South Sudan border, demonstrates how settlements emerge as assemblages of humanitarian aid, state intervention, refugee agency, and local economic practices. Its transformation from a marginalized, insecure borderland into a site of economic activity and social reconfiguration illustrates how connections between refugees, hosts, humanitarian actors, and the state continually reshape the settlement's nature (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; DeLanda, 2006). In contrast, West Nile illustrates how refugee hosting produces assemblages that extend beyond immediate humanitarian relief to encompass broader developmental interventions. Stadium construction, electrification projects, and service delivery initiatives are not isolated acts but part of a wider network linking global donors, local governance structures, host communities, and refugees themselves. These interventions expand the "dimensions of multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), reconfiguring marginal borderlands into sites of infrastructure, investment, and geopolitical recognition. Taken together, Palabek and West Nile reveal Uganda's refugee policy as a dynamic assemblage: in Palabek, refugee agency and humanitarianism transform local geographies, while in West Nile, development and humanitarianism converge to reshape regional economies and governance. Both cases underscore how assemblage thinking illuminates the relational and evolving character of refugee hosting, where multiplicities of actors and forces continually redefine the social, economic, and geopolitical significance of Uganda's borderlands.

Refugee Hosting and Donor Assistance as Assemblages

Uganda's refugee policy cannot be understood in isolation from the international humanitarian and donor assistance that sustains it. The South Sudan refugee response alone is delivered by nearly one hundred partners, supplemented by initiatives from the World Bank and other bilateral agencies. This raises critical questions: without such external support,

would Uganda continue to front its policy of free movement, self-reliance, and integration for refugees? How much of Uganda's humanitarian posture is contingent upon donor flows, and what opportunities emerge from refugee hosting?

Empirical evidence suggests that donor assistance has been central to transforming refugee hosting into a developmental assemblage. Accessibility to community facilities such as health centres, schools, and food distribution points has increased interaction between host and refugee communities, boosting local trade and generating household income. As one representative from the Refugee Welfare Council in Palabek explained: *"The accessibility to the community facilities, such as health facilities, schools, food distribution points has increased interaction between host and refugee communities, helped boost the economic trades and generate household income."*

At the programmatic level, Uganda has benefited from large-scale investments such as the Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan (JLIRP), which committed UGX 608,515,468,751 (approximately USD 169 million) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Similarly, UNHCR initiated agricultural projects in 2020, including a 270-acre refugee-run farm in Mungula, Adjumani district. According to the Local Council Chairperson of Aliwara: *"The commercial maize farming has enabled peaceful co-existence between the hosts and mainly the South Sudanese refugees in the area…"* Local residents echoed this sentiment, noting that refugee presence had catalyzed infrastructural improvements: *"This village did not have roads or schools before the settlement…"* (Agwara, women's representative, Aliwara).

Benefits at Multiple Levels

Uganda's refugee hosting generates benefits across three interconnected levels: local, regional, and global, each of which can be conceptualized as part of a broader assemblage of geopolitics, development and humanitarianism.

Local Level: Refugee settlements are often located in remote, marginalized, or previously insecure areas. Their establishment brings basic services such as water, electricity, and road networks, while also pacifying zones once dominated by rebel activity. Palabek settlement, for example, was formerly a stronghold of the LRA but has since been transformed into a site of infrastructure and economic activity. Employment opportunities for host populations, disparities in teacher

salaries between government and humanitarian-funded schools, and the expansion of trading centres all illustrate how refugee presence reshapes local socio-economic landscapes.

Regional Level: Uganda's refugee policy must also be situated within the Great Lakes security complex, an assemblage of threats including armed groups such as SPLA/M, LRA, RPF, M23, and ADF. Hosting large refugee populations is not only a humanitarian gesture but also a regional security strategy. Uganda's history of hosting Rwandese refugees since 1959, which eventually contributed to regime change in Rwanda in 1994, underscores the geopolitical implications of refugee flows. Cross-border disputes with the DRC and accusations from Sudan during the LRA war highlight how refugee hosting intersects with regional rivalries and diplomacy.

Global Level: Uganda employs humanitarian rhetoric to escape dehumanizing narratives and to sanitize its contested human rights record. Donors have at times threatened to withdraw funding for basic services due to concerns about democracy and rule of law. Yet Uganda has strategically leveraged refugee hosting much like its engagement in HIV/AIDS campaigns and counterterrorism to secure international legitimacy and resources. In the contemporary global capitalist economy, refugee bodies are managed (Fassin 2012) as part of broader systems of aid, security, and development, with Uganda positioned as a key partner in Western migration management strategies. Assemblage theory helps illuminate these dynamics by showing how Uganda's refugee policy is not a singular, unified project but a multiplicity of interconnected processes. Humanitarian aid, donor funding, local governance, refugee agency, and geopolitical interests converge to form an assemblage that continually reshapes Uganda's refugee landscape. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue, assemblages expand their dimensions of multiplicity as new connections are forged, altering their nature.

Conclusion

Uganda's refugee hosting regime can be conceptualized as a dynamic assemblage in which humanitarian, developmental, and geopolitical dimensions converge to produce a distinctive form of refugee liberalism. Humanitarian organizations including UNHCR, UNDP, the World Bank, and bilateral donors supply resources and infrastructure that materially reconfigure settlement geographies. State institutions such as the Office of the Prime Minister and district governments mediate and coordinate

refugee policy, embedding governance within local contexts and extending state presence into marginal borderlands. Refugees and host communities actively co-produce economies, social relations, and localized transformations, integrating displacement into everyday practices of livelihood and exchange. At the regional level, refugee flows intersect with the Great Lakes security complex, where cross-border disputes, armed groups, and fragile frontiers situate Uganda's hosting within broader geopolitical strategies of stabilization. Globally, discourses of humanitarian generosity frame Uganda's approach, legitimizing donor support and international recognition, while simultaneously obscuring underlying political and human rights concerns.

This assemblage is fluid, contingent, and continually reconfigured, revealing Uganda's refugee liberalism as more than a static policy. It is an adaptive strategy sustained by donor flows, legitimized through humanitarian rhetoric, and embedded within local, regional, and global systems. Assemblage theory illuminates how heterogeneous elements donor funding, state governance, refugee agency, local economies, and security imperatives interact to reshape one another, expanding the "dimensions of multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Uganda's refugee liberalism thus operates simultaneously as humanitarian generosity, developmental intervention, and geopolitical manoeuvring, transforming marginal spaces into sites of infrastructure, economic activity, and international recognition.

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SECTION 3

THE PROBLEM OF INTEGRATION: A PROBLEM EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER NINE

POLICY VS PRACTICE: CHALLENGES OF REFUGEES' LOCAL INTEGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLENT ETHNIC CONFLICT IN GAMBELLA, ETHIOPIA

Hika Dereje and Fekadu A. Tufa

Introduction

Building on other contributions from Gambella, Ethiopia, this chapter specifically focuses on the role of ethnicity in shaping refugee-host relationship, and how this has affected the programmatic Ethiopian government and other refugee governance actors' endeavours in locally integrating refugees – this could be economic, legal, social, political or a combination of all. Ethnic based violent conflict has characterized Gambella in the last several decades. The conflicts have been primarily between the Anywaa and Nuer, the two major ethnic groups competing to dominate the Gambella national regional state. The refuge phenomena have also been broadly cited for contributing to the protracted violent conflicts in the Region (Feyissa 2011; Hagos 2021). The fact that refugees in the Region also belong to either of the two ethnic groups makes understanding the ethnic factor in refugee-host relationship as well as the planned local integration crucial.

In Gambella as of mid-2025 refugees were hosted in seven refugee camps: Jewi, Kule, Nygunyyiel, Okugu, Pinyudo-1, Pinyudo-2, and Tierkidi (UNHCR, 2025). To examine the role of ethnicity in the recurring and prolonged ethnic violent conflict including refugee-host tensions we used interactions at the micro-level by identifying refugee-host relationships at two refugee camps: Kule and Pinyudo-1. The former represents a situation where refugees and the neighbouring host community belong to the same ethnic group - the Anywaa. In the latter camp, on the other hand, refugees and host community belong to different groups: the refugees are Nuer while the host community are Anywaa. Using these two contexts we analyse how belongingness to the same or different ethnic group shapes forms of refugee-host interaction, including the potential refugee-local

integration. At micro-level refugees and host communities interact in their everyday experience such as markets, schools, clinics, water points etc. In the situation of tensions and conflicts, the two stop sharing these services and avoid interactions. The micro-level interactions are not only inseparable from the macro or regional context but the two also shape one another. Thus, when refugees in Kule experience more positive interactions with host communities living next to the camp with whom they share ethnic identity, it is also about their concerns at the regional level. Similarly, the Nuer refugees' tense relationship with their hosts around Pinyudo-1, is largely shaped by the broader Nuer-Anywaa ethnic tensions and conflicts in the region.

Thus, generally, Ethiopian Nuer welcomes refugees' local integration mainly because the overwhelming majorities of the refugees from South Sudan belong to the Nuer while the Anywaa oppose it due to the demographic challenge they anticipate the local integration of the refugees would cause. As a result, harmonious inter-ethnic relationships and local socio-economic integration exist where the refugees share ethnicity with the host, and tension characterizes where they are different.

Conceptualization

Several studies have been conducted on refugee-host relationships in the Horn of Africa. For instance, Kinyanjui Sharon Mumbi (2017) studied refugee-host community relationships in Kenya. In his study, the author explored that competition over resources and socio-cultural differences led to refugee-host conflict in Kenya. Girma (2020) studied refugee-host relationships in Benishangul-Gumuz, Ethiopia. Tufa et al (2021) have also critically reflected on refugee-host relationships in Tigray and Afar regions of Ethiopia. There have also been a few studies on refugee-host relationship in Gambella (Carver 2020; World Bank 2020), and refugees and power dynamics (Hagos, 2021). Hagos (2021) explored refugees and local power dynamics in Gambella that discussed political power dynamics, such as competition over political entitlement between Agnwa and Nuer as a major reason for the refugee-host tensions in Gambella. However, the role of ethnicity in refugee-host relationship and local integration as a durable solution has not been emphasized in these studies.

Kinyanjui Sharon Mumbi (2017) argued that local integration is a forgotten solution in refugee governance. The term local integration takes different types, forms, and purposes. Local integration was considered the mode two or more people are connected, or how two or more people or

groups regard and behave towards each other for different purposes. The connections may be by blood or marriage.[49] In the context of refugees, some emphasize the state's involvement and the relationship between refugee and their surrounding host communities (Tara, 2012), whereas others prioritize the opportunity structures available to refugees in their new environments, such as the possibility to access labour markets or on social inclusion (Agblorti et al., 2023; Esser, 2004). More inclusively, Mumbi (2017) tried to clarify and specify local integration of refugees as a two-way traffic where refugees need to adapt to the new environment and the host community accommodates and welcomes refugees (Mumbi, 2017).

Another scholar considers local integration a process with three interrelated dimensions: (1) a legal process, whereby the host state grants refugees a wider range of rights and entitlements, (2) an economic process in which refugees establish sustainable livelihoods and attain a growing degree of self-reliance to become less dependent on humanitarian assistance, and (3) a social process that enables refugees to live among or alongside the host communities without fear of systematic discrimination, intimidation, or exploitation by the authorities or people of the asylum country (Crisp, 2004). Although integration is a controversial concept in the refugee context, a common understanding of the term can be generated from the literature as it involves a wide-ranging process of settling and accommodating refugees that begins upon arrival in the receiving society (Castles et al. 2002, as cited in Meta van der Linden & Jaco Dagevos, 2024).

In this chapter, our point of departure is by considering refugees' local integration as part of the three official durable solutions, the other two being return and resettlement, and the attention it recently attracted from the global refugee actors and the Government of Ethiopia. With the support of the UN agencies and other partners in refugee governance, the Government of Ethiopia has started the process of integrating refugees who have lived for a protracted period of time in local service provisions and employment. There is also a tendency to permanently settle and integrate refugees who have spent more than twenty years in the refugee camps. We argue that while this is an encouraging initiative, it requires a context-specific and conflict-sensitive approach grounded in local history. Basically, in an ethnically diverse and conflict-prone host community,

[49] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/relationship. Accessed 7 June 2024

where this study was carried out, this local integration process is not only about policy implementation but also a dynamic, negotiated process shaped by historical narratives, identity politics, and the trends of conflict.

The study area suffers from violent historical grievances that reinforce the current tense refugee-host relationship. In such context, the arrival, presence and local integration of refugees can be seen through the lens of past grievances. Such impact of longstanding historical grievances and mistrust on the contemporary identity politics where the refugee demography is a threat to the hosts reinforcing the existing hostility and tensions in refugee-host is covered elsewhere in the volume (see Tufa in this volume). Besides, refugee local integration can also influence or be influenced by local power dynamics, including ethnic representation in regional or local councils, as well as access to and control over land (see Emana in this volume). In this chapter we focus on ethnic interactions and tensions at micro-level at two localities and the challenges of refugees' local integration promoted by the state and the UN agencies in the face of declining aid. Instead of evaluating the extent of refugees' local integration, we examine the challenges associated with implementing the local integration agenda.

Research Method

The data for this paper was collected from two refugee camps: Kule refugee camp, characterized by relative ethnic homogeneity between the refugees and the host, and Pinyudo-1 refugee camp, where the majority of the refugees are Nuer while the hosts are the Agnwa. Kule and Pinyudo refugee camps are located 40 km and 112 km respectively from Gambella city, the regional capital. The two camps were selected because of their diverse ethnic composition to examine the role ethnic identity plays in a refugee's local integration by comparing the camps' situations. Informants, including both refugees and host communities, were selected based on purposive sampling and the snowball technique. Interviews, FGDs, and life histories were used to collect data. 44 in-depth interviews, 14 key informant interviews, 6 life histories, and 5 FGDs, each having 6 members, were conducted in both sites. The interviews and FGDs with the refugees and the host community were conducted in local languages, and transcripts were translated by the native speakers of the Anywaa and Nuer languages.

Results and Discussion

Refugees' local integration vis-a-vis the national refugee policy

In the literature of displacement studies, repatriation, resettlement, and local integration are considered key durable solutions to the growing refugee issues. In this chapter, we discuss refugees' local integration in Gambella within the context of Ethiopian government's national refugee policies. According to the Ethiopian Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019, article 41, local integration means a process whereby recognized individuals or groups of refugees who have lived in Ethiopia for a long period are provided with a permanent residence permit upon their request to facilitate their broader integration with Ethiopian nationals until they fully attain durable solutions to their problems (FDRE Refugees Proclamation, 2019). However, there is no further explanation on whether this is temporary inclusion in livelihood or naturalization.

RRS officials in Gambella argued that the office in collaboration with other partners is implementing projects focused on refugee local integration through creating inclusive social services and economic growth opportunities. On the ground, for both the refugee and host communities, the concept of local integration is unclear. Many of them understood it as it inherently implies the host country's provision of citizenship to the refugees. However, over five years after the revised proclamation that triggered the discourse of local integration, the refugees are still in a state of uncertainty about what may come as a result of local integration. An FGD participant from Kule refugees stated:

We [refugees] want local integration if we get the opportunity, if not we would like to return to South Sudan as much as possible if the security issues there get resolved. However, we haven't taken any legal steps towards local integration or return to our home country so far. Overall, we don't want to stay long here in this camp [Kule refugee camp], because camp life is very difficult and challenging (FGD-KR1).

The same thing is reported in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp, where informants from the Aynwaa refugees argue that they are in favour of local integration. My FGD participant from these refugees stated, *"We want local integration and become Ethiopian citizens if the opportunities are open to integrating refugees to their surrounding host communities or host country"* (FGD-P1AR). These are views in places where refugee-host relationships are positive and strong. On the contrary, in Pinyudo-1 where the refugee-host interaction was very tense, the Nuer refugees were

hesitant about local integration and preferred resettlement in other countries. A 35-year-old informant from Nuer refugees stated, "*From the beginning, we were displaced from our homeland due to violent conflict. Here also, we continue to suffer from ethnic strife and are imprisoned [confined] in this camp. If possible, I would prefer resettlement in a third country, as staying in Ethiopia or returning to South Sudan is not viable due to ongoing conflicts in both countries"* (IDI-P1NR-6).

In both contexts, local integration is considered part of the whole complex environment. Where there were relatively peaceful situations, refugees consider their future lives to be in Ethiopia, integrating for them is becoming Ethiopian if they get the opportunity. However, those in very tense political situations such as the Nuer in Pinyudo-1 consider local integration to be the continuation of the current challenge and therefore prefer resettlement in a third country. In other words, they know other potential alternatives to local integration, and they would like to take it.

Local integration: A contested issue in Gambella

Since Ethiopia signed an agreement to implement comprehensive refugee response frameworks, local integration has emerged as a central point of discussion. While this policy offers potential opportunities for refugees and host communities, it also presents significant challenges and uncertainties or could be perceived that way by the host communities in places such as Gambella where local contestations are already quite high. In a focus group discussion held with Anywaa hosts in Itang, all FGD participants argued that they refuse refugee-local integration, as it leads to a demographic shift in the region, and probably tends to increase the existing ethnic conflict in the region. One FGD participant stated:

From the beginning, we don't have clear knowledge and understanding of the objectives of 'refugee-local integration'. Besides, we are concerned that refugee-local integration could negatively impact the local economy, politics, demographics, social structures, environment, and cultural ways of life. Therefore, we don't want refugee-local integration at all (FGD-KAH-1).

This extract from a focus group discussion somewhat represents the views of the Anywaa public. During the discussions and from the above quote, it was clear that the Anywaa host community members have developed a common position and have similar responses toward refugees' local integration. A 32-year-old government employee informant from Pinyudo

also pointed out a more or less similar view concerning refugee-local integration and its impacts on host communities.

Now, refugees outnumber host communities. If they locally integrate, it will lead to a demographic shift [in Gambella], which may directly allow them to gain direct control over political, economic, social, and other aspects of life in the region. This may create extremely damaging conflict due to competition over getting access to resources in the future. Even today, the increasing number of refugees has led to the destruction of the environment in the region, as refugees are cutting and burning trees for different purposes including charcoal [causing deforestation] (IDI-P1H-4).

From the above quote, it is clear that the Anywaa host community members oppose to refugees' local integration because they have already convinced themselves that integration would lead to different social, economic, political, and environmental problems. Generally, the host community tends to use similar arguments. Girma's (2020) study in *Bambasi refugee camp and its surroundings in Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Western Ethiopia,* show a similar host community argument. However, we do not mean the host communities' concern is unfounded. Both demographic politics and environmental degradation due to deforestation are realities on the ground. The demographic politics in Gambella is due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the refugees are Nuer that directly related the ongoing violent ethnic conflict to refugee-host relations (see also other chapters on Gambella). Our key informant who was working for an international NGO accuses the government of not clarifying local integration to the extent the sensitive political environment demands . He stated, "*Local integration of refugees is a highly sensitive and politicized issue. Consequently, many host communities are resistant to the idea. A main grievance among these communities is that the government implemented the policy without prior consultation with local stakeholders and achieving any consensus with them [host]"* (KII-INGO-3). This view was shared by another key informant who was working in a government office in Pinyudo:

*In the beginning, host communities were not informed about the concept of refugee-local integration as far as I know. Upon hearing of the initiative, a strong and widespread opposition emerged, significantly hindering refugee-local interactions in Pinyudo-1 Nuer refugees. This resistance has posed a major challenge to the successful implementation of the integration process in the area (*KII-GO-1).

These data imply that host communities especially Agnwaa ethnic groups strongly oppose refugee-local integration. On the contrary, the Nuer host community members support refugee-local integration. They expressed explicit support for refugee-local integration and emphasized their willingness to fully participate in and contribute to the successful implementation of the process. In this regard, a 38-year-old Nuer informant from Kule who belongs to the host community stated, "*I don't have any problem concerning refugees' local integration and its implementation. Even we [the Nuer] agree and support the implementation of this process as much as we can* (IDI-KNH-3).

The statement reveals the differences between the informants along ethnic lines. On the other hand, government and non-government organizations are trying to work towards diversifying and improving the livelihood of refugees and the surrounding host communities through establishing inclusive and shared projects. This is expected to play, according to informants, a pivotal role in improving one's socioeconomic status, and a network of connections between the refugees and the host to promote refuge-local integration. According to a key informant from the refugee and returnees service (RRS) in Gambella:

Nowadays, we [RRS] are trying to integrate refugees into host communities by promoting peaceful co-existence through community dialogues, strengthening livelihood activities, and mainstreaming basic social services. We are also working on creating awareness in collaboration with higher government officials at all levels to reduce conflict between refugees and the host population. Nowadays, there is a conducive atmosphere for peaceful co-existence, and the intensity of conflict has downsized and become relatively stable and more secure than it was before. Moreover, we are working on identifying refugees who want and fulfil the criteria for local integration and facilitate their local integration process including other related issues like employment and residence permit. Furthermore, we have already given a resident permit and refugee national ID cards to a few thousand refugees who want to live in the country [Ethiopia] in peace with host communities (KII-GO-3).

The RRS is trying to take some positive measures in this very complex environment to facilitate refugee socio-economic integration of the refugees locally. This progress is evidenced by some refugees who have residence permits and get paid employment and mobility permit. The positive steps taken by the Ethiopian government and its local

representatives should be extended into consultation with the local host community.

The role ethnic identity plays in the local integration of refugees

In Gambella, ethnic identity plays a great role in determining refugee-local integration. Belonging or not belonging to either of the two politically and demographically dominant ethnic groups in Gambella is critical in local integration. As discussed above, ethnic belonging is more important than citizenship status evidenced in the Nuer host community members' support for local integration as opposed to the Anywaa. In this context, a participant of an FGD from the host Anywaa communities stated:

It is clear that refugees are Nuer who came from South Sudan following the civil war that broke out there. For us [Anywaa communities] there is no difference between the Nuer who are citizens [of Ethiopia] and those who are refugees. This is because whenever ethnic conflict arises between Nuer and Anywaa host communities, the Nuer who are refugees organize themselves and stand on the Nuer [the citizen] side. What is important in Gambella is belongingness to an ethnic group [not citizenship]. This has been intensifying existing ethnic conflict in the region. That is why we don't want refugees' integration into host communities (FGD-KAH-1).

This data revealed that Anywaa ethnic group opposes local integration of refugees, as they consider refugees as a threat to their community's peace and stability. Conversely, there was no evidence from the refugee side that supports the host communities' view. However, it is public knowledge that the division in Gambella is usually along ethnic lines and that regardless of their citizenship status individuals support their ethnic groups (Hagos, 2021). Due to the same inter-ethnic conflict and security situation, refugee-local integration is not going well or at least far behind what the government actors are claiming. According to our Nuer refugees FGD participant, "*As far as we [Nuer refugees] know, the implementation of refugee-local integration on the ground is not going well. This is mainly because of the continuing ethnic conflict. To our knowledge, no refugees are locally integrated, and even we don't want to integrate in such an insecure environment"* (FGD-P1NR-2). Of course, this was directly contrasted by Anywaa refugee informants in the same camp, who share similar ethnic backgrounds and are more welcomed by the hosts, making them prefer local integration.

In contrast to the data obtained and stated above from the Nuer informant, one of our informants from Anywaa refugees in Pinyudo-1 stated, "*We*

[Anywaa refugees] belong to the same ethnic group with our surrounding host communities; we share a similar culture and speak the same language. Therefore, if we get an opportunity, we prefer to locally integrate into the host communities" (IDI-P1AR-6).

Belongingness to similar ethnic groups and having close relatives in the locality play a significant role in determining refugee-local integration. There are some locally integrated refugees, in the political sense, even beyond socio-cultural integration. These are mainly those who have nearest relatives in the host communities. The more refugees belong to the same ethnic groups with host communities and have nearest relatives in the region the better they locally integrate, as they get residence in the locality and local ID card (FGD-P1H-1).

This indicates a strong parallel between shared ethnic backgrounds and a sense of collective identity between refugees and host community members. As noted above, the Nuer host community members affirmed this by their acceptance of Nuer refugees in Kule, and Kule refugees also showed willingness for refugee-local integration. However, the Nuer refugees in Pinyuod-1 were hesitant about local integration in the locality where the host community surrounding the refugee camp is predominantly Anywaa ethnic groups. Similarly, the Anywaa host communities who strongly oppose Nuer refugees' local integration in Kule encourage the Anywaa refugees' local integration in Pinyudo where they share ethnic similarities. This shows that at the micro-level the dramatic relationship between the refugees and host community members is about ethnic relationship between the Anywaa and the Nuer which has grown hostile in the last several decades (see Tufa in this volume).

These contrasting approaches highlight the prominent role of a shared ethnic identity in determining refugee-local integration in the study sites. Recent literature also emphasized the roles proximate networks of ethnicity, families, children, and kin play in facilitating social integration (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). Newland et al (2007) also further argued that ethnic divides have great impacts in determining refugee local integration where a group of people from the same ethnic groups have a strong sense of oneness which is very important for local integration and the reverse has true for a group of people from different ethnic groups (Newland et al., 2007).

Recurrent conflict between refugee and host communities

Recently Anywaa-Nuer violent inter-ethnic conflict skirmishes is enormously affecting refugee-host relationships in Gambella. This development that has been occurring for a long time has now gone beyond tearing down the refugee-host interaction. It has directly affected refugee governance in the region. A host community member who participated in an FGD conducted with host communities in Kule stated, *"… whenever conflicts arise between Ethiopian Nuer and Ethiopian Agnwaa, refugees organize themselves and stand by the side of their respective ethnic group [either Nuer or Agnwaa] and take part in the conflict rather than being neutral"* (FGD-KAH-3). Similar cases were reported in Pinyudo–1 Nuer site refugee camp. A 42 year-old informant, who is working as an incentive worker in the refugee camp explained:

There is no explicit reason for conflict between refugees and host communities. It is rather due to the deep-rooted and prolonged conflict between the Ethiopian Nuer and the Ethiopian Agnwaa. Thus, whenever such conflict arises between Nuer and Agnwaa, the Nuer refugees are vulnerable to attack because Agnwaa citizens see and treat Nuer refugees similar to the way they treat Nuer citizens just because we belong to the same ethnic group…Some Agnwaa men intensify this conflict with their attitude that refugees should not settle on their land [Agnwaa land]. As a result, Nuer refugees are vulnerable to continuous attacks by Agnwaa hosts (KII-P1-NR).

The quote above provides a compelling argument that conflicts between refugees and their surrounding host communities are not 'refugees' versus 'host' as such. They rather are part and manifestations of the pre-existing inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts. Refugees become targets due to shared ethnicity with one of the conflicting groups. The case presented demonstrates how a long-standing conflict between the Nuer and Anywaa communities in Ethiopia is the underlying cause of violence against Nuer refugees. The refugees became victims of the longstanding problems that had predates their arrival – an intertwined complex problem discussed in chapter by Tufa in this volume.

Generally, in Pinyudo the Nuer refugees and the surrounding host community have little interaction. The refugees are restricted to the camp and unable to move freely outside the camp, at least during fieldwork for this paper was conducted in 2023 and 2024. Due to this recurrent violence, many refugees were displaced from Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp out

of fear for their lives. They left this refugee camp and reportedly moved to other camps that were surrounded by Nuer hosts (IDI-P1NR-7).

In most cases, minor disputes between individual refugees and host community members often escalate into larger group conflicts, tragically resulting in loss of life. This rapid escalation hinders positive relationships and local integration efforts. Thus, refugee informants emphasized the challenges of maintaining positive relationships, let alone local integration, under such circumstances; because such conflicts quickly ignite broader tensions, creating a significant obstacle to peaceful coexistence and integration within the host community. Eventually, this cycle of escalation undermines stability and jeopardizes the well-being of both refugee communities and their surrounding host populations.

An in-depth interview conducted with Kule refugees' central committee member highlighted the conflict between two individuals, one from the refugee, and the other from a host community member in Kule refugee camp in 2019 as follows:

In 2019, two boys - one from a refugee and the other from a host community began fighting after excessive alcohol consumption inside the camp, on the day of the Ethiopian New Year holiday celebration. The conflict escalated as host communities organized themselves and stood by the side of their man. Tragically, this conflict resulted in the death of two persons from refugees and many others injured. Similarly, sometimes host community children beat refugees' children when refugee children go outside the camp, often escalating into a broader violent conflict between the two communities [refugees and hosts] (IDI-KR-12).

On top of this, refugee informants reported that intimidation by host communities is another significant issue affecting refugee-host relationships. The refugees feel that the host communities create sometimes fear and tension among refugees deliberately. An FGD participant from Kule refugees stated, "*Host community members sometimes frighten us, and their use of firearms occasionally supports this strategy. As a result, we live in a constant fear for our safety"* (FGD-KR-4). Overall, the prolonged and continuous ethnic conflict negatively impacts refugee-host relations, intensifying ethnic tensions, fuelling disputes, and leading to violent conflicts between refugees and their surrounding host communities. A previous study also argued that, Anywaa and Nuer ethnic conflict in Gambella has persisted for decades in the region (Abraham, 2002, as cited in Eticha, 2013; see also Feyissa, 2010),

and made ethnic conflict the major challenge in the refugee-host relationships.

Some of the stories relate the micro-violence in Gambella and the protracted conflict in South Sudan that makes them flee from their country. The following stories from one of the refugee informants would help to understand the longstanding impact of this violence on individual households.

I fled from South Sudan to Ethiopia in 2014 to save the lives of myself and my children from the brutal civil war that broke out in the country. I arrived here with my mother, brother, and seven children. My husband died in the conflict between the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups in 1992. Unfortunately, I lost both my mother and brother in the violent conflict between refugees and the host community in the Kule camp in 2019. My home is here in a refugee camp, where life is extremely difficult…I belong to the Nuer. Recurrent conflicts between refugees and host communities have also strained our relationship. Currently, there is a high degree of distrust between refugees and host communities, where host communities see refugees as thieves whenever host communities' property such as cereals, sheep, goats, and other properties get lost. As a result, I choose to remain within the camp for safety reasons since there are limited opportunities for positive interaction of refugees with their surrounding host community members (LH-KR-3).

The life story of this woman highlights the ongoing security threat refugees were facing. After losing her husband in South Sudan, she was forced to leave her country and raised her children alone. Again, she lost her mother and brother here in Ethiopia in the violent conflict between refugees and their hosts. On top of this, she has been suffering from poverty, limited movement due to insecurity making her confined to the camp with continued challenges of uncertainties. Another interesting story of life in protracted displacement and violence is described by another informant:

I came to Ethiopia in 1994 following the war that broke out between Sudan and South Sudan to save the life of my family and my own. From the moment I arrived, we have been mainly supported by different support given to us by aid organizations. Also, I'm an incentive worker working as a security guard as a supplementary livelihood opportunity. The services in the camp are so limited that we faced poverty, insufficient food, malnutrition, and lack of adequate shelter, mattresses, blankets…. Since I arrived in Ethiopia, I have been living here in Pinyuod-1 Nuer site refugee camp. We have been living in an area with continuous conflicts and

security threats. Now imagine I can't even move outside the camp as I am a Nuer, and the surrounding host communities are Anywaa…. My home area in South Sudan is still in a violent conflict, and it is impossible to return. If you are looking for some solution for us, it is resettlement in another country (LH-P1NR-2).

Most of the stories in the camp are about the longstanding and continuing sufferings from violent conflicts both in South Sudan and in Gambella. The refugees commonly accuse the surrounding host, and the surrounding host accuse the refugees in the camp unless they belong to the same ethnic group.

Organized robberies and gender-based violence

In this violent situation, another major challenge associated with refugee-host relationships is the ever-increasing organized thieves or robbers in the areas between a refugee camp and the host community reinforcing the ethnic-based conflicts. It is not a separate incident. Rather it is a continuation of the conflict between the two ethnic groups and the violent refugee-host relationships. Our 22 years old informant in Kule refugee camp stated:

There are organized robbers, sometimes supported by guns in the areas between the refugee camp and host communities. These robbers are organized by both communities [refugee and host] but we don't know their immediate as well as long-term goals and objectives. They have been robbing personal properties such as mobile phones and valuable goods and abducting women. They are also contributing to the distrust between refugee and host communities, leading to conflict between the two communities. However, we don't know why concerned security bodies can't eliminate these criminals yet (IDI-KR-13).

There is also a high prevalence of rape and forced abduction around refugee camps. For instance, in Kule camp, due to this issue, women refugees can't move from one place to another place freely. Concerning this, a 26 years old woman refugee informant stated:

When we [women refugees] leave the camp to go to market, collect firewood, or for any other purposes, we are in constant fear of the host communities. Many women face the threat of being raped and abducted by local youths. These issues negatively impact on our daily activities and overall safety, making it extremely difficult for us to fulfil our basic needs without encountering such risks (IDI-KR-14).

Gender-based violence including rape and forced abduction might not be limited to the refugee camp. Our informants try to link such pervasive violence and insecurity to the refugee-host relationship. They also argue that it plays a role in exacerbating the already challenging situation. These have badly affected refugee-host community relationships in general and refugee local integration in particular. Generally, according to our informants and our personal observation in 2023 and 2024 in Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps and their surroundings there was limited movements and interactions between refugees and host communities unless they belong to the same ethnic groups. For instance, there is little report of violence and reports of robbery from in 'Pinyudo-1 Anywaa site' refugee camp where the refugees and the surrounding community belong to the same ethnic group – Anywaa – strengthen our argument that the 'refugee-host conflict' in Gambella is part of the broader ethnic conflict violence in the region.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the refugee phenomenon in Gambella, which has been enmeshed with violent conflict. We examined the role of ethnicity in refugee–host relations and how it has become a major challenge to the planned local integration of refugees. Ethiopia endorsed its first refugee policies in 2004, which provided refugees and asylum-seekers access to its territory, protection, asylum, safety, and services mainly provided through Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) with the support of UNHCR and other international humanitarian partners. This proclamation exclusively focused on camp-based protection and basic service provision for refugees. In 2019 Ethiopia's parliament adopted its revised refugee proclamation which was admired as the most progressive refugee policies in Africa (UNHCR 2019).

Aligned with the Global Compact on Refugees and Ethiopia's ten-year National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy, the proclamation provides refugees with the right to work, reside outside of camps, freedom of movement, increasing educational opportunities, providing agricultural land, local integration, reserve jobs in industrial parks, and issuing vital documents for refugees aimed to empower refugees, enhance their protection, and promote self-reliance (Kassa et al., 2024; UNHCR, 2020). Out of this list of provisions this paper mainly analysed the local integration taking micro-politics – with implication at the macro level – at two camps in the Gambella Region. Since the launch of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in May 2018 and

the 2019 revised proclamation, some changes have taken place in Gambella. The Gambella regional government, RRS, community leaders, youth leaders, private sectors, and the general populace are increasingly getting awareness about the CRRF and the proclamation. Besides, the UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society organizations have been pouring some resources including to the hosting regional government and communities to address humanitarian problems through investing in development that is supposed to support peaceful co-existence through enhancing the refugee-host relationship (UNHCR, 2019). This study examined the challenges of refugee local integration in the context of violent ethnic conflict in Gambella, Ethiopia by focusing on two refugee camps: Kule and Piyudo-1, and their surrounding host communities. By using these two camps; the former is where refugees and host communities share similar ethnicity, and the latter, Pinyudo-1, where the refugees are predominantly from Nuer ethnic group and the hosts are the Anywaa, the chapter emphasized on the role ethnicity play at micro level, a day to day activity, in enabling or constraining local interactions regardless of the people's status (refugee or host).

The Anywaa elite commonly treat the Nuer refugees and Nuer citizens of Ethiopia in the same way. Similarly, the Nuer citizens of Ethiopia welcome the refugees' local integration who are overwhelmingly from the Nuer ethnic group primarily because of their ethnicity. The Anywaa elite without exception oppose to the local integration again mainly due to their ethnic identity. We have also discussed how such identity-based discourse and violence has made interaction at micro-level or at community level on the ground very difficult. These are manifested in the form of recurrent interethnic conflict & intimidation, organized robberies, and gender-based violence as discussed in the paper in detail. Generally speaking, ethnic identity played a pivotal role in shaping refugee-local integration in Gambella and actors in refugee governance need to be sensitive to such local developments.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF SOUTH SUDAN REFUGEES: A CASE STUDY FROM KHARTOUM STATE – SUDAN, 2022 – 2025

Salim Abdalla, Adam Haroon and Noha H. E. Hamza

Introduction

This study deals with the social integration of refugees, which is considered one of the most important and controversial academic topics in the field of social studies and migration. Although refugees try to preserve their culture, they usually face difficulties in adapting and acclimatizing to the culture, values and social practices of the host society (Shehata, 2023, p.217).

This study focuses on the social integration of South Sudanese refugees in Khartoum State. In relation to the refugee crisis, Sudan represents an interesting case within the Horn of Africa. This is due to the fact that it is both a source and a receiver of refugees. The country is an interesting case because, in spite of long civil wars and political instability, Sudan is receiving refugees from neighbouring countries whose conditions are not as worst as the Sudanese case. In terms of relative security and stability, Uganda, Chad, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are better than Sudan. Yet, people from these countries have been seeking refuge in Sudan for the last 30 years (Assal, 2007, p.2).

South Sudan emerged as an independent state following its separation from Sudan in 2011. Despite its status as one of the world's newest countries, persistent conflicts and governance challenges have disillusioned the international community. The nature of the conflict in South Sudan is highly complex, involving multiple dimensions that intersect political, ethnic, and economic factors. There are historical causes and root causes behind the outbreak and exacerbation of the conflict, which resulted in a civil war that reflected its impact on the humanitarian and economic conditions (Al Tom, 2023, p. 1).

This civil war has led to chaos, insecurity, killing, rape, and other negative manifestations of war in addition to the mass destruction of property and

means of livelihood. The situation has further deteriorated along the Sudan–South Sudan border, transforming the area into a zone of conflict, insecurity, and recurrent fighting. Accordingly, large numbers of South Sudanese have fled to seek safe haven in neighbouring countries, including Sudan. Large numbers of South Sudanese refugees have moved to major cities such as Kosti and Khartoum in order to seek a better life with security, protection, and means of livelihood, as they have become self-reliant and do not receive any external assistance (Elhassan, 2016, p. 5).

Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to understand the social integration of refugees in the host society, in which they can become an integral part of the host society while keeping their identity, culture, customs, and traditions. This process of integration depends on both the host society and the refugees. It is influenced by various factors, including the refugees' own readiness to adapt to new conditions in the host country, as well as the attitudes and structures of the host society. When refugees relocate to urban areas, they often encounter challenges in building social connections with the host community, while simultaneously contributing to changes in the social and cultural fabric of relationships.

The key question which the paper tries to answer is: To what extent is there social integration between South Sudanese refugees and the host community in Khartoum State? To answer this, I focus on a number of factors: The sub-questions are as follows:

1. Examine the economic status of South Sudanese refugees and its role in facilitating or hindering their social integration.

2. Investigate marriage relations between South Sudanese refugees and members of North Sudanese society as a dimension of social integration.

3. Explore identity construction among South Sudanese refugees and analyze how their identity is perceived and recognized by the Sudanese host community.

4. Analyze gender differences in the experiences of social integration among South Sudanese refugees.

5. Finally, identify challenges and difficulties encountered by South Sudanese refugees in the process of social integration within Khartoum State.

Methodology

Due to the nature of the study, the researcher used a case study (South Sudanese refugees) to be able to monitor and analyse information and data about the study. Observations and interviews were used in the process of collecting data on the topic of social integration of South Sudanese refugees. Individual interviews were conducted with 15 South Sudanese refugees, along with three group discussions involving members of the same community. In addition, one individual interview was held with the assistant of the Refugee Commission in Khartoum State to gather further insights about South Sudanese refugees. To understand the host community's perceptions and the social relations between them and the refugees, eight individual interviews were also conducted with members of the host community in Khartoum State.

The economic dimension

Studies show that refugees often encounter significant challenges when trying to enter the labor market in host countries. Even when they succeed in securing employment, they struggle to obtain fair and appropriate wages relative to the nature of their work. On average, the wages earned by working refugees are lower than those of the native population. The National Compensation Survey' issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the US Department of Labor showed that the average wage of a refugee worker in the United States in 2012 was $9.27 per hour, while the average wage of a native worker was $21.29 per hour, which is undoubtedly a significant difference. This disparity is significant, and in many cases the wage gap can be attributed to the limited skills and work experience of refugees compared to the native population. Refugees often migrate from countries with weaker economic and social conditions to more developed and stable host nations, which can further widen the skills gap. In addition, refugees frequently cluster in self-run businesses, while many employers and employees in the host community show reluctance to hire them.

The social dimension:

The social dimension focuses on integrating refugees into the host society so that they become an integrated part of the community while maintaining their national identity, culture and customs. This process depends not only on the host community but also on the refugees themselves. Social integration is influenced by several factors, some of which are related to the refugee himself, such as his readiness to adapt to the new conditions in

the host country, the way in which the refugee left his country, which has a great psychological impact on him, and his legal status in the host country. In addition to structural and economic factors, the integration of refugees also depends on the attitudes of the host society. The extent to which the indigenous population accepts refugees and is willing to include them in various spheres—such as employment, education, housing, and even personal relationships—plays a crucial role in shaping refugees' opportunities and overall well-being in the host country

A Brief Overview of South Sudanese Refugees in Khartoum State

Khartoum hosts an estimated 309,000 refugees and asylum seekers, representing the largest concentration in the country. This figure accounts for approximately 38 percent of the total refugee and asylum seeker population nationwide (UNHCR, 28 February 2023).

An estimated 120,000 South Sudanese refugees in Khartoum live in open areas and have high humanitarian needs. There are also refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, and Chad.

An estimated 93,000 Syrian refugees and 2,000 Yemeni refugees live in Sudan, most of whom are settled in Khartoum. As Arab nationals, they have access to national asylum procedures and should be granted almost the same treatment as Sudanese nationals, with the exception of political rights. However, recent political changes have cast uncertainty over their rights, leaving them in a vulnerable position with legal uncertainty over their status in Sudan (OCHA, 2023).

In 2011, before South Sudan's referendum that led to the secession of South Sudan from Sudan, the majority of South Sudanese living in Khartoum gathered at 41 departure points (assembly areas) to receive assistance in returning to South Sudan. Many of these South Sudanese had lived in Khartoum for many years (UNHCR, 2020).

Between 2010 and 2013, UNHCR and the Voluntary Humanitarian Action Commission (VHAC), in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), assisted the return of some 75,000 people by road, river, train and air, when voluntary returns were unsuccessful due to the diversion of resources to referendum preparations. A number of people remained stranded in these areas, which lack infrastructure and public services. Since 2011, only a limited number of South Sudanese have been repatriated. Following South Sudan's independence and the subsequent

changes in the legal status of people of South Sudanese origin in Sudan in 2013, departure points in Khartoum gradually transformed into what became known as "open areas." 'Open Areas' in Khartoum are informal locations hosting South Sudanese refugees with significant humanitarian needs. There are more than 31,000 registered South Sudanese refugees residing in 9 'open areas' in Um Badah, Jebel Awliya and East Nile areas of Khartoum State. While registration efforts continue, it is estimated that there are approximately 154,700 refugees living in 'open areas' in Khartoum. They constitute approximately 55 per cent of the total number of South Sudanese refugees in the state and are the most vulnerable (UNHCR, 2020).

On 27 September 2012, Sudan and South Sudan signed an agreement on the status of South Sudanese citizens. In particular, the agreement provides for a two-state agreement and the right of citizens of one state to acquire and dispose of property in the other state (Grabska, 2016, p. 7).

Open areas such as Angola, John Medit, Naivash, Dar el- Salaam, Mandela, and Baraka are not only underdeveloped and lacking basic services, but they are located outside the city. The location of the camps and settlements makes access to health care impossible. In case of serious illness, refugees must endure long and tiring journeys and often face hostilities and denial of service when they reach the hospital. These open areas and informal camps are subject to organized demolitions by the government, and some refugees are relocated to remote locations in the desert (Buter, 2011, p.49).

South Sudanese refugees in popular areas of Khartoum State

There are a number of South Sudanese refugees living in popular neighbourhoods, and their places of residence tend to be (scary) from the public eye in one way or another, but long-term presence and knowledge of the area shed light on what the eye refuses to see. Some live in empty villas, often isolated from the ethnographic world and the eyes of tourists. These villas are no longer used by those who previously enjoyed privileges but suffered a sudden economic or political decline in their status, and these buildings have become long-term accommodation for the displaced. The use of waste materials to cover hole s in fences and walls alerts curious observers to the presence of residents in homes perceived as empty, which have often remained empty for many years and are dispersed to facilities by South Sudanese refugees and other marginalized communities, who try

to keep their presence a secret for fear of being kicked out. (Grabska, 2016, p. 7).

Others live on building sites (i.e., buildings under construction) with the permission of the owner in exchange for guarding construction materials from theft. These sites often have no walls, and clothes and blankets are hung on a clothesline rather than providing a level of privacy. Children play with concrete, conditions are poor with no running water or toilets, and the site has few furniture belonging to refugees: some chairs, one or two beds, a television set, and a satellite dish on the outer wall of the construction site that indicates their presence (Grabska, 2016, p. 7).

The Position of the Government of Sudan towards South Sudanese Refugees

The position of the government of Sudan towards South Sudanese refugees is unclear, as former President Omar al-Bashir announced in his public speech during the first phase of the influx in 2013 that those coming from South Sudan would be welcomed as dear guests. At different times, South Sudanese were variously described as citizens or as arrivals; however, none of these classifications were ever formally codified in written decrees or directives. As their numbers increased, they eventually came to be officially recognized as refugees in 2017 (Bilal Musa, personal communication, 2023).

In fact, the Sudan Humanitarian Aid Commission (SHAC)—originally established to address the needs of displaced persons—was entrusted with managing the situation of "arrivals," rather than the National Committee for Refugee Affairs, which officially employed the term. Importantly, this designation carried no political or legal connotations; it does not exist in any local or international laws, protocols, or political agreements. Instead, it merely referred to administrative measures applied to their case. Yet even these measures were ambiguous and poorly understood, creating confusion about their intended implementation. While the term "arrivals" implied that they should be treated as citizens, in practice this was not the case. Many settled in what the Sudanese government referred to as "waiting stations" and "open areas," rather than formal camps as noted earlier. Within these spaces, they were registered, their movement was restricted—requiring official permits to leave—and they were permitted only limited income-generating activities. Nevertheless, they did have access to certain services, including medical care, education, and other basic provisions. In fact, outside of waiting stations and open areas,

especially in large cities, many services are inaccessible (Elhassan, 2016, pp.7-8)

Discussion of Field Data

The economic dimension

When South Sudanese refugees entered Khartoum state, they needed humanitarian aid, but some of them started working to cover their basic needs of food and drink, and the occupation of refugees can be categorized according to type.

