Searching for a Nation: South Sudanese Refugees in Des Moines

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ABSTRACT

For my thesis, I explore how South Sudanese refugees in central Iowa imagine a utopic South Sudan amidst contemporary inter-ethnic tensions emanating from their recently independent country. In central Iowa and in particular Des Moines, South Sudanese refugees subtly reproduce the type of unilateral authority they meant to leave behind, but instead of using tensions and divisions to further deepen ethnic divides, the diaspora enacts their own will through political discourse and community construction. My research focused on the South Sudanese community center, where I spent a year from 2012 to 2013 as a participant-observer engaging in political discussions within re-interpreted spaces resembling a common experience of refugee camps right after independence and into a period of renewed ethnic hostilities in the East Africa region.

I suggest not only that the ideal created in diaspora is rooted in transnational migration, re-interpreted identity and territory, but that the imagined peaceful plurality then serves to circumvent the actions of the state – most importantly the state’s capacity to construct a unifying element for its people in Africa and abroad. To conceptualize a general attitude of the de-centralized South Sudanese population, I use my own definition of “stateless,” which defines the familial unit as irreplaceable but the inhabitants of government positions as expendable, thus necessitating avoidance of the country’s inter-ethnic dynamic to produce a nonviolent reality. I argue that South Sudan’s fragile ethnic dynamic – in modern South Sudan but also throughout the regions long history – necessitates re-defining the parameters of coexistence to encompass a nation that does not yet exist. My study demonstrates one such attempt emanating out of Des Moines that uses the bonds of the refugee community to express a common circumstance.
CHAPTER I
SEARCHING FOR A NATION: SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES IN DES MOINES

This thesis examines South Sudanese refugees in Des Moines and their discourses about South Sudan’s future as a nation and the role of the South Sudanese diaspora in it. South Sudan became an independent nation in July, 2011. Prior to that, thousands of refugees fled the region as a result of ethnic violence and conflict. Presently, South Sudan is pulled in two primary directions: between former SPLM/A (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army, the rebel faction that fought for independence from Sudan between 1983 and 2005) led by Salva Kiir, the current President of South Sudan, and Riek Machar, the Vice President. Kiir is a member of the Dinka, the largest ethnic group in modern South Sudan, and which have held control of the government since the end of the civil war granting South Sudan autonomy. The Dinka are the ethnic majority and reside in resource rich territories of South Sudan. Riek Machar is a member of the Nuer, the second largest ethnic group, which most recently held the position of Vice President, and whose people strategically occupy resource laden lands. The presence of these two ethnic groups over oil producing areas creates a situation where the new state of South Sudan cannot exist without Dinka and Nuer influence. The country is divided into more than sixty languages and dialects, spread out over a land mass that is 644, 329 square kilometers only “slightly smaller than Texas” (CIA World Factbook, 2013). Despite South Sudan’s diversity, the Dinka and Nuer remain the most influential actors leading the country into its uncertain future. This power dynamic has little to do with the Islamic and Christian dichotomy that fundamentally polarized the political discourse between the northern government of Khartoum and South
Sudan. Sudan’s government is Muslim, but the fight for independence was initially a struggle for even political representation of the country’s diversity in a secular and united Sudan, though the active opposition was mainly comprised of the Dinka and Nuer; further marginalizing the many regions of the country were unequal resource profit distribution from the government situated in Khartoum (Johnson, 2003). I studied individuals who comprised the South Sudanese diaspora in central Iowa, which emerged from the long conflict with Sudan (most recently from 1983 to 2005), and who imagine an ideal world where their lives stand for more than pawns against materialistic and ideological rivals. I argue that the possibility of a new future required the South Sudanese in central Iowa to put aside the ethnic hostilities in favor for a celebration of the country’s multiplicity.