Women's occupation

There is no doubt that South Sudanese refugees have endured extremely difficult humanitarian conditions. As a result, some refugee women have been compelled to seek employment in order to support their families. They are engaged in a variety of occupations, including domestic work within host community households, selling tea and food, and producing local alcoholic beverages such as *Marissa* and *Al-Arqi*. These livelihood strategies, and their broader implications, can be discussed in greater detail below.

Women working in host community homes

Many South Sudanese refugee families suffer from the lack of humanitarian services to cover their needs, forcing refugee women to go out to work in order to support their families, and we find some of them working in the homes of the Sudanese community in Khartoum state, which is a place for social interaction between refugee women and the host community. According to the respondents' opinions, they emphasized that some employers treated them well, but the wages were too low to cover their needs. Sometimes some employers tried to exploit South Sudanese refugee women by not paying the full rent, which may cause a kind of frustration for refugee women who have no choice but to look for work somewhere else. In an interview with Mrs. Mervat (one of the refugees), she said, ‘I worked in the homes of the host community as a laundress for a very low wage sometimes, where I was dealt with according to my ability to wash clothes, where the value of washing 12 pieces of clothes is 700 Sudanese pounds, which is equivalent to less than one dollar according to the year 2023.’ Note that this amount is too weak to cover the cost of transport that takes her from her home to her workplace, where the

transport tariff is 1000 Sudanese pounds, equivalent to one dollar, so we find that she works very hard per day to be able to save a little money to help her family.

Although many refugee women report low wages, there is nevertheless a degree of social interaction between them and Sudanese women. Refugee women have adopted certain customs and traditions from Sudanese women—particularly from the wives of household owners—such as wearing the Sudanese *top*, sharing coffee gatherings, and using traditional cosmetics like henna..[50]

As for the women who work selling food and tea, they work in the main streets, public stations, and small markets within popular neighbourhoods. We find that they work in the main streets, public stations, and small markets within popular neighbourhoods. These places are considered areas of interaction between refugees and the host community, where we find that their income is higher compared to those who work at home. These places attract members of the Sudanese community, including those who work there and others passing by, creating opportunities for interaction with refugee women. As a result, social exchanges occur, and the majority of respondents confirmed that they engage in meaningful interaction with the Sudanese community—particularly with customers and individuals working in these areas, such as public transport drivers.

The customer can eat or drink tea or coffee from them and then pay the money in the evening or the next day. This confirms that the relationships between them are strong, and we find that some refugee women have been lucky to build social relationships (marriage and extramarital relationships) with Sudanese customers.

Sometimes there are some quarrels between refugee women and Sudanese women who work in the field of selling tea, but they are not major, and some neighbours at work intervene to solve the problem. There are also some challenges facing refugee women in workplaces, and these legal challenges are faced by the state where selling in such places is considered illegal because there is no license to work in selling food and tea in those areas. So, they are removed and work tools are confiscated by the Sudanese

[50] Henna means the application of henna dye in beautiful designs on the hands and feet of women and is a symbol of a married woman in Sudan.

Public Order Police[51] (*Kashah*), where many police campaigns occurred with South Sudanese refugee women. One of the refugees Mrs. Maria Sayla indicated that she works selling tea in one of the Omdurman areas, where she was confiscated her work tools that she uses to make tea by the public order police. This issue has occurred repeatedly, with the police often resolving it through the unofficial payment of a fee—essentially functioning as a bribe—after which the confiscated work tools are returned. However, tools that are damaged during confiscation or transfer are not compensated.

We find that there are some social relations between some South Sudanese refugee women and some members of the public order police, who help them. Sometimes they make phone calls to tell them that public order police campaigns are near them, and they must close their shops. This call may be in exchange for a sum of money or an extramarital sexual relationship.

The sale of local wines (Marissa and Al-Araqi)

The sale of wine is prohibited by law, but some members of the host community and some refugees alike sell wine. The places where wine is sold are considered areas of interaction between refugees and some members of Sudanese society. It is important to note that the sale and consumption of alcohol are prohibited under Sudanese law. Consequently, free trade in this sector cannot be expected. Instead, both sellers and buyers face strict legal challenges and potential penalties when engaging in such activities. Therefore, the sale and purchase of local wines take place discreetly in popular areas, driven by fear of legal punishment. Under Sudanese law, Muslims face flogging as a penalty, while non-Muslims are subject to fines. Moreover, some Sudanese men have described South Sudanese refugee women as particularly skilled in the production of local wines. We find that some of them spend their time in places where they sell and drink local wines. However, some young Sudanese men, after consuming liquor, become involved in altercations with the wine sellers, as well as some southerners who are around the place where the liquor is being drunk.

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[51] The Public Order Police is part of the Public Order Law established by the Engaz Regime in 1995 and has several tasks, including organizing public streets and shops.

The occupation of refugee men

Southern refugees live in very tragic conditions and are in need of humanitarian assistance from international, regional, and national organizations. Therefore, all categories of refugees (women, children, and men) were forced to go out to work in order to cover their basic needs. So, we find that men work in several fields, such as construction and factories, and a few of them work in the field of trading, and this can be discussed below.

Workers in the field of construction and factories

This category of workers is characterized by low wages, lack of continuity of work, and intermittent work due to the incompatibility between workers and employers who try to exploit refugees continuously by not paying full wages, as well as the difficulty of providing job opportunities.

Usually, refugees who have found employment opportunities work with some members of the Sudanese community, whether workers like them or employers. Here interaction occurs between them that may lead to building social relations. They described their relationships with some Sudanese workers as generally cooperative. However, they also noted that certain Sudanese workers adopt a condescending attitude toward South Sudanese refugee labourers, arguing that refugees should not receive full wages and that Sudanese workers deserve higher pay since they are working in their own homeland.

We find that some refugees complain about their employers, especially factory managers or engineers who manage the construction industry. They give them low wages and sometimes intermittent wages, which leads to a worse relationship between them and leaving the job.

The field of trade

This field requires high financial ability or capital and prior experience. We find that most traders were practicing in trade in South Sudan or North Sudan before the separation, where most commercial work is limited to small shops within the neighbourhoods or in open areas. The *Afrangi*

market[52], which is considered one of the oldest markets for southerners before the separation, where they work in the clothing and footwear trade.

These commercial places are considered areas of interaction between refugees and Sudanese society. The *Afrangi* market is characterized by a large area that gathers many Sudanese traders and customers, so the rate of interaction between them is high, which leads to building social relations between them. Refugees also reported that the social relationship with some Sudanese merchants is positive, and there is mutual cooperation between the two groups.

Child labour

The tragic conditions in which the South Sudanese refugees live have forced all family members to go out to work in order to provide for their basic needs, as mentioned earlier, and also children have gone out to work, ranging in age from 10 to 16 years. Most of them were born in South Sudan but grew up in Khartoum State, but living conditions did not allow them to attend school or play with other children their age, whether from the host community or refugees.

They have been forced to go out to work in markets or main streets, where they work as manual car cleaners and shoe cleaners for very low wages, in order to help their families. Some of them face bad people from the Sudanese community who use racist language and sometimes exploit them by not paying the full wage. Others describe some car owners from the Sudanese community who wash their cars with the refugee children as well-treated and pay the full wage. They have become regular customers, and there is some social interaction between them.

There are also men who remain unemployed and rely on external assistance from relatives in South Sudan or from expatriates living abroad. Others depend on their wives and children to meet both household needs and personal expenses. Much of their time is spent with companions in clubs, watching football or wrestling matches, and playing games such as dominoes. Also, they sometimes stay at the drinking places. In the evening,

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[52] Afrangi market is located in the state of Khartoum, bordered on the eastern side by Sinai (St James), on the southern side by Abu Janzeer Square, and on the western side by the Central Station, and is considered an old market in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, which has different names and was previously called Khartoum Bilil Market as well as the Southern Market.

they return to their homes to have dinner with their families, and then they ask their wives and children about the money they earned during their daily work. This is in order to go to the viewing club and local drinking places the next day. They have some friends from the Sudanese community, and they spend their time with them in the viewing clubs and drinking places. Sometimes, there are some scuffles between some Sudanese and refugees in the drinking places, but these scuffles are not significant and are resolved immediately.

The social dimension

The social dimension focuses on integrating refugees into the host community so that they become an integral part of it while preserving their national identity, culture, and original customs. This process does not depend solely on the host community but also on the refugees themselves. We find that in the social dimension of integrating refugees from South Sudan, it is necessary to discuss some points represented in housing patterns, marital relationships, identity, and belonging.

***1. Housing patterns and duration of stay*:** Naturally, when refugees enter host countries, safe places for their residence and protection must be provided, as well as means of livelihood that meet some of their needs. It is known that the South Sudanese refugees were originally Sudanese citizens before the separation in 2011. After the separation, a civil war broke out in South Sudan, and a large number of southerners entered several states in Sudan, including Khartoum State, and became refugees.

We find that the majority of them, after seeking refuge, live in open areas, while others reside in residential neighbourhoods with the host community. This study focused on the second group, those who live in a popular metropolitan area in the city of Omdurman with the host community, whether they are in buildings under construction, renting small houses, or in empty spaces between buildings where they set up tents.

According to the respondents' opinions, they entered Sudan - Khartoum in two periods: the first period in 2013 and the second period in 2016. Therefore, the duration of their stay in Khartoum ranges between 7 and 10 years. This duration may significantly affect the interaction process between the refugees and the host community. Some studies have confirmed that the longer the stay, the more it strengthens the interaction process and builds social relationships between them.

Conversely, a short-term stay may not lead to interaction and the building of social relationships.

It is noticeable that the South Sudanese refugees who reside in open areas settle in ethnic groups, and similarly, in the popular neighbourhoods of Omdurman, they live in ethnic groups. For example, in Angola, most of the refugees belong to the Balanda tribe, and in the Hatana neighbourhood, most of the refugees belong to the Dinka tribe.

Some refugees rent houses in the slums of Omdurman, and although they have become more expensive due to the economic deterioration that Sudan is experiencing, refugees usually rent half a house, a single room, or even share with relativists. Those who live in the popular neighbourhoods in Omdurman city confirmed that the interaction and social relationships between neighbours are different from person to person among the members of Sudanese society. Some social relationships are good, and some are bad.

We find that some Sudanese welcomed the South Sudanese refugees since their arrival in Khartoum State. They gave them part of their land to live on, especially empty spaces and buildings under construction. They live on this land for free or in exchange for guarding it, where social relationships developed between them. They share in social events and holidays. In an interview with the refugee Nadine, she mentioned that we live on an empty space belonging to a Sudanese citizen and that their treatment is good, as he shares in the Eid al-Adha celebrations by gifting us some meat annually. This indicates that the relationship between the Sudanese neighbours and the Southern Sudanese refugees is good. It is noticeable that the Southern refugees participate in the Sudanese Muslims' festivities, while the Sudanese do not participate in the Christmas holidays with the Southerners. This may be because the Sudanese Muslims believe that celebrating or participating in Christmas holidays is forbidden (haram) in their Islamic religion.

As for the bad relationships, some refugees mentioned that there are some Sudanese who are unfriendly and do not welcome them, nor do they allow them to rent or live near them. Some members of the Sudanese community perceive South Sudanese refugees as foreigners and describe them as difficult to deal with. They accuse them of producing local alcohol and turning their homes into places of disorder. In addition, refugee women and girls are criticized for wearing clothing deemed inappropriate, which, according to these Sudanese neighbours, may negatively influence the upbringing of their children by exposing them to what they consider

immoral behaviours. Therefore, they prefer to distance themselves from the southern refugees. In an interview with Mrs. Maria, who lives in the open area of John Medit, she mentioned that "I tried to rent a house in Khartoum." However, some Sudanese did not allow her, arguing that Southerners are bad at dealing and make alcohol and similar things.

It is also noticeable that the majority of refugees prefer to reside within the city or in popular areas rather than living in the open areas designated by the Sudanese government for refugees from South Sudan. This is for many reasons, including that these popular neighbourhoods provide security and also offer some services, such as hospitals and basic education for their children, as well as job opportunities for them.

***2. Marriage relationship*:** according to the respondents' opinions, they confirmed that there are marital relationships between refugees and the host community, with the most common being the marriage of refugee women to Sudanese men. Cases of South Sudanese refugee men marrying Sudanese women are considered rare. Additionally, there are relationships outside of marriage, which can be discussed in detail, as we do below.

Marriage relationships between Sudanese men and South Sudanese refugee women

There are some marriage relationships between Sudanese men and South Sudanese female refugees. Most of the Sudanese men who marry the refugee's women belong to the Nuba tribes and some non-Arab tribes from Darfur, as well as some Blue Nile tribes in Khartoum State. This may be due to the ethnic and cultural similarities between the two communities. Here, we can clarify some of the reasons that have led some Sudanese tribes to marry South Sudanese refugee's women as follows:

The Nuba tribes from the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan marry South Sudanese refugee women in Khartoum because there is a similarity between them and the tribes of South Sudan in terms of culture, ethnicity (biological), and religion. Some members of the Nubia tribes also embraced the Christian religion. Additionally, the state of South Kordofan is located on the border between Sudan and South Sudan. In this border area, there is an overlap between Nuba tribes and some tribes from South Sudan. So, the relation between them is not new but rather historical. There is also a historical link between the Nuba tribes and the people of South Sudan in their rebellion against the national governments in northern Sudan in the name of the SPLM. Therefore, we find them interacting with

the southern refugees in building social relationships and marrying them without barriers.

As for the non-Arab tribes of Darfur, such as the Fur, Albarti, Altanjur, Aldaajw, and others, we find that there is a similarity between them and the South Sudanese refugees in terms of ethnicity and color. Therefore, we see them interacting with the South Sudanese refugees in building social relationships and marrying them without barriers.

Some non-Arab tribes from Blue Nile, such as Alfunj, Alberta, and Alianqisana, among others in Khartoum, mostly reside in the popular neighbourhoods of Omdurman. We find that they share characteristics similar to those of South Sudanese refugees, leading to a high degree of interaction between them in building social relationships. It is also noticeable that most of these tribes live in popular areas, which is why South Sudanese refugees prefer to live near them.

The wedding rituals are based on the agreement between the families of the bride and groom, but most of the time, the marriage is officiated by a religious cleric. The husband pays for the dowry, and some of the bride's family demand a dowry according to their customs and traditions, meaning some of them demand cows or goats or their equivalent. However, in most cases, the dowry is based on their agreement, and then they hold the wedding ceremony, as well as the traditional dances specific to the bride's family, and then the groom takes his wife to his home or hotel to spend their honeymoon.

And these marital relationships may provide a form of protection for some South Sudanese refugee families. Additionally, the husband helps his wife's family whenever they need him. Some female refugees have also found the opportunity to live with their husbands, whether in a rented or owned house, which alleviates the burden on the refugee wife's family. Therefore, some refugee families have stopped thinking about returning to their other homeland, South Sudan.

It is noticeable in the marriage relationships between South Sudanese refugee women and Sudanese men that some of the refugee girls embraced Islam after marrying Sudanese Muslim men. In particular, the Fur tribe are strict about religion and sometimes force their refugee wives to convert to Islam. As for the Nuba tribes, they do not care a lot about their wives converting to Islam; we may find a husband is Muslim and a wife is non-Muslim or Christian, and they are living together.

Intermarriages between refugee men and Sudanese women

People described such marriages as very rare despite the absence of a law prohibiting it, attributing it to the difficulty Sudanese families have in accepting the Southern refugee, whom they describe as a foreigner, a refugee, and a non-Muslim. The majority of Sudanese society adheres to the Islamic religion, considering it impermissible for a Muslim girl to marry a non-Muslim. As it contradicts the principles of their Islamic faith. Conversely, it is permissible for a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman. Additionally, some view Southern refugees with a racist perspective, believing that since the Southerners seceded, they have no right to mix or intermarry with Sudanese, even if they convert to Islam.

A famous story circulated on social media in 2021 about a young man named Deng, a South Sudanese refugee living in Sudan. He fell in love with a girl named Ihsan Ahmed and wanted to marry her, but her family rejected him for racist reasons because he was South Sudanese. Deng and Ihsan then decided to run away from their families, escaping to Juba, South Sudan, where they got married. Later, Ahmed, Ihsan's father, took to social media, stating that he disowned his daughter Ihsan after her marriage to a South Sudanese man, meaning that Ihsan was no longer his daughter as a form of social punishment.

The researcher wanted to mention this story to show the extent to which some members of Sudanese society refuse the marriage of their daughters to South Sudanese refugees, regardless of the cost, due to ethnic and cultural differences, as well as the fear of losing their daughters' identity.

It is also noticeable that some young refugees recall that their southern relatives used to allow northern Sudanese traders to marry their daughters in their country, South Sudan, before the war. When they came to Sudan as refugees, they were surprised to find that they could not marry Sudanese girls due to religion or ethnicity, and they described this as a form of racism practiced against them by Sudanese people.

Extramarital relationships between South Sudanese refugee women and some Sudanese men are very widespread within popular neighbourhoods, leading to an increase in pregnancy cases among refugee girls and the emergence of children with unknown parentage who exhibit traits of Sudanese men. South Sudanese refugees do not have a problem with these children; rather, they care for them and consider them part of their family, believing that these children will be an addition to the family members and will also increase the tribe's numbers.

They form a committee of senior family members who seek to reach the Sudanese man who married the refugee girl, demanding a financial settlement known as "*Kasar Bayt*"[53], which is considered part of their customs and traditions inherited from their parents and grandparents in the past. They believe that this financial settlement is compensation for the refugee girl's family, who worked hard to raise, feed, and educate her. However, Sudanese men generally do not acknowledge these children and the tradition, so no financial settlement occurs. In an interview with Ms. Mervat, she mentioned, "The neighbourhood is filled with children who bear the traits of the Sudanese man with light skin, but we see no father or uncle taking care of them."

It is noticeable that this financial settlement, or what is called "*Kasar Bayt*", includes anyone who has impregnated a South Sudanese refugee girl, whether they are a South Sudanese refugee or a North Sudanese. It is also noticeable that there are no relationships outside of marriage between South Sudanese refugees and Sudanese girls, which may be due to the Sudanese girl's rejection of the South Sudanese refugee. Additionally, most young refugees do not have the financial means to establish relationships with Sudanese girls, so they prefer relationships with refugee girls, who are considered part of their community.

Identity and belonging

The issue of identity remains a problem for both modern and ancient Sudan. Historically, South Sudan has not been socially integrated into Sudanese identity. This has led to uprisings in various historical periods, demanding rights and recognition of participation in power and wealth, ultimately resulting in the secession of South Sudan.

According to the respondents, they identify themselves as Southern refugees. They expressed that they are not integrated into Sudanese society and experience marginalization, accompanied by condescending attitudes from some Sudanese. This is further reinforced by the use of racist language and the lack of recognition of their identity as Sudanese citizens. Some respondents confirmed that they have experienced racism since the moment they crossed the borders, noting that certain army and police officers at the crossings directed discriminatory remarks toward them. In

[53] Kasar Bayt is the money demanded from the person who marries the girl and is considered compensation for the girl's family.

an interview with Peter, he said, ‘I entered Sudan in 2016. When we entered Sudanese land, we found some police and army officers who told us’, “You have separated your country; what do you want again? Please go back and solve your problem.”

In an interview with Mr. Kundi, he mentioned a particular incident. When he went out to work one day he found a dog attacking a small child. He rushed with two young men to drive the dog away from the child and noticed that there was a northern man sitting near the child who did not drive the dog away. When asked why he didn't drive the dog away, he said, “I thought this child was one of the southern refugees, so I didn't save him from the dog." The child belonged to the Nuba tribe, which is one of the tribes in Sudan that has features similar to the southern tribes, as mentioned earlier. This indicates that there is resentment from some Sudanese individuals towards southern refugees.

In addition to some citizenship policies implemented by the Sudanese government and international organizations, which described the southerners residing in Sudan, particularly in Khartoum, as not belonging to the Sudanese state, these individuals are refugees who do not have the right to obtain official documents such as the national ID number, national card, and Sudanese passport.

We find that the majority of South Sudanese refugees, especially men, are forced to coexist with the Sudanese in their society. Therefore, they maintain their identities, customs, traditions, and languages, in addition to their feeling of belonging to South Sudan. They wish to return to their homeland if security, peace, and stability are provided.

Others feel that they are Sudanese and have the right to reside in their second country. Despite the separation and major policies that resolved the issue of the South in 2011, the refugees still feel that they are Sudanese, especially the women and some of the Muslims among them.

Comparison of social integration between refugee women and refugee men from south sudan

Since refugee women are more integrated than refugee men, largely because they interact more frequently with the host community through workplaces such as domestic service, tea and food-selling places, this has enabled them to build stronger relationships with members of the host community, particularly men. Some refugee women have married Sudanese men and have also formed relationships outside of marriage, as

mentioned earlier. They have also acquired some Sudanese culture from Sudanese women, as they have started wearing the Sudanese thobe and some have adorned themselves with Sudanese women's cosmetics such as henna and kohl. Additionally, a banking system (the fund) has been established, where some refugee women collect money from each participant and then distribute the money to each person after a certain period until the specified time is over.

As for the men and youth, we find that most of them are not integrated into Sudanese society. This may be due to the fact that some members of Sudanese society view them with disdain and practice a form of racism against them, as well as the lack of job opportunities in government institutions, in addition to their uncertain future in Sudan. They do not have any allegiance to Sudan, whether economically, socially, or culturally; rather, their allegiance is to their homeland, South Sudan. These individuals are more protective of their identities, customs, and traditions.

The host community's view towards refugees from south sudan

According to respondents from the Sudanese community, South Sudanese refugees are explicitly identified as such and are looked down upon. They reported experiencing acts of racism and exploitation in workplaces, particularly in factories and construction sites, as well as among women employed in Sudanese households. Respondents also described South Sudanese refugees as having no legitimate right to reside in Khartoum, arguing that their presence places additional pressure on the state's already limited services, including healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. For this reason, many expressed a preference for the refugees' return to South Sudan. Others identify the refugees as Sudanese and brothers. There is also interaction between the two communities on many levels, and some members of the Sudanese community welcomed them upon their arrival in Khartoum and allowed them to live on their lands, especially in vacant spaces or buildings under construction without rent, or to live for free, or to live in exchange for guarding the buildings, as we mentioned earlier. There are social relationships between the refugees from South Sudan and the Sudanese community. Some members of the Sudanese community have married South Sudanese refugees, and some Sudanese youth spend their time with the refugee youth in viewing clubs and local drinking spots and playing football. The relationships between the South Sudanese refugees and the Sudanese community seem generally good. However, some members of the Sudanese community

believe that the separation of South Sudan has affected the nature of social relationships and the Sudanese economy.

Problems faced by south sudanese refugees in khartoum state

South Sudanese refugees face many problems in Khartoum State, the most important of which is the lack of basic necessities such as food and water. This is due to the unavailability of services from international and national organizations and the lack of job opportunities to meet their basic needs. Additionally, refugees suffer from housing and security issues, as safe housing is considered a basic human need to maintain life and dignity. Southern refugees prefer to live outside open areas, but they face housing problems due to high rental prices in the city, forcing some of them to rent half a house, a single room, or even share with relatives. Also, among the problems facing southern refugees are education and health, as they struggle to obtain education for their children. There are no schools supported by international and regional organizations in the popular neighbourhoods of the refugees. Additionally, the tuition fees are very high for refugees due to the Sudanese government's policies, which treat them as foreigners who must pay tuition fees in dollars. It is well known that refugees do not have income sources to meet their basic needs and educate their children in schools.

Refugees also suffer from healthcare issues, and we find that a very large number of refugees suffer from chronic diseases. It is difficult for them to access healthcare, and they lack the financial resources to obtain free medical services from hospitals or health centres in popular neighbourhoods. Additionally, treatment in government and private hospitals is considered expensive for them. Racism from some members of Sudanese society is also considered one of the problems that refugees suffer from. Sometimes they face harassment and are unable to obtain legal protection.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study focused on examining the extent of social integration of South Sudanese refugees in Khartoum State, a place in which they arrived to stay as refugees in 2013 and 2016, following unrest in their home country. Our aim was to understand the level of social integration between the refugees and the host community.

The study attempted to answer the main question: Is there social integration between refugees from South Sudan and the host community

in Khartoum State? And as our discussion has shown, despite the complexities and difficulties faced by refugees from South Sudan, there is a significant segment that has socially integrated with the host community, especially among women and some of the Muslims. This social integration has made considerable progress, perhaps due to the historical, geographical, and cultural ties that bind the two communities.

From an economic perspective, the workplace of refugees from South Sudan serves as a place for social interaction between them and the host community. This interaction can lead to bonding and the building of social relationships among them. Socially, the men and young refugees from South Sudan have worked to maintain their identity despite their stay in Khartoum ranging from 7 to 10 years. There are marital relationships between the refugees and the host community, with the most common being marriages of refugee women to Sudanese men. However, marriages of South Sudanese male refugees to Sudanese women are considered rare, and there are also relationships outside of marriage. All in all, there is a degree of acceptance and welcome from the Sudanese community towards South Sudanese refugees since their arrival in Khartoum State.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

(IN)SECURITY IN UNCERTAINTY: WITCHCRAFT, RITUALS & BELIEFS AMONG SOUTH SUDANESE URBAN REFUGEES IN KAMPALA, UGANDA

Eria Olowo Onyango and Brenda Birungi

Introduction

Refugee security is a global concern. Majority of persons on the move are forcefully displaced by armed conflicts. South Sudan has known insecurity as a result of armed conflict since its establishment as a sovereign state in 2011. Armed conflict in the region didn't only begin after the referendum in 2011, it traces as far back as disgruntles over political, ethnic and religious differences that occupied the Sudan. Therefore, persons on the move in search for refuge from the Southern part of Sudan started way back before the state of South Sudan was ever established. Uganda has taken a fair share in hosting refugees, and South Sudanese are the majority. Refugees experience diverse forms of insecurities, and it is the duty of host countries and international agencies in charge of refugee protection, to ensure refugee security. On the other hand, the presence of refugees is also characterised as a security threat to the host state. All this affects the degree of integration between refugees and the host population. Our discussion in this chapter shows us a special version of this by showing links between security and witchcraft.

The concept of security is often looked at in a more physical way, something visible that may also be tangible (Fisher & Leonardi, 2020). For instance, refugees are often confined to holding camps reinforced by armed guards, preventing direct contact with the outside community. In some cases, they are provided with documentation attesting to their refugee status, which offers them a promise of security. However, there are growing concerns of insecurities that are related to the invisible (Luongo, 2020). Insecurities that are neither visible nor tangible but affect the lived realities of those that belief in them. Issues of witchcraft, a complex phenomenon often underestimated by the lens of colonialism and post

colonialism as an indigenous tradition, with minimal bearings to current realities. Yet to date, still shapes the realities and meanings of security and insecurity for those who belief in it.

The dynamic and ambiguous nature of witchcraft makes it difficult to be engulfed in one single definition. All definitions are influenced by the standpoint of the individual or group (Mahoney, Baer, Wari , Eka, & Behrman, 2020). Among refugee populations, studies on witchcraft are not that popular. The available studies on the topic indicate that refugees carry with them their beliefs in witchcraft throughout their refugee cycle. Individuals who believed in witchcraft before their flight believed that witchcraft must have induced or played a role in the events that led to their displacement, influencing events along their route to refuge and also stirring up situations while in displacement or resettlement. Mahoney and colleagues studied the resettlement of Congolese refugees in Canada and noted how they pointed out witchcraft as the force behind their misfortune, strange occurrences and sudden deaths (Mahoney, Baer, Wari , Eka, & Behrman, 2020). If we try to follow the refugee cycle backwards from before their resettlement through scholarly accounts, we would be able to trace sightings and claims of witchcraft throughout their cycle. In his work among Congolese urban refugees, Gusman, recorded that the Congolese refugees believed witchcraft had made them stuck in Kampala, with no possibilities of repatriating back to the Democratic Republic of Congo and experiencing overly delayed chances of resettlement to a third country (Gusman, 2018). Back in eastern Congo, where majority of the Congolese refugees in Uganda originate, there is mass evidence of the presence of witchcraft beliefs (Quaretta, 2019).

The same could be the case of South Sudanese refugees, however, it is challenging to find scholarly literature documenting their witchcraft beliefs in Uganda as refugees and also in countries in which they are resettled. However, there is literature suggesting that South Sudanese refugees who repatriated back to South Sudan were accused of witchcraft practices and beliefs that they allegedly learned while they lived in Ugandan refugee settlements, therefore posing a challenge to their social integration (Cherry, Storer, & Fisher, 2021). Early Anthropologist like Pritchard identified the witchcraft beliefs among the Azande of the then Sudan and criticized its existence as merely an escape goat for misfortune and bad luck (Pritchard, 1937). Pritchard's work presented an argument that witchcraft beliefs were uncivilized and a backward practice. However, with the rise of decolonial scholarship, Pritchard's arguments struggle to hold. In fact, witchcraft as a belief is gaining attention in scholarship on

Africa's economic, social and political development. Some sub-Saharan African states have legislation on witchcraft beliefs (Quarmyne, 2011; Mesaki, 2009). Furthermore, there is growing evidence of the reawakening of witchcraft beliefs in the global north because of the movement of persons like refugees.

It is not the belief in witchcraft that is problematic (Schnoebelen, 2009), rather the problem arises in what people do as a result of this belief. For instance, in refugee camps in Tanzania, the security of children and albinos was threatened by witchcraft beliefs of gaining superficial wealth through ritualistic sacrifices. In Ugandan refugee settlements witchcraft claims of ritualistic sacrifices arouse as refugees explained how fellow refugees acquired success in their business ventures in a short period of time (Charles, 2022). The United Nations high commission for refugees (UNHCR) recognises witchcraft beliefs and awards refugee statuses to persons fleeing from witchcraft persecutions and accusations (Schnoebelen, 2009). Therefore, witchcraft beliefs should not be underestimated in regard to refugee security. In this paper, we examine witchcraft beliefs on the experiences and interpretation of security and insecurity by South Sudanese urban refugees in Kampala.

Methodological Terrain

Conversations on witchcraft beliefs are rarely spoken out openly because of the social connotations that surround witchcraft. Therefore, approaching interlocutors to disclose their views on witchcraft beliefs and security required a more subtle approach that didn't expose the interlocutors' standpoint. The research adopted a qualitative research design involving in-depth conversations, observations and gathering of life histories. Fieldwork engagements were conducted between 2022 and 2023, in *Namuwongo, lukuuli* and *Kisugu* suburbs of Kampala. Ten primary interlocutors interacted with *Kakwa*, Azande, *Madi*, *Muru* and *Balanda*. One paralegal officer from an NGO was a secondary interlocutor.

Although South Sudanese urban refugees were purposively selected as the primary interlocutors, the ethnic groups represented within this study were not deliberately chosen. But the location of the interviews might have influenced the ethnic representation. In Kampala, South Sudanese urban refugees are divided, mirroring the ethnic divisions experienced back in South Sudan. The study locations presented here are dominantly occupied by South Sudanese from the equatorial region in South Sudan.

Results and Discussion

Insecurities: "We are in Kampala, but still not yet safe"

Urban areas are often portrayed as a space for a better life. There is an alleged feeling of a secured freedom attached to urban life, that at least most settlement or camp-based refugees aspire to. However, scholars continue to highlight the façade behind this promise of a better life for refugees in urban settings (Birungi, 2023). Urban life is challenging for most refugees with limited or no access to humanitarian assistance, and the reality of competing with the urban poor for employment, accommodation or business success. For those who believe in witchcraft, it becomes easy to turn to witchcraft to either blame it for the hardships or to find solutions to protect themselves from such hardships that yield insecurities in the urban.

Before we delve deeply into the kinds of insecurities faced by South Sudanese urban refugees, it is imperative to understand the perceived genesis of armed conflicts that have left many displaced. Arguably, ancestral spirits initiate thoughts into the minds of the living which later manifest into armed conflict and war. It is believed that these ancestral spirits talk directly to the living through thoughts or dreams and influence them to start conflict or even participate in conflict. These ancestral spirits are born out of persons who died innocent deaths and return to assert their revenge. It is believed that rebel leaders or war lords hear voices that tell them what to do, either through dreams or thoughts. Allegedly, for that reason, rebel or war lords make statements like; *"something is telling me to fight".*

Ancestral spirits not only instigate conflict and wars, but they were also depicted as "protectors" of the weak, vulnerable and disadvantaged. The most visible efforts of their protection were during the covid-19 pandemic. An invisible threat that shook global security. It is believed that ancestral spirits protected the African continent from Covid-19, securing African lives from severe deaths as compared to those experienced in Europe and the USA. The weak health facilities on the African continent were no match for the threat presented by Covid-19 in comparison to the sophisticated hospitals in Europe and USA. Yet fewer deaths were recorded in Africa, only African ancestral spirits could have protected Africans from such a boisterous invisible threat.

It is not our role to adjudicate the interpretations that have been formulated; rather, our aim is to convey the depth of belief in the invisible as protectors

against unseen insecurities. This raises the question: do invisible "forces" or "beings" provide protection only against invisible insecurities? In this paper, we seek to address that question. Drawing on empirical evidence, we argue that invisible forces not only safeguard against unseen insecurities but also extend protection to visible ones.

Wives of rebels or mercenaries are often accused or suspected of possessing information regarding their partners' involvement in conflict. As a result, they face severe violence during investigations into their husbands' alleged participation in war. Jacinta an urban refugee in Kampala had an experience as a wife of a suspected rebel back in South Sudan. Her husband was allegedly taken by the army and accused of conspiring against the government. Jacinta was suspected of having information about her husband's rebel activities and faced atrocious violence during the investigations. With the help of her father-in-law, she escaped to Uganda, but she was still being followed by who she believed to be spies. Jacinta says:

...That evening, my father-in-law threw me in a truck called 'kumi-kumi' that smuggles things to Uganda. He was scared that the army men could return and kill me. I sat in that truck with my son; it was dark with no window because it was a cargo truck. I was in pain. I didn't know where my husband was, but I knew Uganda was going to be safe for me. I could not stay in Nimule because it is a border area, my father-in-law had given the truck driver instructions to deliver me to his brother, the uncle to my husband who could assist me. We stayed in the settlement for few weeks, then spies started following me. My husband's uncle took us to Nairobi. But Nairobi was expensive, so he sent us to Kampala. While in Kampala, they [spies from South Sudan] attempted to break into my house, they attempted many times, but my door was strong, I used to lock it from the inside with 6 padlocks…I later shifted away from South Sudanese now am at least safe.

For Jacinta, security meant finding the right distance from the threat. This is similar to what other south Sudanese urban refugees claimed for settling in Kampala. They argued that Kampala provided a safer protective distance compared to refugee settlements that are closer to the South Sudanese border. But not all places in Kampala provided the security that Jacinta needed, the closer she was to her fellow South Sudanese, the more insecure she felt. This is a contrast to most research that suggests that refugees feel a sense of security by living in proximity to their fellow refugees most especially of similar nationality and ethnicity. The

uncertainty and insecurity she experienced during her stay with her fellow South Sudanese urban refugees drove her to socially exclude herself to find security.

However, Jacinta's troubles didn't seem to end. She acquired what she referred to as a strange illness, it involved a foetus like movement in her stomach.

*There was something moving in my stomach, I was in pain. I went to hospital, and the x-rays scan found nothing. It was like I had a child inside my stomach but there was nothing detected in the hospital. I have a very close friend of mine. She is a muganda woman, she told me that what I was suffering from could not be detected in hospitals. She told me it was witchcraft and she knew where to take me for treatment. She took me to an old woman with very old things, she treated me with some herbs (*Jacinta, urban refugee*).*

Uncertainty: A life lived looking over the shoulders

There is intertwine between uncertainty and insecurity. Insecurity breeds uncertainty and somehow uncertainty breeds insecurity. For a State like South Sudan where ethnic divisions are strongly displayed as cause of tensions that erupt into armed conflict and mass displacement (Boswell, 2021), life in displacement becomes somewhat challenging. Because in every war there are war victims and perpetrators (Derluyn, Vandenhole, Parmentier, & Mels, 2015) and if these categories are ethnically branded, life gets a little more complex while in displacement uncertainty blooms, social trust is scarce and social networks narrowed.

In Kampala, refugees developed communities according to their nationalities. These communities are known to provide connections to services, assistance and relationships (Johnston, Kvittingen, Baslan, & Verduijin, 2019). The South Sudanese refugees had a community: Uganda South Sudanese urban refugee community (USSURC). Although refugees from Southern Sudan have experienced longer protracted displacement in Uganda, USSURC was the youngest community of urban refugees formed in Kampala. It was registered in 2019, with operations which were to begin in 2020 but due to COVID-19 delayed to 2021 (Birungi, 2023). Perhaps USSURC was the youngest community because South Sudan only became a sovereign state in 2011. The core function of USSURC was to foster peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic groups.

However, USSURC was unpopular among the South Sudanese urban refugees. The founder of USSURC who was the community president by then, was suspected of having ties with the government back in South Sudan. Following the 2020 appointment of Riek Machar a Nuer vice president in South Sudan, and in Kampala a Nuer founder and president of USSURC. The coincidence was allegedly too perfect. Rumours of forceful repatriation of alleged suspects of war only worsen the situation. Even the South Sudanese consulate in Kampala came to be feared by the urban refugees. It was alleged to be conspiring in the forceful repatriation of refugees suspected of war. They referred to the phrase allegedly made at the consulate; *"SPLA oyee",* as the cause of their fears. Conspiracy theories grew and uncertainty was inevitable.

In Kampala, there was a tendency of a back-and-forth movement between South Sudan and Kampala, especially by the male refugees. They claimed to be moving to South Sudan for employment opportunities and back to Kampala to visit their wives and children. These movements raised tension for both parties; those who made the trips, and those who remained but especially for those who made the trips. In South Sudan, those who made the trips from Kampala were suspected of conspiring with rebels, and when they returned to Kampala, they were suspected of conspiring with the government as spies. Peter, a youth of *Muru* ethnicity, made frequent visits between Kampala and Juba and feared that his movements led to the social isolation for his family and sometimes also constrained his movements in Kampala.

*"We live in fear of who we will encounter. I am suspicious of people who ask me questions. I am scared for my life, the community at USSURC looks at me suspiciously because I have just returned from Juba. I don't want them near my family. I am always looking behind me to see who is following me, because they are always following for information." (*Peter, urban refugee)

Uncertainty in displacement disrupts possible networks that are necessary for survival. In the urban areas, the lack of humanitarian assistance towards refugees strengthens the importance of social networks formed in refugee communities, however such social networks are undermined by uncertainty. In uncertainty, social isolation appears as a solution for security. This doesn't mean that the challenges of social isolation are waived off. This only means that the individuals learn to live alongside these challenges.

The social isolation from South Sudanese refugees, constructed avenues to forge new social bonds especially with Ugandan citizens. Some of these bonds were so strong that some south Sudanese refugees especially the wives to suspected rebels assumed a Ugandan identity. Sometimes these new bonds threatened the security of the Ugandans especially when the refugees were targeted and their homes broken into by suspected spies from South Sudan. With such threats to the citizens, the refugees were forced to shift to different places. Each new place was further away from their fellow South Sudanese community.

Out of these new networks forged with Ugandans, new habits were also learned and sometimes old practices reawakened. Witchcraft beliefs were among them. Ugandan friends knew where to find spiritual assistants who could perform spells for protection, business prosperity and fertility.

Witchcraft: A Paradox for Security and Insecurity.

Witchcraft is a double-sided phenomenon. On one hand witchcraft could potentially provide security while on the other hand, it could unleash all sorts of insecurities at least for those who believe in it. In traditional sub-Saharan Africa, witchcraft beliefs were the only form of religion known, and therefore practiced communally for protection against bad omens, misfortunes, infertility and general insecurities. The traditional belief systems were not branded as *witchcraft*. They were only belief systems. The rebranding to witchcraft came as colonialists introduced new belief systems. This caused a division between profane and sacred, right belief and wrong beliefs, and evil and good. Traditional religious beliefs were branded *witchcraft*, traditional, backward and evil. The colonialists thought their religions to be more civilized, since they had undergone series of witch hunts in a bid to eradicate witchcraft practices in Europe.

In post-colonial sub–Saharan Africa, witchcraft beliefs still exist. Those who belief in witchcraft only now practice it in hiding due to the residues of the negative colonial connotations attached to it. The reasons for witchcraft beliefs remained the same: protection against infertility, misfortunes, business failure, spiritual attacks, and general insecurities. On the other hand, witchcraft can be used to cause infertility, misfortune, stagnancy, financial constraints and business failure. The person who is attacked by witchcraft is referred to as “bewitched”. The bewitched experience, misfortunes, stagnation, bad luck, strange illness, financial difficulties, marital failure, lack of self will and all sorts of insecurities.

Among the South Sudanese urban refugees, there were ethnic groups that were recognized and feared for their witchcraft beliefs and practices i.e., Baka, Azande, Balanda and Muru. The Baka witchcraft beliefs were the most feared. The social position on the witchcraft hierarchy among these ethnicities was known and told through stories. It was rumoured that the Balanda's had the ability to sense the presence of a wizard, if a wizard were to get closer to a Balanda, the hairs on the arms of the Balanda could stand and the wizard could notice that they were identified and run away. Stories of Baka witchcraft recount beliefs that cassava trees could grow from the back of an individual suspected of theft. To an extent, the social position of witchcraft beliefs provided a form of security to the ethnicities ranked even while in displacement.

The Azande in Kampala strongly believed that the strength of their witchcraft was centred with the organisation of their kingdom. To them the presence of an organised kingdom was the source of their witchcraft strength. When Evans-Pritchard studied the Azande in 1926, there were no colonial borders in place (Evans-Pritchard 1937). It is speculated that he interacted with the Azande in the now Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Then, the Azande kingdom was still intact. Post- colonialism came along with disintegrating the Azande kingdom and Azande divided with state borders with some locked-in Southern Sudan. The 2011 referendum came with hope for the Azande of South Sudan, the reestablishment of their kingdom and coronation of a king.

*"After 117years, since our king was killed by the French and British. Our kingdom will grow and we shall be strong again." (*Mercy, urban refugee)

When probed further, to better understand what was meant by "*strong again*". It was used in reference to the supernatural control of the spiritual realms which provided the Azande with social status that created some sort of security for themselves and their property. However, there were some Azande who questioned the power of their witchcraft to defeat their enemies and offer them protection.

Some argued that witchcraft spells only affected persons with a close connection to the "*bewitcher*". For instance, the kin were more likely to be affected by witchcraft than distant clan members. They argued that there had to be some closeness between the "*bewitcher*" and the "*bewitched*". And sometimes ignorance of witchcraft could protect from catching the spells. This meant that if one didn't belief in witchcraft or know of its consequences then the witchcraft could not affect them.

The clear example to emphasize this point was that of Joseph Kony. Joseph Kony led his lord's resistance army (LRA) through Azande villages back in South Sudan where they looted, raped women and destroyed property and the Azande witchcraft failed to stop the LRA and protect them. To some, Joseph Kony was an outsider, therefore the Azande witchcraft could not affect him. While others believed Joseph Kony wore stronger witchcraft that out-spelled the Azande witchcraft. This paradox underscores the contested nature of spiritual power.

Although the Azande witchcraft beliefs were revered, the South Sudanese urban refugees who sought for witchcraft protection against spiritual attacks did not seek it from the Azande. They instead used their own networks within their own ethnicities and sometimes sending for spiritual assistance from their kin who lived in refugee settlements. In some instances, the profanity of witchcraft created a fear amongst them to share their beliefs in witchcraft to their fellow refugees and instead constructed friendships with Ugandans who connected them to Ugandan spiritual assistants locally known as "*omuzawo omuganda*", or "*witchdoct*or".

Witchcraft was never practiced as a solo belief. It was only complimentary to either Christianity or Islam. Balance was necessary. The solo belief in witchcraft practices was shunned. It could cause social alienation and socially harm the person accused of practicing it. While a solo belief in Christianity or Islam could not provide instant solutions to challenges and hardships experienced.

The urban refugees turned to witchcraft beliefs and practices for security against strange illness, business misfortunes, marital challenges, and even witchcraft attacks from those they believed to envy them. Fellow South Sudanese refugees were the suspected "bewitchers", and sometimes Ugandans were also suspected of causing such spiritual insecurities. What caught our attention was the witchcraft spell that was believed to locate persons especially those who don't want to be located. It was believed that this spell could cause the person to expose themselves in public or even return to the crime scene while under the influence of the spell. The way to protect oneself from being caught by this spell was for them to perform rituals that could protect them against being located by the witchcraft. The threat presented by witchcraft forced some to make trips back to South Sudan to a region known as Yei in order to get charms that could protect them against witchcraft.

Rituals: Protection from (in)visible insecurities

Refugees are known to perform their traditional rituals even while in displacement. These may include marriage rituals, death rituals, naming rituals, protection rituals and rituals to treat war trauma. Similarly, even while in displacement, there are rituals learned especially in multi-cultural areas. We borrow the definition of rituals from Rappaport as, the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers (Rappaport, 1999). In this section, we identify some of the rituals that were used by South Sudanese urban refugees in Kampala for protection against both the invisible and visible insecurities. Rituals were performed to offer protection for wealth, health, and general wellbeing. Performing of rituals occurred throughout the life cycle of an individual. For instance, the naming rituals, was the first ritual to introduce a newborn to society.

When a child was born in Kampala, preparations were made for the naming ritual of the child. This was known for social protection. The name had to be carefully selected because it provided the child with a lifelong identity. This identity was crucial for inclusion to kinship, clan membership and ethnic belonging. The naming rituals were performed by the paternal relatives at least among the ethnicities we interacted with. It was believed that if the naming ritual was not performed, the infant could acquire a spirit of unrest, turning into a vagabond. This could also imply that even in adulthood, the individual would experience misfortunes, curses and bad luck. The naming rituals held great significance that the paternal relatives of the child were searched for within the refugee settlements or back in South Sudan to perform the ritual.

Among the Azande, *Kasugude* (bringing out the child) was one of the cultural rituals still practiced even while in Kampala. It was performed seven days after childbirth. The seven days collaborated with the falling off of the umbilical cord of the infant. After the umbilical cord fell off, the ritual was performed as an introductory ceremony of the infant to society. It was believed that it protected the infant from evil spirits that would smell blood. The ritual was performed by the paternal relatives of the infant, and it was on this day that the infant was also given a name.

While in displacement, it was difficult for the refugees to perform or reencounter the ritual mimicking the same performance displayed back in South Sudan. It was challenging to locate paternal relatives, because some remained in South Sudan, others are displaced out of Uganda, others are resettled in third countries, while some urban refugees avoided making

contact with their relatives back in South Sudan for security reasons. The ornaments and herbs used in the ritual were also a challenge for the urban refugees. The herbs were mostly acquired from the refugee settlements because within the settlements, refugees had small plots of land to cultivate, which was not the case for urban refugees in Kampala. Back in South Sudan, cultural naming rituals were practiced alongside Christian baptism. However, the challenges experienced in locating relatives and herbs to keep up the rituals influenced some to only perform Christian baptism.

There were assorted herbs[54] used for protection against invisible attacks- *Jobo* and *Lugeyi* were among them. Some rituals didn't require socializing, for instance placing the root of *jobo* in the handbag for ladies or in the wallets for the case of men. It was believed that the root of *jobo*, provided protection from witchcraft attacks. While *lugeyi* was believed to cure and repel all sorts of witchcraft if planted in the homestead. Rituals are a social performance, involving a group of people with similar beliefs. The uncertainty made participation in social events like rituals quite difficult for some urban refugees. For instance, the *Buti* ritual by the Kakwa which was performed back in South Sudan for protection against witchcraft attacks on the clan members.

"Buti": a kakwa ritual against witchcraft attacks.

Buti was a traditional ritual performed by the Kakwa people for protection against invisible forces of witchcraft. It was performed in the last month of the year, because the period was associated with great harvest. The ritual begun at sun set and lasted trans night to the following morning. It was presided by elderly men and women from the different clans of the Kakwa ethnicity. The ritual involved chanting, dancing and drinking *kwete*. The men danced with bows, arrows and spears as the dance signified protection from the invisible forces of witchcraft, while the elderly women from each clan were smeared with a substance locally referred to as "*meje*". *Meje* was described as a yellowish, orange dust like substance that formed on the surface of the water in rivers. Each elderly woman who was smeared was a representation of her entire clan. At sunrise, there was a goat slaughtered for the elders to wrap up the ceremony.

[54] By herbs we mean plants and plant parts inclusive of dried roots, leaves or stems.

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SECTION 4

THE ISSUE OF LAND:
ETHNICITY, IDENTITY, AND CITIZENSHIP

CHAPTER TWELVE

"BITTERNESS IN A SUGAR ESTATE": LAND AND THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEES IN JEWI CAMP, ETHIOPIA

Teshome Emana

"*Today, the food aid we receive from the UNHCR is not enough for us to survive. When we ask them (UNHCR administrators), to give us more, they advise us to go and produce food around our camp. But the land is not ours, where can we produce food? We are landless here; 'they' do not allow us to touch it*" (Tok, August 2024)

Introduction

The above quote from an informant in Jewi Refugee Camp in Gambella is cited here to show the variety of the difficulties that refugees face. The quote points at two types of problems. First, it points at the insufficiency of the help the refugees get from the national and international humanitarian and development agencies. Second, it points at the problem of land and access to land outside the camp. As this second problem is one of the key foci for my discussions in the paper, I begin with an overview of that particular problem. This is the problem of land and access to overtly fertile land outside the refugee camps. It is this fertile land which is conceived as a 'sugar estate' in this paper though paradoxically full of bitterness for both refugees and the host-community. While the host community still survives on traditional small holder agriculture and some family level fishing activities with low level of technology and poor infrastructure, the pressure they receive from the presence of refugees has made them constantly remonstrate about the impact on both natural resources and social stability. Equally, refugees often complain that the host community is not willing to share the land and other resources around the camp because they are neither citizens nor Anywaa in their ethnic background.

The broader context of the refugee-host community relationship is the following. While the Ethiopian refugee policy is to reduce the settlement of refugees in camps and to improve on the possibilities for refugees to be

integrated in the local communities in which they live, this policy seems to be met by particular problems in the region of Gambella. The problem is a long-standing conflict between refugees and the host population, and in this case the refugees are represented by Nuer people from South Sudan, and the local community and landowners are represented by the Anywaa, originally from South Sudan, but now Ethiopian citizens. As this conflict is an important focus in the paper I start with a brief overview of the different dimensions of the conflict itself.

The Anywaa-Nuer conflict

The interaction between the groups in Gambella goes far back in history, a history in which both groups since before 1900 were moving back and forth between Gambella and South Sudan. With the border agreement between Sudan and Ethiopia in 1905, the early years of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan period, a majority of Anywaa ended up on the Ethiopian side of the border, while most Nuer remained in South Sudan. Hence the Anywaa was the majority group in Gambella and when Nuer migrants came into their territories the Nuer accepted that they were in Anywaa territory, and they respected the rules of the Anywaa. This situation lasted until the end of the 1970s. However, this quickly changed in the mid-1980s (Hagos & Winczorek, 2018, p. 32; Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 7). With the sudden influx of refugees due to the second Sudanese civil war and the resettlement projects of the Ethiopian Derg regime, the demographic composition developed gradually in favor of the refugees, and over time the demography also shifted with the Nuer becoming the majority population. The Anywaa never accepted this and claimed they were the legitimate citizens of Ethiopia while the Nuer that also went back and forth between Gambella and South Sudan were foreigners. With the Derg this inequality had also increased, as the Derg allowed the SPLA to operate in the region and accepted the Nuer soldiers in ways that discriminated against the Anywaa. With the new TPLF government in place in Addis there was some years of alliance between the regime and the Anywaa elites who had supported them in the fight with the Derg, producing hopes for a change in policies towards the groups in Gambella, but this changed throughout the 1990s and the Nuer were again favoured. A situation that has lasted up until today,

For the argument of the paper, therefore, it is important to note that the Anywaa-Nuer conflicts have a historical background as well as a regional and national Ethiopian background. And the tensions have increased as we move towards the later periods in which this study was carried out. The

study therefore is carried out in a context in which the conflicts between the Nuer refugees in the camps and the Anywaa local population have been dramatized and with that also produced an intensified public debate about the mechanisms and the design of refugee integration in the region.

This situation has affected the envisaged implementation of national/regional land laws and service provision activities by the government and partner NGOs. All these complications have kept both refugees and the host community in a state of bitterness towards each other, a bitterness that is produced by the unequal access to the fertile land in the area. Unpacking this complex situation, therefore, is useful not only to improve our academic understandings of the contexts but also to inform about policy gaps that exist between centrally decided policy intentions and their effects on the local level in Gambella.

Methodologically, the study has used qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews with refugees, members of host community, NGO representatives, and regional/local government officials to unpack refugees in their everyday endeavour to access land in the host community. This approach has produced different perspectives from different informants in different positions, providing us with a view into the local refugee context in Gambella, a context that is both dynamic and unpredictable.

To better understand this the focus is on South Sudan refugees in Jewi Camp, which is situated in the Anywaa Zone in Gambella region. The Camp was established in 2015 and hosts nearly 66,776 refugees (UNHCR 2022) who often struggle to make their living. This is so even if the land is fertile and conceived as a "sugar estate" but at the same time the conflict between the Nuer and Anywaa has made this fertile land "full of bitterness" for both refugees and the host-community. While the host community still survives on traditional small holder agriculture and family level fishing with low level of technology and poor infrastructure, the pressure they receive from the presence of refugees has made them constantly aware of the effects of the conflict on both natural resources as well as social stability. On the other hand, refugees often complain that the host community is not willing to share the land and other resources around the camp. The problem for the refugees is that they are neither Ethiopian citizens nor Anywaa.

A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In the following discussion complexity theory is used to explain how refugees' agencies in their everyday life are affected by an assemblage of factors, including host community perceptions, local politics, limited social networks, global political trends, resilience capacity of local community and the refugees. The complexity in refugee situations is dynamic and changes overtime (Poocharoen, Jeffrey, and David 2019) in a non-linear fashion (Butler and Allen 2008) where the equilibrium of the relationship between the actors may be shaken by the contemporary social contexts (Rhodes 2008). As there is no universal rule to explain the behaviour and interests of each actor in the refugee protection system, the theory helps us to interpret the interplay of these multiple actors and the networks they create to achieve their purposes (Klijn 2008). The theory also helps us to account for the way policies are framed and how changes unfold (Eppel and Rhodes 2018). Overall, Tenbensel (2018) argues that complexity theory is useful in studying the situation of refugees as they navigate in social phenomena which are the products of a collection of social interactions between heterogeneous groups of individuals, associations, institutions, and the socio-cultural and legal constructs.

To further our understanding of the complexity of refugee situations, Betts (2010) argues that refugee regimes themselves are complex because the way two or more actors interact and influence each other's scope and purpose in refugee protections and solutions are complex. Aggarwal (2006) further elaborates the complexity in the actors' engagement saying that they may be limited to some localities or some issues, or specific institutions may be part of the wider multilateral partnerships. At the same time, some actors such as the UNHCR and the RSS of the Ethiopian government may play parallel or overlapping roles in multiple institutions. Despite the assortment of actors that play in supporting refugees, many refugees now find themselves in an exile-like camps waiting for alternatives where there are no solutions in sight (Poocharoen, Jeffrey, and David 2019). What we have examined thus far may not offer an exhaustive account of complexity theory within refugee studies. Nevertheless, it can serve as a point of departure for exploring the everyday struggles of South Sudanese refugees in accessing land and other resources in the communities around Jewi Camp. It is within this scope that Guinn and Straussman (2019) and Straussman (2015) argue that complexity theory provides a framework to understand the interconnected and dynamic nature their situation by moving beyond the usual linear cause-effect

models. It helps to gain a holistic picture and unpacks how certain actions and decisions at a certain level can have effects on other levels to collectively impact both refugees and host communities. Thus, understanding South Sudan refugees' access to land and related resources around Jewi Refugee Camp entails unpacking the interactions, co-operations, and/or conflicts among different actors who appear with different interests and power inequalities within the contemporary local, regional, continental and global complexities.

Using this theoretical framework on our empirical case we see that locally, South Sudanese Nuer refugees as well as Anywaa host communities in Gambella region. Both live in a chronic severe poverty situation, constant peace instability, and where there is fierce ethnic competition over land resources. Another local context in which we examine refugees' access to land is the fact that almost all the camps are situated in Anywaa Zone where land is traditionally under the ownership of the Anywaa ethnic group. This sense of ethnic based land ownership always comes to surface whenever any sort of conflict arises between the Anywaa and the Nuer in the region. This local conflict has an incessant spillover effect on the everyday life of the refugees as their access to social and economic resources is restricted to camp life. To worsen the complexities in the everyday life of refugees, the engagement of partners such as UNHCR, government agencies, and other non-government organizations become constrained in providing support due to lack of capital. This has happened because of the unreliable national and local capacities given the level of a problematic national economic situation as well as global political shifts. In addition, it is often criticized that Ethiopian land laws such as the 1995 Constitution (see Article 40) are state-dominated and do not have enough space to accommodate refugees' demand for land.

Understanding the complexity in the living situation of South Sudan refugee in Jewi Refugee Camp also requires examining it within the present East African regional contexts. Today, East African countries such as South Sudan, Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia are in recurring displacements because of their internal political instabilities, conflict between some of these countries, and natural disasters such as drought. This has resulted in the lack of precise information, both on the number of refugees and asylum seekers, but also a complete record of their everyday demand of support. For the purpose of this paper, which is to understand the situation of the South Sudan refugees in Jewi refugee camp, it suffices to see the crisis in South Sudan and to focus how the developments in that

country over time has produced suffering and displacement of a large number of people.

The crisis in South Sudan goes back to the mid-1950s, first with the First Civil war that ended in 1972, and then the Second Civil War from 1984 until 2005, through which South Sudan gained its independence in July 2011. Both war periods produced deaths and also displacement of people into the neighbouring countries, including Ethiopia. After their independence in 2011 South Sudanese got their own civil war, in 2013, with a deadly conflict between the government and opposition forces that forced thousands of people to flee. All these conflicts in South Sudan produced a stream of refugees into Ethiopia and helped to make Gambella into the main refugee state in the country. To make matters worse in East Africa, the current Sudan civil war that erupted in April 2023 resulted in "the largest displacement crisis of the year, with 6.1 million Sudanese fleeing to other areas within the country and 1.5 million people seeking safety abroad" (UNHCR 2025). As of December 2024, Ethiopia hosts 1,073,275 refugees out of whom 429,216 are South Sudanese who live in seven camps in Gambella Regional State (UNHCR 2024).

Furthermore, geopolitical interests of external powers also have effects on the everyday lives of Africans in different regions. "Africa has in recent decades become a site of intense competition between 'great' powers-the US, Russia, and China as the latter's presence on the continent has expanded" (Carmody, 2025, P.1), but seemingly without the African countries being able to exploit this competition to the benefit of their people. In addition, former refugee receiving countries, especially in Europe, were closing their doors, or at least reluctant to receive refugees, producing the crisis in the Mediterranean as well as all the problems along the overland routes.

The current increase in the population of refugees and asylum seekers in Ethiopia is likely attributable to the interrelated factors such as the contemporary political turmoil in East Africa, civil wars such as the one in Sudan, and internal conflicts like the one in South Sudan.

The Paradox: Land as a Source of Bitterness

The complexity of access to land and related resources for refugees in Jewi camp emanates from the multiplicity of local, regional, national agencies or actors, and emerging global factors that often shape the everyday encounters of refugees and their relationship with the host communities. In Gambella Region, these interconnected factors increase the level of

bitterness by the refugees and the host community toward each other. This part of the paper illustrates this feeling of bitterness by incorporating the views of informants from the refugees and the host community. In addition, opinions from government agencies and other NGO representatives who often play the middle role are also included. This helps us to see how the main coordinating agencies such as the RRS and UNHCR act on refugee responses and how humanitarian and development partners operate to help refugees and the host community builds resilience in the everyday complexities they encounter.

"We are on the lands of others": Refugees as trespassers

The complexity in the refugee situation in Gambella is much related to the way the refugees perceive themselves in the community where land is traditionally designated as land of a certain ethnic group, and where the administrative zones are also designated along these ethnic lines such as Anywaa and Nuer. Here we explore whether South Sudan refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp have reliable means of accessing land formally or informally in the community around the camp. A refuge informant told me that refugee households in the camp did not have any means of using land in the community and thus remained highly dependent on UNHCR and other NGOs for humanitarian assistance. That is why another refugee said, "*in Ethiopia, land is of the citizens and refugees are not allowed to use it for their livelihoods. It is illegal for refugees to own land here*" (Interview on December 24, 2025). This goes with one of the provisions in the 1995 Constitution which reads as *"… Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange*" (Article 40.3). The restriction of access to land begins from this point on, making land transactions legally forbidden.

An elaborate account of the problem of refugees' access to land was given by a refugee incentive worker in the camp. His account includes why and how the South Sudan refugees use of land is limited to within the camp:

"I live in this refugee camp. I am married and have 5 children. In our culture, every married Nuer man who has children more than seven years has two houses. The tradition is that once the children are above seven years (at least when they remove their baby teeth), the father should leave them with their mother and construct a second house for himself. So, the wife visits him in the second house at the will of the spouse. Thus, I have two houses because some of my children are above seven years. The first house was constructed by UNHCR while I constructed the second by

securing the plot with the permission from the concerned bodies such as RRS and the Camp Chairman. In addition, I have a plan to secure land to keep cattle and undertake small farming due to the shortage of food we faced last year. During that crisis, some of our friends went back to South Sudan while some others went out of the camp in search of food in the local community. But they were bitterly attacked by members of the local community around the camp. Three people were killed in the conflict."

This lack of access to land has forced some of the refugees to take the risk of going to Gambella City and exploit opportunities that would help them get access to resources in areas such as the New Land-formerly called Nuer Land-where Ethiopian Nuer nationals are dominantly residing. Connected to this, a refugee teacher of a secondary school in Jewi Refugee Camp shared his experience as follows.

"*Out of the 37 teachers in the school, I am the only Nuer and a refugee. After I knew that New Land village is where the Nuer are the majority, I decided to use my ethnic background so that I could get a physical space for residence. Now I have a house and a grocery where I do small business during my spare time. You know, many other refugees want to move to the city because the ration of food they get is too small for their survival. Services are not sufficient; for example, water is very scarce there. But out of camp mobility is very difficult for them. When some people move to fetch water and firewood around the camp, they are attacked by the local Anywaa community for all the refugees are Nuer*."

This restriction from the host community also hindered the services provided by organizations such as the UNHCR for both the refugees and the local community around the camp. This challenge is observed by a refugee informant as follows:

"*There is a plan to help refugees produce their food around their camps. For example, last year, a certain organization came to help us cultivate land and produce crops and vegetables around the camps, but the host community was not willing to allow us to carry out the* activities." (Interview with an incentive worker in the camp, December 2024).

This interview shows that the host community strongly opposes the presence of refugees on land outside of the camp. Simon Peter, a former refugee in Jewi Camp and a member of the RCC in Addis Ababa during my interview in December 2023 expressed his feeling about the refugee-host relationship over land access in Gambella Region.

"*I was living in Jewi Refugee Camp before I came here as a caretaker of a sick person from the camp. Now I am the RCC chairperson though I am not paid anything for this service. The cost of living here is rising and many of us do not get enough food. The budget is not enough. Due to cultural barriers, some of us do not eat Ethiopian food even though it is cheaper. I know that our fellow refugees in Jewi camp have similar shortage of food. The camp is located on what is traditionally called Anywaa land where refugees are not allowed even to touch it. It is difficult for them to use the available resources including land, water, and firewood. When they go out of the camp they are beaten and arrested by community members. For example, three refugee women were killed last year. This inflicted additional tension between the Anywaa and the Ethiopian Nuer communities as the Anywaa suspect that the Ethiopian Nuer support the refugees because of their ethnic tie. After that, the police started to escort refugees go to Gambella when they wanted to buy goods for their daily consumption. The Anywaa always attack us because they are armed and we are not*."

Another refugee from the camp who serves as an incentive teacher in the primary school in the camp said:

"*We do not have the right to use the land in the community. I think the Ethiopian government does not have the law to allow us. The Anywaa host community members do not at all allow us to use the land out of the camp; they do not even want to see us walking on their land*."

From the above interviews, we can see how bad the relationship between the local community and the refugee Nuer is. However, it is necessary also to listen to the host community so that readers will attain balanced information. Thus, the following part delves into the perception of some members of the Anywaa host community near the Camp.

"It is Anywaa Land!": Position of the Host Community

Informants from the host community side are of diverse economic backgrounds, ranging from farmers, fishers, youth, government employees, and business people. Though many of the informants consulted during this study had similar feelings towards the refugees, some of the informants from the regional government offices had divergent views about the refugee-host community relationships in connection with refugees' access to land and other resources. I first consulted a civil servant who works for a development project under the control of the regional government. I wanted to know if he could explain to me about the overall

relationship between the refugees and the host community and the challenges that refugees face to access and use land for their livelihoods. He expresses his feelings as follows:

"*Well, I do not oppose the intended integration plan. I support it, but because of the historical background of the relationship between the two major ethnic groups in the Region, the Anywaa people feel that they are purposefully suppressed by the successive Ethiopian political regimes. I think they suspect the government to be in favour of the Nuer ethnic group. So, there is a fear that if refugees and the host community integrate, it could cause a massive displacement of the Anywaa from their land. Practically, integration is impossible because the Anywaa do not want to share their land. The Nuer cannot settle on the Anywaa land! You know, in camps where the refugees are Anywaa, there is no problem with host community. So, it is good to relocate the refugee camps to the zone where the local Nuer are demographically dominant*."

I further enquired to capture the opinions of other officers from other regional line departments. The following opinion is extracted from the long interview I had with the Natural Resource Development and Environment Protection project expert who held the opinion that refugees are destructive to the natural environment and cause instability in the area and thus should not be let out of camp (Interview July 10, 2024). His opinion reinforces what the above informant had already said.

"*I believe that refugees should be kept in the camps because I fear they are expanding everywhere using their ethnic tie with the Ethiopian Nuer community. Before some years, the Ethiopian Nuer were only in Jikaw woreda /district but now they have expanded to three woredas. You know, they are polygamous and have many wives and can produce many children easily. So, as the land in the camp is not enough to construct additional houses for the extra wives and children, they usually move out of camps illegally and construct new houses by cutting down trees on Anywaa lands. That always causes conflict*."

It is not only marrying more than one wife that contributed for the possible fast expansion of the Nuer but also their relatively open culture to marry extra wives from other ethnic groups such as Anywaa or any other ethnic group in the region. Yet, these all could not stop the conflicts from happening. A young, educated informant from the host community was asked whether he shared what the above informants said. From his opinion, I could grasp that he was strongly against the presence of the

refugees in his area mainly because of the strong bondage between land and ethnic identity among the Anywaa community.

"*If you ask me, I can say that the local community does not accept refugees on our land. The government reports that it is working to integrate the local community and the refugees but practically it is not true. The host community knows that refugees are problem creators as they kill people and destruct the natural environment. But I still see that some refugees come to the city, buy whatever they want and go back to their camp. We may tolerate this*."

From this interview we can see that it is tolerable to see refugees in the local markets while they purchase goods for their everyday consumption, while it is not allowed for them to touch the "Anywaa land" and other natural resources on it. In general, the above interviews show that the discourse of refugee-host community integration demands solving the local political and economic conflicts between the Anywaa and the Nuer ethnic groups relating to that naturally endowed land. It also requires accepting that refugees are not only problem creators but also potential contributors to the local economic development activities. Thus, identifying the missing link between the integration rhetoric and understanding the context at community level may make stakeholders' commitments more fruitful. Otherwise, we may continue hearing the host community complaining as "*refugees are occupying the land illegally and destruct our environment. They are securing jobs in offices such as NGOs while citizens are jobless. They take everything*" (Interview with Omot, December 2024) .

Voices in Between

From the above discussion, we have seen that refugees and members of the host community have diverging perceptions regarding resource sharing including land around Jewi Refugee Camp in Gambella. These divergent positions have become sources of bitterness towards each other. Thus, this requires a look at the views of partners who are working at different levels with different capacities to provide services. During my fieldwork in Gambella, I consulted some informants from government and non-government organizations to find out if they had any opinion on why and how refugees and the host community could develop a feeling of bitterness against each other. However, due to the number of actors and the local context during the fieldwork, this part will present the feelings of selected informants without prejudice to the volume and quality of their

engagement in refugee service provisions. Thus, people from the office of Refugee and Returnees Service (RRS) and Gambella Regional State Rural Land Administration from the government wings, and DICAC and UNHCR from the NGO side were consulted.

To begin with, the main duties of RRS office in Gambella include constructing camps, providing basic services, and coordinating the overall refugee assistance programs and working with partners who support refugee-host community integration and self-reliance activities. Having this in mind, I asked an expert in the office to tell me the overall situation of refugees and their access to land around their camp and he said:

"*Today each household in the camp gets 7.5 kg food aid every month. This is not enough. So, we expect them to produce their additional food by using the land around the camps. There is vast fertile land there to be used by both the host community and the refugee for cultivation. But the plan is not going as well as expected*".

Knowing this, I further enquired to know why the plan for helping refugees to produce their additional food was not successful. He simply uttered that it was because of the perpetual conflict between the refugee and the host. He said, "*last year, there was a continuous conflict in which three women refugees died while they were trying to collect firewood from the forest. The host community does not want to see refugees outside the camp*."

In July 2024, I went to the RRS branch office near Jewi Camp and talked to the Food and Cash Program coordinator. He partially repeated what I heard from the expert in the RRS office in Gambella branch. He also elaborated how refugees were engaged in using the land within the camp but not allowed to use the land outside:

"*We often give 7.5 kg of food for each HH. This amount of food is not sufficient, and we encourage them to produce their own food in and out of camps and keep cattle and sheep as much as possible. They can use the available land in the camp for any purpose. Now they do small farming activities, open shops, and keep cattle and goat keeping. The problem is they cannot use the land outside the camp because the host community does not allow them to do so. The local community is armed and sometimes breaks into the camp and raids refugees' cattle and robe. Thus, there is always conflict between the refugees and the host community. Refugees could not go to Gambella city for fear that they would be attacked*."

As part of the government line department, I also interviewed the Land Administration expert in Gambella Regional State to tell me if he knew

how much refugees were using the land around Jewi Refugee Camp. He explained:

"*The refugee situation in Gambella is a serious matter. There is always conflict between refugees and the host community. I think repatriation is not realistic at present. So, all stakeholders should think out of the box. Refugees are not problems by themselves. The problem is how we approach to support both the host community and the refugees together so that both groups use land for common purposes. I think the challenge is that Ethiopia tries to solve problems of others (refugees) before solving its own: the problem between Anywaa and the Nuer*."

Here the informant carefully constructed his view to show that he is impartial in his position. But he could not hide that the major cause for the repeated conflict between the refugees and the host community emanates from larger political contestation between the Anywaa and the Nuer Ethnic groups over power and resource control.

Apart from the government line departments, there are several partner NGOs that support refugee service provisions in Gambella Region. One such NGO is the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Development and Inter Church Aid Commission (known as DICAC). It is the development wing of the church which works mainly on the provision of social services such as secondary education to refugees in Gambella. According to branch officer, DICAC works not only on refugee education but also livelihoods activities. He reported that activities in education are successful but helping refugees to engage in income generating activities is not that much encouraging for some basic reasons. He said:

"*Due to lack of awareness to engage in some livelihood activities other than their traditional pastoralist way of life, refugees are not much effective in agriculture. Of course, several households do some activities such as cattle rearing, goat keeping, fruits and vegetable production. Yet they are limited to the camps due to security matters which are related to the resistance from the host community*."

For this part, a final opinion was sought from the UNHCR as a major NGO actor in refugee management and protection. To this end, a Food Security Expert in Gambella Branch Office was asked to review the way refugees were acting to access land for their livelihood activities in and around their camp. This expert felt that there was always tension between the refugee and local communities to the level of perpetuating the precarious living situation of the refugees. In his opinion, the local community was not only

unwilling to share land resources in the community but also kept complaining that their land was given away to others under the guise of camp construction. But he was optimistic that the refugee-host community conflict over land in the region was pointless as there are vast tracts of fertile land that can accommodate the need of everyone. For him, the problem is "lack of commitment and absence of caring for others".

Refugees' response to restrictions

So far we have seen that refugees are leading bitter lives because of the bitter reactions from the host community that restricted refugees' access to local resources outside the camp. Thus, this part of the paper explores how refugees navigate alternatives to support themselves on the "land that is not theirs". These alternatives, among others, include establishing one's own business, using ethnic ties, approaching religious institutions, and seeking remittances from the Nuer Diaspora.

Owning business

The geographical settlement of the South Sudan refugees in the diaspora is spread across Africa, in the Sudan, and Uganda and beyond. This has helped them to strengthen their ties and develop solidarity to navigate alternatives means to access resources in those countries. Interview results from the refugees indicate that such a tie has helped them in Ethiopia to access some useful resources including spaces for doing small businesses far beyond the camp and its surroundings to survive the economic and social misfortunes. However, there are still resistances from the host community whenever refugees try to find spaces for business. Yiech Tut tells a small part of his long history of refugee experiences as follows:

"*I am 30 years old. I am married and have two children who live with me here in New Land Village in Gambella City. I started this business by renting this house from a local resident. I am doing well, and I think my capital is nearly 40, 000 Birr now. I have employed six refugee women in the restaurant. I brought them from Jewi Refugee Camp. Two young boys are also helping me in the shop. I also help some refugees who want to start their own business in the camp or elsewhere. I send them some goods from here; they sell and give me my money back and keep the profit for themselves. They are doing well too. I also have other plans but there are problems such as price fluctuation and lack of legal license because of my status*."

Another refugee woman, Nyabanga Tut with two children, who owns a small cloth shop in the same village told me the challenges she has experienced to secure a space for her small business. In our interview in July 2024, she told me the following:

"*I came to Ethiopia when I was 14, because of the war in South Sudan. I arrived with my mother and grandmother and started to live in Pugnido refugee camp in 2012. Life in the camp was so hard, and I decided to move out. I began to save money by selling some of the items from the ration. I used the money to travel to Gambella city in 2019. When I came here, I found a few Nuer refugee women who were engaged in street vending by selling used cloths and perfumes. I also started to do the same job until I rented this room. In the long run, I heard that Moyale is a good source of goods to do business and I followed some people and went there (at the Ethio-Kenya border) to buy cloths, perfumes, and shoes to bring here and sell. My initial capital was 30,000 Birr by then. I worked hard and accumulated 50,000 Birr after two rounds. But when I went to Moyale for the third time, all the goods I bought were confiscated by the police at Dilla checkpoint. Now I am bare handed. In this shop I still sell cheap cloth and perfumes, and the income is not sufficient to feed my children. I pay 3000 Birr for the shop and another 2000 Birr to rent a room for living*. "

An informant from Jewi Refugee Camp summarizes the level of refugees' engagement in small businesses that are restricted to the camp. He said:

"*I know that some refugees have their own business such as shops in the camps. They have small farms, cattle, and goats. They also sell goods but are not much successful because they cannot easily go out of camp to buy goods for their shops*."

In general, the above interviews show that refugees are trying to become self-reliant. However, factors such as lack of space, finance, and safety are the main constraints (RRS Food Security and Cash service expert at Jewi Camp).

Traditional support systems

As a tradition, the Nuer have had traditional means of supporting each other. They call it "*Nyuak*", meaning sharing. This works for all members of the Nuer ethnic group, be it for refugees or the Ethiopian Nuer. Being Nuer itself creates a sense of solidarity during difficult situations. An Ethiopian Nuer said that he contributed 1500 Birr during the June to October 2023 shortage of ration in the refugee camps. Such support is

collected by churches. Women have '*Mat*' support system during wedding ceremonies, drought, or in paying blood compensation. There are also small self-help traditions systems for girls and boys.

I wanted to know if the refugee-host community relationship affects resource sharing through traditional networks. From the interviews, I found that informants had mixed views. Some felt that resource sharing between the two groups is more rhetorical than in practice. Others seemed to better understand the government or NGO integration policies. A refugee incentive worker from the camp told me that:

"*The basic assumption is that the host community gets 25% of the services given to the refugees. So the host communities benefit from the presence of refugees in their areas. However, this year we have seen a serious conflict erupt between Anywaa and the Ethiopian Nuer in Gambella city. This has highly affected mobility and livelihoods of the refugees. In my understanding, the relationship between the host community and the refugees varies from camp to camp. For example, refugees in the camps in Itang area do not have much problem with the host community as they are both from the same ethnic background. But in Jewi camp here, it is difficult to share resources because the host community is entirely Anywaa*."

Remittance as a support mechanism

So far we have seen that South Sudan refugees in Jewi Camp have used their own mechanisms and initiatives to respond to the restrictions they face in their everyday life because of their status. Another means of support some refugee families receive is from the Nuer Diaspora across the world. In our interview in July 2024, Paul, a refugee from the camp narrated how his fellow refugees receive remittance from relatives abroad.

"*Some people get remittances but receiving it is difficult because they do not have access to banks. So, they get the remittances through some agents such as the people from the highlands who are neither Anywaa nor Nuer but do their business near the camp. Because of their legal status, they receive the money from the sender and take up to 15% of the money before they give it to the recipient refugee. It is paid secretly and represents a serious problem for the refugees in our camp*."

Land and the legal system

Until now I have discussed the everyday life of South Sudan Refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp in Gambella and we see that it is full of complexities and uncertainties connected with a series of actors and different

institutional factors at several levels. To end the paper, I want to compare the Ethiopian situation and challenge with that of Uganda and Kenya. These two countries are known to develop promising policies and solutions for what seems so difficult in Gambella, to start a process whereby refugees can leave their camps and start up a life outside the camps and get better integrated in the communities in which they find themselves.

Refugee regimes and land laws: Some applied lessons

The Europe Commission (2024) reported that countries such as Uganda and Kenya have implemented better laws that help refugees access to basic services. Uganda is often cited for having laws that allow refugees to use land to strengthen their capacity to sustain their livelihoods (see paper by Chris in this volume). Kenya also revises its laws and plans (see the 2019 Shirika Plan, Refugee Act 2021 and the 2010 revised Constitution) to support refugees' protection and solutions. In a similar manner, Ethiopia welcomes refugees to the country for it has been implementing laws (see the 1995 Constitution, 1995 Refugee Affairs Authority establishment, Immigration proclamation 2002, 2017 CRRF, and the 2019 refugee proclamation) and reforms that allow refugees access to work permits, education, banking services, and registration of vital events. Yet, compared to Uganda and Kenya, Ethiopia seems to lack sufficient legal spaces in its laws to create opportunities for refugees to access land in the country in general and in Gambella region in particular. Thus, in concluding this paper I want to discuss the land laws of Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia in a comparative way, so that we can better understand what challenges Ethiopia is up against when the country wants to improve this situation.

Looking at the case of Uganda in terms of its refugee management and land laws is important to learn how the country has managed to host a huge number of refugees and how it has better ensured refugees' access to land. Uganda's refugee laws are often applauded for they afford enough spaces for refugees in all aspects except the restrictions in obtaining citizenship. The country's refugee policy is exemplary to the world in that it allows refugees to access land and other basic services. In addition, in contrast to Ethiopia, Uganda recognizes urban refugee status.

The following paper by Chris C. Opesen and Stevens Agutto Odongoh (Chapter 13) in this book provides details on the Ugandan situation but the authors also show that the reality for the refugees are more complex than the impression given by the "perfect system" represented by Uganda in which Uganda's refugee laws are considered to be among the most

progressive laws, at least in the African continent. On the negative side the informants of Chris and Stevens mention the size of the plots as being too small, corruption in the distribution process of plots and that some plots are even in areas with poor soil quality.

Kenya is another East African country which hosts a large number of refugees. The 2021 Refugee Act of Kenya envisioned that refugee camps would turn into integrated settlements that create opportunities to integrate refugees into the host community. The Act promotes refugee integration by granting them the right to work, freedom of movement in a designated area, and the right to own property (Halakhe and Omondi, 2024). The new law is promising the transformation of refugee camps into settlements. In addition, Kenya looks moving forward in that it has got a plan called 'Shirika Plan' which could transform the lives of more than 600,000 refugees as a result of converting refugee camps into urban settlements (Halima 2024). This plan is to create an immediate solution that would ensure economic integration of refugees by linking the gap between humanitarian and development responses.

Despite its promising vision, the Shirika Plan has faced criticism from refugees, host communities, and civil society organizations. Key concerns include the lack of meaningful consultation with refugees and community leaders, unclear implementation guidelines, limited administrative capacity, and fears of increased pressure on already strained and underfunded services. Questions around transparency, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability continue to cast doubt on the plan's ability to deliver on its ambitious goals.

Challenges for Ethiopia

It is against the above experiences, both positive and negative, drawn from Uganda and Kenya that we should look at Ethiopia's way of supporting refugees to access land and other services. The country is signatory to many of the international, continental, and regional legal instruments, conceptualized as refugee regimes by Betts (2010), that deal with solving "the multi-factor and multi-level conditions" (Poocharoen, Jeffrey, and David, 2021) of refugees such as the protection of their rights and ensuring access to crucial resources for enhancing their livelihoods. These legal instruments include the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1969 Convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU, now AU), the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2019), and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) to mention a few. Asfaw and Fantu

(2024) argue that African countries made their own specific CRRF pledge to promote refugee-friendly policies after adopting the Declaration. Ethiopia not only adopted the Declaration but also played a significant role in the recognition of the North-South global cooperation for refugee protection. After that the country openly claimed it has developed a more refugee-friendly policy in the era of CRRF (Asfaw and Fantu 2024:1338).

Ethiopia is also part of the Kampala IGAD Declaration on jobs, livelihoods, and self-reliance for refugees, returnees and host communities in the region (IGAD, 2019). In addition, the IGAD-EAC Ministerial Declaration on durable solutions for refugees in the East and Horn of Africa (2023) affirmed commitments and obligation to the 1951 Convention on Status of refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Ethiopia in its Proclamation No.1110 /2019 has given attention to providing asylum and protection to refugees by promoting the search for durable solutions (see articles 22- 42).

If we look at Ethiopia's major legal frameworks of refugee management, both field data and the document review undertaken for this study show that the country has not yet boldly spoken out how to help refugees fully access land for realizing the envisaged refugee-host community integration. There is a clear improvement on the legal side of things, with Ethiopia signing and joining international documents that point towards improvements in the handling of refugees. But we also see from the fieldwork data from Gambella that these advances do not automatically get translated into local improvements. Here we see that Ethiopian politics constitute a problem, with a heavily securitized refugee management system, but even more so the multifaceted political contestation over resources. As in several other papers in this book, the conclusion is the same, that the national system of government is an important factor in deciding the outcome of various refugee policies, and to achieve progress in a situation such as the one I have discussed for Gambella, requires various forms of priorities, perhaps the major one needed is a willingness to deal with the issue of competition over land between the refugees in camps and the host communities. Reminding ourselves about how land in such communities are linked not only to local livelihood processes but also to identity processes among the people involved, but also to national interests which we see in the allocation of land to national and international investors producing a competition not between refugees within camps and host communities, but between different forms of land use, between small scale agriculture among local people and the large scale agricultural farms representing big capital investments. What this shows us is that it is not

only a competition over land between the Nuer and the Anywaa, and other groups for that matter, all characterized by poverty and relative lack of political influence, and the capital-intensive exploitation of the land, carried out by investors with political support from the centres of Ethiopian political power. The challenge is to balance these interests and to develop processes that allow all groups to be heard.

Conclusion: Any Last Straw?

This paper has explored the complex nature of South Sudan refugees' access to land in Jewi Camp in Gambella Regional State of Ethiopia. It has exposed how several interrelated factors such as the Anywaa-Nuer regional political power contestations, refugee-host community relationships, the implementation of legal frameworks, and the ever-changing global orders have affected the realization of solutions for refugees' multifaceted problems. The empirical field data and the comparative perspective of the legal regimes of Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia show that ensuring the availability of land for refugees becomes a central factor to seek durable solutions from the bottom. Experiences from Uganda and Kenya show that a relatively generous land law may reduce refugees' and host community's bitterness in access to land, but only if the law is given effect on the local level where real people make real decisions which is also part of the applied lesson from the discussion presented. Which is that there will be no quick fixes that will solve all problems but that access to land certainly is the key, but not only for the two groups that seem to be in the centre of the conflict, but also for other types of actors, who also represent pressure on land in the area. This again requires a complex series of inputs and strategies that require real political will.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"*WE CANNOT REGISTER THE LAND WE BUY…..*": SOUTH SUDAN REFUGEE EXPERIENCES WITH UGANDA'S LAND POLICY

Chris C. Opesen and Odongoh A. Stevens

Introduction

Uganda is both a producer and a host of refugees. It has had a long tradition of hosting refugees that goes up to World War II when it hosted Poles fleeing from the Nazi-occupied Europe (Calabria, 2021; OPM, 2019). It also has what is considered one of the world's most progressive refugee policy that gives refugees freedom of movement, the right to work, establish a business, own property, and to access national services, in all sectors education and health inclusive (OPM, 2019; UNHCR, 2023b; WBG, 2017). This makes Uganda an attractive destination for refugees world over and ranks it as the largest refugee population hosting nation in Africa and third overall in the world[55] (OPM, 2019; WBG, 2017). Given its strategic relations with the United States of America, the country also hosted 2, 000 Afghans after the current Taliban government captured power back in 2021(Calabria, 2021). About 92 percent of the refugees in Uganda live in settlements either in West Nile (Adjumani, Arua, Koboko, Moyo and Yumbe) or Acholi (Lamwo) in northern Uganda, with smaller numbers also settled in Western Uganda, Mid-West or Southwest. Urban areas especially, Kampala account for the remaining population of refugees (8%) (UNHCR, 2023b). As an assemblage with an assortment of people, 57% of the refugees in the country are from South Sudan. About 31% are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The remaining 12% come from Burundi, Somalia, Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia and other countries (OPM, 2019; UNHCR, 2023b). By age, out of over 1.6 million refugees currently in the country (UNHCR, 2023b), 60% in this assemblage are under 18 years of age (OPM, 2019).

[55] After Iran and Turkiye respectively

Given the freedom to work they enjoy, refugee assemblages in Uganda are involved in over 70 types of livelihood activities but for those in settlements, subsistence farming is the mainstay of their livelihood (Calabria, 2021). To supplement the food parcels relief agencies provide and with 60% of the refugees experiencing food related challenges (UNHCR, 2023b), some refugees are renting or have purchased land even if the Ugandan land policy bars refugees from owning land (UNHCR, 2023a). It's the experiences of this section of refugee assemblages with Uganda's land policy that is the subject of interest in this paper.

Refugee Experiences With Uganda's Land Policy and The Rationale of The Study

Uganda is renowned for a hospitable environment with its refugee world's most progressive policy (Calabria, 2021; OPM, 2019; UNHCR, 2023b, 2023a; WBG, 2017), also known as the world's best refugee policy (Calabria, 2021) offers. In particular, this policy allows refugees to live in settlements, gives them access to parcels of land for small-holder farming and provides for access to national services (UNHCR, 2023b). The 2006 Refugees Act and subsequent policy frameworks also place refugees and asylum seekers at the same footing with citizens (Parliament of Uganda, 2006). The Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda 2021/22 – 2024/25 (ERP II) for example, just as the ERP I (2015/16/2019/2020) includes refugee learners in the national education system and prioritizes "shared learning services for refugees and host communities" (MoES, 2021). Refugees and asylum seekers are also entitled to work, enjoy freedom of movement and access to social services including health and education, although they do not receive Ugandan citizenship (UNHCR, 2023b; WBG, 2017).

Despite this, there are areas of this policy that do not excite refugees. For example, the Uganda Constitution prohibits the nationalization of offspring of a refugee even if he or she is born in Uganda (Parliament of Uganda, 2006). The land policy also bars refugees from owning freehold land in Uganda, pursuant to section 65(2) of the Refugees Regulations 2010 (MoLHUD, 2013).

Inside the two sides of this policy, limited deliberate anthropological attempts have explored experiences of refugees. To contribute to the corpus of knowledge and debate in the area, this study juxtaposed the top-down "World best refugee policy" rhetoric on one hand with the bottom-

up experiences of refugees with Uganda's refugee policy on land on the other using refugee perspectives.

As a general objective, the study explored experiences of refugees with Uganda's refugee regulatory framework on land access and ownership using South Sudan refugees in Kiryandongo as a reference point. Specifically, the study explored two areas: first, experiences of refugees in settlements with Uganda's land parcelling and additional land acquisition processes; and second, experiences of refugees owning land outside the settlement with Uganda's constitutional provision barring refugee land ownership

Theoretical Framework: Maryam Mushtaq Refugee Assemblages Theory (2023)

Rooted partially in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Maryam, 2023), assemblage theory derives its core concept from the French word "agencement"−meaning both the action of fitting together components and the result of that action (DeLanda, 2016; Deleuze & Guattari, 2013; Elder-Vass & Timothy, 2017; Mushtaq, 2023; Nail, 2017). Essentially, it implies the coming together of two or more things (Maryam, 2023; Nail, 2017). In this paper, we focus and highlight the four key assumptions assemblages using the Maryam Mushtaq (2023) edition of this theory given its relevance to refugees. These include:

Heterogeneity and relationality: Refugee assemblages consist of diverse elements, including human actors (refugees, aid workers, government officials), non-human entities (documents, technologies, infrastructure), and abstract factors (laws, policies, cultural norms). The relationships between these heterogeneous components are crucial, as they shape refugee identities and experiences. The interactions between components are more significant than the components themselves, emphasizing the fluid and contingent nature of being a refugee.

Emergence and the process of becoming: New properties and dynamics emerge from the interactions within the assemblage that cannot be predicted solely from the characteristics of individual elements. This emergent nature underscores the unpredictability and complexity of refugee experiences. The assemblage as a whole exhibits properties and behaviours that are not reducible to its parts.

Territorialization and deterritorialization: Refugee assemblages are constantly undergoing processes of territorialization (stabilization and

consolidation) and deterritorialization (destabilization and transformation). These processes shape the structure and identity of the assemblage over time. Territorialization creates order and structure, while deterritorialization introduces change and potential for reorganization, reflecting the ongoing and dynamic nature of refugee experiences.

Distributed agency and materiality: All components of an assemblage have some degree of agency or capacity to affect the assemblage, including non-human and non-living elements. This challenges traditional distinctions between active and passive entities. The material aspects of assemblages are as important as the social or cultural ones. Agency is distributed across the assemblage rather than being located solely in individual refugees or institutions, acknowledging the role of various elements, including non-human ones, in shaping outcomes and experiences.

Using these assumptions, a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexity, fluidity, and interconnectedness of refugee experiences, challenging traditional static and hierarchical views of social phenomena is provided and contextualised. Accordingly, these assumptions informed analysis of findings emerging from this study.

Methodology

The paper is developed primarily from an ethnographic study conducted in Kiryandongo district on refugee experiences with Uganda's land policy.

Data were collected using three (3) key ethnographic interviews (Ethno-Ints) from May 2022 to December 2023 from three household heads that have land usufruct or ownership rights in Uganda purposively sampled using a snowball strategy. The strategy was facilitated with the help of a refugee friend who turned out to be our peer researcher. One of these household heads (EI, Kirya-1) moved into this resettlement site in 2016. The other two settled in the community outside the settlement in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Data from these three ethnographic interviews sustainably collected over and over between May 2022 and December 2023 was enriched and triangulated hermeneutically and using life story analysis on the land acquisition stepwise approach.

For quality assurance, to fill in the grey areas, generate consensus and for validation purposes, each life story script was shared with the respective study participant. After editing and cleaning, data analyses and interpretation were inductively conducted by content in three stages

namely, identification and selection of meaningful verbatim, experiences and observations; collation of selected verbatim, experiences and observations into sub-themes with similar contents and lastly, aggregation of these sub-themes into major themes.