The scope of the South Sudanese diaspora has made it difficult to accurately gauge its size. According to the UN Agency on Refugees (UNHCR, 2013) the number of displaced peoples originating in South Sudan is 453,598, with 87,009 refugees outside of the country out of a total population of 11,090,104 (CIA World Fact Book, 2013). Complicating circumstances further are 202,581 refugees residing in South Sudan from elsewhere. The dynamics of ethnic violence and political tensions that drove many individuals out of South Sudan have persisted into the present, most clearly evidenced by the 2013 presidential coup. South Sudan appears on the brink of a new civil war, while the government is plagued by political meandering of its officials that must bear the suspicions of their people while proving to the country’s population that they are to be trusted, though a deep mistrust of anybody outside of one’s ethnic group characterizes the state’s inter-ethnic dynamic (Amollo, 2007; Nyol, 2013). The territory comprising modern South Sudan has yet to be internationally defined (CIA World Fact Book, 2013). Two areas are currently disputed: one by Sudan and the other by Kenya, both of which
are claimed by South Sudan since secession. Within South Sudan, the ethnically diverse population, particularly the Dinka and Nuer, are fighting for political representation in the spaces created by the state’s independence. While acknowledging and in many ways embodying these tensions, many individuals within the South Sudanese diaspora in central Iowa view the creation of a South Sudanese nation-state with hope for what a new state means for all of South Sudan’s many ethnic groups. Des Moines’ South Sudanese community expresses belief in the possibility of an ideal South Sudanese state, where ethnic tension turns into cooperation towards a prosperous and modern nation. The central Iowan community represents the various administrative divisions in South Sudan, but the areas recent history leading into the present predominantly concerns the two majority groups in the south, who fought the north but whose relationship has remained suspect throughout their past.

Dinka and Nuer peoples have a history of intermarriage and contact, yet both ethnic groups have remained linguistically distinct (Willis and Buck, 2007). Early in diaspora, the refugee communities lacked the durable networks that facilitated daily life, creating limitations from acquiring proper nutrients out of a new diet selection to the political arena of majority ethnic influence. The Dinka majority sub-groups which comprised the SPLM/A are the Bor and Bar El-Ghazal; the relationship between members of the two ethnic groups is largely dependent on a levels of communication within each. That is to say, friends across tribal divisions may refrain from certain topics considered sensitive to a particular group. A Dinka Bor (from conversation on January 28th, 2013) explained a term that specifically referenced the Nuer – “Nya-gat” denotes a betrayer from the 1991 split from the SPLM/A. Although tribal divisions from the two majority ethnic groups in South Sudan follows a clear historical separation during the recent civil war ending in southern autonomy, the divisions within the larger Dinka ethnicity
have recently polarized those comprising the power dynamic in the South Sudanese government that the diaspora reflects. The community reflects the leaders, though the actions of an individual do not necessarily attach the ethnic group to a particular vision. However, ethnic visibility, as in the actions of governmental officials during the recent coup accusations of the Nuer, creates resentment of affiliated groups and mistrust between spheres of tribal relationships (Biar, 2013). Dr. Garang represented Dinka Bor and the current president Salva Kiir is of Dinka Bar El-Ghazal. Mistrust stemming from the death of Dr. Garang keeps Bor weary of the possible contribution Dinka Bar El-Ghazal may have had, same as the mistrust in the Nuer since the split of the SPLM/A. The diaspora live this fragile intersection of hope for a new nation coupled with a recent history of mistrust that is built on a foundation of mistrust.

Sudan’s government was not supported by the population in the whole of the region, and relied on counter-insurgency methods to address political opposition, resulting in the long civil wars leading up to 2005 (Deng, 2010). Deng (2010) considers the effects on social capital during times of this particular violence. Conflict between different ethnic groups in Sudan and South Sudan strengthened bonds within, though broke down relationships outside of ethnic affiliations. Only those relationships at the headwaters of violent conflict saw the deterioration of social networks. Deng (2010) measured mistrust during the 1998 famine on the border of Sudan and South Sudan by the rise of court claims regarding the ownership of cattle; I see this mistrust translated in central Iowa through the attempts of the community at the center and throughout the area to delineate categories of conversation in separate spaces. Furthermore, restricting certain phrases and topics depending on the presence of ethnic groups eases inter-ethnic communication by avoiding divisions manufactured by the state – at one point used to silence opposition in Sudan and now through the failure of peace in South Sudan.
In this thesis, I explore how various members of this diaspora subjectively interpret their experiences to imagine this new ideal. I argue that the diaspora is not united by the common bond of citizenship here or in South Sudan, nor is it sufficient to say that forced migration was enough to bring the diaspora together as a community, since the stories of displacement vary between individuals. The South Sudanese diaspora is ethnically diverse, and those who are here as refugees represent a variety of ethnic divisions who have yet to find a unifying South Sudanese identity, nor have had one promoted by the new state. Here I argue that the South Sudanese diaspora in central Iowa imagine a nation, devoid of governmental corruption and unequal power dynamics based on ethnicity, where the structures of the state do not exist to impede the development of unity amongst the marginalized throughout East Africa.