As part of the ethical consideration observed, informed consent was obtained from all three participants. The other ethical considerations observed include voluntary participation, privacy and confidentiality. In addition to managing the COVID-19 transmission risk, all participants and interviewers observed the MoH standard operating procedures (SoPs). Among others, these include wearing masks, washing hands with soap or sanitizing before every interview, avoiding contact and keeping social distances of at least 2-4 meters apart.

Findings

Findings in this section are structured under two key headings derived from the specific objectives that guided the study notably, experiences of refugees in settlements with Uganda's land parcelling policy, and two experiences of refugees owning land with Uganda's 1995 constitutional prohibition for refugees to own land. The key refugee experiences in settlements in these two themes for contextual and referencing purposes are flagged by a life story as told by "Lual".

For context purposes, we met Aken, a Dinka refugee who has since 2018 owned land in Kiryandongo first in June 2022 in Makerere with a South Sudanese friend. After building rapport, we cajoled him to walk us through his journey to Uganda and how he was able to acquire a piece of land in a country where refugees are barred.

"*It's a long story you man*", Lual opened up. "*I even don't know where to start. But let me say: There was a battle for Juba in 2016. This battle involved a series of clashes between the rival factions in SPLA loyal to President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar respectively. You might know that in August 2015, both sides signed a peace accord to end the South Sudanese Civil War and Machar became the Vice-President in April 2016. Before he returned however, about 1,400 soldiers loyal to him moved into Juba and set up their camp near the barracks of the faction loyal to Kiir since both sides did not trust each other. When Lt. Colonel GK was allegedly killed by government security personnel in July, tension rose within some security forces in the city. The fight started with an incident on 7 July, as soldiers loyal to Machar were stopped at a checkpoint in Juba's Gudele district. The army barracks erupted into*

violence. Over 300 people were killed in the fighting and approximately 36,000 civilians fled parts of the city due to the clashes. This is how I also ended up in the Kiryandongo settlement in Uganda in July 2016."

And Lual continued: "*I will now tell you about my experience with the Uganda's land policy in the settlement in a three stepped process. The first is the capture of bio data into the biometric system (documentation). At the end of this process, a ratio card is issued. In the second, you are assigned a block under a block leader who is also a refugee. And third, through your block leader, you are given a parcel of land to settle and till. The size of the land is determined by the size of your family. I was given a small one because my family only had 3 members. Some refugees also do rent land from the host communities. Landowners here give you land in exchange for food items, but some people also rent it with money. Some refugees whose daughters have been married off access land for free while in the settlement from their in-laws. Lastly, some HHs in the block sell their land to those that want it. For me I received an alert that someone was selling her parcel. I approached the seller and brought her together with the head of the block, her son and the Local Council 1 Chairperson. When we reached a consensus, we signed the land purchase ward agreement, the block leader took the document to the Office of the Prime Minister and then we were called with the seller to the office to authenticate the process. This is all. I have also some land in the community. The one in Kiryandongo is approximately 1 acre. I bought it in 2018 in the name of my son in law, a Ugandan who is married to my daughter. Authorities would not allow me to buy it because the law prohibits"* (EI, Kirya-01).

Using the experience of El-Kirya 01 whose life story is triangulated here with the experiences of EI-Kirya 02 and EI-Kirya 03, these experiences are explored in two parts. The first part focusses on refugee experiences with the land parcelling process in settlements. The second focusses on refugee experience with acquisition of additional land in the settlements.

Experiences of refugees with the land parcelling process in the settlements

The experience Aken and his two peers share here highlight a three-step structured pathway to the land parcelling process in the settlements. In step one, all asylum seekers are documented on arrival in order to acquire refugee status. Specifically, the documentation process here involves the capture of asylum seeker bio data into the biometric system. The end product in this step is a ration card that is issued for the duly registered

asylum seeker or refugee to be able to receive food rations. In step two, in their respective households, all registered refugees are placed under blocks, each under a block leader. And lastly, in step three, all household heads in their respective blocks and with the help of their block heads receive parcels of land to put up a house and to till. As an assemblage of different household sizes, the size of the land appropriated varies depending on the household size. Aken's narrative on these steps is validated by the Office of the Prime Minister's guidelines on the refugee land parcelling process that follows the same three steps (OPM, 2019).

The experience of refugees with this process is two-sided. On a positive side, there is excitement that after the ordeal of crossing from the war zone, one is welcomed, documented and given a plot to put up a house and plant crops for a dietary supplement to the relief food provided. On the negative side however, the size of the plots parcelled is experienced by the refugees as very small.

"The plot given is too small for farming depending on the family size. For some people, it is only enough for a house" (EI, Kirya-3)

This is partly because of the refugee numbers that are too many and keep going up yet the land available is fixed. The implication is that the size of the land given so that families can grow own food is insufficient for the purpose as Calabria (2021) highlights, leaving refugees vulnerable to both hunger and labour exploitation in the crop fields outside the settlements where they sell cheap labour.

Secondly, corruption by refugee block leaders is a key part of the refugee experience in the process of getting a land parcel. As a challenge, some block leaders ask for bribes. The rich also use money or livestock to get larger and fertile parcels.

"The quality and size of land officially is determined by your ability to pay a bribe (chicken or money) if he asks for it" (EI, Kirya-3)

Last but not least, some settlements are located in nonproductive landscapes. These include rocky landscapes or land that has been used over and over. Calabria (2021) also raises this experience up in his critique of Uganda's refugee land policy. Nevertheless, should not be surprising given that some of these plots have been occupied by the different sets of refugees from World War II.

Despite this negative connotations, Uganda's refugee land parcelling policy in settlements is partly what makes the Uganda's refugee model

reputable as probably the best in the world as Calabria (2021), WBG (2017) and UNHCR (2023b) all observe. It is also one of the pull factors that have continued to attract refugees to the country right from the period of World War II.

From a theoretical perspective, these refugee experiences with Uganda's land parcelling policy in settlements validates the assumptions of heterogeneity and relationality in the refugee assemblage theory. As rightly assumed, refugee assemblages consist of diverse elements that shape their experiences. There are human actors (refugees, aid workers, government officials), non-human entities (documents, technologies, infrastructure), and abstract factors (laws, policies, cultural norms). The relationships between these heterogeneous components as Maryam Mushtaq (2023) puts, are crucial in shaping refugee experiences with the land parcelling process. Similarly, in the process of a refugee acquiring land parcels, there is a lot of interaction with many human actors including aid workers, government officials in all the three steps right from documentation, issuance of ration cards, and attachment to blocks to land parcelling with block heads. This renders interactions between components in the refugee assemblages more significant than the components themselves as they determine who gets a plot where and of what size, as Lual puts it.

Experiences of refugees in settlements with acquisition of additional land

Highlighting the role of individual agency in solving challenges, as Mushtaq (2023) puts it, can in our case here be illustrated by the ways the refugees deal with the problem of land scarcity.

It is a common experience among refugees that they have to supplement the small parcels of land officially received. To deal with this some refugees go an extra mile to increase the sizes of the parcels they have. As Aken highlights again, there are three pathways on the individual agency level that refugees use to acquire extra land over and above what is parcelled.

The first is renting land from the host communities; *"Landowners here give us the land in exchange for food items, but some people also rent it with money"* (EI, Kirya-1)

The second is used by the well-off refugees. They can make direct purchases of parcels from refugees in the settlement that have no or less

interest in the land provided or that commit offenses and are therefore forced to sell off the parcel to raise money to pay for fines: "*I received an alert that someone was selling her parcel. I approached the seller and brought her together with the head of the block, her son and LC 1. When we reached agreement, we signed the land purchase ward agreement, the block leader took the document to the office of OPM and then we were called with the seller to the office to authenticate the process. This is all*" (EI, Kirya-1)

The third and last is land gifting by in-laws. Some refugees, both the well-off and less well- off, have had their daughters marry out into the host communities. As a blessing of a wedding the daughter will always influence the home of matrimony to present some land as a gift to her parents: *"Some refugees whose daughters have been married off also access land for free from their in-laws, also when they remain in the settlements."* (EI, Kirya-1).

With the exception of land gifting by in-laws the two first strategies, both of renting and buying land, are predominantly for the category of refugees who are rich enough to benefit from such opportunities. Here we can make use of these empirical examples to link them to different assumptions in the Mushtaq refugee assemblage theory.

The first is that of emergence and the process of becoming. The assumption here is that new properties and dynamics emerge from the interactions within the assemblage that cannot be predicted solely from the characteristics of individual elements. This emergent nature underscores the unpredictability and complexity of refugee experiences. A refugee marrying a daughter into a host community with a different culture and language is not an obvious or predictable strategy. But it does happen, and when it does it opens up for new possibilities and may lead to some refugees becoming food sufficient, becoming traders, or even landlords in a foreign country in which such an outcome seems to be prohibited even in the constitution. As Mushtaq observes too, the processes of emergence and becoming make assemblages multiple and diverse, with no fixed or essential identity, existing in different forms and configurations with fluid and permeable boundaries. Refugees married in host communities are seen as refugees and non-refugees at the same time depending on their perspective. And while the constitution of Uganda bars even children of refugees from becoming citizens this provision is blurred when a refugee has married in the host community. The daughter married into the host community can buy land by herself or also help her refugee family in the

camp buy land outside, using the husband's name. These possibilities have all shaped experiences of refugees in Uganda.

This process of acquiring additional land from fellow refugees is different. In such cases disagreements, bad blood and frustration often occur as normally several people are interested in buying the same piece of land once it becomes available. In such processes many things go on, for instance that some households have more resources than others and are able to bribe brokers and agents involved in the process. Or, some have mystical capacities, such as witchcraft, and by using witchcraft accusations they can push others out of their way. Or share numbers can also affect outcomes. This happens in cases in which fighting breaks out between contenders. All this is summed up by the following statement:

"Everyone is struggling to get a fertile parcel of land. Sometimes the struggle causes bribery, witchcraft and fights" (EI, Kirya-1)

This reality unfortunately affects relations between the competing households even when they are going to settle next to each other in the settlement for many years.

These experiences also come out in the Calabria (2021) critique of Uganda's refugee policy. In his critique he observes among other things the issue of corruption although he looked at this vice at the level of the state and not refugee leadership. In addition, he observes that although plots of land are provided in settlements, many people lack sufficient space for farming, and the soil quality is often poor. As a result, he adds that farming is no longer a viable livelihood for many. Based on this, liberal refugee policies promoting self-reliance in Uganda must be supported with adequate resources to be effective and meaningful he adds (Calabria, 2021). With 60% of the refugees experiencing food related challenges as reported by UNHCR (2023b) it is not surprising that at the individual level there is a struggle for the parcels available for sale.

Experiences of refugees owning land outside the settlement with Uganda's constitutional provision barring refugee land ownership

The second objective of this study explored experiences of refugees owning land outside the settlement with Uganda's constitutional provision barring refugee land ownership. Using the experiences of the two refugee informants, EI-Kirya 02 who has owned land in Kiryandongo since 2015 and EI-Kirya 03 who has owned land in the same district since 2016, these refugee experiences are explored in two parts. The first focuses on their

experiences with the process of acquiring land. The second focus is on their experiences with the land ownership registration process.

Experiences of refugees with the process of acquiring land for ownership outside a settlement

Given that the Ugandan Constitution prohibits refugees from owning land, and drawing on their personal experiences as refugees, one of the authors engaged in an in-depth discussion with EI-Kirya 02 and EI-Kirya 03 about their attempts to acquire land for ownership outside the settlement. The discussion revealed two key pathways to refugee land acquisition for ownership outside the settlement in Uganda contrary to the constitutional provision.

The first pathway is that of direct purchases in which all purchase documents are written in the refugees' own names. Although the law prohibits refugees from owning land in Uganda, informally, refugees are making direct purchases of land. This process starts with a negotiation with the landowner in which payments in kind or cash or both happen, and the signing of a sales agreement is made in the presence of witnesses, such as a local area leader:

"You negotiate with the owner about the cost of the land, sign a sales agreement in the presence of witnesses and the LC 2 or the clan leader, and you take possession" (EI, Kirya-3)

"I settled in the community in 2015 and in 2018 I bought land equivalent to 2 quarters (half an acre) after paying two goats,1 basin of maize and UGX 1,000,000 (approximately USD 300)" (EI, Kirya-2)

It is important to note that while all refugee land purchases are informal, they are recognized by the parties involved and also by the community. These purchases are enabled by a number of factors. The key include the existence of a recognized customary land tenure system that allows over 60% of land in Uganda to be owned by the people with no land titles (Felicia, 2024). Other factors include the lack of legal awareness by many of the citizens and local leaders, high poverty levels in the host communities that reduces the purchasing capacity of the locals interested in the same pieces of land, existence of cross border ethnic identities that makes host communities to see refugees as their own people, and finally corruption that facilitates bribery of local leaders who sanction these agreements.

The second pathway is that of indirect purchases of land, in the names of trusted kindred that are citizens. Some refugees have their daughters married off in the area. These are indirectly buying land in the names of their in-laws.

"I also have some land in the community. This is approximately 1 acre. I bought it in 2018 in the name of my son in-law, a Ugandan who is married to my daughter. Authorities would not allow me to buy it because the law prohibits it" (EI, Kirya-1)

Transactions that involve purchases of land indirectly in the names of in-laws or friends largely involve parties that are aware of the law and its prohibitions. This makes people act covertly, simply because of fear of the authorities. As a result, this makes such purchases of land overpriced and more costly, not least because of the various bribes to be paid to manoeuvre through the transaction.

"*Other land owners overcharge for the land"* (EI, Kirya-2 & 3)

"We have to bribe local leaders to endorse our purchase agreements" (EI, Kirya-3)

These examples of land sales again bring in Maryam Mushtaq's (2023) arguments about assemblages and their dynamics. With the involvement of multiple actors in these processes that are otherwise irregular, the reality that a foreigner can purchase a piece of land where the law clearly bars it show how individual refugees can operate to bypass the problems, showing examples of their agency. It also relates to Mushtaq's wider arguments about refugee assemblages in which she sees such assemblages being established but then also constantly undergoing processes of destabilization and transformation. In the case of land sales we see a process in which the particular resources and skills of manoeuvring allow certain refugees to succeed in a landscape that is full of constraints, including formal legal constraints (MoLHUD, 2013; OPM, 2019; Parliament of Uganda, 2006; UNHCR, 2023b).

The following discussion shows yet another example of the same.

Experiences of refugees with the process of land registration

The 1995 constitution of Uganda recognizes five land tenure systems in Uganda. These are the customary land tenure system where land is owned under clans in northern and Eastern Uganda, registered Mailo land tenure system in central and Western Uganda, the leasehold land tenure system, the freehold land tenure system and the public land ownership system

(Parliament of Uganda, 2006). Like the refugees that purchase ownership, over 60% of land in Uganda is owned by the people and have rights to it, but oftentimes, with no land titles (Felicia, 2024). While the citizens can register their land, the 2010 land policy prohibits refugees from registering ownership of land or owning freehold land in Uganda. This is pursuant to section 65(2) of the Refugees Regulations 2010 (MoLHUD, 2013) and the provisions in the 1995 constitution. And the refugees also know this:

"*We cannot register the land we buy formally in our names because refugees are not allowed to own land formally*" (EI, Kirya-3)

Without title deeds, refugees who have purchased land experience a number of threats to their ownership different from those faced by Ugandans. One such threat is the experience of having Ugandan citizens trespass with impunity on land possessed by the refugees.

"Some of the host communities graze animals in our gardens and steal our crops with impunity. Even when you report there is no justice. This is part of the reasons refugees' conflict with host communities and is the very reason some individuals decide to sell it off" (EI, Kirya-2)

The other threat is insecurity of ownership that often is tied to the instability in the marriage of a relative in whose husband's or wife's name the land purchase agreement is written**.**

"If the land is purchased in their names and the marriage ends, your ownership can also end. I have seen this occasionally" (EI, Kirya-2)

The issue of failure to register land and attendant challenges that follow again highlight the role of the heterogeneity and relationality in refugee assemblages with the diverse human actors (refugees, aid workers, government officials), non-human entities (documents), and seemingly abstract but very real factors (laws, policies, cultural norms) playing a role in shaping experiences of refugees in their dealing with this land policy.

But as we have seen, even when the law forbids, a refugee can still manage to use his/her individualized agency to acquire or even register land outside a settlement. This is what is implied in Maryam's general argument, that we can see refugees in their assemblages as individuals as constantly "becoming" through their interactions within the assemblage, influenced by changing circumstances, movements, and events.

Conclusions

This study discusses Uganda's celebrated refugee land policy using information on how it affects South Sudanese refugees on the local level. What we have seen is that this celebrated policy is a producer of differentiated informal refugee land access, control and ownership registration strategies that span through differentiated forms of refugee-host community agency in a context of a restrictive legal regime. In particular, experiences of refugees with the land policy in Uganda are varied and are shaped at different levels by a heterogeneity of actors and factors. To capture these complexities we have introduced Maryam Mushtaq's (2023) use of the concept of assemblages. The theoretical framework is already introduced as a basic perspective for our project in the introductory chapter, but here we find Maryam's use of this general theoretical framework particularly useful as she particularly directs it towards the study of refugees, calling it a "refugee assemblage". This opened up for us to further explore the usefulness in our understanding of the various adaptive strategies followed by South Sudanese refugees in their particular dealing with the problem of land shortage. What we learned was that this empirical exploration showed us how the individual agency of different refugees played a significant role in where they ended up within the larger context of their lives as refugees. We saw processes both at the individual as well as community levels, processes that are shaped by realities and relations that are actively constructed by factors in the form of the laws, policies and culture. At the macro and national level, the Ugandan regulatory framework is the primary factor shaping these experiences, particularly through the 2010 Land Act, the 2010 Refugee Regulations, the 2006 Refugee Policy, and the 1995 Constitution. Internationally, UN and their refugee policy frameworks have also been key influences. On a normative level the implication of these large-scale realities is that Uganda's refugee policy is considered as a global model. However, at a local and empirical level, among the refugees living in camps among themselves and in relationships with the surrounding host community we see a different picture. Refugees are pursuing their own interests and some of them are successful in achieving what they want, in this case access to land, even though the larger systems consider this to be unlawful. But rather than a simple dichotomy between legal and illegal, what we found was a series of adaptive strategies in which such dichotomies were overcome. The case discussed then offers an example of refugee agency through which the refugees deal with the various contexts they find themselves. Some of these contexts are of their own making and

others are not. But together they all make up a landscape that challenges the view of refugees stuck in their camps, passively accepting what is happening to them. Refuges have agency and the concept of assemblages can help us to better understand how that agency produce different results for different refugees, thus making the concept of refugee itself complex, covering for a lot of unexpected processes that remain hidden if we only follow the normative and hegemonic assumptions that dominate refugee policies in the contemporary world.

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SECTION 5

PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CAMPS:
A COMPLEXITY OF CAUSES

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN REFUGEE WOMEN'S LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES IN JEWI REFUGEE CAMP, GAMBELLA, ETHIOPIA

Muluemebet Semaw and Teshome Emana

Introduction

This study was conducted at Jewi Refugee Camp, situated in the Gambella Regional State of Ethiopia. The camp was established on 15 March 2015 to provide a safe and dignified settlement for refugees who initially fled to Ethiopia from South Sudan due to the ongoing civil war and violence that erupted in December 2013. These refugees first settled in Leitchour and Nip Nip camps; however, severe flooding in these locations left them homeless, prompting their relocation to Jewi Refugee Camp, where they could rebuild their lives in safety and stability (UNHCR, 2022).

As of October 2022, the Jewi Refugee Camp was home to 66,421 refugees (55% of refugees are women), providing a vivid picture of the demographic distribution with a focus on gender and age (RRS, 2024). The camp's infrastructure includes four schools, a health centre, a clinic, and two food distribution centres, showcasing an active attempt to address the basic and educational needs of the refugees. Partnerships with over 25 organizations, including RRS, UNHCR, WFP, and others, underscore a collaborative effort in managing and providing essential services ranging from primary education, health, general food distribution, camp management, to specific projects focusing on shelter, infrastructure, livelihood, environmental protection, and more (UNHCR, 2022).

Several implementing partners contribute to improving the livelihoods of refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp, each playing a distinct role. DanChurchAid (DCA) focuses on food security and self-reliance through cash and voucher assistance, agricultural support, and vocational training. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) emphasizes economic empowerment by facilitating vocational skills and income-generating activities. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) supports education and vocational

training to enhance employability. Mercy Corps works on economic opportunities and climate-resilient livelihoods, while ZOA aids infrastructure development, peace-building, and long-term food security. Strengthening Host and Refugee Populations in Ethiopia (SHARPE) promotes business development, capacity building, and market access to foster self-reliance among refugees and economic integration with host communities. Together, these organizations play a pivotal role in ensuring economic stability and empowerment for the camp's residents.

The field study

In spite of all this, like other refugee camps in Ethiopia, Jewi Refugee Camp is also affected by many challenges including livelihood issues affecting all refugees. Women refugees, in particular, face significant livelihood challenges while residing in the camp. Their experiences are shaped by unique vulnerabilities and obstacles that further complicate their ability to achieve economic stability and self-reliance. Therefore, this research was conducted to comprehensively investigate and document the major livelihoods of women refugees residing in the Jewi Refugee Camp. To capture the complexities involved a case study design was adopted to explore the livelihoods of the women refugees in the camp. The case study design enabled a comprehensive and descriptive analysis of the livelihood strategies and challenges faced by women refugees. By selecting individuals who varied in age, gender, educational background, and community roles, the study aimed to reflect the complexity and diversity of the refugee-host relationship. Participants were identified through close consultation with the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) representative, ensuring a deliberate effort to include voices from different demographic and social groups that are critical to the research objectives. The demographic composition of participants ranged from 15 to over 45 years, with the majority falling between 15 and 35 years old. This range was intentionally selected to capture perspectives across different life stages, from youth to adulthood. The inclusion of educated and less-educated participants, as well as individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, ensured a broad understanding of livelihood strategies.

We shall discuss different aspects of the women refugee adaptations in the camp focusing on two major entry points. First, the economic life of the women as we observed it and as the women commented on. Within the camp we see the following three general types of livelihood strategies followed by the women. First comes relief seeking from aid organizations such as UNHCR and other donors (ZOA, VIS, SHARPE, Mercy Corps,

LWF etc.), in which we shall discuss the important role of the assistance provided by these organizations in the various economic activities, including the important cultivation activities among women within the camp. Secondly, various informal jobs emerge, such as roadside selling dried fish, raw meat, vegetables, and fruits, along with the trade in grass used for roof covering and fencing. Also, the selling of firewood is important as is small retail shopping, the running of small restaurants, and the selling of tea and coffee. Some handicrafts like pottery making, lace work and making traditional baby blanket is going on, as is sex work. Finally, some women are engaged in formal jobs in the community or with NGOs, such as elementary school teacher, social worker and cleaner. The responses gathered from the study highlight the diversity of livelihood support available, the skills needed to access these resources, and the broader social and economic contexts at play within the camp and which are affecting the labour market. Women are well aware of both possibilities and constraints that they experience in their economic life. They also talked to me about how they solved wider social and economic problems by collaborating. Two institutional mechanisms that constantly were referred to were *ider* and *ekub*, the first helping people to get money for unexpected expenses, the second a saving association providing needed capital to start small businesses.

The second major focus in our discussion relates to the problem of security. One major type of problem that was mentioned by all informants was the fact that they were constrained to activities within the camp area itself. The lack of contact and interaction with the host community living outside the camp was highlighted as a major factor that negatively affected their economic opportunities. The problem here was the problem between the refugees in the camp and the local host population living in the areas around the camp. The refugee-host relationship was very much an ethnic problem as well, between the Nuer refugees within the camp and the Anywaa people making up the host community around the camp. This conflict is described and analyzed in the paper by Teshome Emana, and in that paper the land conflict is highlighted, as the refugees are generally denied access to land outside the camp, which limits their possibility of compensating for the lack of land within the camp itself. Women talk about the same constraints but in my paper, we shall focus on some other aspects of this refugee-host community conflict, as it appears for instance in the transportation system, but also in other sectors, as they emerged in my conversations with the women. But there are also security problems within the refugee camp itself, and we shall also discuss how such problems were

presented by my informants. Overall, the paper ends with a broader discussion of the security situation and the ways they deal with such problems both outside and inside the camp.

Livelihood Strategies of Women Refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp

The livelihood strategies of women refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp are significantly shaped by the support they receive from various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the area. These organizations play a critical role in providing resources, training, and opportunities that enable refugees to sustain themselves in a challenging environment.

Multiple NGOs, including the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), ZOA Relief and Recovery Organization, International Medical Corps (IMC), and Lutheran World Federation (LWF), have been instrumental in enhancing the livelihoods of refugees through targeted assistance programs. For instance, a refugee woman respondent noted, "*DRC, ZOA, and IMC are helping refugees in livelihoods, with criteria based on the degree of vulnerability of women, elders, and people with disabilities. Based on such criteria individuals could be selected to receive cattle or other assistance".* This approach not only provides immediate relief but also empowers these disadvantaged groups by giving them the resources needed to build sustainable livelihoods. The emphasis on vulnerable groups reflects a broader humanitarian strategy aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting social inclusion within the camp.

In addition to direct assistance, NGOs such as SHARPE (Strengthening Host and Refugee Populations in Ethiopia) have focused on skill development and entrepreneurship, particularly among women. Sharp's initiatives include providing hens to start poultry businesses, offering training, and certifying participants to help them sustain their livelihoods. A woman refugee respondent shared the following: "*Sharp gives hens to start poultry businesses, provides training, certifies us, and gives chances in groups to produce and sustain our livelihoods".* This approach not only equips refugees with practical skills but also fosters a sense of community and collaboration as they work together in group enterprises.

Furthermore, NGOs like LWF have previously provided technical training in tailoring and knitting, which are crucial skills for income generation. Although some of these programs have been terminated in recent years, their impact continues to resonate within the community. One refugee respondent noted, "*Several NGOs terminated their programs in 2024, such*

as Plan International and NRC. However, LWF previously provided technical training in tailoring and knitting". This points to the ongoing need for consistent support in skill development to maintain and expand livelihood opportunities for refugees.

Agriculture remains a key livelihood activity within the camp, supported by NGOs like ZOA and DRDIP. Refugees are provided with seeds, farming tools, and training to engage in agricultural practices. Interestingly, the camp does not impose restrictions on accessing farmland, allowing refugees the freedom to cultivate land within the camp as they see fit. A refugee woman respondent explained;

In the summer season, ZOA supports us with seeds and farming tools. DRDIP also helps refugees and the host community with agricultural activities. There are no restrictions on getting farmland within the camp; anyone can come and cultivate easily.

This accessibility to land within the camp is crucial for food security and income generation, especially for women whose husbands remain in South Sudan. These women, however, often limit their farming to maize and sorghum due to a lack of familiarity with vegetable cultivation. As one refugee noted, "*Most women's husbands live in South Sudan, and we are not familiar with vegetable farming, so we cultivate only maize and some sorghum".* This highlights the need for targeted agricultural training that can expand the range of crops grown and improve overall food diversity and security within the camp.

In summary, the livelihood strategies in Jewi Refugee Camp are deeply influenced by the interventions of various NGOs, which provide essential resources, training, and support to vulnerable groups. These efforts are critical in fostering self-reliance and resilience among refugees, enabling them to navigate the challenges of displacement. However, the ongoing need for skill development, particularly in agriculture and market integration, underscores the importance of sustained and targeted support. The insights from the respondents highlight the successes and gaps in current livelihood programs, pointing to areas where continued investment could further enhance the economic stability and well-being of the refugee community. One refugee respondent remarked:

There is no specific marketplace where we interact with the host community, but we get and sell consumable products in the camp's local station, MENAHAREA. Many Habesha traders (from the Ethiopian highlands) are always there.

What is pointed at here represents an important limitation on the further developments of the economic activities the women in the camp have started up within the camp itself. For further expansion to take place such an expansion would have to take place outside the camp, and thus also involve the host population outside the camp. We notice in the above quote that no interaction with this host community takes place in the marketplaces within the camp. We also know that the host population is mostly from the Anywaa tribal group, and the Nuer refugees in the camp are in a constant conflict with them, a conflict that severely limits the opportunities for the camp residents to engage in economic activities outside the camp. As mentioned in the Introduction the conflict between the Anywaa and Nuer around the Jewi camp is described and analysed in Teshome Emana's paper, in which we see how the conflict constrains the possibility of camp refugees to get access to land for them to engage in cultivation outside the camp. Here we shall focus on how the women we worked with saw this conflict over land as well as other conflicts, and how they understood what effects the conflicts had on them and their activities. But before we do that, we shall discuss further how the women we interacted with in the camp commented on and actually dealt with their general economic situation.

Further comments on and by women and their views on their livelihood challenges

In my conversations with the women in the camp, they kept coming back to the issue of their economic situation and the existence of financial constraints, limited employment opportunities, and the high cost of living, which, they argued, collectively impeded the accumulation of wealth. The women refugees highlighted the financial burden imposed by the high cost of living within the camp, hindering any potential for savings or investment. In the words of a refugee woman:

Despite engaging in various formal and informal activities, it has been impossible to accumulate wealth at Jewi Refugee Camp. The high cost of living consumes any income I might earn, relegating my efforts to merely covering my family's basic needs along with the rations provided. The inability to develop wealth stems from the sheer expense of daily life, leaving no room for savings or investment.

Focusing on why this was so, another woman respondent stated:

The absence of land for cultivation and lack of access to both formal and informal employment severely limits any opportunity to build wealth within

the camp. Financial constraints prevent me from starting any self-employment ventures, while the challenging conditions of camp life further exacerbate our family's plight, making wealth accumulation an unattainable dream under these circumstances.

These quotes underscore the interconnected challenges of the absence of cultivable land and restricted access to employment, creating a formidable barrier to wealth-building. This aligns with research on refugee livelihoods, which emphasizes the importance of economic opportunities in shaping the well-being of displaced populations. This also resonates with literature highlighting the importance of external support structures in enhancing economic prospects for refugees (Freedman, 2016). A third refugee woman respondent stated:

We have been unable to develop wealth in the camp due to various constraints, including the lack of land for cultivation and insufficient employment opportunities. The meagre wages from organizational employment fail to meet even our basic needs, let alone allow for savings. Additionally, the limited and competitive nature of available opportunities, coupled with communal expectations of sharing any small gains, stifles any chance of progressing economically within the camp.

This response expands on the various constraints, including limited employment opportunities, insufficient wages, and communal expectations due to cultural orientation, contributing to the economic inactivity within the camp. The findings reveal that the preceding cultural orientations of the Nuer ethnic group of South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia exert a discernible influence on their current work habits, contributing to adverse effects on wealth development. This aligns with existing literature on the Nuer community, emphasizing their collective economic ethos, where generosity stems from scarcity rather than wealth accumulation for special privileges. The Nuer community functions as a cohesive economic entity, sharing surpluses with neighbours rather than amassing wealth for individual advantage (Hutchinson, 1992). The observed negative impact on wealth development among Nuer refugees in the findings resonates with the cultural principles outlined in the literature, underscoring the continuity of cultural influences on economic behaviours in the refugee context. This mirrors studies emphasizing the role of social dynamics in shaping economic outcomes in refugee settings (Barnett, 2013).

On the other hand, a woman explained about the issue of wealth development:

My attempts to engage in entrepreneurial or employment activities within the camp have been pointless, with no viable means to develop wealth. Even as I strive to meet my children's basic needs through borrowing and occasional earnings, the camp's restrictions and lack of access to resources or supportive infrastructure make any form of substantial wealth accumulation impossible.

This response elucidates the impact of economic inflation and the expensive cost of living on the participants' efforts to sustain a livelihood. This aligns with research emphasizing the vulnerability of refugees to economic fluctuations and the challenges of maintaining financial stability (Betts & Collier, 2018).

As evidenced by the testimonies of those living in Jewi Refugee Camp, a key respondent stated that:

The lack of access to employment within the organizations or opportunities for self-employment leaves me reliant on the camp's ration system and minor income from selling firewood. The limited and highly competitive nature of available opportunities, combined with the insufficient scope of organizational support for livelihoods, means that even the most basic needs are a struggle to meet, let alone accumulating any form of wealth.

This indicates the reliance on the camp's ration system and limited income sources, emphasizing the insufficient organizational support for livelihoods. This resonates with literature highlighting the importance of effective support mechanisms in promoting economic resilience among displaced populations (Crisp, 2003).

In conclusion, these narratives provide a rich tapestry of experiences within Jewi Refugee Camp, offering a valuable contribution to the broader anthropological understanding of economic struggles in refugee settings. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions addressing both economic and socio-cultural dimensions to foster sustainable wealth accumulation within such environments.

Collaborative efforts among the women to deal with the lack of economic resources

Some of the social relations within Jewi Refugee Camp are significantly shaped by the establishment and active participation in traditional community-based systems. Some of these new social support systems are adapted from the Ethiopian contexts in which the refugees find themselves within. Two such institutions of great importance are *Ider* and *Ekub*.

Today, these support systems, which were introduced from outside and then developed within the camp, play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, mutual support, and a sense of community among the refugees. The responses we gathered provide insight into how these systems function and how important they are in maintaining social stability within the camp.

Ider: A community-based support system

Ider is a traditional social structure that serves as a community support system, particularly in times of crisis, such as funerals or other significant life events. Within the camp, *Ider* brings the community together to provide emotional and material support to individuals and families in need. As a refugee woman described this process:

We have social structures called Ider. If something happens to an individual, the community comes together from morning to evening, counselling, and some bring maize or other items, staying for 3 or 4 days starting from the funeral ceremonies.

This response highlights the deep-rooted cultural practice of communal solidarity, where the collective responsibility of supporting one another is emphasized. Ider not only provides practical assistance but also reinforces the bonds between community members, ensuring that no one faces hardship alone.

The practice of *Ider* in the camp is indicative of the strong cultural continuity that refugees maintain, even in displacement. It also reflects the adaptability of traditional practices to new environments, as the refugee community has successfully transplanted this social structure from their homeland to the camp, where it continues to serve as a vital mechanism for social support and resilience.

Moreover, the adaptation of *Ider* within Jewi Refugee Camp reflects a significant transformation in the social dynamics of the refugee community, illustrating their resilience and capacity for cultural innovation in a displacement context. Unlike in South Sudan, where *Ider* was not practiced, refugees in Jewi Camp have successfully integrated this social structure, facilitated by support from organizations such as the IMC. IMC played a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion by organizing orientation sessions and capacity-building programs, specifically aimed at enhancing the social attachment among women refugees. Through these initiatives, women were encouraged to engage in mutual support systems, creating a robust communal network.

In the camp, *Ider* has evolved into a key mechanism for collective assistance, particularly in times of need. Refugees are organized into blocks where they actively participate in supporting each other, such as the elderly or those unable to consistently access food resources. This includes providing material aid during periods of food shortages, visiting and caring for the sick, and offering emotional and practical support during funerals. The practice of *Ider* within the camp highlights the community's ability to adapt to a social system that fosters solidarity and ensures that no individual faces hardship in isolation. The successful establishment of Ider in Jewi Camp demonstrates the adaptability of traditional practices to new contexts, reflecting how displacement has catalysed the development of new forms of social organization that enhance community cohesion and provide essential support in the absence of formal social services.

Ekub: A rotating savings and credit association

Ekub is another significant social structure within the camp, functioning as a rotating savings and credit association. This system allows community members to pool resources, typically money or goods, and distribute them based on a lottery or rotational system. As a woman explained,

Yes, we have Ekub. We collect money, and the chances are given by a lottery system. Ekub is not only about money; we also participate by collecting items like maize or sorghum and distribute them in rounds.

Ekub provides a crucial financial safety net for refugees, allowing them to access funds or resources when needed, thereby fostering economic resilience within the community. The implementation of *Ekub* in the camp demonstrates the refugees' ability to adapt their economic practices to the constraints and opportunities of their current situation. It also underscores the importance of collective financial management in a context where formal financial institutions may be inaccessible or unreliable. Through *Ekub*, community members can maintain a degree of economic autonomy and stability, even in the face of limited resources and uncertain futures.

Additionally, *Ekub* as a rotating saving and credit association has been adapted by refugees in Jewi Camp as a result of their interactions with the local highlander community who are living and selling items around the main gate of the camp. Through regular exchanges of goods with local highlanders, refugees have integrated this economic practice into their communal life. Today, *Ekub* functions as an essential financial mechanism within the refugee camp, where community members contribute resources, either in kind or in the form of *Birr*, and distribute them on a rotating basis.

This system provides a critical safety net for many refugees, allowing them to access goods when needed. Furthermore, the IMC has supported this initiative by promoting saving habits and offering awareness creation. Moreover, IMC has helped facilitate the creation of income-generating activities by engaging women refugees in the production of handmade goods, further supporting their livelihoods. The adaptation of *Ekub* within the camp illustrates how refugees have borrowed and transformed local economic practices to suit their needs, fostering both economic autonomy and social cohesion.

Both *Ider* and *Ekub* were not practices brought from South Sudan but were established within the camp itself. This points to the dynamic nature of social structures among displaced communities, where new practices can emerge or existing ones can be adapted to meet the needs of the community in a new environment. A woman refugee expressed, "*Both social structures were established here, not when we were in South Sudan*".

Camp refugees and the host community seen from inside the camp

While the women in the camp are active in trade, it remains somewhat insular, limiting opportunities for broader economic engagement and integration in the area, a development that would require interaction with the surrounding communities. But this is not happening. While refugees in Jewi Camp have some opportunities to start businesses within the camp, their ability to engage in economic activities outside the camp is severely restricted. Due to the ongoing conflict between the groups within the camp, who are Nuer, and the host populations on the outside, who are Anywaa, access to the camp is strictly controlled by government bodies such as the Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS). One of the key respondents concisely described this situation:

The relationship is not possible because the refugees settle in compound-based living. The compound is the safety and security of refugees, and no one is allowed to enter the camp without permission from the governmental body such as RRS.

This statement underscores the institutional and structural barriers that prevent meaningful interaction between refugees and the host community. The security protocols, while necessary for the protection of the refugees, inadvertently create a physical and social divide between the two groups, making integration difficult. Additionally, the lack of a physical fence around the camp exacerbates the challenges of integration and security. The absence of a fence has led to incidents where individuals from the

surrounding community have entered the camp without authorization, resulting in conflicts and attacks on refugees. This situation was highlighted by a refugee woman respondent who noted:

One of the reasons for conflicts is that the camp does not have a fence, so some people enter the camp and attack the refugees. This was also the case in the recent conflict in July 2024.

The vulnerability of the camp to external threats not only heightens the sense of insecurity among refugees but also further complicates any efforts toward integration with the host community. The recent conflict (July 2024) mentioned by the respondent underscores the precarious nature of the relationship between refugees and the host community. Without adequate physical barriers or security measures, the camp remains susceptible to external violence, which in turn fuels mistrust and tension between the two groups. The incidents of unauthorized entry and subsequent attacks illustrate the challenges of maintaining both security and the potential for integration in such a setting. In general, the integration of refugees with the host community in Jewi Refugee Camp is significantly hindered by the camp's compound-based structure and the lack of physical security measures, such as fencing. These factors contribute to a sense of isolation and vulnerability among refugees, which in turn limit opportunities for interaction and integration with the host community. The ongoing security challenges and conflicts further exacerbate these issues, highlighting the need for more effective strategies to protect refugees while fostering a more inclusive relationship with the host community.

The wider conflict in the region

If we move outside the camp, we see that resource sharing between refugees and host communities is a critical aspect of the conflict, not only focused on land but also spreading into general regional services. As per the information obtained from the FGD, various domains of shared resources, such as transportation services, local markets, banking services, and high school education, serve as focal points for interaction and potential sources of both cooperation and tension. In the realm of transportation services, the collaborative use of communal transportation may foster social cohesion, as individuals from both refugee and host communities interact during their daily travel. However, during my second field work (July 2024) I have observed that conflicts arise when local communities perceive a danger while using shared transportation resources. Similarly, the potential coexistence in markets can potentially

enhance social cohesion by providing a shared economic space, yet tensions may emerge due to competition for resources, market access, or economic disparities between the two groups.

My respondents also commented on this situation. They stressed that conflicts between refugees and host communities could occur when utilizing communal services. Local communities might resist or feel resentful when the refugees used collective transportation or when they tapped into natural resources, collecting firewood or grass, or using river water. Ethnic differences can exacerbate these conflicts, acting as catalysts for tension. The cited observations align with the broader literature on refugee-host community relations. Works such as Betts et al. (2024), emphasize the significance of resource sharing in shaping intergroup relations, with potential for fostering cooperation or contributing to conflict. Additionally, ethnic diversity's role in conflicts resonates with studies like Fajth et al. (2019), underlining the intricate interplay between ethnicity and social dynamics.

In conclusion, understanding the complexities of resource sharing between refugees and host communities is crucial for promoting social cohesion and mitigating conflicts (Fajth et al., 2019). Tailored interventions that address the specific challenges within each domain can contribute to building peaceful relationships between these two communities. On the other hand, conflicts between refugees and host communities significantly impact the livelihoods of women refugees. In such situations, economic activities both within and around the camp come to a halt, disrupting the daily lives and means of subsistence for those women refugees residing in the camp.

Conflict management mechanisms – views from within the camp

Throughout the responses, refugees consistently mention that conflicts do occur, but they also made the important point that conflicts varied a lot in their nature and their size. Most conflicts were mostly minor and were resolved through community discussions, negotiations involving local and refugee representatives, and mediation by the RRS. This approach of local resolution mechanism and the involvement of the authorities only if the conflicts got big is reflective of conflict management strategies suggested in humanitarian guidelines that prioritize community engagement and empowerment (Sphere Project, 2011).

The reflections of the participants emphasize the collaborative and community-centred approach to conflict resolution within Jewi Refugee

Camp. Both the refugees and the local community actively participate in addressing disputes, with refugee representatives, local government officials, and organizations such as UNHCR and the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) playing key roles. Minor conflicts, including those involving transportation issues or disputes between local *kebeles*, are typically resolved swiftly through open communication and collective decision-making. This system of conflict resolution reflects a strong commitment to peaceful coexistence and effective governance, where both the refugee and host communities work together to maintain peace building.

The organization of security

In the context of the Jewi Refugee Camp, conflict management is seen as a multi-layered process that involves both internal refugee-led structures and external support from various organizations. The conflict management chain within the camp begins with local block representatives, known as *Shurta*, who are responsible for addressing disputes at the most immediate level. When conflicts escalate beyond the capacity of the *Shurta*, they are passed on to zonal representatives, typically members of the Refugee Community Committee (RCC). Finally, if the issue cannot be resolved within these structures, it is referred to the Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS) protection teams and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which provide higher-level intervention and support. One key respondent emphasized the role of these internal structures, stating, "*We solve our problems by ourselves through our block and zonal Shurta, but if the problem is beyond our capacity, we report it to the RRS at the camp level*".

However, despite these efforts, the ability of refugees to protect themselves remains limited due to the federal government's prohibition on arming refugees. Consequently, self-protection strategies rely heavily on awareness campaigns conducted through the refugee community's own structures, such as the *Shurta* and RCC. A woman pointed out, "*The federal government does not allow us to be armed, so we protect ourselves by raising awareness within our community through our block and zonal Shurta and RCC*".

This statement underscores the importance of community-based awareness and the role of internal structures in ensuring the safety and security of the refugee population. In summary, conflict management in the Jewi Refugee Camp is a well-organized process that integrates internal refugee-led

structures with external support from NGOs and federal authorities. The emphasis on self-reliance, combined with targeted interventions by NGOs, reflects the complex dynamics of conflict resolution in a refugee setting. The involvement of various stakeholders ensures that conflicts are managed effectively, although the limitations on self-defence highlight the ongoing challenges faced by the refugee community in maintaining their security.

Safety within the camp

The handling of crime, particularly serious offenses such as rape and gender-based violence (GBV), within the Jewi Refugee Camp is a critical aspect of the overall protection framework established by the Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS). As per the respondents, the RRS plays a pivotal role in ensuring the safety and security of refugees, with a specific mandate to monitor and manage day-to-day incidents within the camp. When cases of serious crimes arise, the RRS coordinates closely with legal institutions at both the regional and federal levels, ensuring that such cases are appropriately escalated and addressed within the legal system. A woman refugee highlighted this coordinated approach, stating, "*One of the responsibilities of RRS is protection, so they follow up on cases daily and, if needed, transfer them to the legal institutions at the regional and federal levels*".

This statement underscores the structured process in place for addressing crimes within the camp, ensuring that incidents are not only documented but also dealt with in accordance with the law. Furthermore, the presence of a mobile court within the camp signifies a significant advancement in the accessibility of justice for refugees. This system allows a judge to visit the camp bi-weekly, where cases are heard directly within the refugee setting. The mobile court is designed to be responsive to the needs of the camp population, enabling refugees to raise their cases with the protection department of the RCC camp office and have them adjudicated in a timely manner. As a key respondent described,

Within the camp, there is a mobile court, which means the judge comes to the camp every two weeks. The refugees can bring their cases to the protection department in the RCC camp office, where the judge then makes a decision.

The implementation of a mobile court system within the refugee camp is particularly important for addressing crimes such as rape and GBV, which require prompt and sensitive handling. This system helps to overcome the

barriers that refugees might face in accessing traditional legal services, such as distance, cost, and fear of reprisal. It also serves as a deterrent against such crimes, as it demonstrates a clear commitment to upholding justice within the camp. Overall, the combined efforts of the RRS and the mobile court system within the Jewi Refugee Camp illustrate a comprehensive approach to managing and mitigating crime, particularly serious offenses like rape and GBV. Such cases of gender-based violence are often rooted in cultural and compound-specific issues. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the International Medical Corps (IMC), Save the Children, and Plan International, also play crucial roles in addressing these issues by providing psychosocial support, child protection services, and youth-focused interventions. The presence of these organizations, each with their own refugee structures, ensures that cases are identified and reported safely to legal services, highlighting the comprehensive nature of protection and conflict management efforts within the camp.

By facilitating access to legal recourse within the camp and ensuring cases are handled swiftly and fairly, these mechanisms contribute to the protection and empowerment of the refugee community, reinforcing the camp's internal justice system and enhancing overall safety. This again indicates a strong sense of self-reliance within the refugee community, where conflict resolution often occurs internally before external authorities are involved. The reliance on these internal mechanisms reflects a need to maintain social cohesion and autonomy within the camp.

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth exploration of the livelihood strategies employed by women refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp, highlighting the complex interplay of challenges and opportunities that define their experiences. The findings demonstrate that women refugees face significant barriers to achieving sustainable livelihoods, which are deeply intertwined with issues of gender inequality, limited economic access, and inadequate institutional support. These challenges are exacerbated by socio-cultural factors and the precarious conditions within the camp, all of which significantly impede their ability to secure stable sources of income and improve their overall quality of life.

Despite these challenges, the study also reveals the resilience and resourcefulness of women refugees, who actively participate in informal labour markets and entrepreneurial activities within the camp. Their

engagement in small-scale businesses and community-based initiatives underscores the importance of targeted support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government agencies. However, this study indicated that while the contributions of these organizations are vital, there are critical gaps in the provision of resources, skill development programs, and long-term economic opportunities. Many women expressed a strong desire for enhanced educational and vocational training, emphasizing the need for programs that cater to their specific needs and help bridge the gap between survival-based strategies and sustainable livelihood development.

In conclusion, addressing the livelihood challenges of women refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates safety, education, healthcare, and socio-economic empowerment. A collaborative effort between NGOs, government bodies, and the refugees themselves is essential to develop interventions that are responsive to the complex realities of camp life. By enhancing access to education, expanding skill development opportunities, and fostering economic inclusion, stakeholders can help transform the livelihoods of women refugees, enabling them to achieve greater autonomy and resilience within the camp. However, if we look beyond the camp we are met with the problem of refugee - host community interaction, which in this case is also an ethnic conflict between two South Sudanese groups that have different histories in the Gambella area. To solve such conflicts, action is required along a number of dimensions, from dealing with small conflicts in everyday life to larger issues around the use of land, to the most dramatic conflicts in which the Nuer and Anywaa end up in larger violent conflicts. This study highlights the urgency to act along all these dimensions and ends by pointing at the need to keep a focus among all these challenges on sustained, gender-sensitive strategies that address the specific vulnerabilities and aspirations of women refugees in Jewi Refugee Camp.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

REFUGEE INCLUSION TO HIGHER EDUCATION, GAMBELLA, ETHIOPIA

Getaneh Mehari

Introduction

The overall objective of the study is researching the nature of refugee inclusion in the higher education particularly focusing on Gambella region of Ethiopia. Specifically, the study aimed at 1) exploring the overall situation of refugee inclusion in the national education system; and 2) examining refugee inclusion to higher education and its implications for local integration mainly concentrating on Gambella University.

Ethiopia is the third largest refugee hosting country in Africa, next to Uganda and Sudan. It hosts 1,079,460 (52% female) refugees from several countries of origin including South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Syria. Around 91 percent of the refugee in Ethiopia came from three neighbouring countries. South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea are the origin of 41% (437,442), 33% (360,523) and 17% (180,749) of the refugees living in the country. After the 2023-armed conflict in Sudan, the number of Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia increased to 89,612 which is around 9% of the total refugee population in the country. The origins of the remaining one percent of refugees are Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Syria (UNCHR, 2025).

South Sudan is the origin of more than 2.3 million refugees hosted in countries such as Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. These four hosted about 98 percent of South Sudanese refugees: Uganda, 43%; Sudan, 27%; Ethiopia, 19%; and Kenya, 9% (UNHCR Global Report 2024, Situation Overview, South Sudan Situation). Ethiopia hosts more than 0.4 million South Sudanese refugees. More than 90 percent of South Sudanese refugees are hosted in 8 refugee camps in the Gambella region while more than 8 percent live in the Benishangul Gumuz Region (UNCHR 2025; Ashenafi 2016). Most of the South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia are Nuer, the second largest ethnic group in South Sudan next to the Dinka that constituted 40% of the South Sudanese population. The Nuer are

predominantly pastoral people. Cattle husbandry is a key element of the Nuer culture, livelihoods and social life. Cattle served as source of milk, meat and dung. Moreover, cattle played an important role for creating social bonds, for sacrifice and rituals, for marriage transactions and conflict resolution (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1956). Despite significant socio-economic changes in Nuer culture, cattle are still at the centre of Nuer economy, culture and social life. The Nuer livelihood is also supplemented by other economic activities such as subsistence farming, fishing, and hunting.

The situation in Gambella region involves tense refugee-host relationships. This is partly because of the complex and dynamic ethnic landscape of the region. Various ethnic groups live in the region. Five ethnic groups that are considered as native to the region are Anywaa, Nuer, Mazhenger, Komo, and Opo. Other ethnic groups living in the region (e.g., Oromo, Amhara, Kambata) are widely known as highlanders. As Mun Wal and colleagues (2023) described, the settlement patterns of Gambella city are dominated by ethnic enclaves whereby each ethnic group concentrates within a specific quarter of the city. As enclave settlements involve positive aspects such as fostering vibrant communities and social coherence, they also have negative impacts including isolating each ethnic group from accessing resources and services in other quarters of the city. This was what we observed in Gambella city where the mobility of the Anywaa and Nuer was restricted at the river which divides the Newland from the rest of the city.

The Anywaa is largest Ethnic groups in the Gambella region. However, the Nuer constitute the largest population (33.8 percent) of the Gambella city followed by the Anywaa 26.1 percent. Four ethnic groups known as highlanders constitute about 40 percent of the city population (Oromo 14%, Amhara 7.4%, Tigrian 6.5%, and Kambata 4.3%) whereas other ethnic groups constitute about 5 percent (Mun Wal, Tibebu and Samson 2023). Large number of Nuer refugees from South Sudanese also live in Gambella region. Initially, Nuer refugees were minorities as compared to the Anywaa, the largest ethnic group in Gambella region. Gradually, the number of Nuer refugees increased over time, especially after the 2013 civil war in South Sudan.

The mobility of Sudanese Nuer to Gambella was common in the first half of the 20th century. The relationship between the hosts and the refugees was cooperative and involved inter-marriage and trade. The extent of eastward mobility of Nuer refugees in the last decades of the 20th century

was small scale; and host-refugee conflicts were very limited. Since 1950s, the number of Nuer refugees in Gambella has been increasing as a result of violence and civil war in South Sudan. Conflict in South Sudan in the 1980s triggered the flow of large number of Nuer refugees to Gambella. The 2013 civil war in South Sudan was followed by waves of refugee mobility, in large numbers, to Gambella region. In 2017, the population of South Sudan refugees in Gambella region reached around 399,000, a considerably larger number as compared to the host population, which was around 400,000 in the same year (Hagos 2021).

The dynamics of the host-refugee demographic landscape, intertwined with identity politics and competition for resources, leads to recurrent conflicts. The nature of the conflict evolved alongside macro political changes that influence local politics and host-refugee relationships. For instance, the nature of the host-refugee relationships in Gambella has been drastically changing after 1991, an important historical milestone in the political history of Ethiopia. The year 1991 marked the end of the unitary state structure and the beginning of Ethnic federalism. Ethnic identity and identity politics become essential to get access to political representation, political power and economic privileges from the federal to local levels of government structures. The Nuer obtained some political power as a result of the change while the Anywaa, who consider themselves as genuine citizens of Ethiopia, do not accept the political representation of the Nuer. Hence, identity politics led to a significant shift including politicization of ethnic identities, elite competition and utilization of ethnicity as instrument to gain power, resources, and prestige. This situation drastically changes the nature of the conflict between host and refugee populations. For instance, the conflict between the Anywaa and Nuer in 2016, 2018 and 2019 resulted in huge damages including the death of NGO workers and local militias (Hagos, 2021).

Conflicts are common not only in and around refugee camps but also in Gambella city (Mun Wal, Woldeamanuel & Belachew, 2023). Competing ethnic identities and narratives and their manifestations such as inter-ethnic tension, mistrust and conflict hindered free mobility of the Aynwaa and Nuer and confined each group to certain quarters of the town. The division of Gambella city into two segregated quarters is a good example. The emergence of a new quarter - New Land where the Nuer population concentrate is separated from the rest of the city by a river called Jejebe. For the Anywaa crossing the river to the New Land [you can call it the Nuer Land] involves a risk for their lives. The reverse is true for the Nuer whose mobility is limited by the mutually constructed ethnic boundary.

Issues associated with refugee-host relationships, local integration and refugee inclusion to the national educational system are discussed within this wider context.

Study Area and Research Methods

The study area

The study was conducted in Gambella, one the regional states in Ethiopia. It is bordered with South Sudan in the west, Oromia region in the north-west, Southwestern Ethiopian region in the southwest. The total area of Gambella region is 29,783 square kilo meters, which is by far greater than the size of Djibouti, 23,000 square kilometres. The total population of Gambella region is more than half a million based on the 2022 projection. Hosting more than 400,000 refugees, the region serves as the home of most of the South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia. The refugee population in Gambella region has become a political issue because the number of refugees (predominantly Nuer ethnic group) has been increasing overtime and reportedly surpassing the population of the Anywaa, the largest ethnic group in the region.

According to Ethiopia Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) - Gambella Branch, refugees in Gambella region are hosted in seven refugee camps: Nygunyyie, Tierkidi, Jewi, Kule, Pingyudo I, Okugu and Pingyudo II. Adding Akula refugee camp, the 2023 UNHCR educational factsheet listed eight refugee camps in Gambella region (UNHCR 2023). Established in 1993, Pinyudo I is the oldest refugee camp in the region. The remaining six camps were established in recent years, from 2013 to 2016, in response to the waves of refugee flows to the region after the 2013 civil war in South Sudan. Okugu refugee camp was established in 2013. Four refugee camps were opened in 2014 (Tierkidi and Kule) and in 2015 (Jewi and Pinyudo II) whereas Nygunyyiel, the largest camp in terms of refugee population (more than 110,000) was founded in 2016. Based on the RRS-Gambella Office, there were 26 schools in the seven refugee camps until 2022. With refugee population of 10,428, Pinyudo II refugee camp had one school while Okugu (hosting 13,482 refugees) had two schools. Hosting 110919, 51524, and 48840 refugees respectively, Nygunyyiel, Kule, and Pinyudo I had 5 schools each. Tierkidi (70,394 refugees) and Jewi (64,421 refugees) had 4 schools each (RRS, Gambella Branch Office web site).

Several domestic and international stakeholders are engaged in refugee education in Gambella region. In addition to the Regional Educational Bureau, a governmental office responsible for governing the overall educational matters in the region, several organizations play an important role in supporting refugee education. Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS)-Gambella Office is a government agency responsible for ensuring refugee protection and coordinating refugee assistance schemes. The Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC), a domestic NGO established by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, supports refugee education. The international partners working on refugee education include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), Plan International Ethiopia (PIE), and Save the Children International (SCI) (UNHCR factsheet 2023).

Objectives and methods

The study mainly relies on data gathered through qualitative methods. The main data collection methods were in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and informal discussions and conversations. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews from 10 refugee students (8 from Gambella University, 2 from Addis Ababa University), 4 host students (from Gambella University), and 1 incentive teacher who was working at a refugee camp school. In addition, 10 key informant interviews were conducted, including representatives from non-governmental organizations engaged in refugee education (n=3), the Refugees and Returnees Service – Gambella office (n=4), and the Regional Education Bureau (n=3). Considerable data was also gathered through informal discussion with diverse people such as university instructors, officials, and individuals working in public offices. Some data were also collected through personal observation of university campus settings including outdoor cafeterias where students stay in small groups under tree shades taking coffee or tea or simply sitting and talking.

Two rounds of fieldwork were conducted in Gambella region: from July 7-22, 2024, and from December 17-30, 2024. Universities were closed for vacation during the first round of fieldwork. Hence, the data collection activities focused on key informant interviews and informal conversations with study participants from NGOs working on refugee education, informants from refugee camps, government offices such as Refugees and Returnees Service and Regional Education Bureau. The main focus of the second-round fieldwork was Gambella University. The bulk of qualitative

data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 10 refugee university students. Eight students were interviewed at Gambella University, including 5 refugee students (1 female and 4 male) and 3 host students (1 female and 2 male). In addition, 2 male refugee students from Gambella were interviewed at Addis Ababa University during the second-round fieldwork. In addition to gathering qualitative data from different sources, figures on refugee students and refugee higher education were gathered from online sources, annual reports, and registrar offices of Gambella University.

Refugee policies of Ethiopia

Refugee policies of Ethiopia have been changing over time from restrictive to refugee-friendly strategies. For example, the 2004 refugee proclamation recognizes the legal grounds of refugees. Despite this, however, it embraces articles that restrict the rights of refugees. For example, Article 21, sub-Article 3 reads: "… Every recognized refugee and family member thereof shall, in respect to wage earning employment and education, be entitled to the same rights and be subject to the same restriction as are conferred or imposed…by the relevant laws on persons who are not citizens of Ethiopia." This indicates that the 2004 proclamation did not provide refugees with special treatment or provision. It treated them as any other foreign nationals regarding rights to access basic services such as education, health care as well as rights to movement and economic participation (FDRE, 2004).

As compared to the 2004 refugee law, the revised refugee proclamation of 2019 recognizes most of the refugee rights. It considers recent global developments related to strengthening refugee protection and providing durable solutions to refugees' problems. The proclamation has provisions on social services such as education (Article 24), and health services (Article 25); economic rights such as the right to work (Article 26), and the right to property (Article 29) as well as the right to association (Article 27) and freedom of movement (Article 28). Article 24, for example, deals with refugees' access to education. Sub-article 1 of the same article provides the same right to refugees and Ethiopian nationals to access pre-primary and primary education. According to sub-article 1: "Every refugee or asylum-seeker shall receive the same treatment as accorded to Ethiopian nationals with respect to access to pre-primary and primary education." Regarding secondary and higher education, the proclamation placed some restrictions. According to sub-article 2 of Article 24, refugees could get access to higher education (including vocational training and education)

based on available resources. Regarding access to secondary and higher education, sub-article 3 states that refugees "may receive the most favourable treatment as accorded to foreign nationals." This treatment includes issues such as "access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarship." (FDRE 2019)

Recent policy developments reveal Ethiopia's commitment to address refugees' problems through durable solutions. For example, the National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy (NCRRS) creates suitable policy environment for local integration of refugees. NCRRS encourages village style development-oriented settlement of refugees and supports the socioeconomic integration of refugees in Ethiopia. The goal of the NCRRS ten-year plan is to "gradually transform Ethiopia's refugees operation approach and model from encampment towards hosting refugees in village-style development-oriented settlements." This quote from the national strategy reveals the commitment of Ethiopia to enhance the socio-economic integration of refugees (UNHCR-Ethiopia 2020-2025).

Conceptualizing integration

Defining concepts such as inclusion and integration is essential to discuss the inclusion of refugees to the national educational system. Dryden-Peterson and colleagues (2019: 10) conceptualized inclusion as "an active and dynamic processes of coming together of refugees and nationals [host students] in schools". Inclusion also refers to "policies and practices" that foster refugees access to national systems of education. The concept integration, which embraces structural and relations aspects, is important to discuss "educational goals of inclusion, including access, quality, and belonging and social cohesion". Structural integration and relational integration are conceptualized as processes of inclusion. Structural integration refers to "the ability to access institutions and services such as education". Specifically, structural integration refers to inclusive services. The following are some of the manifestations of structural integration: refugees and host students pursue their education based on the same national curriculum; both groups are instructed by national teachers; learn in the national language; sit for the same national exams; and receive national certificates. Relational integration, on the other hand, is defined as "a sociocultural process related to identity development and transformation." It requires intense sociocultural interactions between refugees and host students. Relational integration embraces two levels of

integration: “an individual-level sense of belonging or connectedness” and “group-level social cohesion.”

Three models of refugee inclusion are observed within national education system. First, the shared space model whereby refugees and host students share the same school and classrooms. Second, geographically separate space whereby refugees and host students reside in different locations and use physically separate schools. However, in some cases, for example in rural areas of Uganda and Kenya, refugees (reside in refugee settlements) and hosts live in separate geographical locations, but some host students attend refugee schools. Third, utilizing temporally separate space in which refugees and hosts share the same school but utilize space at different shifts (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019).

Findings and Discussion

Socio-political landscape: Refugee-host perspectives

Findings of the study reveal that the overall socio-political setting of Gambella, particularly related to refugee-host interactions, is characterized by competing narratives, feelings of hostility, fear, uncertainty and recurring clashes. One of the main factors for the spread of uncertainty is the dynamics of host-refugee population in the region. According to sources, the refugee population has been significantly increasing since the 2013 conflict in South Sudan and surpassing the population of the Anywaa, the largest ethnic group in Gambella region. Out of fear and uncertainty caused by the demographic superiority of the refugee, the host, specifically the Anywaa, complain about: (1) the expansion of Nuer refugees and competition for resources (e.g., land), Anywaa informants reported that refugees are pushing them away from their ancestral land; (2) the reluctance of the government of Ethiopia to protect their rights as Ethiopian citizens; and (3) the bias of NGOs - both local and international organizations - towards the refugee and the marginalization of host communities.

The nature of refugee-host relationships involves periods of relative peace and stability followed by times of tension, conflict and violent clashes. Host communities and refugees embrace diverse perspectives regarding the causes of the recurring conflict between the two parties. Excerpts from field data reflect the voices of both refugees and host communities. The following short quotations from a Nuer incentive teacher reflect the views of the refugee:

Some host community members [from the Anywaa ethnic group] get registered in refugee camp schools but they do not show up when classes started…they come to the camp school, get registered, grab educational materials…and go back; they do not come to start classes. The problem is not related to the availability of the service. They do not like to learn with Nuer students (incentive teacher from X refugee camp).

The source of the problem is politics and politicians. Hence, politicians cannot solve it. Regional government is not impartial. It is one-sided [it favours the host] (another refugee informant).

Do not talk about education; our primary issue is protection! (a refugee student)

These quotations reveal the resentment among refugee population. They portray the concerns of the refugees, their fear, their need for security and protection and their perspective about host communities and students. The second quote specifically reveals that refugees lack trust in the political system of the region. Refugees blame political settings stressing the partisan nature of the regional government dominated by Anywaa political elites. The refugees consider themselves vulnerable as the local government does not provide them with protection. At times of conflict, they claimed the government support the host, especially the Anywaa ethnic group.

The host community, predominantly the Anywaa, reflect their perspective, which is quite different and even contrary to the claims of Nuer refugees. The following short quotation in Amharic reveals the widely reflected view of the host who claimed that refugees are treated in a better way and benefit more than the local community. The quotation says: "እንግዳ ስጋ ባለቤት ጎመን እየበላ እንዴት ሰላም ይሆናል?", which is literally translated as follows: "How can peace prevail when a stranger [the refugee] dines meat while the owner of the house [the host] eats cabbage?" The quotation reflects that refugees eat high quality/expensive food (meat), which symbolically shows the higher status of the refugees while the host eats cabbages which is associated with low social status based on local standards. This expression throws light on the grievance of the hosts who feel that they are marginalized in their own country while stakeholders (NGOs) treated refugees in a better way. This is not the only question posed by the host. The above saying clearly reflects the level of dissatisfaction of host communities who complain that refugees benefit at the expense of host communities. Participants also claimed that NGOs including international organizations stand/work for the benefits of

refugees. In addition to benefits they obtain from NGOs and international agencies, study participants asserted that refugees exploit the natural environments including misusing the forest.

In addition to being excluded from some services and benefits, the host fear the perceived long-term implications of an increasing number of Nuer refugees in the region. Anywaa informants claim that the refugee population is increasing from time to time and exceeding the population of the largest ethnic group (the Anywaa). This development, according to Anywaa informants, would have implications for the social, economic and political position of the host ethnic group. A young and educated Anywaa informant said the following to reflect his fear: "The number of Nuer refugees is increasing from time to time… I fear… they would take our country, our land, in the near future." The following quote from the RRS staff, Gambella, supports the perspective of the host community:

Population of camp registered refugees is about 380,000 whereas population of host communities is around 320,000 which is less than the refugee population. This population imbalance has created fear among the host community who have developed phobia of being overwhelmed and assimilated by the refugee population. They uttered words such as, "the refugee would take our country in the near future."

The complaint also includes the disparity between the quality of education in host schools and refugee camp schools. Study participants from the host community claimed that refugee schools are better in terms of resources, facilities such as libraries and ICT labs, and quality of teachers. Compared to other teachers working in government schools for host communities, refugee camp schoolteachers enjoyed better benefits such as higher salaries, housing allowances, and transport facilities. This is reflected in the results of refugee students in the national exams, the number of refugees students enrolled in public universities including Gambella University. Refugee and Returnees Service informant reported that 12 refugee students graduated from Gambella University in 2016; and 3 of them were gold medalists.

The dissatisfactions of local communities, according to field observations, are among the main factors that aggravate the tension between refugees and host communities. Inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts in turn hinder local integration, which requires peaceful interactions between local and refugee communities. The macro-politics of the country, ethno-federalism, provides fertile ground for the duplication of competing ethnic identities, which in turn aggravates inter-ethnic tension and conflict between host

communities and refugee populations. In general, ethnic/identity politics, which is closely associated with fierce competition for resources, prestige and power, seem the core of the tension.

Refugee inclusion to national education system

This study focuses on refugee inclusion to the higher education system in the Gambella context. However, it also explores inclusion of refugees in primary and secondary schools to portray the overall situation of refugee education in Gambella region and provide background information relevant to understanding refugee inclusion in the context of higher education.

Refugee inclusion: Pre-university education

The nature of refugee inclusion in the national education system can be explained in different ways. Gambella region hosts large refugee population living in 8 refugee camps. The field data reveal that refugee students learn in geographically segregated camp schools from the pre-school to high school levels. The only exceptional case is observed in the Nuer zone where refugees and host communities share the same ethnic identity. In other administrative zones, refugees do not have opportunities to learn in schools outside their camps. Host students do not also learn in refugee camps schools. Moreover, as refugee students have very limited mobility outside their camps, they are removed from interaction with the host. Despite this, however, refugee education involves structural integration in terms of using the national curricula and textbooks taught by trained teachers and sitting for the same regional and national exams.

The meaning of local integration in the context of Gambella is different from its broader conceptualization in global and national refugee policies. Key informants from non-governmental organizations and government agencies including the regional education bureau were asked about local integration of refugees in the region. Some of their responses include: fifteen percent of books dispatched by the Ministry of Education to refugee schools are distributed to schools of host communities; both host and refugee camp schools use the same national curriculum; the provision of on job training for teachers and educational leaders from both refugee & host communities; the distribution of school grants for both communities; distribution of sanitary materials for both host and refugee school girls; and the implementation of the same monitoring and evaluation procedures to assess the performances of both refugee and host schools. The responses

of informants outlined above demonstrate that, from pre-school to high school levels, refugee inclusion to the national education system is limited to structural integration.

Despite this, refugee camp schools and education are rated better as compared to host schools in terms of physical structure, resources, and quality of teachers. Findings of the study demonstrate that refugee students show better educational performance. For example, refugee students score better results in Ethiopian national exams and join public universities. According to UNHCR-Ethiopia fact sheet 2023, out of the 1129 (145 female) refugee students sat for the national exam administered in 2023, 41 (all male) students passed the exam. According to the UNHCR (2023), 3.6 percent of the refugee students passed the national exam. This is slightly better than the overall Ethiopian national exam results of the same year which was 3.3 percent (UNHCR-Educational Factsheet 2023). The same UNHCR information shows a broad gender disparity related to refugee students who took the national exam in 2023: only 13 percent were female out of the total refugee students (1129) who took the national exam whereas no female student passed the same exam.

The Ministry of Education introduced the remedial program in response to the low percentage of students who passed the newly introduced national exam. Students who failed the national exam benefit from the remedial program which provides them with the second chance to sit for another examination after completing remedial classes. Relatively large number of refugee students benefit from the remedial program and joined public universities located in different regional states. For example, in 2023, 492 refugee students sat for the remedial exam whereas 455 (92%) of them scored the passing marks. The gender disparity is still high: out of the 455 students who passed the remedial exam, female students (36 in number) constituted only eight percent. These figures reveal that refugee students (455) passed the remedial exam and enrolled in public universities in 2023 is by far greater than number of refugee students (45) passed the national exam and qualified for university entrance.

The rate of students who passed the remedial exam (92 percent) seems exaggerated as compared to that of the national exam (3.6 percent). Regarding gender disparity, though it seems better, the number of female students who passed the same exam is still below ten percent.

Refugee inclusion: Higher education

Gambella University evolved out of the previous college structures focusing on agricultural and vocational training programs. An educational institution established as Gambella Agricultural, Technical, Vocational and Educational Training College (2002-2011) and restructured as the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources under Mettu University (2012-2013) was transformed into Gambella University in 2014. The total number of students at the University was 1996 (416 females) in the 2024/2025 academic year. The number of refugee students during the same year was 96 (20 female), which constituted 5 percent of the total student population at Gambella University. In addition to refugee students enrolled at Gambella University, 113 female refugees are enrolled in Technical and Vocational Training (TVT) colleges based in Gambella town. Most of female refugee students prefer to study at TVT colleges in Gambella instead of traveling long distances to other universities because most of them are married and have children.

Refugee students' access to higher education is not limited to Gambella University. Several refugee students from Gambella region were placed in several public universities across Ethiopian regional states. For example, according to RRS data for the 2012 academic year (2020/2021), more than 180 refugee students from the same region were placed in 19 Ethiopian public universities located in Oromia, Amhara, the former Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Afar and Somali regions (See the Table below).

Table 15-1: *Refugee students placed at public universities across regions of Ethiopia, 2020/21*

Region	**# of universities**	**# of students**	**% of students**
Oromia	7	117	64
Amhara	5	32	17
Southern Ethiopia	4	23	13
Afar	1	8	4
Somali	2	4	2
Total	**19**	**184**	**100%**

Source: *Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS), Gambella Office.*

The majority of refugee students from Gambella region (64 percent) were placed in seven public universities in Oromia regional state. The remaining 36 percent were placed in the following regional states: 32 students (17 percent), 23 students (13 percent), eight students (4 percent), and four students (2 percent) in Amhara, the former SNNPR, Afar and Somali regional states respectively. This data reveals that refugee students who passed the national exam are structurally integrated to the higher education system in Gambella as well as other regional states.

Inclusion of refugee students in the national education system is conceptualized as a process involving structural integration and relational integration; the former is essential to enhance the latter (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019). The pre-higher education refugee inclusion is limited to service provision in geographically separated school system which hampers refugee-host interactions. As a result, the pre-higher education structural integration does not lead to relational integration. Local integration of refugee students at the university level is quite different from integration at the pre-university level. This is because public universities, except Gambella University, are located outside Gambella region. Moreover, public universities receive students from different regions of the country and from diverse ethnic and cultural contexts. Hence, refugee university students who did not experience day-to-day social interactions (relational integration) with host communities in Gambella region would

be exposed to a wider and more diverse university population situated in strange cultural and geographical settings. This study mainly focuses on refugee inclusion to higher education system particularly emphasizing on Gambella University.

Refugee inclusion: Opportunities and challenges

Study participants were asked to talk about opportunities and challenges related to inclusion to higher education in Ethiopia. Refugee university students, regardless of other limitations related to local integration, consider their inclusion to the Ethiopian university system as a good opportunity. Comparing to the education quality in their home country, some of them reported that the quality of education in Ethiopia is better. For example, a female student said the following:

Coming here [Gambella] is a good opportunity for me and my siblings; because South Sudan is not safe; corruption is increasing; and education is not good. Here in Ethiopia- education is good. I would like to live in Ethiopia if I get job after graduation. Going back to South Sudan is not good for us.

As the above quotation reveals, in some cases, siblings of the same family manage to get access to higher education in Ethiopia. For instance, DJK, second-year student at Gambella University, reported that he did not pass the National Exam in 2021. However, he managed to pass the exam in 2022 after completing the remedial classes and joined Gambella University. His brother also enrolled at Bonja University in 2023. A female refugee student at the same university reported a similar experience. She was happy for the educational opportunity in Ethiopia as she and her younger sister are pursuing their studies in Ethiopian universities. The following is what she said:

I did not pass the national exam during the first round. I was placed at Metu University for remedial program and… then…, after passing the remedial exam, I continued my first-year classes at the same university. Finally got transferred to Gambella University. My sister also moved to Mizan Tepi University for the remedial program…I hope she will pass the exam…

The study also explores the support system available for refugee students of higher education. Two stakeholders, RRS and DAFI, provide scholarship opportunities. According to the UNHCR factsheet of 2023, RRS supports refugee university students in different ways. It provided

scholarship opportunities for 105 (9 female) students (UNHCR, 2023). In collaboration with security forces, RRS also supports refugee students by enabling them to get protection when they need to move from refugee camps to university campus during the times of tension and conflict. DAFI, a German institution, provide scholarship for 1159 (33 female) refugee students from Gambella region (UNHCR, 2023).

DAFI, Albert Einstein German Academic Scholarship Initiative, is a scholarship program for refugees and returnee students to get undergraduate degree in their country of asylum. With the support of the German government, UNHCR and private donors, DAFI has been supporting thousands of refugee students pursue undergraduate studies in several African and Asian countries in the last 25 years. According to refugee students at Gambella University, DAFI provide them with varied types of support including pocket money, cloth allowance, book/stationary allowance, female students' special allowance, cost sharing payments, and graduation allowance. DAFI staff companion refugee students during their graduation ceremony. DAFI also covered the cost sharing payments of refugee students upon their graduation.

The 2023 DAFI report throws light on the major countries of origin of refugee University students benefiting from the DAFI support globally as well as the top countries of study for refugee university students. South Sudan was the first among the top 10 countries of origin of refugee students based on the 2023 DAFI report. According to the same report, South Sudan was the origin of 2059 (362 female) refugee students pursuing university studies followed by Syria and Afghanistan with 1486 (895 female) and 1392 (692 female) respectively. One the other hand, Ethiopia is the first among the top 10 countries of study for refugee students of higher education. Ethiopia hosts 1583 (139 female) refugee university students followed by Turkey hosting 696 (413 female) and Pakistan hosting 654 (251 female) students (DAFI, 2023).

Regardless of benefiting from the educational opportunity, refugee students face various challenges while pursuing their study in university settings. One of the main challenges is language problem. Communication between refugee students and other students is difficult because refugee students do not speak Amharic whereas Ethiopian students are not good in English. Moreover, most of the administrative staff of the university do not speak English. This situation hampers relational integration between refugee students and other students. It also affects academic communication in and outside classroom settings. This is because some

instructors partly use Amharic while teaching some courses; in most cases, Ethiopian students discuss academic issues in Amharic as well. Language problems pose challenges for refugee students beyond academic arena, for example, discussing issues with supporting staff such as those working in student cafeteria. In some cases, they rely on Ethiopian students to translate their request. As a student of Gambella University reported, language barrier hinders smooth communication between security people (the police) and refugees, especially during times of conflict. The same student portrayed the situation as follows:

We do not speak Amharic. We did not learn the language at all. We face some problems because we do not speak Amharic. The Federal Police give us protection. But sometimes, because of communication problems, they [mistreat us] … They do not know who is who; as I told you … we do not speak Amharic, they do not speak English (DJK, refugee student, Gambella University).

Experiences of exclusion were also reported by refugee students at Gambella University. The food culture of refugee students is quite different from the food items served in university cafeterias. For most of the refugee students, they complained, adapting to injera is very difficult and some refugee students encounter stomach aches. They reported that refugee students and host students are not treated equally in the student cafeteria. Refugee students demand to get bread instead of Injera has been denied while the demands of host students are entertained. A female refugee students complained that when refugee students ask some questions related to the food, people working in student cafeteria go as far as saying this: 'you do not have the right to claim this, you are not citizens.' According to the same students, these kinds of words 'harm their emotion and force them to feel as outsiders'.

Inclusion and local integration

Finding of this study demonstrate that, despite the pro-refugee inclusion policies of Ethiopia, the rhetoric of local integration in the education sector is far from realities in Gambella region. This is mainly because the rift between refugees and host communities is huge as a result of inter-ethnic tension and intermittent conflict between the two groups. Overall, refugee-host relationships are dominated by mistrust, hostility, rivalry and isolation. For example, at the pre-higher education level, refugee students are confined to their respective camps and study in segregated refugee camp schools. With a few exceptions, students from host community do

not benefit from the educational services available in refugee camps. Refugee inclusion observed at the pre-higher education level in Gambella is similar to the geographically separate space model of inclusion whereby refugee and host students reside in different locations and learn in physically separate schools (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019). As Bellino and Dryden-Peterson (2019) noted, notwithstanding the effort of the Ethiopian government, enhancing refugee inclusion involving both structural integration and relational integration remains difficult in Gambella because of the tension and conflict between refugees and host communities. Refugee university students move to institutions of higher education with experiences of isolation from host communities.

The overall situation of refugee students pursuing their studies at public universities in Ethiopia involves a transition from the geographically isolated camp settings to university environments where refugee and host students live together in the same premises. Though it seems similar to the shared space model of inclusion whereby refugee and host students share the same school and classrooms (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019), university settings provide more opportunities. First, in university settings, large number of students (including refugee students) come together from different geographic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Second, in addition to sharing the same campus environment, university students attend lectures in the same classrooms, use the same library facilities and dine at a common student cafeteria. Hence, the university environment provides a wide range of opportunities for interactions between refugees and other university students.

Despite these opportunities, however, campus life presents challenging circumstances that hinder the process of relational integration. The first challenge is related to social group formation among students. Social relations among students revolve around social groupings constructed based on common identities such as geographic, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. As a result, student population in Gambella University embraced several ingroups and outgroups. Ethnic identity plays an important role in group formation since the macro and local political landscapes in the current Ethiopia are dominated by identity politics. Refugee students who do not speak Amharic or other Ethiopian languages experience some level of isolation from the rest of university students and tend to confine their ties with refugee students. The situation limits relational/socio-cultural integration between refugee students and host students.

After graduation: hope and despair

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), emphasizes the importance of international cooperation to achieve sustainable solutions for refugee situations that benefit both host communities and refugees. GCR stresses on the imperatives of reducing the pressure on host community resulting from refugees (it could be resource competition, and security issues). International partners are expected to strengthen their solidarity with refugees and host communities affected by the presence of refugees/refugee camps in their surrounding areas. The objectives of the GCR emphasize supporting refugees to be self-reliant, providing them with access to third country solutions, and supporting them to go back home by facilitating the situation in the country of origin (United Nations, 2018).

The three options outlined above are important to provide long-term solutions for refugees upon their graduation. Refugee university students interviewed for this research reflected on their future lives, especially after graduation. Most of the refugee students mentioned the following three opportunities: (1) getting job in Gambella or other parts of the country; (2) moving to third countries; and (3) moving back to South Sudan. Refugee students who participated in this study asserted that all the three possibilities are very difficult to achieve. For example, for most refugee students, obtaining job in Ethiopia is difficult. Getting jobs that resonate with refugee students' fields of studies is very difficult. A 5th year refugee student at Addis Ababa University said the following:

We do not have opportunities to get job here in Ethiopia except serving as incentive teacher in camp schools...because we are not citizens. Refugees can work as incentive teachers in camp schools with a very low payment.

This could be explained in light of the overall rate of unemployment in Ethiopia where several thousands of university graduates failed to get job. Despite constraints related to getting job in Ethiopia, most of the refugee students hesitate to go back home, to South Sudan, which, according to their view, hardly provides them with job opportunities; rather it would be a risky decision. One of the refugee students said the following in this regard:

It is one of the options but a risky one. I can go there; to be involved in corruption... Political power is controlled by one ethnic group [the Dinka]. They may see me as a threat or as an enemy if I go there. But I may go

back if I have no other options (a graduating class student, Gambella University).

The continuing ethnic conflict in South Sudan, especially the struggle and competition between the two major ethnic group, Nuer and Dinka, could be the main reason that discourages refugees to go back home. Based on the refugees' view, moving back home would be difficult because political power in South Sudan is dominated by the Dinka. As the refugee (Nuer) and host (Anywaa) relationship in Ethiopia remain tense as a result of ethnic identity; Dinka-Nuer politics in South Sudan involves ethnic rivalry. Hence, moving back home is not a good option for refugee students after graduation.

Refugee students also assessed the third option of the sustainable solution for refugee situation: resettlement in a third country. According to one of the refugee students, the chance of moving to the third country is very narrow. Moreover, the most available job opportunity in Western countries is not pleasant because, even if you have a university degree, you would be forced to grab low-profile jobs. The following excerpt reflects this view:

There is a very limited chance of going to European countries. Very few refugees got this chance facilitated by the German organization [DAFI, Albert Einstein German Academic Scholarship Initiative] based in Addis Ababa. The chance is rare… If you get the chance to go [to European countries], your degree will not help you to get a good job. You must be working at a low-ranking job - so it is not encouraging (5th year student AAU).

The three options for durable solution for refugee problems are not viable options for most of the university students interviewed for this study. Hence, refugee university students embrace little hope to achieve economic integration in Ethiopia; moving back to their home country is not a good and viable option; and resettlement to the third country is a good option but a rare opportunity.

Conclusion

Ethiopia has pro-refugee laws, policies and strategies. The current policy and legal framework in Ethiopia, including the 2019 revised refugee proclamation, provides refugees with basic rights to education, healthcare, movement, and economic rights. The refugee policies are aimed at fostering the socioeconomic integration of refugees through the implementation of village-style development-oriented settlements.

Inclusion of refugees into the national education system is regarded as one component of the process of local integration. The reality observed on the ground reveals that refugee inclusion is limited to structural integration from pre-school to higher education levels. The structural integration also involves discrepancies. For example, refugee camp schools do not use Amharic or any other Ethiopia language as a medium of instruction. This has a huge implication for local integration as language skills (by facilitating communication between refugees and host communities), play a leading role in enhancing relational or socioeconomic integration of refugees.

In addition to language barrier, local integration is constrained by ethnic/identity politics and related tension and conflict between refugees and local communities. The regional political landscape is dominated by competing narratives that nurture mistrust, tension and conflict. As evident in the macro and local politics in Ethiopia, Nuer-Anywaa relationships have been shaped by competing ethnic/identity politics whereby ethnic identity has been utilized as an instrument to gain political power and resources.

Higher education is considered as a pathway for refugees to broaden their socioeconomic engagement, harness available opportunities and enhance their participation in the wider community. What most refugee university students, including those who received their degree, aspire to achieve through education (e.g., getting employed) seems very difficult to realize for multifaceted barriers they encounter. As a result, refugee university students remain divided embracing some hope while overwhelmed by dilemma, despair and uncertainty about their future!

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING HEALTHCARE SERVICES FOR SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES ON THE BORDERS: THE INGOS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN AL-SALAM LOCALITY IN WHITE NILE STATE, SUDAN

Khadeeja Salih Eshag Abdalnaeim

Introduction

This paper focuses on South Sudanese refugees in White Nile State. This state has emerged as a critical destination for South Sudanese refugees, hosting numerous camps such as Al-Kashafa, Jouri, Al-Redais 1, and Al-Redais 2 (Edris, 2016). Many of these refugees arrive in Sudan under dire conditions, suffering from malnutrition, exhaustion, and poor health. They often lack essential resources such as food, money, livestock, or personal belongings. The overwhelming influx has placed immense strain on host communities, where existing services are already inadequate to meet the needs of both refugees and local populations (JAM, 2017).

One of the most pressing concerns in White Nile State is the accessibility of healthcare services for South Sudanese refugees. Overcrowding, limited medical infrastructure, food insecurity, and inadequate access to clean water exacerbate health risks, leading to high rates of communicable diseases, malnutrition, and maternal and child health issues. Although international humanitarian organizations and NGOs, including the UNHCR, provide essential medical services, multiple obstacles hinder effective healthcare delivery.

The healthcare system in Sudan in general is severely under-resourced and fragile, plagued by malnutrition, infectious diseases, and the impacts of natural disasters and internal conflicts. The country's healthcare sector has suffered from prolonged economic sanctions, financial instability following South Sudan's secession, and overall weak health governance (Akok, 1998). These structural weaknesses make it difficult for Sudan to

meet the growing healthcare needs of refugees, and we see this demonstrated also in White Nile State. Healthcare access among South Sudanese refugees in that state is shaped by various factors, including legal restrictions, economic hardships, cultural norms, and systemic discrimination. Refugees often face challenges such as language barriers, lack of documentation, and financial constraints, which prevent them from accessing medical care. Women, children, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable (Adele et al., 2020). Cultural beliefs and traditional healing practices also influence healthcare-seeking behaviours, with many refugees initially relying on indigenous medicine before engaging with formal medical services. Additionally, experiences of marginalization and social stigma contribute to a deep mistrust of healthcare institutions (Chambers, 1986).

A significant challenge in providing healthcare to refugees in White Nile State is the conflict between international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local government institutions. While INGOs play a crucial role in delivering humanitarian assistance, their operations often face bureaucratic restrictions, limited government cooperation, and political interference. Local authorities, struggling with their own governance issues and resource constraints, sometimes perceive INGOs as undermining national sovereignty or bypassing local health systems. This tension hampers the coordination and efficiency of healthcare services, further complicating access for refugees (UNHCR, 2018).

Although international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and government institutions are actively involved in providing healthcare services, tensions between these entities often impede the effective delivery of aid. Conflicts over jurisdiction, resource allocation, and governance create additional obstacles, making it difficult to establish a coordinated and sustainable healthcare response. However, I argue that the primary reason for the persistent lack of healthcare access in refugee camps is the withdrawal of INGOs after implementing health-related projects without proper planning or an effective mechanism to transition these projects to equally capable local entities. This abrupt disengagement leaves a gap in service provision, ultimately worsening the healthcare crisis. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that considers the historical, political, economic, and cultural dimensions affecting refugee healthcare access. By examining these dynamics, this study aims to contribute to policy discussions and humanitarian efforts to improve healthcare accessibility for displaced populations in Sudan. Using Al-Kashafa camp in White Nile State, Sudan, as a case study, this research

will explore how unstructured withdrawal by INGOs exacerbates existing healthcare challenges and propose strategies for ensuring more effective and sustainable healthcare delivery in refugee camps. I start with an overview of the national health system.

Healthcare system in Sudan

The health system in Sudan is decentralized, and health care services are provided at three levels: primary, secondary, and the third level. This includes the public and private sectors. The health sector in Sudan is divided into three parts: 1. The Federal Ministry of Health; 2. The Ministry of Health in each state; and 3. Local health authorities in each state (Health Officer, White Nile, 2023). The Ministry of Health plays a primary role in providing national health policies, strategies, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as external relations. States rely on federal guidelines for financing and implementing health plans. Local authorities, on the other hand, are primarily responsible for implementation and service delivery. Inadequate coordination between these three levels leads to duplication of responsibilities.

The health situation in Sudan is a major challenge. The country suffers from a weak and fragile health sector, primarily dominated by malnutrition and infectious diseases, which are often exacerbated by natural disasters and ongoing internal conflicts. The health system is ill-equipped to handle the increasing spread of infectious diseases. Healthcare services in government facilities were largely free prior to the introduction of co-payments, which led to increased out-of-pocket spending on healthcare services. To mitigate the risk of high healthcare costs for citizens while ensuring access to quality healthcare, Sudan introduced the National Health Insurance System in 1994[56]. Initially, membership was voluntary for all Sudanese but later became mandatory for all government and private sector employees. In 2016, the Health Insurance Law stipulated that every Sudanese citizen must be covered by the health insurance system or at least have access to healthcare services. On the other hand, Sudan's weak resources and fragile infrastructure have severely limited its healthcare services. Sudan a developing country that suffers from a severe shortage in resource management, in addition to the impact of long-term economic sanctions on the country's ability to manage an effective and robust healthcare system. The secession of the south also had significant

[56] An interview with the healthcare representative (Ezzaldein) at White Nile state, March,2023

repercussions on the healthcare system and the deterioration of health conditions in Sudan, significantly impacting the economy. As a result, Sudan entered a severe financial slide[57].

With Sudan's healthcare system unable to meet the growing health needs, numerous local and international organizations and UN agencies are providing health-related humanitarian assistance through public health services. In early 2018, the UN presented a Humanitarian Response Plan for Healthcare Services with over 87 partners (UN OCHA, 2018). The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) is the primary government body coordinating the distribution of humanitarian aid in Sudan. It registers and approves all international and national NGOs through technical agreements at both national and state levels. HAC works in partnership with UNHCR, which leads the provision of services and care to refugees, and with the Federal Ministry of Health, under the leadership of the World Health Organization. The Ministry of Health approves all health-related work of all international and national NGOs at the national and state levels[58].

On the other hand, according to the testimony of refugees and employees of the refugee commission, there is severe tension between the United Nations and the rest of the humanitarian actors in the same field. This was clearly demonstrated by the strike that included the refugee commissions in all the states of Sudan, which lasted for a week. One of the reasons for this was the disparity in wages between the employees of the different institutions

Refugees from South Sudan to White Nile state, how are they being received?

The growing refugee population has become one of the major challenges in providing adequate services inside the camps. With more than 1.4 million refugees worldwide, Sudan hosts a significant share of refugees and displaced people. This situation is particularly difficult given that Sudan is a developing country already struggling to meet the needs of its own citizens. The more people flee their country to the hosting one, the more help and the support they need. Accordingly, the large influx of South Sudanese refugees in White Nile State represents a main challenge of

[57] An interview with the healthcare officer, Khartoum,2022
[58] An interview with the commissioner of refugees at White Nile state, March,2023

accessing healthcare services by the refugees and also it is the main obstacle for the organizations in providing the services for them[59].

One of the reasons for choosing thus particular study area was the cultural similarity between people from White Nile State and those from Upper Nile State in South Sudan. The two states share a border that before was an administrative border but has, following the secession of the South has become a national border. There is a long history of coexistence between communities in the region. Many southerners once lived in White Nile State but moved south following the secession. With the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013, many of these same people have now returned as refugees. They live in camps yet can still see their former homes and lands now occupied by new residents. Other groups of refugees were also there, coming from other areas of South Sudan, but they were all hosted in camps by the Humanitarian Aid Commission. HAC was supposed to follow the UN rules in which refugees should be protected. They must be 50 kilometres away from borders for their safety and security. They were usually accepted as groups, and the Commission of Refugees had to provide land and protection, while United Nation Higher Commissioner of Refugees had to provide services (health, education, food, shelter …. etc.) and it turned out various organizations were very active to serve them (Hugo[60]).