The South Sudanese community in Des Moines have foci throughout the city: a community center in north Des Moines, where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork; the lot where the center is located contains an Ethiopian owned grocery store and a barber, catering to all genders and East Africans; and churches around Des Moines serve the South Sudanese Christian and Catholic congregations. All of these spaces are constantly used, with daily or weekly gatherings. From here, the community has a sense of itself within the greater Des Moines area, and these are spaces to disseminate information on events throughout the Midwest. South Sudanese reside all over the U.S. and many places in the Midwest, with large populations in Omaha and Minneapolis (Copeland-Carson, 2004). Members of the diaspora communicate with friends and relatives throughout, creating general knowledge of the Des Moines community center when people come to visit. My informants speak of its popularity and boast of its size and ability to bring in those that live in Des Moines, as well as those visiting.
I found the refugee community in Des Moines full of hope and questions about new sovereignty of South Sudan. Furthermore, the community was eager to share their experience fueled by a mix of joy over their new country and a willingness to be an active participant in its future. The various age groups of the diaspora, with difference in education, demarcated perspectives on what occurred in the conflict with Sudan. College age South Sudanese felt they would be the inheritors of the state and would use their American college educations to fill the many voids in the new country; the older generation, opinionated and hopeful, had much to impart for anyone willing to listen; but the community leaders living in Des Moines have a more active vision of the nation and are working together to join all the diaspora communities around the U.S. into one cohesive society working towards common ground for everyone. The diaspora I encountered was predominantly from the area of South Sudan, but the issues they face do not solely concern their population. The territories bordering South Sudan to the north have been historically marginalized by the ruling center of Khartoum, and currently oppose their government that has an uneven relationship regarding the distribution of wealth and power within Sudan, Darfur being the most popularly known and the area called Nuba have recently made headlines through George Clooney’s “Enough Project” (2014), which tracks bombings in the southern territory. Refugees from these territories also live in central Iowa and have a voice in the forming of an umbrella community that may encompass all those forced to flee.

Following the end of the civil war in 2005, marginalized ethnic groups historically linked to the ruling center of Khartoum through religious conversion, are now positioned against their government without autonomy (Kalo, 2010). Legitimacy in pluri-ethnic territories are difficult to govern when traditional ideas of a nation-state are imposed, as with an official administrative language or with a single style of governance (Stepan, Linz and Yadav, 2010). The social
stratification constructed by Sudan affects more than South Sudan, and while South Sudanese benefit from the recent creation of the state, the contested regions like Darfur are also represented as refugees in central Iowa and are possible participants in a united diaspora.

Claims of autochthony by the different ethnic groups and the territory in question are due to the fact that much of the current populations of South Sudan are not the original inhabitants, particularly contentious in the border, disputed regions. Coupled with ethnic tensions existing since the first waves of Nilotic migration from the area of present day Khartoum whose descendants comprise the majority in South Sudan (Beswick, 2004; Deng, 1995) and deepened throughout its exploitive and colonial history (Ryle, 2011), South Sudan’s brief and chaotic experience with statehood is wrought with competition for control of resource rich areas between the north and south without a unifying plan of identity. Reports from the Economist, The Sudan Tribune and The South Sudanese News Agency (via the Huffington Post) show an even grimmer picture of what South Sudan has become since it gained independence. Corruption is rampant in South Sudan, ethnic rivalries in particular the Dinka and Nuer are at the point of open war in Jonglei state South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur are still attacked from their own government in Khartoum and the contested region of Abyei (currently awaiting a delayed referendum to determine whether the territory will become a part of Sudan or ...

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1 Autochthony (indigeneity) as a precursor to political representation and agency are contested in the outlying disputed territories and in the interior. The South Sudanese population is not fighting against groups of colonizers as in Francophone and Anglophone Africa; their struggle for autochthony and national belong is rooted in contemporary contested borders and constructed social hierarchies determined by religion under the Sudanese regime. Ceuppen and Geschiere (2005) acknowledge the strategies of autochthony as “de-centralization” or “bypassing the state,” but the question of autochthony in South Sudan concerns the ruling groups and ruling structures in South Sudan that came from elsewhere: in the form of the Islamic rulers from Khartoum, or the native administration installed during the colonial period (Deng, 1995). Here in lies an element of “fake,” the allochthon or stranger, in South Sudan who fought against the SPLA leading up to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, which resulted in autonomy for South Sudan.

2 The Dinka and Nuer represent the majority in the northeast, mixed Arab in Nuba and the Fur in the area of Darfur (see ethnic map in appendix). Conflict in South Sudan is over control of the government, while the regions in Sudan fight for a similar representation that led to South Sudanese independence.
South Sudan) may bring both sides into another full out war (Reeves, 2011; D.H., 2013; R.N., 2013).

In stark contrast, the diaspora and in particular the South Sudanese community in Des Moines imagines a utopic version of South Sudan. The inclusion of their voices in the discourse of the new state will help with an added awareness of international relations and in the benefits of an inter-ethnic peaceful existence. They see the rivalries that characterize the whole region and acknowledge the errors and dangers in ethnic divisions. The central Iowan refugee community use the spaces created by disruptions in civil life, which forced them to flee, to re-imagine belonging for a future detached from South Sudan, and although inextricably linked via family to South Sudan, the central Iowan community imagine a pluri-ethnic nation devoid of past and present tensions.

**LITERATURE**

My study population, and the moment they find themselves in, highlights national belonging in a new context. An exploration of how individuals in the South Sudanese diaspora imagine their connection to the South Sudanese nation contributes to an anthropological understanding of how individuals forge connections to nation-states in an era in which nations are increasingly deterritorialized and their populations transnational. This thesis considers how migrants, whether forced or willing, fashion national narratives within the disordering spaces caused by movements from one area to another. In doing so, it draws from and contributes to existing anthropological literature in the areas of nationalism, deterritorialization and identity.

Existing literature on nationalism argues that any given population, whether residing in a homeland or spread across the world in diaspora, imagines their connection to a larger entity
Anderson (2000) proposes that nationalism was a European invention, and is an “expression of certain straightforward ideas which provide a framework for political life” (2000:1). These nations represent a homogeneous normative strengthened through appearance and behavior that define one group from another. The dissolution of medieval Europe inaugurated this European derived notion of nationalism (Gellner, 1992) though the idea of the nation only came in hindsight to this era. The state needed to perpetuate an image of its populous that learned its norms through structures of education. Balibar (1990) sees the nation emerging out of the state, though the two are not mutually inclusive – the state usually implicated within the existence of a nation.

Overt globalization changed the articulation of nationalism by emphasizing violence and the resulting emergence refugee in South Sudan via forced displacement, rather than any mechanism of inclusion sponsored by the state. Malkki (1995) showed how episodes of violence can be transmitted to the rest of the world by NGOs and news reporters. Interior problems of a country are now global knowledge and the discontent of those effected use mediums of information dissemination to relay material. The basic model for refugees (Malkki, 1995; Malkki, 1995:496). The concept of a refugee did not exist in its modern form until after World War II, where the encampment of displaced peoples created institutions for their management (Malkki, 1995). The camps were controlled by the military and the designs were set for the administration of large populations. It wasn’t until the formation of the UNHCR (United Nations High commissioner for Refugees) in 1951 that refugees became “an international social or humanitarian problem, rather than as a primarily military one” (Malkki, 1995:500). The Geneva Convention defined in legal terms what it meant to be a refugee:

The term “refugee shall apply to any person who[,]...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (Geneva Convention).
Black, 2001; Geneva Convention, 1951) explains the legal status that the diaspora assumed when fleeing civil instability during the various wars from 1956 to 2005 (Sarwar, 2012); and the politics of belonging consist of a mix between associations that create identity, the nation-state that nourishes the associations, and the realities that allow a people to imagine a nation (Geschiere, 2009:21).