What emerged was a collaboration in which health care services in the camps, provided by UN agencies, were delivered in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

Health care system in White Nile camps

Refugees are the most vulnerable groups in terms of health status, as they experience high rates of disease. This vulnerability stems from the consequences of war, including psychological problems, as well as the physical strain of walking long distances for many days under direct sunlight without adequate food or water. With the continued influx of refugees into the White Nile region, on top of those already residing in the camps, the burden on the state's health system became immense. This strain was particularly severe given that the system was already weak and fragile to begin with. The health care system in White Nile State before the coming of refugees was already weak, and it was severely affected by the influx of refugees. Hence, the introduction of international organizations

[59] An interview with an employee at Plan Sudan Organization, October,2022
[60] He is the commissioner of refugees that was mentioned before

became an important help in dealing with this situation. But this situation also created tensions. Especially between the refugees in the camps who benefitted from the health care provided by international organizations and the host communities outside the camps who had to depend on the Sudanese health system. This was a general problem throughout the state, and to address the emerging tensions, the Assistant Commissioner decided that 25% of health services should be for the host community and 75% for the refugees. As Doctors Without Borders was a leading institution in refugee assistance, the organization submitted a proposal to the Humanitarian Aid Commission to implement a project in Al-Kashafa Camp. The initiative was designed to serve not only refugees from all camps but also members of the host communities. The project was accepted and led to the construction of the Kashafa Hospital, which was opened in December 2019.

Al-Kashafa Hospital in White Nile State

According to Azadiene (Health representative), in December 2019, the new hospital was equipped with 85 beds, and other facilities that greatly improved the quality of health care provided to South Sudanese refugees as well as local communities in the state. Children suffering from acute malnutrition and people suffering from chronic infections diseases, such as HIV and tuberculosis, could now get help. As a result, refugees came from all camps to get medication at that hospital, and people from host communities also came in large numbers. But then an important change happened that triggered the problems discussed in this paper.

What happened was that the government closed the hospital and also transferred the running of the hospital to Ministry of Health. This change was for the remainder of the period in which MSF was supposed to be engaged in the running of the hospital. The response from the refugees to this change was to seek medical help outside the camp, thus meeting the weak health care system of the government, a system that lacked the most basic funding of equipment, medicine and services needed. Many refugees travelled to the regional capital, Kosti, and some even went to Khartoum. Many refugees travelled to the regional capital, Kosti, and some even went to Khartoum. However, upon arrival they were confronted with demands for fees that were far beyond what they can afford. This problem came on

top of a new challenge which was to get travel permits to move outside the camp, which required the possession of identity documents[61].

The closure of Al-Kashafa Hospital and its handover to the Ministry of Health in December 2021 marked a major shift in the healthcare structure in the camp and other camps, a situation that was described to me by Saeed and Haitham in 2023, Camp Director and Deputy Director of the camp. What this demonstrated was the refugees' heavy reliance on humanitarian organizations to meet their healthcare needs, and in this situation the closure of the MSF hospital clearly revealed the fragility of healthcare systems in refugee settings and the significant challenges refugees faced in such a transitioning from international organizations to local healthcare services represented by the Ministry of Health. The following statement illustrates how some of the refugees felt about this.

"My family and I have suffered after the closure of Al-Kashafa Hospital and getting health care for my children has become a real challenge that makes me completely helpless. Sometimes I have to go to other camps like Dabat Bosn camp but to no avail as that camp does not have a laboratory or even a doctor. You get medicine by meeting the nurse and even the medicine is not available, so you have to bring it from outside the camp and there you need money which forced me to sell part of my monthly food ration"[62] (Tomas, 43years)

This statement describes the situation well. The MSF hospital in Al-Kashafa camp was not just an ordinary hospital, but a reference for all refugees in all the White Nile camps, providing specialized services. It was the only centre with a dedicated nutrition department and provided comprehensive and integrated services to both refugees and host communities. Its scope was extensive, meeting the needs of more than 270,000 refugees and 450,000 host communities, making it a healthcare hub in the White Nile region[63]. Prior to the establishment of this hospital, access to healthcare services for the local community and refugees was limited. The construction of this hospital represented a bright spot and a significant improvement in the availability and quality of healthcare. The hospital delivered high-quality specialized healthcare and provided completely free medical services. Its role was vital in a context marked by the scarcity of such services. It has provided nearly 500,000 outpatient

[61] An online interview with the head of MSF at Khartoum, April,2024)
[62] An interview with Tomas who is a refugee living in Al-Kashafa Camp for 7 years, he has 43 years old, the interview took place near to the local market of the camp, April,2024.
[63] An interview with the health officer at White Nile,October,2024

consultations, received more than 20,000 patients, treated thousands of malnourished children, and assisted in more than 50,000 successful births, in addition to large-scale vaccination campaigns and mental health services.

According to refugees and camp managers, the MSF hospital was unique in the entire White Nile State. Even White Nile State citizens would travel far to enter the hospital for treatment. The hospital was well-equipped, had well-trained staff, highly qualified doctors, modern equipment, and free, highly effective medications[64]. A system for managing chronic diseases and acute health problems was also in place. The hospital had a mobile clinic, which ensured that health services reached even the most remote areas, improving accessibility for both refugees and the host community.

In this situation, then, the closure of the hospital without warning or a plan for future health services had devastating psychological and social impacts on the health and safety of refugees. This can be seen from the experiences of individuals such as Peter, 32, and Akol, 28, refugees from Al-Kashafa Camp. Akol's story of losing his friend Todd due to a delay in obtaining medical care highlights the risks refugees face without timely medical intervention.

"*My friend died two years ago from a massive heart attack in the middle of the night. The health centre doesn't work at night. After a lot of effort, we managed to find a means of transportation to take him out of the camp to a health centre in another camp, but by then he would have died. I am absolutely sure that if the MSF hospital had been working as it was before, we would have been able to save him*"[65]**.** (Akol,28 years).

The closure of the hospital and the restrictions imposed on healthcare have exacerbated the refugees' problems, replacing the sense of security provided by this organization with uncertainty and a sense of powerlessness in a fragile and impoverished environment. These challenges illustrate the fragility of healthcare systems in refugee camps once the organizations' projects end and they announce their withdrawal without proper planning. "*When MSF was in the camp, the situation was much better than it is now. The hospital was well-equipped with doctors*

[64] An interview with the camp Director at his office at 12 o'clock, March,2023

[65] A quote that said by Akol who is a refugee living in Al-kashafa camp for 10 years and he has 28 years, he lost his friend due to lack of services after MSF departure. the interview took place at the camp, April,2024)

and medicines, we received treatment at no cost, we didn't have to wait long to see a doctor, and we felt safe"[66]**.** (Piter,32 years).

MSF's presence in White Nile State was essential in improving access to healthcare for both refugees and local communities. Its services significantly reduced health risks and improved the quality of life in the camps. However, the organization's departure left a structural gap in the overall structure of the camps, as reflected in the personal stories of refugees who suffered the consequences of reduced access to healthcare. This situation underscores the urgent need for sustainable healthcare solutions that operate independently of humanitarian aid, ensuring continued medical support to vulnerable populations even after the organization's projects end.

The wider context for the closure and hand-over of the hospital

What happened in Al-Kashafa camp was part of a wider strategy. The Director of the Protection Office at MSF, Khartoum 2022, said: "*The handover of the hospital from MSF to the Sudanese Ministry of Health in December 2021 was a very significant event and was undertaken under the slogan "Services will remain available to all""*. This handover was the result of an agreement between MSF and the Sudanese Ministry of Health that aimed at the Ministry of Health continuing healthcare services even after the MSF-organization's departure from the camp. The signing of the agreement was attended by important figures such as Dr. Nour Eldin El Amin Mohamed, Director General of the Sudanese Ministry of Health at that time, and Dr. Claudia Stephenson, Director of MSF. Due to the importance of the event, security and executive leaders, the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid in Sudan, and representatives of foreign and national organizations participated, emphasizing the collective effort that will be made to maintain the continuity of hospital services. The Secretary-General of the White Nile State Government, Dr. El Shazly Khalid Ibrahim, pledged to maintain the hospital and continue its services in coordination with various partners such as the United Nations organizations. He said, "*We will preserve this great edifice and strive to continue providing services through it*". This pledge by the state secretary indicates a commitment to filling the gap created by the absence of Doctors Without Borders. The state secretary also approved the inclusion of the hospital in the state's 2022 general budget, indicating the extent to which

[66] A quote from an interview with Piter , 32 years old , who is a refugee living at the camp for 5 years , August 2024

the local government was striving to prioritize healthcare in the region despite the withdrawal of international aid. However, while the handover appeared to be promising the continuity of services, the success of this agreement depended critically on the ability of the White Nile State government to continue providing hospital services as before, while ensuring the necessary support.

But there were significant concerns about the ability of the local Ministry of Health, with its very limited resources, to maintain the high-quality services previously provided effectively by MSF. While the commitment to include the hospital in the state budget was a positive step, the Ministry of Health did not have the same capabilities as MSF, making it impossible to continue providing the same services with the same efficiency[67]. While the handover was an important initiative to ensure the continuity of healthcare services, it was also considered an ill-considered step, as the Ministry lacked the resources to operate such a hospital, reflecting the difficulty of continuing to provide health services to refugees and even the host community. This reflected the challenges of ensuring sustainable health care in the absence of international aid and also reflected the danger of relying on international humanitarian aid.

Post-MSF healthcare situation in the camp as experienced by refugees

Returning to the fieldwork, I observed that, as expected, MSF's departure had a significant impact on the healthcare system in the refugee camp, severely disrupting medical services and creating a crisis for the camp's residents. The most pressing challenge was the shortage of medical professionals, with the absence of specialists who previously treated chronic diseases and complex medical conditions such as heart disease. Refugees now struggle to access the medical expertise they need, as testimonies like those of Rosemary 44-year-old show: *"The health centre operates for limited hours, and if an emergency occurs outside of these hours, we have no choice but to wait or try to reach volunteer doctors in other camps. These doctors often lack the necessary expertise, which presents us with a real challenge."* Stories and examples from individuals inside the camp highlight the consequences of the absence of an institutional framework like MSF. They (the refugees) face challenges including prolonged wait times to see a doctor, restricted operating hours at health centres, and dependence on volunteer physicians who often lack

[67] An interview with Hytham, who is the camp manager of Dapt Posin camp, and he conorls also Al-Kashafa camp, May,2023

the expertise to manage serious or complex illnesses." All of these factors combined have weakened the health care system and made refugees even more vulnerable. In addition to the shortage of medical professionals, the availability of essential medicines has become a critical issue. Prior to MSF's departure, medicines were provided regularly and free of charge. However, the situation has changed dramatically, with medicines now either unavailable or prohibitively expensive for refugees. The rising costs of treatment have placed a huge financial burden on an economically vulnerable community, forcing many to seek alternatives such as traveling long distances or to distant hospitals. Elizabeth, 23, said, "*When I have shortness of breath due to asthma, I need to go to the hospital, but there is no specialist doctor or equipment to deal with my condition, as there is a shortage of medications. In my case, there are no asthma medications such as inhalers, which forces me to use them with extreme caution when I find them, and sometimes I have to reduce the dose for fear of running out.*"

The dire consequences of this shortage, particularly for patients with chronic conditions such as asthma, are described. The lack of inhalers and other essential medications forces patients to ration their medication, increasing the risk of serious health complications. Delays in accessing treatment have also led to high mortality rates, highlighting the life-threatening impact of these healthcare gaps. The healthcare crisis extends beyond immediate medical needs to encompass the broader structural challenges facing the refugee community. Overcrowded health centres have limited opening hours, and a lack of adequate medical equipment contributes to delayed healthcare and poor health outcomes. In emergency situations, patients are left without timely intervention, increasing the likelihood of preventable deaths. The personal account of Akol, who lost his friend due to the lack of a functioning health centre at night, is a stark reminder of the urgent need for sustainable healthcare solutions. The deterioration of health services after the departure of MSF revealed the fragility of the infrastructure in refugee camps when humanitarian organizations withdrew. The shortage of specialized doctors, medical supplies, and operational support led to refugees struggling to meet their healthcare needs. These challenges underscore the urgent need for improved healthcare policies, strong government commitment, and sustained international support to ensure refugees receive consistent and adequate medical care. Without immediate intervention, the health crisis in the camp will worsen, putting refugees' lives at greater risk.

The danger of over-reliance on humanitarian aid – some concluding comments

Although international humanitarian organizations and the international community have constructive goals in providing support to refugees and developing countries, this support can sometimes have disastrous, unintended consequences. Such support often fosters dependency rather than self-sufficiency. The situation at Al-Kashafa Camp is a clear example of how prolonged reliance on international aid without long-term planning for sustainability can leave communities more vulnerable when support is cut off. Aid agencies often face the dilemma of providing support over time when the need for support is constantly increasing. As Harle Bond (2002) argued, continued reliance on external support without efforts to build self-reliance can undermine a community's ability to function independently. Rather than empowering refugees, international aid often reinforces dependency, making it difficult for them to adapt once aid is reduced or withdrawn. The situation in Al-Kashafa camp illustrates this vividly. Refugees became entirely dependent on the healthcare services provided by Doctors Without Borders (MSF), without parallel efforts to build local infrastructure or develop the skills and resources necessary for sustaining independent medical care. When MSF withdrew, no alternative system had been established, leaving refugees struggling to cope with the loss. . This reinforces the urgent need for sustainable assistance strategies in which international and local organizations, UN agencies, and governments collaborate to find long-term solutions, rather than short-term relief efforts that end when external support ends.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SHAPING SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES AT THE BORDER: COMPETITION AND INTERVENTION FROM OTHER HUMANITARIAN ACTORS IN WHITE NILE STATE, SUDAN (2022-2025)

Ahmed Suliman Ahmed Fadl Alla

Introduction

This paper discusses the formation of social relations between South Sudanese refugees and the host community in White Nile State, Sudan, focusing on the daily interactions that arise in multiple spaces such as markets, schools, workplaces, and health centres. The paper examines the nature of the relationship between refugees and the host community, and how this relationship is affected by humanitarian interventions, competition for resources, and cultural and social interactions. The study also discusses the environmental, economic and social impact of the presence of refugees, including competition for employment opportunities, the integration of refugees into economic activities, and the impact on the host community.

The study is based on a descriptive and analytical approach based on field data collected from interviews with refugees, members of the host community, representatives of government agencies such as the Commission for Refugees (COR) and the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), as well as civil society and international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Doctors Without Borders (MSF), among others. I did fieldwork and collected information from refugees living in different refugee camps about their relationship with the host communities in villages neighbouring the refugee camps such as Dabat Bosin village which is neighbouring the Dabat Bosin camp, Al-Radis Al-Bahr village neighbouring the camps of Al-Radis 1 and Al-Radis 2, Al-Alqaya village neighbouring Al-Alqaya camp.

It is noticeable, of course, that the name of the camp is often identical to the name of the neighbouring village, both signifying a geographical location. The camps also were part of transportation systems that connected the camps to the nearest cities. The major cities are Kosti, Rabak, Al Kawah, Al Duwaim, Al Qatina, Tandelti, Al Jabalin, Al Jazeera Aba, Al Shawal, Nu'mia, Um Jar, Shabsha, Al Sufi, Al Jamalab, Al Daradir, Al Hashaba, and Wad Nur. Refugees as well as local people visited the cities that were nearest to them to meet their needs that were not available in the camp or near it. My focus was to stay in areas around the camp, trying to find out how social relationships were formed and shaped by focusing on the interaction in arenas such as markets, schools and health stations. Among the several camps and local communities, a special focus was given to the social relationship between host communities and refugees in the community of Dabat Bosin.

With information from this home area and people's relationship with the refugees in the camp I also tried to understand how these relationships between hosts and refugees came to affect viability of households in the host community. In other words, it will explore how the presence of refugees has affected the life of the host community in terms of how their livelihoods are maintained and new opportunities are created by different actors in the study community of Dabat Bosin. We shall see examples of peaceful coexistence as well as situations of conflict and competition and discuss what the basic factors are that produce different outcomes.

To explore this, I made use of primary and secondary data. With regard to secondary data, I reviewed a large number of relevant studies and collected reports. Concerning primary data, I conducted various interviews targeting different groups like members of the host communities, refugees, relevant government agencies (COR-HAC), international and national organizations. In presenting the results I organized and discussed my data in the following sections: Social system, educational system, economic system, and health system. But first, let me present some contexts for the refugees in the White Nile State.

Following the South Sudanese refugees arriving in their camps

The refugees who came into White Nile State were displaced during the civil war that started in their home country in 2013 and the vicious fighting that continued during the following years. The situation got worse with the spread of famine during the same period. There were four border crossings through which refugees could enter Sudan and the White Nile State. These

were, and are Jouda Crossing, Al-Maqines Crossing, Kweik crossing, and Um Galala Crossing

Arriving in White Nile State, the refugees are placed in refugee camps that are organized in different sectors. In the Eastern Sector there are three camps: Dabat Bosin camp, Al-Ghana camp and Alagaya camp. In the Southwestern Sector there are two camps: Jourie Camp and Al Kashafa Camp. In the Central Western Sector there are two camps: Al-Raddis 1 Camp and Al-Raddis 2 Camp. Finally, in the Northwestern Sector there are three camps: Um Sangour camp, Khor al-Warl camp and Al-Jameya camp.

Each camp has a field office inside the camp for the Refugee Commission to follow up and manage the work in the camps (granting exit permits from the camp, supervising the work of organizations inside the camp, resolving conflicts in the camp ... etc.). In total some 150 000 thousand refugees live in these 10 camps. In addition, a larger number are living outside the refugee camps.

The camps were built to accommodate the refugees and were equipped with basic needs, and some health centres, schools, water stations, and road infrastructures. The WFP played a major role in providing and distributing food, and several organizations were present to establish income-generating projects for the refugees as well as host populations.

Despite the initially positive reception, significant challenges emerged in the formal management of refugees. The Sudanese authorities refrained from automatically designating the arrivals as refugees, since such a classification would have necessitated the involvement of international organizations like UNHCR and, with them, the application of international legal frameworks to guide the subsequent handling of South Sudanese entrants. In the beginning, South Sudanese refugees were called expatriates, our brothers, and guests. These labels also affected their areas of residence, whether sent to reception points instead of refugee camps and so on. In this early period, services were initially limited to food and primary health services. Later, when they were recognized as refugees, they entered the refugee camps.

These issues are dealt with on other papers in this book, here I shall continue with a discussion of what factors were shaping social relations between refugees and the host community. As expected, the local host communities' acceptance of refugees residing on their land was directly related to the development prospects offered to the refugees' presence near

them. Such factors became important even though local people underlined the historical relationships between themselves and the people coming from the other side of the border before the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Therefore, it became important for me to look at the different sorts of fields in which this meeting between refugees and host communities took place, and what effects I could see within the different fields.

The environment

The Assistant Director of the UNHCR Office, Costy, stated in an interview that the environmental situation was becoming catastrophic due to the general degradation processes. Costy believed that the establishment of the camps was not done according to studied plans but was done in an indiscriminate manner and were built in areas that were vital for the host populations. Such areas were for instance "agricultural land" that now had become a place of residence for the refugees. Shortage of water also became an increasing problem.

Checking this kind of information led me look into the situation in five refugee camps namely Daba Bosun, Al-Alqaya, Al-Qanaa, Al-Radis 1 and Al-Radis 2. I found that the first three camps were located on the eastern bank of the White Nile on the main road connecting the major cities in the state with South Sudan. Here the land of these camps had originally been agricultural land. The camps thus interfered on the corn fields that extend on both sides of the camps on the Nile. The areas remaining for cultivation were owned by members of the host community or also one business owner (as in the case of Al-Radis 1 camp). Seen from the perspective of the refugees they were complaining that they were not allowed to engage in cultivation on the land that was still available. They were, however, able to work as seasonal labourers for members of the host community. Yet this employment was marked by extremely low wages compared to those earned by host community workers, reinforcing exploitative relationships.

Another relationship that is problematic is when the refugees use the trees near the camp for the purpose of firewood and the construction of dwellings. The local people argue this is illegal logging. Also, as women are involved in the collection of firewood there are also cases of sexual harassment and rape.

The social system

It is known that the refugee process is a process of moving across borders, carrying little except one's own values and cultural heritage. Settling in

refugee camps thus brings values and the broader socio-cultural system of the refugees in contact with the parallel systems among the people living in the host communities. In cases of conflicts, we see that there might be a clash of values in the interaction between refugees and host communities

One example is in the liquor and beer production in the camps. Both in South Sudan and in Sudan people have always used alcohol, but in Sudan the Islamist regime has made it illegal. Problems may arise then when some members of the host community come to the camps for the purpose of drinking liquor and beer. For the women in the camp this is part of a normal market adaptation which they have also pursued back home in the south. But in the north, in Sudan, the marketing of alcohol is simply illegal. The use of alcohol gives rise to various problems, ranging from conflicts between refugees and individuals outside the camps to involvement in illegal activities that draw the attention of authorities, including the Office of Refugee Accreditation and the police.

Another problematic issue is found in the possible sexual relationships between men and women, normally men from the host community and women from within the camps. Interviewing a Sultan in one camp, Sultan Thomas Lak, told me: "We have a girl and boy issue, where young men from neighbouring villages come to the camp to talk to refugee girls in "unclear ways," and this creates issues with the host villages."

The Sultan's statement reflects the issues of sexual harassment but only addressed in careful ways ("unclear ways"). The same happened in an interview I had with the head of the Popular Committee in the village of Al-Radis Al-Bahr, located on the west bank of the White Nile. When asked about marriage relations between the members of the host community and South Sudanese refugees, he said: "Direct marriage relations through the door do not exist, but there is a relationship through the window."

Again, using metaphors for saying that there are sexual relations outside the framework of marital relations. The door and window metaphors were a way of telling me that in cases of sexual relationships between people from the camp and outside the camp, the case is dealt with informally, meaning that it is not dealt with according to the official law, using relevant traditional legal traditions depending on who are involved. The head of the Popular Committee continued: "If you are caught in a sexual relationship with a South Sudanese refugee, you pay the losses and go." If the woman is married the settlement is with the husband. Losses were traditionally in cattle, for instance in cases with Dinka women, but now the cases are

settled by paying money, and negotiations are settled by the Sultan of the camp.

The economic system

In the above, we have seen some changes in the environmental and social aspects in the relationship between the refugees and the host communities. In the following, I will discuss what goes on in the economic field.

Market

The market is one of the most important places of interaction between refugees and the host society. In the market interaction takes place on a daily basis

Markets often emerge inside or on the outskirts of refugee camps, such as the one in Dibba Bosun camp, located on the eastern side of the paved road connecting Sudan with South Sudan. In these markets, the majority of traders come from the host community. They engage in butchery, sell cane along the roadside, and purchase food from refugees. There are also a number of shops in Al-Radis 1 camp engaged in the sale of small commodities such as tobacco, cigarettes, and shisha. They can also sell larger items such as air conditioners. Also, we find small mobile phone service centers that have phone accessories, as well as some grocery stores.

There are differences between the camps when it comes to the types of shops there. For instance, I recorded a difference between Dibba and Bosn camps, which is relatively small in terms of commercial activity, compared to its counterpart Al-Radis camp on the eastern bank of the White Nile.

Apart from such commercial activities run by the refugees and the host communities themselves, the international refugee system is also contributing, for instance through the UNHCR.

As for the case of Al-Radis 1 camp, the shops are stalls owned by refugees and members of the host community, and these are bigger than is the case of similar stalls in Dibba and Bosun camps. The shops are relatively well established, with some specializing in phones and accessories, others in clothing, and still others in tobacco and various items demanded by refugees. Overall, commercial activities in this camp are considerably more developed than those in the eastern camps situated along the eastern bank of the White Nile. This can be related to the issue of tight control of goods that pass on the national road to South Sudan through the three

eastern camps (Dibba Bosun, Alagaia, Al-Jamia) compared to the western camps where control is less frequent.

A common sight in marketplaces across the camps is groups of women selling tea, while South Sudanese men gather around them, relaxing with a glass of tea in hand. The phenomenon of the market in the camps can be viewed from several perspectives. The needs within the camps, as well as the needs of the host communities, may both provide a base for commercial activities. The system of humanitarian aid is also a key element in the emergence of the market, as such organizations provide goods that then become part of the commercial activities in the camps. These are commodities that the host communities also demand, thus increasing the scale of the commercial activities. For a comparative view from Somalia, I can quote Mahmoud (2020), who states:

"About half of the food distributed is sold and about 80 to 90 percent of refugees sell part or most of their food packages (mostly maize and beans) on the black market, but an oversupply of a particular commodity such as oil or maize flour means that the market value drops. A thriving ration resale market operates right in front of a major food distribution center. Often, ration resale has become the subject of active policing, including police sweeps that have forced ration sellers to clear the area, especially when these practices become too blatant and obvious. Since Turkana people don't have any food, they do strange things and buy corn and beans from refugees." (Mahmoud, 2020, p. 84).

Refugee Employment

When it comes to the issue of paid labour available for refugees and host populations, I showed how the refugees are exploited as cheap labour power on the farms of the more affluent people in the host communities. Such seasonal labour in the sesame and corn harvest is still of great importance for the refugees.

Some refugees told me that they were exploited in the agricultural seasons by not getting paid correct wages. Also, they complained that the costs of transportation and the cost of food during working hours had to be carried by themselves, thus further reducing the value of the salary. I discussed this with the employees of the UNHCR office in a camp, and they saw this issue differently from the refugees. They argued that there were regulations that control the movement of workers from the camps to the place of cultivation, and that formal identity papers were demanded from the farmers who hired them. On a formal level this could well be right, but it

would be no surprise if the more exploitative aspects of the relationships also were widespread.

Educated refugees were perhaps better placed as they could find some employment in local schools and also in working for organizations inside the camps. Also, refugee women work in several jobs such cleaning the health centre within the camp or cleaning houses of families among in the host society.

Employment in the camps

The labour market in these areas also shows that members of the host communities find work within the camps. Job opportunities in the camp include work in local markets as well as positions as taxi drivers, transporting refugees between the camp and nearby cities. Educated young people in the host community can also work as employees with government bodies in the camp, such as COR. Summing up the discussion above, I first present a table which shows a more systematic way of the different types of discussions I have carried out above.

Table 14-1: *Refugees and host communities by type of work*

Category / Individual	Work	Type
South Sudanese Refugee men	Agriculture "Farming Season"	Marginal - Free - Seasonal
	Construction Work	Marginal - Free - Seasonal
	Fishing	Marginal - Free - Permanent
South Sudanese Refugee Women	Home workers "Washing, cleaning, mopping ...	Marginal - Free - Permanent
	Tea selling	Marginal - Free - Permanent
	Municipal liquor industry	Marginal - Free - Permanent
	Vegetable selling	Marginal - Free - Permanent
Individuals from host villages	Meat selling "butchery"	Trade
	Grocery and buying food aid	Trade
	Cane selling	Trade
	Taxi drivers	Free - Permanent
	Camp administration staff	Permanent
	Government employee COR	Permanent
	Agriculture seasonal	seasonal

Source: *fieldword 2023*

Discussions with members of the host community reveal a sense of alienation, particularly because refugees receive multiple forms of assistance—both material and psychological—from international agencies, while host populations themselves continue to live in conditions of extreme poverty. In their view, their position as citizens of Sudan is worse than that of the South Sudanese refugees—a perception that can also give rise to anger. This sentiment is frequently expressed in statements of injustice and inequality, directed both toward their own authorities and toward the refugees themselves. Acknowledging these sentiments, my own view—based on both study and observation—is that they can be balanced by other perspectives expressed among community members as well as through my personal observations. This alternative view is based on the fact that the arrival of South Sudanese refugees to White Nile State and the establishment of camps are processes that have led to the creation of economic opportunities in the host areas by attracting development and economic resources to these areas. The presence of the international community, through both international and regional organizations, provides services that the Sudanese system itself cannot afford—often surpassing the contributions of national partners. The paper by Muhamed Bakheet shows a case that illustrates this point. His point relates to the tensions between a specific international organization, the MSF, and the Sudanese system. A situation that I also find in my observations. Which shows that the health services offered by the Sudanese institutions is far below that offered by the international community through international and regional organizations. Local people are therefore correct in noting a clear disparity between the health services provided in the camps—both in terms of quality and cost—and those available outside the camps. Val Todd, a South Sudanese refugee from the Dabat Bosin camp, argued about the Sudanese based system: “The hospital exists as an existing building in the camp, without medicines, tests or medical tools, if the refugees go to the hospital, they do not meet a doctor but a medical assistant, there is no medicine in the hospital pharmacy except for malaria treatment and some painkillers and there are saline solutions without body connections, but refugees resort to buying medicines from private clinics in the camp."

Turning to the education system, this constitutes one of the essential services provided to refugees, as stipulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Convention states: *“Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to their nationals with regard to elementary education”* (Article 22). Also, here we see differences. Since the start of the influx of South Sudanese refugees in 2013 the areas in

which the refugees were received did not have schools. However, the UN organizations, in national partnership and government oversight, have established a number of schools, which now total 19 (UNHCR, 2020). It is interesting to see that most of these schools were established in areas between the camps and host villages in order to provide education services to both communities. In this situation, refugees voiced complaints regarding the schools. Their concerns centered on the use of the Sudanese curriculum and the fact that Arabic was the primary language of instruction. As a result, refugee children faced significant difficulties in their learning. Back in South Sudan, they were accustomed to English, which is the official language of instruction there. The dilemma was solved by the ADRA organization, which intervened to solve the issue by involving teachers from the refugee camps to help in education. As a result, there are some schools where lessons are taught both in English and Arabic.

Conclusion

The findings in my study indicate that the relationship between the refugees and the host community is characterized by a degree of coexistence but is sometimes affected by tensions arising from competition for resources and basic services. The study also sheds light on the impact of humanitarian aid in shaping the relationship between refugees and the host community, as the services provided by international organizations play a role in improving the standard of living, but may also contribute to creating social and economic gaps between the two parties.

The paper recommends promoting adaptation and coexistence programs between refugees and host communities, alongside the development of sustainable policies to support social and economic integration—particularly in light of the continued influx of refugees and its strain on regional infrastructure and basic services. My study, I believe, can provide valuable knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of the impact of refugee camps on their host communities and the relationship between the host community and the refugee population. It also exploresd possible sustainable solutions to improve the relationship between them and how to better adapt and coexist, which will benefit both host communities and refugees alike. Finding sustainable solutions for coexistence between refugees and their host communities is seen as critical to development, as refugee situations are unlikely to disappear, and there is an urgent need to understand the dynamics of these relationships.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MASCULINE EXPERIENCES OF MALE SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES IN NYUMANZI REFUGEE SETTLEMENT, UGANDA

Nyiraneza Mollen

Introduction

This paper focuses on South Sudanese male refugees in Nyumanzi refugee settlement in Adjumani district, North-West Uganda. Nyumanzi settlement was established in 2014 and is one of the largest refugee settlements in Uganda, hosting over 55,000 refugees, primarily from South Sudan (UNHCR, 2020). The settlement is managed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in collaboration with the Ugandan government and various humanitarian organizations. Despite efforts to provide basic necessities, refugees in Nyumanzi settlement continue to face significant challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities (OPM, 2020). But these general problems are not my focus here. The focus of my discussion is specifically on male refugees above the age of 18. This is a choice I made after discovering that humanitarian and support programs that I read about often failed to address the specific needs of refugee men. The mainstream narratives I saw tended to portray men as privileged decision-makers and women as vulnerable dependents in need of empowerment. Given such a bias I was curious to find out to what extent such a lack of attention and support would discourage men from talking about their problems and thus from seeking help. To explore this, my fieldwork focused particularly on men, focusing on three areas within the Nyumanzi settlement, first, to explore the (re)constructions of being a man among South Sudanese refugees, second, to assess how male South Sudanese refugees deal with their vulnerabilities, and three, to investigate how male South Sudanese refugees imagined their future. But recognizing that masculinity is a social construct, the study also engaged with women, who play a crucial role in shaping masculine identities through the socialization of boy children and defining male roles. To do this, I spent three months of fieldwork, observing the daily lives of people, and participating in their

activities, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives (Spradley, 1980). In-depth interviews were also conducted to gather detailed information about their lives, experiences, and perceptions of specific person (Bernard, 2002). Furthermore, focus group discussions were organized with refugees to explore specific topics, gather diverse perspectives, and observe interactions and dynamics (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This multifaceted approach, I believe, allowed for a rich and subtle understanding of the refugees' experiences and of the ways the refugees navigated the tensions between cultural heritage and the realities of refugee life.

(Re)constructing masculinities: Being a South Sudanese man and refugee

The research aimed to explore how South Sudanese men, specifically from the Dinka and Nuer communities, define and construct masculinity. Given that gender is a social construct that varies across cultures and contexts (Butler, 1990), the study sought to understand whether the traditional notions of masculinity persisted among displaced refugee men. Through a focus group discussion (FGD) with Dinka refugee men at Nyumanzi market, participants shared their perspectives on what constitutes a traditional Dinka man. According to them, a key aspect of traditional Dinka masculinity is the ability to provide for and protect one's family, echoing findings from other studies on masculinity in African contexts (Silberschmidt, 2001). As the participants explained, this definition of masculinity remains an important benchmark for men in their community.

According to the Dinka refugee men, traditional Dinka masculinity is defined by several key characteristics. These include the ability to provide for one's household through agriculture, serving as the supreme decision-maker, and possessing leadership qualities that enable effective dispute resolution within the family and community. Marriage and progeny are also essential aspects of Dinka masculinity, with a traditional Dinka man expected to have multiple wives and many children. Additional markers of masculinity include initiation into manhood, provision of shelter, and ownership of large herds of cattle.

Cattle hold significant cultural and economic value in Dinka society, serving as a medium of exchange, a symbol of wealth, and a means of payment for important transactions such as marriage and debt settlement (Deng, 1972). The study found that the possession of cattle is deeply tied to social respect and identity, with participants emphasizing that wealth

and education are secondary to cattle ownership in earning respect within the community. As one participant noted, "For us Dinkas, it doesn't matter how much money, wealthy and educated one is, as long as you don't have cows, there is no respect for you". This underscores the enduring importance of traditional practices and cultural values in shaping Dinka masculinity.

In contrast, the construction of masculinity among Nuer men was explored through a focus group discussion (FGD) with Nuer men at Nyumanzi market. According to the participants, traditional Nuer masculinity is characterized by several key attributes, including initiation marked by forehead wrinkles, the ability to fight and defend one's family, and provision for one's household. These findings are consistent with much older literature on Nuer culture, which emphasizes the importance of martial prowess and provision in defining masculine identity (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). The participants' narratives highlight the significance of these traditional markers of masculinity in shaping Nuer men's sense of self and identity.

In Nuer culture, masculinity is defined by several key characteristics. A Nuer man is considered mature upon undergoing initiation, marked by forehead wrinkles, a rite of passage that signifies his transition to manhood. He is expected to possess certain skills and assets, including the ability to fight and defend his family, as well as owning livestock such as cows, sheep, and goats, and being able to fish.

Traditional Nuer gender roles dictate strict divisions of labour, with men prohibited from engaging in domestic activities like cooking. They are expected to maintain a distance from the kitchen, even in situations where food is burning. Furthermore, a Nuer man is not supposed to request food, as it is the responsibility of his wife or mother to anticipate and serve his needs.

The Nuer practice a form of bride wealth, where a man's status is partly measured by his ability to acquire a wife through the payment of a substantial dowry, often consisting of a large number of cows. For example, some men pay up to 200 or 400 cows as dowry, highlighting the economic nature of marriage arrangements in Nuer society (Evans-Pritchard, 1951). This system implies that marriage is contingent upon economic capacity, with the Nuer belief that a man's wealth can determine his eligibility for marriage. In this cultural context, women are seen as subject to familial and societal arrangements, with limited agency in choosing their partners. The patriarchal nature of Nuer society is evident

in the power dynamics within families, where men hold more authority than women.

The traditional definitions of masculinity among the Dinka and Nuer communities have undergone significant transformations over time. Research has shown that refugee experiences can profoundly impact gender roles and identities. Specifically, the study's findings indicate that the majority of refugee men from these communities are no longer able to fulfil their prescribed gender roles, which are fundamental to their identity as men. The scarcity of resources in refugee settings has rendered certain traditional rites of passage inaccessible, thereby disrupting the conventional markers of masculinity.

Displacement and refugeehood have resulted in a profound loss of economic status and livelihoods, catapulting individuals from lives of relative certainty to uncertain and precarious circumstances. This loss of economic stability has been linked to changes in gender dynamics, with men often experiencing a loss of status and power. Consequently, refugee men are forced to rely heavily on external assistance, including humanitarian aid and host government support, in order to survive. This precarious existence has significantly altered the traditional dynamics of masculinity, highlighting the need for an intricate understanding of the complex interplay between displacement, identity, and gender roles.

A story of Amoi's experience in Nyumanzi Refugee Settlement.

In South Sudan, Amoi worked as a teacher in primary four and five classes. Instead of receiving monetary compensation, he was paid in kind with food items such as sorghum, oil, and salt. This practice changed in 2005 when the government began paying teachers who had formal training. However, Amoi lacked formal education in teaching, having dropped out of school in senior two. Prior to his teaching career, he had been a refugee in Kenya before returning to South Sudan.

Amoi's teaching career was interrupted in 2006 when he joined the army, which aimed to liberate the people from perceived Arab oppression and forced imposition of religion and rules. Following South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011, the country plunged into civil war in 2013, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of displacements (The Sentry, 2019). The conflict persists to this day. Talking to Amoi;

Amoi, a Dinka man, joined the army to protect his people from external oppression. However, when the conflict turned internal, he became reluctant to fight and eventually left the army, citing the unacceptability of fighting his own people. Amoi described life on the battlefield as marked by constant fear, uncertainty, and high risk of death, attributing the ongoing conflict to soldiers' hunger and inadequate wages.

In contrast, he described life in the settlement as a significant improvement, despite limited resources. Amoi found relief in being reunited with his family and engaging in agricultural activities to supplement their food. The emotional reunion with his family was marked by tears of joy and relief, ending a long period of separation and suffering.

Amoi's story highlights the complexities of masculinity in conflict and displacement. As a Dinka man, he felt obligated to protect his people, reflecting traditional masculine norms of protection and bravery. However, when the conflict turned internal, Amoi's reluctance to fight his own people challenges these norms, revealing the nuances of masculinity in conflict.

Studies have shown that male refugees often struggle with traditional masculine roles, particularly in displacement settings where they may feel unable to provide for their families (Turner, 2016). In Nyumanzi settlement, many refugee men reported feelings of frustration, helplessness, and marginalization.

According to UNHCR data, as of 2022, there were over 230,000 South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, with many more arriving in subsequent years (UNHCR, 2022). Many of these refugees, like Amoi, have fled conflict and violence, often experiencing trauma and stress.

Amoi's narrative also highlights the emotional toll of conflict on men, challenging traditional masculine norms around emotional expression. His emotional reunion with his family and description of life in the settlement as a "significant improvement" underscore the importance of family and social connections in refugee experiences.

In terms of masculinity, Amoi's story suggests that men's experiences in conflict and displacement are complex and multifaceted. While traditional masculine norms may emphasize bravery and protection, Amoi's reluctance to fight and his emotional expression reveal a more subtle understanding of masculinity.

Changing gender roles among South Sudanese male refugees in the settlement

The patriarchal nature of Dinka and Nuer societies in South Sudan perpetuates gender disparities in leadership and decision-making. Traditionally, men hold positions of authority, while women's roles are limited to domestic spheres (Jayasinghe et al., 2020). In Dinka culture, women are often excluded from leadership positions and are not permitted to speak in the presence of men, reinforcing their subordinate status (Ahimbisibwe 2018).

Research has shown that men in Dinka society are socialized to hold positions of power, while women are viewed as property and relegated to roles such as caregivers and spouses. This patriarchal system discourages women from pursuing leadership roles, leading to low self-esteem and a lack of confidence.

However, the dynamics of power and leadership shift in refugee settings like Nyumanzi settlement with humanitarian agencies such as UNWOMEN, UNHCR and others often prioritizing the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including women, which can lead to changes in household power dynamics. Focus group discussions with male participants revealed feelings of disempowerment and frustration, as they perceived women as having taken over leadership roles in households (Male FGD, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023). This perceived shift in power dynamics highlights the complex and sophisticated nature of gender relations in refugee settings.

In an FGD with women, the women stated how they are the wives and husbands in the households, with men failing to perform their roles as the family heads by saying that;

Gone are the days when men used to be men. Nowadays, women have become the wives and husbands in homes because they are the ones doing everything for the families to survive. These men you see here no longer want to do anything. Instead of trying out new things, they are still stuck in their tradition which has not helped them but leaving us to carry all the family burden. These men you see spend most of their time at the market center playing card-games and come back home to ask for food which they never bought. Then you will hear them saying that we are disrespecting them, yet they are doing nothing to perform their roles as men and husbands (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

Some KII respondents also supported the statements of refugee women by noting that, the men are lazy and spend the entire day playing card-games. They said that;

These South Sudanese men you see are very lazy. They don't want to do anything. It's so funny how they spend their entire day doing nothing but again want to restrict their women's mobility. There are times you call women for a meeting, and you hear them saying that I will ask my husband and see. Husband does nothing to support the family but spends the whole day playing card games. These men are so proud in such a way that even when they are sick, they don't want to seek treatment. By the time you see him coming for treatment, you just know that he was really badly-off. When the children are sick, in most cases, you will see women being the ones moving up and down looking for treatment, yet the man is there doing nothing (KII, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

The narratives above reveal how refugee men struggle to renegotiate their masculine ideals that they were socialized into culturally, particularly concerning domestic work being termed as women's work and the role of provider being primarily men's work. With this background, most refugee men have found it difficult to engage in activities presumed to be for women even when most women have been flexible in switching gender roles. Due to this perception of refugee men as being lazy by women and humanitarian agencies, it has contributed to the neglect of refugee men with most humanitarian interventions being focused on implementing programs that advance the status of women. The study in Nyumanzi found out that, women have been engaged in activities like bakery, catering, hotel management, tailoring, small-scale businesses and many others which has equipped women refugees with more survival skills in the settlement than men.

Male refugees in the settlement expressed feelings of disempowerment and marginalization, citing the prioritization of women as heads of households in aid distribution by UNHCR and other agencies. This shift in power dynamics has led to perceived redundancy and disrespect towards men, with some feeling belittled and mistrusted by humanitarian organizations. The men attributed this to a perceived bias towards women, who are often seen as more vulnerable. One participant noted, "This perceived marginalization has resulted in men feeling unable to fulfil traditional roles, leading to tensions within households". The experiences of male refugees in Nyumanzi settlement, as reflected in the quote, highlight the complex and delicate nature of masculinity in displacement settings. This

phenomenon is consistent with existing literature on refugee masculinity, which suggests that traditional masculine roles and expectations are often challenged in displacement settings (Turner, 2016; Dolan, 2002).

Research has shown that refugee men often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and emasculation, particularly when they are unable to fulfil traditional roles as providers and protectors (Jaji, 2015). In Nyumanzi settlement, the perceived bias towards women in aid distribution has exacerbated these feelings, leading to tensions within households and challenges to traditional power dynamics. One participant also quoted "When women talk, they believe them, when men talk, they don't believe us". The quote highlights the perceived lack of trust and credibility afforded to men in the settlement. This perception is consistent with existing literature on the marginalization of refugee men, which suggests that men's experiences and perspectives are often overlooked or dismissed in humanitarian settings.

The shift in power dynamics in refugee settings, particularly in Nyumanzi settlement, has led to emotional violence among men. The narrative highlights how women's leadership in card ration distribution has resulted in changes in power relations between men and women. Traditionally, among the Dinka and Nuer of South Sudan, household leadership was a preserve for men due to their masculine roles. However, in the settlement, new forms of power have emerged, centred on food distribution, which has become a key resource.

Women's control over food has given them significant power at the household level, challenging traditional masculine roles. Men's identities, previously defined by cattle, land, and business, are being eroded, leaving them vulnerable and struggling to adapt. The hosting government and aid partners often fail to recognize men's vulnerability, viewing them through the lens of pre-conflict power dynamics.

The experience of displacement has led to a journey of mourning for men, who are forced to confront the erosion of their masculine identities. The loss of property, cattle, and businesses has stripped men of their traditional roles, leaving them feeling emasculated and powerless. As a result, men struggle to adapt to their new circumstances, often feeling overlooked and neglected by humanitarian agencies.

Challenges encountered by South Sudanese male refugees in the settlement

The experiences of male South Sudanese refugees in Nyumanzi settlement are characterized by significant challenges that impact their livelihoods, well-being, and identities.

Displacement and resettlement have led to status loss, with men facing difficulties integrating into their new environment. The challenges encountered by male refugees in Nyumanzi settlement include limited access to employment opportunities that match their qualifications, decent housing and food scarcity.

One of the most pressing concerns for men in the settlement being the lack of land for essential activities such as farming, building, grazing animals, and fishing. As highlighted by participants in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, insufficient land for cultivation, grazing, and construction remains a major obstacle. This has led to conflicts between refugees and host communities and has forced many men to sell their livestock due to lack of grazing space.

Our biggest issue here is land. It's very hard to access and own land here. Most of the fights that arise between the refugees and the host communities are caused by land. When we had just arrived here, UN gave us animals, the animals have multiplied but nowhere to graze them. If they go to someone's garden with crops and eat them, sometimes you are fined the money you don't have, and you may be forced to sell them to avoid problems. If OPM could look for a place for those with animals to graze and keep them, that would really save us. For us the Dinkas and Nuers, we are not experts in keeping money, we keep animals and sell them, grow food and sell but there is no space. This is the major stress that we have. Being a refugee is bad, though security here is good, what can kill you here is hunger. No one is going to give you free food. So, if they want to save a life here and there is land somewhere, let them take those who can dig and keep animals go and they will remain with the burden of looking after those who are so vulnerable and, in that case, it will be easy to look after them. Hunger can cause stealing and robbing. There is a lot of hunger here and food prices have increased. For example, a very small cup of beans here is 2000 Uganda shillings and imagine if you have a family of ten members. Also, a small cup of rice is also 2000 Uganda shillings, maybe they want us to demonstrate, for them to know that we are not happy (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

The lack of access to land has significant implications for the livelihoods of male refugees, who rely heavily on agriculture and livestock for survival. In addition to the lack of land, many men reported difficulties accessing medicine in the settlement's health centres, with some being forced to cross over to South Sudan for treatment as one participant noted:

As I speak right now, I am just coming from South Sudan. My child was sick and when I went to the hospital here, they did not have the medicine, so I decided to take him to South Sudan for treatment. At the border, no one disturbed me, if you are getting out, they leave you to go freely, maybe when coming back. You either have the refugee card or pay some little money, and you are allowed to cross (In-depth interview, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

Education is also increasingly becoming problematic, with many families struggling to afford school fees. As one 50-year-old male respondent noted:

Education is also becoming problematic, I have five children in school, they are in UN school, but each child needs to pay 7000 Uganda shillings per term and 7000 multiplied by 5children, where do I get that kind of money? What brought most of us here in Uganda is because of education not hunger. If a gun, I can hold a gun, if you come to kill me, I also kill you. So, because people are just killing each other, it's hard to develop. So, I decided to come to Uganda for my children's education, and you cannot take one child to school and leave the rest because you don't know who will succeed. Otherwise, I wish this land could be free for us to keep our animals. I sold some animals because I don't have where to graze and treat them. When I sell, I try to use the money carefully and spend it on education, and if the ration stops and I have also sold the animals, how will my family survive? (In-depth interview, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

Thus, the study highlights the need for the hosting government and aid partners to create sustainable livelihoods for male refugees, enabling them to support their families and address the challenges they face in the settlement. This can be achieved through initiatives such as providing access to land, vocational training, and employment opportunities for the refugees.