While previous literature on the nation-state imagined an ideal connection between people-territory-state (Anderson, 2000; Gellner, 1992; Balibar, 1990), recent research in anthropology highlights the ways in which individuals have imagined and created deterritorialized nations and national cultures through transnational media, economic, and cultural links among populations in different physical sites (Bernal, 2004; 2006, Deborah Thomas, 2012). My study demonstrates how South Sudanese individuals in central Iowa imagine nationalism disconnected from an internationally recognized state, where they were forced to find a reality away from East Africa, one that not only resembles the familial relationships and kin ties of the homeland left behind, but that branches out to embrace the inner ethnic dynamic for everyone who left involuntarily. As refugees, the central Iowan South Sudanese community relies on aid as designated by the refugee label (Malkki, 1995), which focused on providing protection to the displaced population. As peoples conceiving an imagined nation, the central Iowan community embodies the ideologue (Gilad, 1990), the imagined ideal that contrast what

The refugee literature still has a focus on aid and programs. The term ‘refugee’ does little to move the discourse away from intervention. It places the individual or population within a certain context and under certain legal circumstances (Black, 2001:63).

Further distinguishing theories of refugees is the “refugee ideologue” (Gilad, 1990:42), a term used to describe a population that felt compelled to leave their country of origin in favor for a place perceived as an embodiment of freedoms. What quickly becomes apparent is that the ideal of freedom is interpreted distinctly under an institutions law, but all states have rules and expectations for behavior. To an extent, their ideas of what freedom meant ended after a time of adjustment and the following realization that laws governed behavior in their new homes as well, perhaps less restricting. One critique put forth by Gilad (1990) of the ideologue was the adopted motivations to flee a location without the extent of danger experienced by others who would claim refugee status. Therefore, the refugee ideologue is in a position to benefit from a legal status and label that will allow them to transition into a new space, based on a non-existent ideal.
has and is occurring in South Sudan, and not without good reason. South Sudan represents a tumultuous inter-ethnic existence, whereas my study population anchors their imagined nation in familial dynamics dispersed over greater distances than ever in their past.

**METHODOLOGY**

I conducted my field work from October 2012 to October 2013 with the South Sudanese student organization in Ames and at their community center in Des Moines. The population in central Iowa is significant, because they are attempting to unite the ethnic communities throughout the U.S. under the common bond of marginalization and displacement. I interacted with community members ranging from ages eighteen to sixty-five, my time being spent mostly in participant observation. I was fortunate to have multiple members of the South Sudanese community in Ames attending Iowa State. They helped introduce me to the community center in Des Moines, and were always available for conversations concerning my ideas. Three students in particular saw early drafts of my proposal, and they helped confirm the many speculations I was having. My initial ideas on the study were guided by their comments and how they expressed the importance of the diaspora’s vision contrasting what is actually happening in South Sudan.

I was first introduced to a student by a member of my committee who suggested the South Sudanese community, since my first project did not materialize. This student in turn introduced me to the student organization on campus that he was a part of. Soon after, I started to attend their meetings and their president showed me the community center in Des Moines along with one of the churches with an Arabic service for South Sudanese Christians. I decided that my time would be best spent at the community center and with the students on campus. I
chose these two spaces, because of their availability and represented age range. The community center was open daily but with the highest concentration of people on the weekends; the student organization had weekly meetings but I had the chance to run into them on a daily basis. My contact is still frequent and I can follow up with many of my informants if needed.

My study analyzes the South Sudanese diaspora, in particular, as refugees living in central Iowa. Other ethnic groups from South Sudan, along with peoples from the border of Sudan, are important within my research as they highlight a marginalized population emerging from the power struggle between the north and south. The central Iowan South Sudanese community has students at Iowa State in Ames and has a community center located near the Drake neighborhood in Des Moines, Iowa. Both the student body and community center are diverse and represent the various cultural groups in South Sudan and around the region; however, the Des Moines center is an all-male space constituting one of the study’s limitations. The student population and community center gave me the breadth of age amongst the male population, with a fewer number of female students represented at Iowa State. Since I did not have access to a diverse gender concentration of South Sudanese laborers at the community center or the university, female members of the diaspora, who tend to work as low-wage unskilled laborers, did not signify a substantial portion of my community interactions (Warriner, 2007; DeLuca, 2009).