The role of host government and humanitarian agencies in responding to the needs of male refugees.

The association of men and masculinities with power and leadership has been well documented (Connell, 2005). However, a study in Nyumanzi refugee settlement revealed that refugee men are encountering significant challenges related to poor or uncoordinated leadership from those in positions of power and leadership, including the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and Refugee Welfare Council (RWC). Yet, effective leadership is crucial in inspiring individuals to achieve a shared vision (Dion, 1968). As was stated in an FGD;

We have our community leaders, but the problem we are experiencing right now is that OPM wants to remove them. The OPM says that community leaders are the ones causing problems. Have you ever seen a community without leaders? For example, when there is an issue, the OPM does not engage all of us in the settlement, it will listen to some leaders and leave out others. It may take the words of RWCIII minus hearing from RWCII and RWCI. The RWCIII, being at the district level and oversees the refugee settlements in the district and heads all the 19 camps and sits in the OPM at Pakele, representing refugees in Adjumani district, is taken more seriously than the others like RWCII at the subcounty/settlement level overseeing the settlement, and the RWCI who is at the village/block level, and oversees the block within the settlement…We also have our own local court here that implements our norms away from South Sudan. Though it has become hard for us to implement our laws here in Uganda because the Ugandan government will call it violence. For example, if you are a man and you are caught cheating with another man's wife, the fine is 3 cows and if by bad luck you bear children, even those children are taken from you. On top of that, they will beat the man cheating with another man's wife…But when you go to the laws here, this will not apply, they will just ask the woman for the man she loves and wants to be with. So, this becomes a problem in implementing our cultural norms here. More so, being that few men are here, it means that our cultural norms and values will also be weak. Yet, OPM is also discriminating and leaving those at the top to report issues within the settlements instead of taking everyone's views (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

The Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) is a governance structure established within refugee settlements to facilitate communication and cooperation between refugees, the OPM, and service delivery partners (Hovil, 2007). The RWC operates similarly to the local council system in Uganda, with

three levels of governance: RWC I (block level), RWC II (village level), and RWC III (settlement level). Despite its vital role in implementing physical protection, ensuring access to justice, and mediating community-based conflicts (Ahimbisibwe, 2018), the study findings revealed that refugees are currently facing leadership challenges that have affected the effectiveness of the RWC.

The current leadership structure in the refugee settlement is facing challenges, particularly with the OPM seeking to remove community leaders, citing them as problematic. This has resulted in selective engagement, where OPM prioritizes the views of higher-level leaders (RWCIII) over lower-level leaders (RWCII and RWCI). The disparity between traditional practices and host country laws has weakened cultural norms and values, particularly given the skewed gender ratio in the settlement. OPM's selective engagement with leaders has exacerbated these challenges, highlighting the need for more inclusive representation and conflict resolution mechanisms.

The power dynamics between refugees and the host community reveal complexities that challenge the notion of hegemonic masculinity, which often assumes men's dominance and decision-making power (Connell, 2005). Instead, refugee men's experiences illustrate the multiplicities of masculinity, with many falling under subordinated forms that are subject to the power of others, including women and men in positions of authority within the refugee context. Refugeehood brings about a significant shift in power dynamics, where men who previously embodied hegemonic masculinity may find themselves in subordinate positions.

This experience is characterized by loss, uncertainty, and fear for the future, as men struggle to cope with displacement and reliance on external aid. Understanding these diverse forms of masculinity is crucial to avoid universalizing men's experiences and recognizing the fluid, dynamic, and context-dependent nature of masculinity. Refugeehood highlights the need for refined approaches that account for the complex power shifts and challenges faced by displaced men. During an FGD with men at Nyumanzi market, one of the participants stated;

Look at us men who are here, most of us are 40 years and above, but when these humanitarian interventions come, they will put an age limit of 18-35 years and none of us who is here will qualify for such a programme. Is it because men are the ones causing war? We can also do agriculture, we can do business, but they choose to ignore us. And the next thing you will hear is that we are lazy and we don't want to work. What should we do?

Women are now the heads of the families and men are depending on them for food because they are the ones who have the money. When you look at the card rations, they are populated by the women…One of the FGD participants whose card was near pulled it out to show the researcher the card which was populated by women's names as the household heads… It's very hard to get yourself registered for the ration if you are a man. They consider women as the heads of the household. They can only register you as a man if you don't have a wife but it's still after so many questions. For example, my wife was killed during the war in South Sudan, I ran away with 14 children and the youngest was 19months. I am the mama and the Baba, but it took me time to be registered for the ration. Every time they had to ask for my wife and explaining it traumatized me. There are very few men registered in the ration. You see, I have come to realize that taking care of children is the hardest job, for us our role as men is always to provide for the family, but this thing of waking up in the night taking care of children is very hard (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

After the participant was done narrating his story, all the participants present responded with a "yes" and others nodding their heads in support of what their colleague had said. Then one of the participants spoke out "everything our brother has said is true, it is as if we are the ones causing all these crises displacing people and we are being punished here in the settlement with nobody wanting to pay attention to what we have to say or our needs".

During a KII with an official from one of the humanitarian agencies offering help in the settlement, about how they were helping men to adapt to the changing masculinities, the respondent confirmed that their focus was on women and girls by saying that;

We try to engage these men. But of course, the main focus is on women and girls being that they are the most vulnerable. These men are so lazy and complicated to work with. That's why most programs target women. Take an example of the food ration, we deal with the women because we believe that women can manage the food better than men. More so, why would you give the food to the men well knowing it's the women going to cook. We teach women how to manage the food and sometimes, we teach them about nutrition for the young kids which things men may not have time to listen to. Then the other thing, these men despise work, you cannot just engage them in these small things like women, they want bigger things which are able to give them enough income. Obviously, they complain that we ignore them, but we know what we are doing. You may choose to give them the

food, and they will end up selling it to get money to drink while their families are starving.

Basing on the narratives above, it is evident that refugee men are not comfortable with the new changes in their lives. And the fact that they tend to be ignored by the humanitarian agencies worsens the whole situation leaving their identity under question. As a result of most humanitarian help being focused at the empowerment of women, refugee men have decided to adapt by letting women take over the household provisioning which was previously their role. Where the behaviour and attitudes towards household provisioning being left to women represents a new form of resistance to feminine power. For instance, it gets overwhelming when a wife who used to be at home and now has a job, new income, been elevated and is doing the would-be masculine role in the household.

Therefore, one cannot descriptively say, that men are idle, drunkards, yes, idle or drunkards on top, but underneath, what do we see? We see a crisis of masculinity or the collapse of masculine power structure. For beneath this, is men keeping quiet, thus, the need to analyse the voices behind men's silences. In interviewing men, the interviews became therapeutic where upon narrating their mundane experiences in the settlement, it was observed that men got so emotional and after narrating, a smile and a sigh of relief would be witnessed upon their faces.

Coping with and making sense of changing gender roles

The humanitarian aid discourse often marginalizes refugee men, portraying them as perpetrators of violence or troublemakers (Olivius, 2016). This binary vision neglects the complexities of refugee men's experiences and positions them as agential, political actors, while refugee women are often seen as in need of empowerment through technocratic programming. Research has shown that refugee men's uncertain position as objects of humanitarian care disrupts the prevailing understanding of refugeehood as a feminized subject position (Olivius, 2016).

In Nyumanzi refugee settlement, men have resorted to alternative coping mechanisms, such as playing card games, silence, surrendering household power, and withdrawing from household duties (as qualitative data indicates). These strategies are often stigmatized as "male laziness" by women and humanitarian agencies. However, they can be seen as survival mechanisms in a context where men's traditional roles are challenged as refugee men have no other options like in the pre-displacement context.

As 42-year-old participant in Nyumanzi settlement noted, men spend their days playing card games due to a lack of alternative activities. This finding highlights the need for humanitarian agencies to reconsider their approach to refugee men and recognize their vulnerabilities and capacities.

I spend my days playing card games because I have nothing else to do. Normally, I would be at the center playing cards by this time, but the rain kept me home today. My wife complains about my card games, but I ignore her because I have nothing better to do at home. Since the women in my household control the finances, they won't accuse me of wasting money because they know I don't have any. Occasionally, if someone like you talks to me and gives me some money, like 2000 Uganda shillings for water, I can use that to contribute to the card game group and play for free. Spending the day at home with the women can be challenging, and they might start arguments. To play cards, we buy a box for 8000 Uganda shillings, which contains 50 cards and lasts us about two months. We have a monthly subscription system, so if I get some money, even 500 shillings, I can deposit it and continue playing for free (IDI response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

The experiences of refugee men in displacement settings are characterized by a profound sense of loss and crisis as they struggle to reconcile their past and present selves. The narrative highlights the complexities of masculine identity in exile, where men who were once engaged in traditional roles such as cattle herding, farming, and fishing, now find themselves idle and resorting to playing card games as a coping mechanism to stress and status loss.

This shift in behaviour can be seen as a response to the changing circumstances and contexts that refugee men find themselves in. The loss of traditional roles and responsibilities has led to feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness as male refugees struggle to adapt to new gender dynamics in the settlement. Therefore, playing card games becomes a way for men to cope with their loss and trauma, and to reassert their masculinity in a context where traditional roles are no longer available.

However, this behaviour is often misinterpreted by aid partners and host communities as "idleness and male laziness", to justify their focus on addressing women's needs. It is essential to recognize that refugee men's experiences are shaped by their pre-displacement contexts and the trauma they have experienced. Where playing card games may be a way for male refugees to express their loss and trauma, and to negotiate their masculine identities in a changing environment. However, some men stated that they

were helping their wives in doing domestic work such as fetching water and firewood, taking care of children in the absence of their wives as a way of renegotiating their masculinity among others which roles were previously a preserve for women in the pre-displacement. Thus, the importance of host governments, aid partners and policy makers to understand the complexities of masculine performances in displacement settings, and to develop programs that address the specific needs of refugee men by recognizing their agency and resilience to create more inclusive and effective humanitarian responses.

Imagining and re-imagining of futures amidst displacement.

The experiences of South Sudanese men refugees in Nyumanzi settlement are characterized by a complex re-imagining of their futures amidst displacement. According to assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2016), refugees learn to integrate into the systems of the host community, but for many South Sudanese refugees, the idea of an authentic South Sudan lies in the past and future, but not the present. This ambivalence towards their homeland is reflected in their mixed feelings about returning home, with some strongly desiring to return while others have lost hope or are apprehensive about the risks involved, as was noted during an FGD;

We believe one day we shall go back home and life will get better. Yes, life may never be like it was before displacement, given that majority of us lost our jobs and livelihood, but as time goes on, it will be better than here in the settlement (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

The risks of returning home are significant, with many refugees fearing being ambushed, robbed, or killed by rebels and soldiers on the journey, especially between Nimule and Juba.

As FGD participants noted;

Talking of going back, where do you pass, sometimes we risk going back but you go praying to reach safely because you can easily be shot on the way. You see, even moving from Nimule to Juba is very risky. People are losing their lives on the way. The government cannot protect people because of so many rebels, soldiers killing, robbing and ambushing people. We are not ready to go back; we are going to starve here. Going back to South Sudan, life will of course be better than here, one won't need to wait on anyone to receive food and other assistance. So, it is easy to feed the family when one is cultivating and keeping animals. In our land, one knows where to get food, for example, it's easy to go and fish which can't be done

here because there is no permission to do so. Here, there are no relatives to beg food but in South Sudan, there are people to ask help from. Here, you can touch nothing, you see even these trees we use for fencing our homes, we buy them including this grass for thatching our houses. Sometimes, settlements are like prisons (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

Others plan to assess the situation before relocating their families, citing concerns about safety and potential suffering. This cautious approach is driven by a desire to ensure their families' well-being and avoid further suffering, as evident in the narrative of a 48-year-old former tutor who plans to first assess the situation alone before relocating his family (Mun's narrative).

If they say that the war has ended, I can't carry my whole family there, I will need to first go and assess the situation before taking my entire family. As a man, I will first go on ground and check, build a house and dig food. I can't just take my kids to suffer again because they are at least safe here. So, it will take 2 to 3 years of assessment. Truth is, I would love to go back home, but imagining the life of starting from scratch again, it is not easy. I was a tutor at a Teacher's Training Institute back in South Sudan. And for the years I have been here, I have lost everything. I am no longer on the government payroll, meaning that I would have to start applying again. Here, I at least have a permanent house, I wouldn't wish to experience what I went through with my family when we had just arrived here. Life was really difficult, I had to struggle so much to put up a house, we were sleeping on ground with no mattress. It's like we were in a jungle, no man's land, this place was all bushy. At night, we struggled with snakes and rodents, once it rained, floods would carry all the rubbish from all over with snakes to sleep with us. I had nightmares every night. There was no one here, my family was among the first people to arrive here in Nyumanzi, so we had to do a lot of clearing. Those who had been here before were refugees from Kuku and had left the place for about ten years. So, you can imagine how the place was. So, with all that experience, I wouldn't want to just take back my family to South Sudan to face this for the second time.

The decision to return or resettle is influenced by various factors, including personal safety, economic opportunities, access to education and healthcare, and cultural identity. According to a study by the Refugee Studies Centre (2019), refugees often weigh the pros and cons of returning home versus resettling in their host country. For South Sudanese refugees in Nyumanzi settlement of Uganda, the perceived benefits of resettlement,

such as relative stability and access to education and economic opportunities, may outweigh the potential benefits of returning home. Some refugees believe that Uganda offers better security, education, and economic opportunities than South Sudan, even in the event of peace returning.

Despite expressing a desire to return home, many South Sudanese refugees in Uganda are hesitant to do so after investing time and resources in rebuilding their lives. For these refugees, South Sudan remains their true homeland, and they actively work to preserve their cultural identity through traditional practices such as rites of passage. These cultural practices serve as a vital link to their heritage and enable them to maintain a sense of continuity and belonging in the face of displacement. By recreating a sense of "home" away from home, refugees are able to carve out a sense of belonging and identity in their host country. Traditionally, for one to be regarded as a Dinka or a Nuer man, that man had to first undergo certain rites of passage into manhood for him to be called a man and failure to do so, one remains a boy despite their age. This means that, once someone is still being viewed as a boy, there are certain activities and meetings of men who performed the rites he cannot engage in or attend until he has been initiated. When asked about whether the refugee men were still able to carry out these rites of passage into manhood amidst refugeehood, with resource scarcity and new cultures from the hosting community, the men in an FGD at Nyumanzi market stated that, they were still doing the rituals though with a lot of changes in preparations and celebrations given the new context of refugeehood as they commented that;

We are still able to hold our initiation ceremonies. Though this is being done in a modern way. For example, in preparation for the initiation, our boys move around with horns for about a month. They move while dressed in shorts though back in South Sudan, they would be moving naked. But here, we can't allow them to move naked because things have changed, civilization has come and some of our boys wouldn't want to be seen naked by their friends. So, they just wear shorts so as not to look so traditional. The initiations here take place after every two years and boys who are aged 12 years are prepared for the initiations though at times, we allow those between the ages of 10-11years to also join. The groups are always organized based on clans, so if one group is wearing red, another one has to wear blue because they have to fight and see which group wins and is the strongest. Traditionally, it was the role of the young girls between the ages of 12-15years who are not yet married and still virgin to smear the

candidates of initiation with butter, but now, it's no longer the case, the boys smear themselves. So, because we are here in the settlement and there is scarcity of food, we prepare early enough, for example, we have initiation coming next year in September and that will be the time for harvesting. For each family, whose son is going to be initiated has to look for a bull or a he-goat. Sometimes, we inform people back home and they send us help because initiation is a very key thing in a boy child's life as far as transition into manhood is concerned. For example, if you make 15 years and above and you are not initiated, you will be laughed at, a young boy who is 12 years and is initiated can talk and make decisions that a 40-year-old man who is not initiated cannot make. If you are not initiated, you are even given a name known as "Dhuk" (Uninitiated male person). During initiations, young girls would be gathered to help fetch water and carry water for the candidates to the bathroom, but now days, they choose a home with running water and a big compound. So, no more bothering the young girls with fetching. The only help they will need now is, some women to cook for them. Because for that one month of preparation, they are to be fed heavily. So, parents gather food and take it where they will be camping and they cook for them. For the last day of the initiation, it becomes a community celebration and anyone who has something in the community gives it out for the celebration unlike this other one month of the preparation where the feeding of the candidates is solely the responsibility of their parents (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

Through this initiation practice, the South Sudanese refugees' community are able to keep ties back home in South Sudan. Despite the modified way of initiation in the settlement, it acts as a symbol of the culture left behind but held so dearly in the hearts of the refugees in the settlement. The combining of the candidates also acts as a unifying factor for the Dinka and Nuer who have a history of ethnic fights back home. The change in the role performed by women and girls in the initiation ceremonies reduces the double care-work burden for the females as was confirmed by women in an FGD at Nyumanzi community center. The women in an FGD said that initiation now days is easy and less tiring compared to how it was back then in South Sudan. The women noted that;

Today's initiation is very easy. We no longer suffer with work during initiation because everything has changed. Back in South Sudan, we used to suffer so much while fetching water for the candidates and doing other tasks. But today, they are all combined in one place which has running water in the compound, maybe, our work is collecting firewood and

cooking for them. Which cooking is also not so tiring because there is no much food here in the settlement. You have to utilize the little that is available for that one month (FGD response, Nyumanzi settlement, 2023).

The uncertainty and trauma of displacement have significant implications for refugees' mental health and well-being. While some hold onto the hope of returning home, others have resigned themselves to life in exile. The complexities of displacement and resettlement require nuanced understanding and support, taking into account the divergent views on return, resettlement, and rebuilding lives.

Conclusion

The experiences of male South Sudanese refugees in Nyumanzi settlement are characterized by significant loss and challenges to their identities, resulting from displacement and the erosion of traditional masculine roles. Formerly, these men held positions of authority and responsibility as family breadwinners, protectors, and decision-makers. However, the loss of economic stability and provider status has led to a shift in gender roles and power dynamics within households. For instance, the study findings revealed that women have increasingly taken on leadership roles in households due to their ability to provide for their families. This role reversal is evident in various aspects of household management, including food provisioning by women.

The transition from traditional livelihoods to idleness and reliance on informal activities has further eroded men's sense of purpose and identity. The inability to fulfill traditional masculine roles has contributed to a crisis of masculinity among these men, highlighting the complex and dynamic nature of male identity in the context of displacement and resettlement.

To support refugee men and promote their well-being and dignity, it is essential to involve them in decision-making processes and provide a platform for them to voice their concerns and experiences. Host governments and humanitarian agencies should prioritize the specific needs of men and boys in displacement settings alongside the needs of women and girls, while recognizing the complexity and fragility of refugee masculinities.

Working together with refugee men, host communities, humanitarian organizations, and host governments can create a more supportive environment that fosters resilience and hope for the future.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

EXPLORING WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF HOUSEHOLD PROVISIONING DURING THECOVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE OF SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES IN PAGIRINYA SETTLEMENT

Nagawa Maria Dorah, Rita Nakanjako, and Fred Bateganya

Introduction

A lived experience is a central methodological notion that aims to provide an understanding of how individuals perceive, interpret, and navigate certain phenomena in their daily lives (Davies & Davies, 2007). Exploring the lived experiences of South Sudanese refugee women provided an understanding of how crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were experienced and navigated by the South Sudanese refugees mostly the women. The concept of lived experience highlights how refugees interpreted, resisted, and adapted to their circumstances. In this study, lived experiences were used to capture the voices, perspectives, and coping strategies of refugee women as they negotiated the everyday realities of household provisioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their narratives revealed not only the burdens they bore but also the resilience and solidarity they exhibited in sustaining their families amid uncertainty.

Methodology

The study employed an ethnographic research design to explore South Sudanese refugee women lived experiences of household provisioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fieldwork was conducted between May and July 2023 in Pagirinya Refugee Settlement, Adjumani District, Uganda. Data collection methods included participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and ethnographic conversations. South Sudanese refugee women were the primary participants, while refugee men and community leaders served as secondary respondents.

Findings

Exploring the South Sudanese lived experiences of household provisioning during the COVID-19 pandemic gave the researcher a detailed understanding of how the refugee women lived through out the pandemic and the meanings attached to their everyday experiences. The lived experiences of the South Sudanese refugee women during the COVID-19 pandemic had various activities as here explained below.

Daily household provisioning

Daily household provisioning involved various support that was given to families on a day-to-day basis with provisioning mechanisms like; income generating activities for example, doing casual work (*katala*), building relationships, and parental nurturing among others. These activities helped the refugee women in meeting their daily household provisioning requirements as explained in detail below.

The Context of Katala- Casual Work

Among South Sudanese refugees, *katala* refers to engaging in any form of casual, informal labor undertaken to earn daily wages. It was one of refugee women's coping mechanisms in the absence of a steady income during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Katala* involved land cultivation, sand collecting, and firewood collecting among others. All these were done in exchange of money for survival and improved household provisioning. *Katala* embodies a spirit of perseverance, adaptability, and the need to "hustle" in the absence of formal employment opportunities for many refugees. *Katala* became not only a means of economic survival but also a form of asserting dignity and agency amidst the uncertainties of displacement and pandemic disruptions (Relief Web, 2021).

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Katala* thus represented a critical survival strategy, enabling refugee families to actively supplement their household needs rather than depending solely on reduced humanitarian aid. The South Sudanese refugee women asserted that when one did the *katala*, she was later paid according to the amount of labour done. Casual Labor (*katala*) supported the refugee women in various ways. It contributed to the purchase of additional food beyond the rations provided by humanitarian agencies, it eased access to healthcare as refugees paid for medical consultations, medicine, and transport to clinics. It further addressed basic needs like soap, sanitary products, salt, sugar, etc.

The refugee women noted that without the income from casual labour, many refugee families would have faced severe hunger and deterioration of living standards (International Rescue Committee, 2020). Mary was one of the refugee women who did *katala* as a way of earning money to contribute to her family's provisioning. She narrated that;

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, I did casual work (katala) and later paid. I was allocated a piece of land to cultivate then later given some small payment which ranged from Ugx. 4,000 to 5,000 per day. When I earned the money, I used it to buy food and home items like soap, salt and others." (20years old Mary- in-depth interview)

Also, during one of the conversations with Martin a leader in the Lotuko community aged 45years, he shared his experience about the causal work he did in order to support his 2 families as a household head. In his conversation he narrated;

"Being the household head, I had to try by all means and do every kind of work to provide for my families during the COVID-19 pandemic. I always did the provisioning of my family in various ways like doing casual labour of digging pit latrines and each feet (ft) I dug deep in the ground always earned me Ugx 2000 (two thousand shillings only) at the end I used to dig 10-15 meters deep in the ground which means for each of the 10ft dug, I would earn Ugx 20,000(twenty thousand shillings) after I got this money, I would distribute it to my two families so that they are able to buy other household items." (Martin aged 45years, community leader- ethnographic conversation).

Just like the refugee women, Martin the community leader emphasized that doing *katala* was one of the coping mechanisms in support for family provisioning during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Furthermore, the refugee women noted that those who could not afford to get *katala* always had their hope attached to the food and cash rations given by UHNCR while others always relied unto the unpaid income generating activities like cutting firewood for sale, group savings, charcoal burning, making local brew and making local chapati also known as *Ejema*. All these activities were done with the main goal of supporting their families.

However, not all the South Sudanese women who did the *katala* were paid the same amount of money. Those who did land cultivation were always paid according to the area cultivated. The bigger the area cultivated, the more money one would be paid. This was the same story to the women who always collected sand from the river side. Since the river was

approximately 2.2km from the refugee's trading centre, some of the elderly women would not afford to walk such long distances while others were not energetic enough to carry the heavy sand. In addition, the little money of collecting a basin full of sand at only UGX 100 at times demotivated some of the refugee women leaving majority of them with no option but rather rely on the gardens around their homes for minor cultivation.

The findings demonstrated that *katala* became an indispensable coping strategy for South Sudanese refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Casual labour helped bridge the gap left by disrupted humanitarian aid and declining household incomes. However, dependence on unstable, informal work mechanisms entrenched refugees deeper into cycles of poverty and vulnerability. Furthermore, the pandemic revealed the gendered nature of casual labour burdens, with women and girls disproportionately bearing the risks associated with informal work. The reliance on *katala* underscored the lack of sustainable livelihood options available to refugees in Uganda, despite the country's progressive refugee policies. Hence, there is a critical need for livelihood programs that provide refugees with safer, more sustainable employment opportunities, skills development initiatives, and labour protections to minimize exploitation during both ordinary times and crises.

Food provisioning through the survival on food and cash rations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most refugees in Pagirinya refugee settlement survived on humanitarian assistance in form of food and cash rations. As humanitarian food aid was cut and economic activity curtailed, the South Sudanese refugee women adapted to provisioning through utilization of strategies like using small-scale gardening, informal labour, communal sharing systems, and consumption rationing among others. Many refugees turned to subsistence farming using small land plots allocated to them or borrowed from neighbors. Households planted fast-growing crops such as maize, beans, pumpkin leaves, and *sukuma wiki* (collard greens) to supplement declining rations (UNHCR, 2021). Even where land was limited, makeshift gardens were developed around homes using sacks and containers. These gardens provided critical nutritional support and helped reduce dependency on food aid. Forty-two-year-old Janet, a mother of four children explains her experience about her survival on the in-kind food assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I and my family depend on the ration that WFP gives us. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, when the food ration got finished, I would seek help

from a neighbour if they did not have that would mean sleeping hungry. I would also pick some greens from the small gardens around my home, and these would be our sauce. I also planted some Maize and beans that I would harvest seasonally to help, provide food for my family. This maize was always consumed in small portions so that it could take us to another month." (Janet aged 42years- in-depth interview).

In response to food shortages, refugee women reported adjusting consumption by rationing meals—often reducing portion sizes or skipping meals altogether. Many households reported prioritizing children and the sick during mealtimes while some ate only once a day, others shifted to less-preferred foods such as wild leaves or porridge without accompaniment.

The refugee women further mentioned that some families were too big and could not survive on the reduced rations for all the two months as many of them consumed /used all the rations in the first month of distribution which left them starving till the other promised distribution that would happen every after two months. For most women, food provisioning was seen as a burden and suffering.

In addition to the above, a priority of various groups of people to get food and cash assistance was implemented. The prioritization exercise ensured that two categories of groups received either food or cash rations. According to the Uganda Refugee Response Plan (RRP 2023/24) and WFP (2023), these groups were: (1) the most vulnerable households, which included individuals with special needs, and (2) the moderately vulnerable households, which encompassed pregnant women, elderly people, and others.

The least vulnerable or those that had some land provided to them by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) were to be taken off the rations because it was assumed that they would afford to carry on cultivation and grow crops for food on the land given to them. Therefore, there was no need for them to get in-kind assistance. However, this was not any good idea to most of the women refugees as they claimed that the *katala* would not be their only option towards food provisioning because casual work always came once in a while. Even the seasonal changes as they cultivated their crops on the land would be hindrance of food provisioning so, they needed the monthly rations for survival.

Parenting and nurturing

Parenting and nurturing as one of the lived experiences of the South Sudanese refugee women during the COVID- 19 pandemic contributed positively towards the family relations in various households. In the researcher's conversation with Florence who is a female-household head, she explained some of the ways in which she maintained her relationships with her family members and mostly her children through providing them with food (breakfast), doing house chores among others. In her story, she narrated;

"During the pandemic, as a family head, I always woke up in the morning, I washed my face and always prepared breakfast for my children. The breakfast always made them happy, and it included boiled water, tealeaves and local bread. I always went by myself to the shop to buy the local bread because the shops are quite a distance, yet majority of my children are young. After we had breakfast, I always went to the bore hall to fetch water from the communal water tap in the settlement. I made this trip of fetching water an average of six times a day because I had to provide clean water for drinking, bathing, cooking and cleaning the house." (Florence- in-depth interview)

In addition to the above, with his experience of family relations during the COVID-19 pandemic, Daniel, a leader of the Lotuko community narrated that;

"I am a father of 12 children from two wives. During the pandemic I used to go to the garden with all my family members, so we plant and harvest some crops for home use. With support from my family, we used to plant bigger acers of crops; even the harvest would be bigger too. The pandemic helped us build genuine relationships as I got to spend my time with my family. This actually helped us to build a better future for both our work and families. It is during the pandemic that we found ways to stay connected with our people mostly those we live within the settlement." (Daniel, Leader Lotuko community, key informant)

Parenting and nurturing as one of the lived experiences improved interior social relations within various households during the COVID-19 pandemic. Florence and Daniel's experiences explained the lived experiences of the South Sudanese refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic and they further elaborated how the interiority relations – expressed as relations within a family were maintained as parents played their role of family provisioning which came with other responsibilities

like parenting and nurturing, food provisioning, and also teaching children how to do other works like farming. This contributed a lot to building interior relationships and easy household provisioning.

Building relationships as a way of supporting household provisioning.

Building a relationship with someone means developing a close connection with that person over time. In line with South Sudanese lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, various women of different households highlighted the importance of the relationships which in the end also supported provisioning for their families. The refugee women reported that they were more likely to get support from their neighbours than from humanitarian agencies because access to neighbourhoods was easier than waiting for food ration distribution that happened after every two months during the pandemic. For example, participants explained that since most of them lacked sufficient income to support their families, they often relied on neighbours—both within and outside their households—for assistance.

Cathy a widow aged 60 years plaits women's hair for income. She is differently abled (disabled) and a family provider. Cathy narrated how her relationship with her neighbourhood households supported her so much with household provisioning as follows;

"During the pandemic there was no movement, I could just walk to my neighbour's home and plait their hair since I didn't have customers because of the movement restrictions. This helped us maintain our friendship and even when I did not have food, I used to go to my neighbour, and she would give me some of her food. These same neighbours would send my son to the market as he drove his motorcycle and on delivery of the items purchased, he would be paid. With that money paid, he would bring it home and we would use it to purchase other home needs alongside the food ration." (Cathy aged 60 years-in-depth interview)

The relationships and connectedness were extended to host communities through renting out land. Cultivation and casual work became the main means of survival for the refugee women during the COVID-19 pandemic as some participants shared that they always rented out land from their friends in host communities to plant various food crops seasonally. These crops would provide food for both home use and for sale while at the same time, the cultivated crops would be sold to the people in host-communities in exchange of money to purchase other home commodities. Adam aged 45 years asserts as follows;

"I was having a friend of mine in Ogwangwa village. That friend of mine used to give me some land to cultivate, I used to freely cultivate his land without any limit, I used to sell some crops that I cultivated and I could get school fees and food for my children. My family always had enough cassava as food which acted as a substitute to the food rations given to us." (Adam 45 years, Block A leader- focus group discussion).

From all the descriptions above, it is evident that the South Sudanese lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic involved various aspects with daily provisioning being the main activity all together with activities like food provisioning, parenting and nurturing, building relations etc. It is important to note that as a means of survival, casual work (*katala*) made it easy for the South Sudanese refugee women in Pagirinya refugee settlement to at least find some income to help them do proper household provisioning. However other activities like maintaining and building relations within the interior of the settlements (families and households) and the exterior (outside) also supported the refugee women in household provisioning as explained above.

Discussion of the lived experiences of household provisioning

The South Sudanese refugee women lived experiences indicated that for the daily household provisioning activity, the refugee women always relied on doing various income generating activities for survival and support to their families during the pandemic. These activities involved casual work (*katala*), sand collecting, grass cutting, charcoal burning and bread-making among others. In support with the above, Brigham, (2021) noted that during the pandemic the refugee women had various ways to make an income for example through cultivation, hair braiding and selling goods at the market etc. Also, in line with the lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bakuluki *et al* (2020) emphasized the social-economic impact of COVID-19 on urban refugees in Uganda where he noted that the lockdown affected refugee livelihoods. For the urban refugees, COVID-19 affected their livelihoods because in urban centres, many of them could not afford to have enough land to carry on cultivation. Unlike the South Sudanese refugees in refugee settlements who at times did casual work (*katala*) on the host communities land and later earned some income. The burden of lack of proper income was further stressed by Yoseefi et.al (2022) as he explained that the widespread of COVID-19 had a huge burden on people's lives and that women were more affected by the limited access to resources like income which in the end made family provisioning hard.

Alternatively, the social lived experiences of the South Sudanese women refugees involved building of social relations through interior (family) and exterior (neighbours and host community) relations. To borrow the concept of relations in assemblage, Deleuz (1987) described the relations as connectedness. To the refugee women, the relations of interiority elaborated were depicted by the relations among members of the different households for example how refugee women related with their men, children and relatives and other household neighbour hoods. It is through these interior relations that South Sudanese refugee women managed to amass support for their families. On the other hand, the relations of exteriority were exhibited through the refugee women's relationship with the world outside their families. Among these were the residents from the host communities who rented out land to the refugees so that they could grow crops that could help them provide food for their families. More still, as a way of provisioning, the relationships of exteriority were further exposed through the South Sudanese refugee women's exchange of sex for land to cultivate with the host communities' men. Hence, as a way of attaining support for their families, some refugee women explained that the exchange of sex for land maintained their relationships with the host community men who at times gave support to their families in the absence of their husbands.

More to the above, the findings indicated that the South Sudanese refugee women always got support of provisioning from their fellow neighbourhoods within the settlement and from the host communities. As an interior relationship Cathy asserted that she always plaited hair within her neighbouring households as a form of income to support her family. In regard to the relations of exteriority, the respondents mentioned that they always rented out land for cultivation from the host communities to further carry out cultivation for food provisioning of their families. As a way of survival, UNHCR, (2020) also emphasized that the refugees rented out land to support their families, this contributed to in the building of their relations of both the refugees and the host communities. However, renting out land was not the case for some refugee women as one of the block leaders Akiru mentioned that some women always offered sex to the men in host communities in order to be given land to cultivate while others needed various provisioning support because they are single mothers. Through all the above activities, relationships were maintained which further eased provisioning of food to various households.

The researcher observed that after the COVID-19 pandemic, many women refugees joined saving SACCOs and skills training activities as a way of

learning and later become job creators. These skill trainings were put in place to support the refugee women in family provisioning. Some of the activities involved tailoring, hair dressing, making liquid soap, and making re-usable pads.

Conclusion

This chapter revealed that South Sudanese refugee women in Pagirinya Settlement played a central role in household provisioning during the COVID-19 pandemic by engaging in casual labour (*katala*), cultivating small gardens, nurturing family members, and building supportive relationships. These activities were not only practical survival strategies but also expressions of resilience and agency in the face of disrupted livelihoods and inadequate humanitarian aid in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic intensified gendered burdens especially to the women refugees. In addition, social networks within families and host communities became essential safety nets though some coping strategies such as transactional exchanges for land highlighted deeper vulnerabilities. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for gender-responsive refugee support programs that recognize and strengthen refugee women's contributions to family survival in crisis contexts.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

NAVIGATING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN HUMANITARIAN SETTING: COVID-19 EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN AYILO 2 REFUGEE SETTLEMENT, UGANDA

Gaster Olowo

Introduction

In any humanitarian situation, such as in general processes of displacement, adolescent girls face heightened vulnerabilities and neglect when it comes to their sexual and reproductive health situation. The needs of young girls are already marginalized in their home environment, but this situation often gets worse during displacement, leaving them at the intersection of helplessness and abandonment. This situation is also found within refugee camps, such as Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement, the camp in which this study was carried out. What we see there was that the COVID pandemic disrupted service delivery within the camp, both in general, but also more specifically the delivery of things of special relevance for the sexual and reproductive health of the group of young girls discussed here. The study argues that the experience of adolescent South Sudanese girls in Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement during the COVID pandemic was not just a health emergency but rather a lived reality of fear, abandonment and no care. Even before the pandemic the health facilities were in crisis, and SRH (Sexual and Reproductive Health) services, especially contraception, menstrual sanitary pads and related services were difficult to find. This situation worsened with the pandemic. But the paper does not only discuss the problems of supply lines within the camp, but also points at other factors, for instance the culture-related notions of emerging sexuality among young girls and the ways such sexuality in the local context is stigmatized and produces sexual violence, early marriages and premature pregnancies. Part of the study is also to look at how such socio-cultural issues and the effects they have on the young female body are dealt with within the context of the camp.

This is relevant as the literature on SRH related issues in humanitarian contexts contains several normative aims that in this paper will be used as baselines for my evaluation of what goes on within the camp. The Women's Refugee Commission emphasizes the general importance of interventions that begin early in adolescence, incorporating not only SRH education but also emotional, educational, and physical development support tailored to their evolving needs (WRC, 2019). In other publications, scholars and practitioners emphasize more specific issues within this general framework. For instance, the importance of culturally responsive, youth-centred approaches lies in the ability to honour local norms while at the same time safeguarding the rights of adolescents (UNFPA, 2021). Also, of importance is the integration of SRH into emergency response frameworks, which ensures that essential services remain available and accessible even during crises (WHO, 2020). Community-based outreach and peer education have also been identified as effective mechanisms for building trust and improving access to services, particularly for adolescents who may otherwise face stigma or barriers in formal health systems (ICRW, 2022). Alongside these traditional approaches, digital platforms are increasingly being leveraged to provide SRH education and support, offering confidentiality and expanded reach for young users who may be hesitant to seek in-person care (UNICEF, 2021).

In the following I will present information on the various points mentioned above; to test to what extent the normative aims are followed on the ground. My study focused on adolescent girls aged between 10 and 14 staying in the Ayilo2 Refugee Settlement. The choice of girls within this age range is because this group is frequently overlooked in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programming. These very young adolescents often lack access to age-appropriate SRH information and services, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and poor health outcomes (Women's Refugee Commission, 2019). This oversight contributes to programming that fails to adequately address the needs of this age group. Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement was chosen as it is in the remotest parts of northern Uganda hosting thousands of refugees mainly from South Sudan, including many adolescent girls. The fieldwork was carried out using a qualitative approach, involving in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and general participant observation of situations in which adolescent girls took part.

Moving into the Ayilo 2 settlement

The following section draws on the various types of information collected within the camp itself, including statements by the girls I met and interacted with, statements about the problems they find themselves in.

Disruption of services

At the height of the pandemic, adolescent girls in Ayilo 2 found themselves navigating the COVID crisis pretty much on their own. With health facilities shut or operating at minimal capacity, the most basic sexual and reproductive health needs went unmet. Contraceptives were often out of stock, leaving girls exposed to unintended pregnancies and fragile health outcomes. Menstrual hygiene products, once a lifeline, became scarce or prohibitively expensive. Many girls resorted to unsafe alternatives of rags, paper, and even leaves. These substitutes not only carried the risk of infection but also forced girls to withdraw from school and community life, deepening their isolation.

One girl from Ayilo 2 settlement captured the reality in her own words: *"We could not access the health centre because it was closed most of the time. Even when it was open, there were long queues and limited supplies."* Her testimony reflects the daily experiences with disrupted services and system breakdowns that exposed the girls to problems.

This brief case and quote are an illustration of how service disruptions in humanitarian setting compound vulnerabilities for adolescent girls. The closure of health facilities and shortages of essential SRH commodities stripped them of agency over their reproductive health. The scarcity of menstrual supplies not only jeopardized physical well-being but also curtailed educational participation, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage. While the COVID pandemic significantly disrupted healthcare systems worldwide, its impact on access to essential SRH services in humanitarian settings was much felt. Adolescent girls in refugee settlements were particularly vulnerable due to pre-existing challenges such as limited healthcare infrastructure, economic hardships, and social instability. At the local health centre (III), one health worker stressed: *In Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement, many adolescent girls experienced increased difficulties in accessing contraceptives and counselling services due to both physical barriers such as transportation issues and social barriers such as stigma surrounding sexual health discussions.*

A focus group discussion revealed similar sentiments, with one girl saying*: "Our health centre was not prepared for the pandemic. They lacked the resources to serve everyone".* These disruptions did not just pause service delivery; they dismantled critical lifelines that many girls relied on for safety, education, and health.

The lived experiences from Ayilo 2 highlight a broader truth: when systems fail, adolescent girls carry disproportionate burdens. Their struggles reveal the intersection of health, education, and dignity, underscoring the urgent need for crisis responses that prioritize adolescent girls' unique needs. Without such attention, humanitarian disruptions risk entrenching gender inequality and perpetuating long-term harm.

Interruption of SRH education and outreach

The COVID pandemic and related lockdowns severely disrupted SRH education and outreach in humanitarian settings. School closures halted programs that had provided adolescents with accurate information and safe spaces for discussion, removing one of the few structured avenues for learning about puberty, contraception, and the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). One adolescent girl from Ailo 2 settlement stated: "*When schools closed, we lost the only place where we could ask questions without shame. At home, no one talks about these things, and online I only see confusing messages from friends or strangers."*

Also adding to the problem was the fact that at the same time, outreach activities led by NGOs and health workers were suspended, leaving girls without trusted guidance during a critical transition stage. Without formal education and community outreach, many adolescents turned to peers or social media as alternative sources of information. While these channels offered some degree of support, they often circulated myths and misinformation, reinforcing stigma and confusion rather than providing clarity. The interruption of SRH education and outreach thus not only deprived adolescent girls of essential knowledge but also exposed them to harmful narratives that could shape their health behaviours and choices.

Increased vulnerability of adolescent girls

The pandemic heightened the general vulnerability of adolescent girls living in refugee settings, exposing them to layered physical, emotional, and social risks. The disruption of protective structures, combined with limited resources and restricted mobility, created conditions in which risks such as sexual violence, unintended pregnancies, and psychosocial distress

became more pronounced. As these challenges converged, they reinforced one another, leaving adolescent girls increasingly marginalized and without the essential support systems needed to safeguard their health and wellbeing.

Exposure to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV)

Restrictions on movement during the COVID pandemic confined many adolescent girls to unsafe environments, heightening their exposure to sexual violence, coercion, and exploitation. With protective services such as counselling, legal aid, and safe shelters disrupted or inaccessible, survivors were often left without recourse. Testimonies from participants reveal the extent of this vulnerability. One adolescent girl explained: *"During the lockdown, rape cases increased because girls were stuck at home with no protection."* Another shared how economic desperation drove exploitation: *"Some girls were forced into transactional sex just to get food for their families."* These accounts highlight how the absence of adult supervision and the collapse of community support structures created conditions in which abuse became more prevalent.

The lack of SRH services compounded these risks. Survivors were unable to access emergency contraception, post-rape care, or psychosocial support, leaving them to cope with unintended pregnancies and untreated trauma. As one girl recounted: *"After the assault, I had nowhere to go. The clinic was closed, and I was told to keep quiet."* Another emphasized the consequences of service gaps: *"Many girls got pregnant because there was no family planning or help after violence."*

Together, these testimonies underscore how systemic disruptions during the pandemic magnified adolescent girls' vulnerability to SGBV, stripping away both preventive protections and responsive care. Which again led to several unintended pregnancies.

Early and unintended pregnancies

When I asked a girl about such pregnancies she stated: "*I was only 15 when I got pregnant during the lockdown. Before, I could go to school and learn about family planning, but when everything closed, I had no information and no way to get contraceptives. I felt alone and ashamed".*

Girls who would have otherwise accessed contraceptives or received guidance through school-based programs were left uninformed and unsupported as the closure of schools and health facilities removed critical avenues for prevention. This left adolescents vulnerable to unintended

pregnancies at a time when protective structures were most needed. And added to this, it should also be noted that pregnancies among adolescents in refugee contexts carry particularly high health risks. Poor nutrition, limited antenatal care, and pervasive stigma often result in unsafe abortions, maternal complications, and long-term psychosocial distress. As one participant explained: *"Many girls got pregnant because there was no family planning. Some tried to end the pregnancy themselves, and it was very dangerous."* Another reflected on the consequences of stigma: *"When a girl is pregnant here, people blame her. She stops going to school, and she feels rejected."*

The absence of post-violence care such as emergency contraception, psychosocial counselling, and safe referral systems meant that survivors were frequently left to cope alone. This isolation was worsened by stigma, which discouraged disclosure and reinforced silence around experiences of violence. As one girl explained: *"Even if something happened, there was nowhere to report."*

Psychosocial and emotional impact

With critical support systems removed, many girls reported feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and isolation. The absence of consistent access to counselling, peer support, and safe spaces meant that girls were left to navigate complex emotional challenges on their own. Those who experienced trauma, whether from sexual violence, unintended pregnancies, or the daily stress of uncertainty experienced that the lack of mental health care exacerbated their suffering. Without professional support, survivors often internalized their pain, leading to long-term emotional distress and diminished resilience. As one adolescent girl from the refugee settlement explained: *"I felt like I was carrying everything alone. There was no one to listen, and I stopped talking to my friends."* Another one also shared: *"When the clinic closed, I had nowhere to go. I cried every night because I didn't know what to do."*

The closure of youth-friendly spaces, which had previously offered opportunities for social connection and confidential guidance, further contributed to emotional withdrawal. One girl reflected: *"Before, we had a girls' group where we could share our problems. When it stopped, I felt empty and stayed at home."* These testimonies highlight how the absence of supportive environments not only reduced help-seeking behaviour but also deepened feelings of isolation and despair.

Delayed or denied maternal care

Delays in antenatal care were also common, increasing the risk of complications for both mothers and infants. Overcrowded facilities and shortages of health staff meant that some girls were turned away when they sought care. Others avoided clinics altogether, fearing exposure to COVID in crowded waiting areas. The consequences of these disruptions were severe. With maternal health services unavailable or inaccessible, many adolescents resorted to unsafe home births, often without skilled attendants or emergency support. This situation contributed to increased maternal and neonatal mortality, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability among already marginalized populations. Adolescent testimonies vividly capture these experiences. One girl explained: "*I was pregnant, but I stayed home because I was afraid of catching the virus at the hospital.*" For some, the lack of care led to tragic outcomes. As one survivor shared: "*My friend delivered at home, without help. The baby did not survive*."

Economic hardships and increased risk of transactional sex

Economic hardships resulting from the COVID pandemic profoundly limited adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement. These financial barriers did not simply restrict access; they reshaped girls' choices, behaviours, and vulnerabilities in ways that compromised their health, dignity, and prospects. *"When the pandemic came, my father lost his job. We couldn't afford even the basics. I had to stay home during my period because we had no money for sanitary pad"* said one adolescent girl.

With family incomes drastically reduced, many households struggled to afford basic SRH supplies such as sanitary pads, contraceptives, and soap. As a result, girls often resorted to improvised menstrual materials like rags or leaves, which increased the risk of infections and contributed to school absenteeism. One participant explained: *"Many families lost their income during the pandemic. We couldn't afford to even buy sanitary products."* Another added: *"I had to stay home during my period because I had nothing to use."*

The inability to afford contraceptives also left many girls vulnerable to unprotected sex, leading to unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. These outcomes were not simply the result of individual choices but of systemic economic pressures that stripped adolescents of safe and dignified options. "*I knew girls who had to sleep*

with men just to get pads or food. They had no choice" one participant stressed.

Economic desperation during the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many adolescent girls in refugee settings into transactional relationships, exchanging sex for money, food, or hygiene products. These relationships often involved older men and were marked by exploitation, coercion, and the absence of consent or protection. For girls with no financial independence, negotiating safe sex or exiting harmful situations was nearly impossible. Testimonies reveal the stark realities of this vulnerability. One participant explained: *"Some girls were forced to sleep with men just to get pads or food."* Another added: *"Because families had no money, girls were pressured to find ways to survive, even if it meant being with men who abused them."* These accounts highlight how the collapse of economic stability intersected with gendered power dynamics, leaving adolescent girls exposed to exploitation and abuse. The combination of economic desperation and service disruption created a cycle of vulnerability that stripped girls of agency and dignity, reinforcing their marginalization within the community.

All these testimonies highlight how systemic disruptions during the pandemic compounded existing vulnerabilities, creating conditions in which adolescent girls faced not only physical health risks but also emotional and social marginalization. The rise in early and unintended pregnancies underscores the urgent need to prioritize family planning and SRH education as essential services in humanitarian settings. These accounts underscore how the pandemic not only intensified existing vulnerabilities but also created new layers of risk by stripping away protective structures. The combination of restricted mobility, reduced access to SRH services, and weakened reporting mechanisms left adolescent girls with few options for prevention or response. As a result, many endured long-term consequences such as unintended pregnancies, trauma, and social stigma, which further entrenched cycles of marginalization.

Cultural pressures and gender norms

When I started menstruating, my family told me it was time to prepare for marriage. They said these SRH services are not for girls like me, because they will affect me when it is time to produce children."(One participant Girl)

Increased vulnerability among adolescent girls in humanitarian settings was aggravated by cultural beliefs and gender norms that prioritize fertility and marriage over education and autonomy. As stated above, girls who began menstruating were often perceived as ready for marriage, with families publicly celebrating this milestone as a marker of womanhood. Such practices reinforced expectations that girls should transition quickly into marital and reproductive roles, regardless of their personal aspirations or readiness. These norms also discouraged the utilization of SRH-services. In many African societies, discussing sexual health is considered taboo or inappropriate for unmarried girls, creating barriers to accessing information and care. As one participant explained: *"If you are not married, people say you should not talk about family planning. They think it is shameful."* This stigma led many girls to internalize feelings of shame about their bodies and reproductive health, often avoiding help even when they were in urgent need.

Cultural beliefs profoundly shape the lives of adolescent girls, influencing their perceptions, behaviours, and access to SRH-services. Within the community, menstruation was often interpreted not as a natural stage of adolescence but as a marker of readiness for marriage and childbearing. These cultural norms reinforced expectations that girls should transition quickly into marital and reproductive roles, often at the expense of education and autonomy. They also discouraged the uptake of SRH-services, as discussing sexual health was considered taboo or inappropriate for unmarried girls. This stigma led many adolescents to internalize shame around their bodies, avoiding care even when they were in urgent need.

The impact of these beliefs was far-reaching. By framing menstruation as a gateway to marriage rather than a developmental milestone, cultural pressures curtailed opportunities for education, silenced conversations about reproductive health, and reinforced cycles of early marriage and unintended pregnancies. Ultimately, these norms undermined adolescent girls' wellbeing and autonomy, leaving them vulnerable to health risks and social marginalization. The intersection of cultural pressures and restrictive gender norms thus magnified adolescent girls' vulnerability, limiting their autonomy and silencing their voices. By framing menstruation as a gateway to marriage rather than a natural stage of development, these norms curtailed opportunities for education and reinforced cycles of early marriage, unintended pregnancies, and diminished agency.-reaching. Ultimately, these norms undermined adolescent girls' well-being and autonomy, leaving them vulnerable to health risks and social marginalization.

Further Discussion of The Major Findings

The findings from this study underscore how the COVID pandemic magnified preexisting inequalities in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) access for adolescent girls in Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement. Rather than creating new vulnerabilities, the pandemic exposed and intensified structural, cultural, and psychosocial barriers that already constrained girls' autonomy and wellbeing. This complex interplay of factors reveals both the fragility of health systems in humanitarian settings and the disproportionate burden borne by adolescent girls. Lockdowns and restrictions led to the closure or reduced operation of health facilities, severely disrupting SRH service delivery. Girls reported long queues, stock outs of essential commodities, and reduced availability of trained personnel. These disruptions were not merely logistical. They represented a breakdown of trust in the health system. When services became unreliable, adolescents turned to informal sources such as peers or social media, which often lacked accuracy and credibility. This mirrors global trends in low resource settings, where the pandemic strained already fragile infrastructures (Riley et al., 2020), but the impact in Ayilo Refugee Settlements was particularly acute due to geographic isolation.

The findings I have presented show both direct and indirect effects of the pandemic, and many of the indirect consequences, such as heightened exposure to sexual violence, early pregnancies, and mental health stress, were deeply felt. The closure of schools and youth centres removed protective environments, leaving girls more vulnerable to exploitative relationships, transactional sex, and coercion. Without counselling or legal recourse, survivors were often left to cope alone. These findings echo Guillemette et al. (2021), who observed heightened anxiety, depression, and trauma among adolescents in crisis settings. Girls internalized these expectations, often viewing SRH services as irrelevant or inappropriate unless tied to childbearing. This paradox where girls are biologically and socially transitioning into adulthood but denied autonomy over their bodies—contributes to stigma and discourages service utilization, particularly among unmarried adolescents.

The findings also show the importance of culture. The psychosocial impacts I have described were compounded by cultural expectations around fertility and marriage, which often override individual agency. Cultural beliefs played a pivotal role in shaping SRH perceptions. The celebration of menstruation as a marker of marital readiness illustrates how entrenched gender norms influence health-seeking behaviour. Girls

internalized these expectations, often viewing SRH services as irrelevant or inappropriate unless tied to childbearing. This paradox, where girls are biologically and socially transitioning into adulthood but denied autonomy over their bodies, contributes to stigma and discourages service utilization, particularly among unmarried adolescents.

The economic fallout of the pandemic further restricted access to SRH services. Families lost income, leaving girls unable to afford sanitary products or transport to clinics. Economic vulnerability often forced adolescents into survival strategies that compromised their health and safety, including transactional sex. Financial barriers reflect systemic inequities in humanitarian aid distribution, where SRH services are frequently underfunded compared to food, shelter, and security. Yet, as this study demonstrates, SRH is foundational to adolescent wellbeing and resilience.

With formal education and outreach programs suspended, adolescent girls relied on peers and digital platforms for SRH information. While this adaptability shows resilience, it also raises concerns about misinformation. Without trained educators or health workers, myths and misconceptions proliferated, leading to risky behaviours and poor health outcomes. This highlights the urgent need for digital literacy initiatives and safe online spaces where adolescents can access accurate, age-appropriate SRH content. It also underscores the importance of community-based peer education models that can function even during crises. It also underscores the importance of community-based peer education models that can function even during crises.

Adaptations in times of crisis

Despite the profound setbacks caused by the COVID pandemic, humanitarian actors in refugee settings introduced creative and flexible solutions to safeguard adolescent girls' access to SRH services. Humanitarian actors implemented adaptive, community-centred interventions that proved vital in sustaining access to SRH services. Mobile clinics and door-to-door outreach were particularly effective in restoring service delivery while adhering to infection prevention protocols, thereby reinforcing trust and engagement within refugee communities. Simultaneously, digital platforms including SMS messaging, WhatsApp, and radio broadcasts were leveraged to disseminate information on contraception, menstrual health, and STI prevention, offering adolescents critical lifelines during periods of isolation. Although connectivity gaps

have limited reach in remote settlements such as Ayilo, these innovations nonetheless demonstrated the resilience of humanitarian health systems and underscored the importance of flexible, participatory approaches in safeguarding adolescent SRH rights during crises. My findings show that adolescent girls in resource-limited settings are affected by the pandemic. Peer educator networks were also reactivated, offering confidential support and referrals within communities. By relying on trusted peers, girls were able to access guidance in safe and discreet ways, even when formal services were disrupted. In addition, emergency SRH kits containing sanitary pads, condoms, and educational materials were distributed during lockdowns, ensuring that girls had at least some of the essential supplies needed to manage their health and dignity. Together, these adaptations highlight the resilience of humanitarian actors and the value of flexible, community-centred responses. By meeting girls whether they were at home, online, or through peer networks these initiatives helped mitigate the worst impacts of service disruptions and underscored the need for innovation in crisis response.

Conclusion

The experiences of adolescent girls in Ayilo 2 Refugee Settlement highlight the profound gaps in access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services that were intensified by the COVID pandemic. What emerged was not a singular challenge but a multitude of interrelated vulnerabilities, some structural, others cultural, economic, and psychosocial, and they all helped to strip away adolescent girls' safety, autonomy, and access to care. The pandemic exposed systemic weaknesses that cannot be limited only to the pandemic, as many of the problems identified were also there in the periods before the pandemic. The pandemic acted as a magnifying lens, exposing systemic inequities that adolescent girls in refugee settings have long endured. In conclusion, addressing structural disruptions, psychosocial vulnerabilities, cultural norms, financial barriers, and information gaps demands integrated, community-driven approaches that—more than is currently the case—must place adolescent girls' health and autonomy at the forefront. Health facility closures disrupted supply chains, the erosion of safe spaces, and the rise in gender-based violence left girls navigating a landscape of uncertainty with limited support.

My findings also underscore that SRH access is not merely a health issue. It is a matter of human rights, gender equity, and social justice. The voices of adolescent girls reveal a deep yearning for dignity, autonomy, and

reliable care. Their testimonies challenge policymakers, humanitarian actors, and health practitioners to rethink how SRH services are delivered in crisis contexts. It is not enough to restore pre-pandemic systems. There must be a deliberate effort to introduce better designing services that are youth-friendly, culturally sensitive, economically inclusive, and resilient to future disruptions. A culturally responsive SRH education program is central to this vision. Such programs must deliver accurate, accessible, and respectful information that reflects the cultural values, beliefs, and lived realities of refugee communities, while remaining adaptive to problems that might recur in future pandemics. Centring adolescent voices in decision making will better ensure that services reflect their realities and needs, rather than imposing external assumptions. In humanitarian settings, SRH services are more than clinical. They are protective, educational, and empowering. When disrupted, adolescent girls lose access to vital tools for managing their health, asserting their rights, and navigating adolescence safely. Ultimately, the COVID pandemic provides a critical opportunity to rebuild SRH systems with equity, dignity, and resilience at the core. By addressing structural barriers, dismantling harmful cultural norms, and ensuring economic and psychosocial support, stakeholders can create environments where no girl is left behind regardless of their circumstances or geographical location.

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SECTION 6

AFTERWORD:
THE REGIONAL PICTURE

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

LAYERS OF DISPLACEMENT AND REFUGEE MOVEMENTS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA AND BEYOND: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Munzoul Assal

Introduction

The Horn of Africa remains one of the most displacement-prone regions globally, shaped by a volatile convergence of armed conflict, climate-induced shocks, and chronic political fragility (Equar et al., 2023, Carvalho and Haybano 2023, Colleta 2015). Displacement in this context is far from linear. It is profoundly cyclical and multidimensional, with communities repeatedly uprooted both within national borders and across them. Protracted internal conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan generate successive waves of internal displacement that often spill into neighbouring states such as Kenya, Djibouti, and Eritrea, straining already fragile humanitarian systems. Refugees escaping violence frequently return during tenuous periods of calm, only to be forced out again when hostilities flare or environmental disasters erode livelihoods. Climate shocks further compound this instability. Recurrent droughts, flash floods, and resource scarcity disrupt traditional pastoralist systems, driving temporary and adaptive migration patterns that blur the distinction between voluntary movement and forced displacement (Tufa 2024). This interplay of insecurity and environmental stress creates a persistent cycle of vulnerability, making durable solutions elusive and amplifying the region's humanitarian complexity.

The cyclical nature of displacement in the Horn of Africa has entrenched a protracted humanitarian crisis. Camps and host communities oscillate between periods of mass influx and partial return, placing pressure on overstretched resources, fragile governance systems, and social cohesion. This crisis is not a series of isolated emergencies but an enduring, self-reinforcing cycle, driven by structural vulnerabilities—including weak state institutions, chronic insecurity, and climate fragility—and further amplified by regional tensions. Countries in the Horn simultaneously

function as both senders and receivers of refugees, creating a complex web of cross-border mobility. Refugees from Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan circulate within the region, often moving multiple times as conflict reignites or environmental shocks erode livelihoods. By mid-2024, the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted an estimated 26 million forcibly displaced persons, including 5.4 million refugees and asylum seekers and 21 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2024). Alarmingly, this figure represents an increase of 9 million in just 15 months, revealing the accelerating pace of displacement. Until 2023, South Sudan remained the largest source of refugees, accounting for approximately 40 percent of the regional total, a stark indicator of the depth and persistence of instability. These dynamics illustrate that displacement in the Horn is not merely a humanitarian challenge but a systemic crisis with profound implications for regional security, development, and stability.

Countries in the Horn of Africa adopt markedly different approaches to refugee policy, reflecting variations in political priorities, resource capacities, and historical experiences with displacement (Colleta, 2015). Among countries that receive refugees from the Horn, Uganda stands out as the most progressive and welcoming, maintaining an open-door policy that grants refugees access to land, employment, and social services. By the end of 2025, Uganda hosted approximately 1.9 million refugees (UNHCR 2024), making it one of the largest refugee-hosting countries globally. Until 2023, South Sudanese refugees constituted the largest displaced population in the Horn, with Uganda, Sudan, and Ethiopia serving as the primary destinations. Examining the trajectories and lived experiences of South Sudanese refugees in these neighbouring countries is therefore both academically significant and policy-relevant, given the implications for regional stability and humanitarian governance. This critical task has been undertaken by the Departments of Social Anthropology at the Universities of Bergen, Khartoum, Addis Ababa, Makerere, and Juba through a collaborative research initiative titled *"Refugees on the Move: South Sudanese Refugees in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Sudan."* The project seeks to advance anthropological expertise and competence in refugee studies while fostering dialogue with affected communities and policymakers on issues central to refugee well-being, mobility, and integration. Building such competence and creating spaces for informed conversations are essential steps toward shaping evidence-based policies and promoting durable solutions in an increasingly complex displacement landscape.

Conceived as a continuation of the earlier research initiative *"Borderlands Dynamics in East Africa"* (Manger et al., 2019), the project emerged in direct response to the protracted crisis triggered by the 2013 civil war in South Sudan, which precipitated mass displacement to neighbouring countries, most notably Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia. When the Borderlands project secured funding in December 2013, the outbreak of war in South Sudan underscored the urgency of examining mobility and conflict in fragile border regions. By the time that project concluded in 2020, there was a significant development: the onset of the Tigray conflict in northern Ethiopia that highlighted the volatility of state structures in the Horn of Africa and the interconnected nature of regional crises. The conflict triggered a rapid and large-scale displacement, with refugees fleeing from the Tigray region into Sudan, which is already burdened with hosting hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese refugees. Thus, before research on South Sudanese displacement could begin, a new refugee crisis had unfolded. These developments reinforce the need to conceptualize displacement not merely as a recurrent humanitarian emergency but as an integral component of broader conflict-producing processes embedded within the postcolonial African state (Mamdani, 1996; 2021). This perspective situates forced migration within a continuum of structural fragility, governance failures, and contested sovereignties, demanding interdisciplinary approaches that link anthropological insights to policy frameworks.

In April 2023 war broke out in Khartoum (Assal, 2023), precipitating massive population movements both within Sudan and across borders into neighbouring states, amplifying regional instability. Consequently, the implementation of the project's work took place under conditions best described as "shifting sands", marked by recurrent intra- and inter-state conflicts, escalating human displacement, and mounting security challenges along fragile borderlands. These developments highlight the imperative of moving beyond narrow, event-driven analyses of displacement to interrogate the structural and systemic drivers, including political fragility, contested sovereignties, and climate-induced stressors, that perpetuate cycles of forced migration in the region.

These developments could not be studied by the project but cannot be glossed over. In terms of both theoretical and applied value, it is necessary to think in broader perspectives and to look at human displacement in connection with governance failures and the problem of reducing people to figures and budgets, as important as they are, by donors and agencies dealing with displaced populations.

This chapter situates these movements within a broader continuum of crisis, capacity, and policy, and calls for adopting comparative perspectives that move beyond single-population studies to examine the relational processes that produce refugees across multiple contexts. Such an approach would enable a deeper analysis of displacement trajectories and structural drivers, paving the way for comparative studies between the Horn and adjacent regions such as the Great Lakes, where patterns of conflict and mobility exhibit striking parallels. Following the April 2023 war in Sudan and the massive displacement it created, there is an urgent need to extend research to Sudanese refugees dispersed across Uganda, South Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia. The remainder of this chapter will examine the broader displacement dynamics in Sudan, Ethiopia (Tigray), and South Sudan, provides a glimpse of what is happening in the Great Lakes region, and offers some anthropological perspectives, before concluding with reflections on future research directions and suggestions for thematic priorities for advancing scholarship and policy engagement.

Sudan as the epicentre of human displacement

Sudan has long occupied a complex position within regional migration dynamics, functioning simultaneously as a source, transit point, and destination for refugees. This role has been shaped by decades of armed conflict, political instability, and shifting borders across the Horn of Africa and Central Africa (Assal, 2007). Between 1955 and 2018, civil wars in South Sudan and Darfur generated massive displacement, forcing millions of Sudanese to seek refuge in neighbouring states such as Chad, the Central African Republic, Uganda, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia. Following South Sudan's secession in 2011, lots of southerners relocated to the new state, only to be uprooted again when civil war erupted there in 2013, driving hundreds of thousands back into Sudan.

Sudan has also served as a major host country for refugees fleeing regional conflicts, particularly from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Chad, and South Sudan. The largest influxes have historically originated from Ethiopia and Eritrea, with hundreds of thousands of refugees remaining in Sudan for decades and becoming deeply integrated into local communities and economic systems (Assal, 2007, Kibreab, 1996). This long-term presence has blurred the lines between temporary asylum and permanent settlement, embedding refugee populations within Sudan's social fabric.

By the onset of the conflict in April 2023, Sudan already had approximately 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), but this figure

surged dramatically to an estimated 11.6 million by the close of 2024. At the same time, the number of Sudanese refugees across neighbouring countries, comprising roughly 840,000 individuals displaced by earlier conflicts, rose to over 3.4 million. Collectively, this means that nearly 15 million Sudanese, or about one-third of the country's population, has been forcibly uprooted (UNHCR, 2024). These staggering numbers show not only the unprecedented scale and severity of Sudan's displacement crisis but also the immense humanitarian, economic, and social pressures placed on host countries and communities throughout the region. The situation illustrates the significant impact of protracted conflict, where displacement becomes both a symptom and a driver of instability, challenging national capacities, regional cooperation, and international response mechanisms.

The outbreak of war in April 2023 disrupted ongoing fledgling processes of social and economic integration, not only in Khartoum, the country's primary urban hub, but across all regions engulfed by the conflict. These disruptions compounded a long-standing pattern of repeated displacement driven by armed violence, environmental stressors, and governance failures. Over time, these cycles have produced communities characterized by chronic instability, fragmented livelihoods, and enduring uncertainty about the future. This evolving reality presents profound challenges for the formulation and implementation of sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for forcibly displaced populations. It demands a more nuanced, context-sensitive approach to questions of return, local integration, and durable solutions, one that accounts for the complex interplay of security, identity, and socio-economic factors.

At the same time, there is a need to examine the experiences of Sudanese refugees who fled the country after 2023. Beyond the operational priorities of humanitarian agencies, grounded research should explore critical dimensions such as decision-making processes during flight, coping strategies and adaptation in transit, settlement trajectories, and the negotiation of identity in exile. Such inquiries are essential for generating evidence-based insights that move beyond descriptive reporting and contribute to a deeper understanding of displacement as a lived experience, informing both policy and practice in ways that are responsive to the realities on the ground.

The Tigray war and influx of refugees to Sudan

The Tigray war, which erupted in November 2020, was driven by a complex interplay of historical, political, and ethnic tensions, culminating

in a violent power struggle between Ethiopia's federal government and the TPLF- Tigray People's Liberation Front (Jima, 2023). While the conflict is deeply rooted in Ethiopia's unique political trajectory, its underlying causes, such as contested governance, constitutional crises, and competing national visions, reflect broader patterns observed in other fragile states. For nearly three decades, the TPLF dominated Ethiopian politics as the leading force within the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). However, the sweeping reforms introduced by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018, aimed at dismantling the EPRDF's centralized control, were perceived by the TPLF as an existential threat, fuelling resistance and deepening mistrust.

The constitutional crisis surrounding elections further escalated tensions. When national elections were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the TPLF defied federal authority by organizing its own regional elections in September 2020, a move declared illegal by Addis Ababa. In retaliation, the federal government cut off funding to Tigray, a measure the TPLF interpreted as tantamount to a declaration of war (Gavin, 2021). Historical animosity with Eritrea added another volatile dimension. The 2018 peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, celebrated internationally as a diplomatic breakthrough, was negotiated without Tigrayan input and viewed with deep suspicion by TPLF leaders. Eritrea, harbouring longstanding grievances against the TPLF dating back to the 1998–2000 border war, subsequently allied with Ethiopia's federal forces, transforming the conflict into a regional war with devastating humanitarian consequences.

Territorial disputes further compounded the complexity of the Tigray conflict, particularly involving the Amhara region's longstanding claims over areas in Southern and Western Tigray, which it asserted were historically part of its domain. During the war, Amhara regional forces fought alongside federal troops and subsequently annexed portions of these contested territories, deepening inter-regional animosities and entrenching grievances. Taken together, these territorial ambitions, coupled with power struggles at the federal level and constitutional disputes over governance and autonomy, created a combustible environment where political and ethnic divisions escalated into full-scale civil war (Jima 2023).

The resulting displacement of Tigrayans into Sudan cannot be understood merely as a humanitarian consequence but as a direct outcome of unresolved structural issues, power asymmetries, constitutional ambiguities, and land disputes, that continue to undermine prospects for

durable peace. Although the conflict formally concluded with the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022, critical challenges persist, including the full withdrawal of Eritrean forces, contested territorial claims, and accountability for widespread atrocities. These unresolved issues obstruct the restoration of normalcy and complicate the potential return of Tigrayan refugees. This reality underscores the need to move beyond a narrow focus on numbers and immediate relief, toward deeper, evidence-based analysis of the political, social, and historical drivers of displacement—an approach essential for designing sustainable solutions that address root causes rather than symptoms.

Given Tigray's geographic position in Ethiopia's northernmost region, adjacent to the Sudanese border, the most viable escape route for civilians fleeing the conflict was westward into Sudan. Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers crossed through key entry points such as Hamdayet in Kassala State, Lugdi/Abderafi in Gedaref State, and crossings into Blue Nile, seeking safety from escalating violence (UNHCR, 2020b; IOM, 2021). Upon arrival, they were accommodated in temporary camps scattered across eastern Sudan, notably Tunaydbah and Um Rakuba, which soon became overwhelmed by the sheer scale of arrivals. By March 2021, UNICEF reported more than 60,000 new arrivals, warning of severely overstretched services and inadequate infrastructure to meet basic needs (UNICEF, 2021; UNHCR, 2021a).

Historically, eastern Sudan has served as a refuge for populations fleeing instability in Ethiopia and Eritrea, with camps established decades ago to host earlier waves of displacement (Kibreab, 1996). This long-standing pattern of reciprocal refugee flows, Ethiopians and Eritreans into Sudan, and Sudanese and South Sudanese into Ethiopia, reflects the deeply interconnected nature of conflict and migration in the Horn of Africa, where borders offer temporary sanctuary but rarely guarantee durable solutions.

Like South Sudanese refugees, the April 2023 war in Sudan had repercussions for Tigrayan refugees, even if indirectly, as most camps hosting them were located eastern Sudan, far from the primary combat zones. Precise data on the number of Tigrayan refugees who fled Sudan due to the conflict remains elusive, reflecting broader challenges in tracking displacement amid overlapping crises. However, some reports (cf. Maulinardi, 2024) suggest that by the end of 2024, more than 70,000 Ethiopian refugees, mostly Tigrayans, were stranded in Sudan under

deteriorating humanitarian conditions. Anecdotal accounts further allege that Tigrayan fighters were observed fighting alongside Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and were reportedly present in Wad Madani, a strategic town recaptured from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in early 2025.

These developments show that Sudan's conflict has become deeply enmeshed in regional security dynamics, drawing in actors from neighbouring countries and blurring the lines between refugee populations and armed groups. The alleged involvement of Tigrayan combatants, though controversial and difficult to verify, highlights the complex intersection of displacement, militarization, and transnational alliances in the Horn of Africa. This intersection not only exacerbates instability within Sudan but also complicates humanitarian responses and raises critical questions about the protection of refugees, the politicization of asylum, and the prospects for durable peace in a region marked by interconnected conflicts.

A critical dimension of the Tigray conflict lies in the historically tense and strategically significant relationship between Ethiopia and Sudan. Recent internal upheavals in both countries have further strained diplomatic ties, shaping how each state has managed overlapping crises, including refugee flows and border security. In Sudan, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have accused Ethiopia of tacitly supporting the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Conversely, the Ethiopian government has charged the SAF with exploiting Ethiopia's vulnerability during the Tigray war by deploying troops into the disputed al-Fashaga border region and allegedly providing sanctuary to senior TPLF leaders. These actions, viewed as provocative by Addis Ababa, risked unnecessary escalation and revealed the fragility of bilateral relations (Soliman and Demissie, 2024).

Such dynamics reveal how domestic conflicts in Ethiopia and Sudan are deeply intertwined with regional geopolitics, creating feedback loops that complicate humanitarian responses and refugee protection. The politicization of displacement, where refugees become entangled in interstate rivalries, calls for the need for research that goes beyond immediate relief concerns to examine how security dilemmas, territorial disputes, and proxy alignments shape migration patterns in the Horn of Africa. Understanding these processes is essential for designing policies that address not only the symptoms of forced migration but also the structural drivers embedded in regional power struggles.

South Sudanese refugees 2013 and beyond: Protractedness and host countries models

As the newest country in the continent, South Sudan emerged as a result of the failure of the postcolonial state in Africa. After decades of civil war, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, known as CPA, was signed in 2005. The agreement, while succeeded in putting an end to a war described as the longest in Africa, led to the secession of South Sudan in 2011. Instead of making unity attractive, it made secession inevitable (Assal, 2022). Ethnic rivalries, bad governance, and corruption devastated the new country and in December 2013 the war broke out in Juba.

By April 2024, more than 2.26 million South Sudanese had fled to neighbouring countries, while an estimated 1.67 million remained internally displaced. According to the UNHCR (2024), as of late 2024, approximately 2.3 million refugees were hosted across Uganda (975,000), Sudan (613,000), Ethiopia (429,000), and Kenya (193,000). What began as an emergency response over a decade ago has evolved into a protracted situation, with many families now living in host countries for years, if not decades. Uganda's progressive refugee policy has become a regional model for promoting self-reliance. Refugees in Uganda's settlements can cultivate land, engage in income-generating activities, and enrol their children in schools, enabling a degree of socio-economic integration that explains why Uganda continues to host the largest South Sudanese refugee population in the world.

In contrast to Uganda's generous settlement approach, Sudan and Ethiopia largely adhere to camp-based models that prioritize standardized humanitarian assistance while severely restricting freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities. This approach fosters dependency and exacerbates overcrowding in facilities such as those in Sudan's White Nile State and Ethiopia's Gambella Region, where resources are stretched to their limits. In Sudan, the initial reception of South Sudanese refugees during the 2013–2014 influx was framed by rhetoric of "brotherhood" (Elhassan, 2016), reflecting historical and cultural ties. However, this guarded hospitality soon gave way to marginalization and restrictive encampment policies, curtailing refugees' autonomy and access to socio-economic opportunities. Kenya, particularly in the Kakuma–Kalobeyei complex, has begun experimenting with hybrid models that combine camp structures with urban-rural integration and education-oriented initiatives (Betts et al., 2020). Yet, these efforts remain constrained by government-imposed limitations on movement and employment rights, leaving

refugees with few viable pathways to self-reliance. Elhassan (2016) discussed the ambivalent conditions faced by South Sudanese refugees in Sudan's White Nile State, highlighting the tension between initial solidarity and subsequent exclusionary practices.

The protracted nature of displacement, now in its twelfth year, has made return to South Sudan both rare and precarious, with only 405,000 documented returnees in 2024 (UNHCR, 2024). For the vast majority, repatriation remains fraught with insecurity, lack of services, and unresolved political instability. Consequently, South Sudanese refugees continue to navigate fragile asylum regimes, uneven access to basic rights, and futures marked by uncertainty in a region where displacement has effectively become a long-term norm rather than an exceptional condition. One aspect that is worthy of attention is the ambivalence that characterizes the position of South Sudanese refugees within the Horn of Africa and East Africa, a condition shaped by oscillating policies, fluctuating humanitarian responses, and the tension between temporary protection and protracted exile.

The war in Sudan triggered secondary movements among South Sudanese refugees, with some returning to South Sudan under duress, while significant numbers remain in Sudan, either by choice, due to socio-economic ties, or because of logistical and security constraints that make departure impossible. Similar to dynamics observed with regard to the Tigray conflict, anecdotal reports suggest that some South Sudanese have become entangled in the Sudanese war, fighting alongside both the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). These developments illustrate the deeply intertwined histories of Sudan and South Sudan, which render their relationship far more complex than Sudan's interactions with Ethiopia (Assal and Yahya, 2025). Understanding South Sudanese displacement therefore requires situating it within this historical continuum, marked by decades of civil war, contested citizenship, and shifting political alliances, that not only produce displacement but perpetuate it. This calls for moving beyond narrow, micro-level accounts of refugee experiences to interrogate the structural and relational processes that sustain displacement cycles. Such an approach should also extend to neighbouring regions, including the Great Lakes, where trajectories of conflict and forced migration mirror those of the Horn, revealing broader patterns of regional fragility and interdependence.

Beyond the Horn of Africa: The Great Lakes region

The dynamics of human displacement in the Horn of Africa mirror patterns observed in the Great Lakes region. This region, anchored by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and Tanzania, has long been characterized by cyclical violence, contested state authority, and transnational networks that blur the boundaries between displacement and migration. The region has been refugee-producing centre for decades (Malkki 1995). By March 2025, the combined East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region hosted approximately 5.7 million refugees and asylum seekers alongside 19 million internally displaced persons, with eastern DRC emerging as a critical epicentre of new displacement and pendular movements (UNHCR, 2025a).

The renewed escalation of conflict across North and South Kivu in DRC since late 2024 has triggered mass re-displacement, the closure of long-standing displacement sites, and perilous cross-border movements into Burundi and Uganda. In navigating these volatile landscapes, displaced populations contend with armed actors, informal taxation regimes, and competing moral claims to humanitarian aid, while simultaneously leveraging kinship ties, ethnic affiliations, and trading networks as survival strategies (Hovil and Lomo 2015). Displacement in this context is not merely a humanitarian outcome but a deeply social process that reshapes marriage practices, labour arrangements, and authority structures within camps and host communities, a pattern long documented across the Great Lakes region (Hovil, 2008). These dynamics call for approaches that move beyond emergency relief to address the structural drivers of mobility and the lived realities of those uprooted by chronic instability.

Health emergencies are a recurrent feature of the Great Lakes region (Ntege, 2019), where displacement often intersects with fragile health systems and epidemic outbreaks. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), forced mobility coincides with a recurrence of measles, cholera, and mpox outbreaks, compounded by severe access constraints, chronic underfunding, and damaged water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure. These overlapping health crises not only exacerbate vulnerability among displaced populations but also shape mobility decisions, care-seeking itineraries, and perceptions of state and humanitarian legitimacy. The implications extend beyond displaced communities, placing immense strain on host populations and local health systems.

Ntege's (2019) research offers critical insights into these dynamics by examining how communities in Bundibugyo District, Uganda, bordering

DRC responded to the 2007 Ebola outbreak through indigenous practices aimed at limiting transmission. His findings reveal that traditional health-seeking behaviours, such as isolating the sick, avoiding physical contact, and using herbal remedies, functioned as culturally embedded mechanisms of epidemic control. By positioning indigenous knowledge as a vital resource for epidemic preparedness, the study advocates for its systematic integration into health policy and community engagement strategies. This approach underscores the importance of culturally informed interventions that complement biomedical responses, particularly in contexts where displacement and health emergencies converge.

Conditions in the Great Lakes region show that there is a central theme in displacement studies: the intersection of local moral worlds and refugee governance in everyday negotiations over land, education, and livelihoods. These negotiations reveal how global humanitarian norms are refracted through local realities, producing hybrid systems of care and control. More broadly, displacement in the Great Lakes region is best understood as a relational and processual condition. People navigate layered sovereignties, climate volatility, and fragmented humanitarian regimes through social networks, moral economies, and adaptive protection practices, strategies that highlight agency and, paradoxically, structural precarity.

This invites a comparative question: What parallels exist between the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region in terms of displacement dynamics? Both regions exhibit cyclical patterns of forced mobility, protracted crises, and the entanglement of humanitarian governance with local political economies. Exploring these similarities can deepen our understanding of displacement as a regional phenomenon shaped by interconnected conflicts, environmental stressors, and evolving norms of refuge.

Both the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region exhibit strikingly similar displacement dynamics, shaped by the interplay of armed conflict, environmental stressors, and governance responses (Abebe, 2021). In both regions, protracted and recurrent conflicts, such as those in Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan in the Horn, and in eastern DRC and Burundi in the Great Lakes, generate sustained and cyclical flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These movements are rarely linear; rather, they involve pendular and multi-directional trajectories as people navigate shifting frontlines, fragile borders, and intermittent ceasefires (Kibreab, 2024). Climate shocks and environmental disasters further compound these crises: recurrent droughts in the Horn and seasonal floods

in the Great Lakes exacerbate livelihood insecurity, intertwining with violence to intensify displacement and produce layered vulnerabilities.

From an anthropological perspective, both settings reveal a paradox of refuge: hospitality norms and moral economies of care coexist with restrictive encampment policies and legal frameworks that marginalize refugees over time. Initial openness often gives way to securitized governance and donor-driven models that prioritize containment over integration (Kibreab, 1996, 2024). Yet studies across both regions show the strength and adaptive capacities of displaced communities. Local actors frequently mediate disputes, innovate livelihood strategies, and deploy informal justice mechanisms to cope with displacement, even as these efforts remain constrained by state fragility, resource scarcity, and the structural limitations of humanitarian regimes.

In summary, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region share profound structural similarities in the drivers of displacement, the design of policy frameworks, and the cultural strategies employed to cope with forced mobility. While regional initiatives, such as IGAD's protocols on free movement and refugee protection (IGAD, 2020) and Uganda's widely praised asylum regime (Grześkowiak, 2024), signal important normative advances, persistent gaps remain between policy commitments and the lived realities of displaced populations. Bridging this divide requires research that foregrounds gendered vulnerabilities, documents community-led adaptation strategies, and critically evaluates regional mechanisms aimed at fostering refugee integration. Such inquiry is essential for promoting durable, context-sensitive solutions that respect cultural norms while addressing structural constraints. These themes will be explored in greater depth in the following section.

Anthropological perspectives on human displacement

The preceding accounts of displacement in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes emphasize the profound complexity of human mobility in these regions. It is therefore critical to challenge dominant narratives that frame displacement as an aberration or a temporary disruption. Rather, mobility must be understood within the context of long-standing pastoral, agro-pastoral, and trade-driven movement traditions that have historically sustained livelihoods and social networks. For centuries, movement across arid and semi-arid landscapes has been adaptive and cyclical, forming an integral part of ecological flexibility and cultural systems (Hammond et al., 2025). The imposition and subsequent formalization of rigid state

borders during colonial and postcolonial periods disrupted these fluid patterns, recasting mobility as a symptom of crisis rather than a deeply embedded livelihood strategy (Derradji 2025, Tieku and Coffie 2025). Revisiting earlier approaches to human adaptation is imperative, particularly in societies where pastoral and agropastoral systems remain central to survival. Such a perspective not only reframes displacement within historical continuities but also opens pathways for policy and research that recognize mobility as a form of adaptation rather than solely as vulnerability.

Given that many communities in the Horn of Africa are pastoral, it is essential to incorporate pastoralist adaptations into analyses of population mobility, even though not all displaced persons originate from pastoral backgrounds. For pastoralist societies, mobility is not merely a response to crisis but a culturally embedded strategy for managing environmental variability and sustaining livelihoods. Displacement, in this sense, often functions as an adaptive mechanism rather than a marker of vulnerability. Berhe and Butera (2012) show how traditional coping systems—such as transhumance, seasonal migration, and reciprocal social networks—mediate climate shocks like droughts, thereby challenging reductive views of mobility as solely forced migration. Similarly, Abeshu's (2025) study of displaced Afar communities in Ethiopia demonstrates how pastoralists actively resist displacement through customary governance structures, negotiating land loss and resource access amid pressures from commercial agriculture and state interventions. These examples reinforce the need to reconceptualize mobility within pastoralist contexts as a dynamic interplay of resilience, cultural continuity, and structural constraints, rather than as a unidimensional humanitarian emergency.

Accounts of human displacement in Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan underline the critical importance of political economy analysis in understanding mobility dynamics. Systems of resource extraction, land dispossession, and uneven development perpetuate cycles of upheaval and forced migration. Abeshu (2025) illustrates this nexus, showing how alliances between "big men," state actors, and private investors mobilized Afar pastoralists to defend land rights, an example of conflict-induced displacement intertwined with political and economic interests. Similarly, in Sudan, the forced relocation of some Nuba communities from the mountains of South Kordofan to the plains (Manger, 1994) marked a profound socio-economic transformation. This movement shifted livelihoods from subsistence gardening toward commercial peanut cultivation to meet cash demands, exposing displaced populations to new

cultural norms and legal frameworks anchored in sharia law. Over time, protracted conflicts in Sudan compounded these disruptions, pushing many Nuba into secondary displacement as internally displaced persons or refugees in South Sudan. These cases reveal how displacement operates within broader processes of commodification, governance restructuring, and identity negotiation, demanding analytical approaches that link mobility to the political economy of conflict and development.

Another dimension that warrants anthropological scrutiny is refugee governance and the underlying logic of the "camp." It is essential to interrogate humanitarian frameworks that compartmentalize displaced populations into rigid categories, such as "refugee," "IDP," or "camp resident", thereby obscuring fluid identities, mobility strategies, and individual agency (Malkki, 1995; Hammond et al., 2025). Camps, as institutional spaces, often reproduce dependency through controlled aid distribution and impose bureaucratic norms that disrupt kin-based social systems, while simultaneously concealing alternative forms of solidarity and survival. These informal networks, rooted in kinship ties and transnational connections, receive scant attention in donor-driven or policy-oriented studies, representing a critical gap in both scholarship and practice. Moreover, displaced populations actively draw on these social infrastructures to negotiate access to resources, navigate host-state restrictions, and maintain cultural continuity. Shifting identities within camps, particularly under conditions of protracted displacement, reveal how refugees construct new forms of belonging and social organization. Far from being passive recipients of aid, these networks exert significant influence over migration trajectories, resource allocation, and decision-making, challenging dominant narratives of vulnerability and dependence.

Finally, displacement profoundly reconfigures gender roles and generational dynamics, often in ways that challenge traditional social structures. Women frequently assume new responsibilities as de facto household heads due to the absence of men, whether through conscription, conflict-related death, or labour migration, while simultaneously confronting heightened exposure to gender-based violence in camps, transit zones, and host communities (Horst, 2006). These shifts, however, are rarely acknowledged in humanitarian programming, which tends to reproduce patriarchal norms by prioritizing male-centred decision-making and overlooking women's agency in coping, leadership, and livelihood strategies. Recognizing these transformations is critical for designing interventions that move beyond protectionist frameworks toward

approaches that empower women and address the intersection of displacement, gender, and social adaptation.

For youth, displacement profoundly disrupts educational trajectories, life plans, and aspirations, often forcing them to navigate uncertain futures in contexts of limited opportunity. Research on South Sudanese and Somali refugee communities reveals how young people negotiate hybrid identities, balancing traditional cultural expectations with the cosmopolitan influences of camp life and host societies (Hammond et al., 2025). Generational tensions frequently surface as elders strive to preserve customary norms and social hierarchies, while youth embrace new possibilities, whether through informal economies, digital platforms, or transnational networks that expand their social horizons. These dynamics highlight the reality that displacement is not merely a spatial phenomenon but a deep social process, reshaping intergenerational relations and producing new gendered and generational negotiations of power, belonging, and identity. Understanding these transformations is crucial for designing interventions that recognize and support youth aspirations and mitigate the long-term social consequences of protracted displacement.

Conclusions

The comparative lens applied to the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region reveals a paradox: while policy ambition has expanded, through IGAD's regional frameworks, national inclusion agendas such as Uganda's progressive asylum regime, and global commitments like the Global Compact on Refugees, daily refugee realities remain shaped by fragile service delivery, constrained mobility, unequal protection, and inconsistent recognition within national development plans. Bridging this gap demands research that is both granular and regionally comparative, attentive to intersectional vulnerabilities and local agency, and explicitly oriented toward informing policy implementation rather than merely reinforcing aspirational frameworks. Building on the discussion above, we propose the following priority areas for future inquiry in the Horn of Africa and, where relevant, the Great Lakes region, with particular attention to Sudanese, South Sudanese, and other refugee populations.

A first research priority is the development of longitudinal, mixed-methods studies that examine the gendered risks and resources shaping refugee protection. This should encompass the often-overlooked continuum from conflict-related gender-based violence to economic coercion, legal precarity in both settlements and urban contexts, and the liminal conditions

experienced by youth in protracted displacement. Within this framework, particular attention may be given to refugee-led organizations and community-based protection networks, their practical innovations in addressing protection gaps, the structural funding bottlenecks they encounter, and the pathways through which they might achieve formal recognition and integration into national and international protection systems.

Climate sensitivity represents a critical and underexplored dimension of displacement in the Horn of Africa. Increasingly, mobility patterns are shaped by climate-related problems, from drought-induced livelihood collapse to flood-driven relocations, yet prevailing scholarship continues to treat "climate migrants" as a residual or secondary category. To move beyond this reductive framing, we need hydro-social and political ecology approaches that link rainfall variability, groundwater and pasture governance, and pastoral transhumance to evolving migration routes and settlement configurations, with particular attention to borderlands and river basins (Manger et al., 2019; Dazé and Crawford, 2016). Coupling climate analytics with ethnographic inquiry can illuminate critical thresholds of (im)mobility, household decision-making under environmental stress, and the distributional politics of anticipatory action.

Health concerns remain a critical dimension of displacement, as mobility amplifies vulnerabilities and facilitates the spread of communicable diseases among both human and animal populations. Displacement frequently intersects with outbreaks of cholera, measles, and other preventable illnesses, exacerbated by chronic funding shortfalls, weak health infrastructure, and restricted humanitarian access. Countries in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region are recurrently affected by epidemics such as cholera and Ebola, compounding the precarity of refugees and internally displaced persons. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that considers indigenous health systems, local knowledge practices, and strategies for strengthening health system resilience under conditions of insecurity and protracted crisis.

Finally, comparative political economy analysis should critically examine how regional frameworks, such as IGAD's Free Movement Protocol, intersect with cross-border market systems and security arrangements to shape mobility corridors, protection spaces, and the political bargaining between national and local authorities. Focusing on border towns offers a valuable lens for understanding how market integration, remittance flows, and informal taxation regimes influence both refugee and host community

welfare. Such analysis can also reveal the conditions under which regional norms and agreements translate into tangible entitlements at checkpoints, municipal offices, and local governance structures, highlighting the gap between formal commitments and lived realities on the ground.

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Refugees on the Move: Forced Displacement and Regional Dynamics in East Africa Formulated under the NORHED II framework, Refugees on the Move presents a timely, ground-level examination of forced migration across the Horn of Africa. Built on decades of cross-border academic partnership connecting researchers from universities in Addis Ababa, Bergen, Khartoum, Makerere, and Juba, this volume investigates the human realities and complex socio-political dynamics of South Sudanese populations fleeing conflict into neighboring Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda. Through first-hand anthropological fieldwork and applied social science, the contributors analyze how displacement intersects with local borderland tensions, regional instability, and host community dynamics. Combining rich case studies with comparative analysis, this book bridges rigorous academic research, policy dialogue, and institutional capacity building—offering an essential resource for scholars, policy-makers, and humanitarian practitioners working on regional development and forced migration governance in East Africa.

Organization for Social Science Research
in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA)

ISBN 978-99944-75-00-1