Both Iowa State and the community center hold the concentration of informants that I drew upon using cluster sampling (Bernard, 2006:157). From these locations and initial interactions, I increased my informant base utilizing the snowball method, or chain referral (Bernard, 2006:192). Weekly meetings with the student organization at Iowa State fell apart due
to low participation, and I made weekend trips to the Des Moines center from November 28th, 2012 up until the completion of the thesis.

The manner of interaction was unstructured, although the community was made aware that I was conducting a research project (Bernard, 2006:210-211). I recorded field note data immediately following contact at the community center, I conducted three informal interviews, and one group interview of twelve South Sudanese undergrads, which I transcribed from voice recordings. I originally wanted to collect upwards of twenty individual interviews, but the community’s willingness to be recorded changed as they became comfortable with me. Early on, one of the South Sudanese students told me that many at the center will jump at the chance, because they have much exposure with journalist due to the media representations of the “lost boys” and Darfur conflict. What I was unprepared for was the noticeable concern at voice recordings as comfort grew. In our various conversations, I realized that many of the community members had direct ties to the military rebel faction in the south. Since they shared freely, they knew they could possibly put people in danger.

Analysis of field notes and transcribed interviews will center on the emergence of patterns based on the various issues presented to the community. Useful responses will fit into paradigms of national belonging and the associated imaginaries, and will be categorized as evidence revealing particular notions of the community as a whole (Bernard, 2006:484). My research will be considered complete once a cohesive narrative becomes visible that illustrates parameters of inclusion, not fabricated by the state. I interacted directly with more than a hundred throughout my weekends at the center and with the student body in Ames.

Throughout this process, I have been conscious of the need to be guided by my informants, and not to create the categories that they will need to fit into. I let a few of the South
Sudanese students read my proposal so they could see the ideas I wanted to flesh out. Since that initial reading, I have been open about the direction of my work and I have explored their ideas whenever they have been given. During the interviews, I asked whoever I was speaking to, to read my questions once we were finished. Any input was noted.

I feel fortunate to not report any grand complications to the study. Even though my community contacts were concerned with recordings and direct mentions of who they were, they were always happy to talk to me. One of my students from recitation in the spring of 2013 was a Kuwaiti who lived with Southern Sudanese for a year in Iowa City, Iowa. He introduced me to a number of his old friends on the social network Facebook. They were accommodating until I asked if they wanted to be in my study, at which time they all declined. Transcribing could be difficult depending on the person’s proficiency of English. Everybody was easy to speak with, and had good control of the language; their pauses and tense errors are included in any transcriptions.

I felt my methods appropriate for my topic of national imaginaries, due to the community’s eagerness to express their opinion. The new sense of agency and involvement for the future of South Sudan meant that every member of the community here in the Mid-West felt that the individual could have an impact. I was, however, occasionally hindered by the language barrier at the center. The conversations tended to revolve around politics using the lingua franca

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4 For this reason, I only gave one alias to the Sudanese student who helped me frame my questions to the South Sudanese. When mentioning the members of the refugee community, I refer to each only by tribe.

5 Sherry Ortner

“view[s] agency as a piece of both the power problematic and the meaning problematic. In the context of questions of power, agency is that which is made or denied, expanded or contracted, in the exercise of power. It is the (sense of) authority to act, or of lack of authority and lack of empowerment. It is that dimension of power that is located in the actor’s subjective sense of authorization, control, effectiveness in the world. Within the framework of questions of meaning, on the other hand, agency represents the pressures of desires and understandings and intentions on cultural constructions” (1997:146).
of the community, Arabic. The languages of the various ethnic groups were not mutually
intelligible and Arabic was in wide usage in South Sudan. Being aware of my intentions,
someone would usually give me the short hand translation of the conversations. Even when the
topic differed from politics, the dynamic of the community was important for helping understand
the context in which they expressed their ideas of the state. Unfortunately, the female voice was
not often present, my gender being a hindrance in creating rapport outside of the center. Women
did not frequent the center, although I did meet a few at some community events, but I could not
engage them meaningfully.

ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

My thesis comprises four chapters including the introduction, starting with the historical
and contemporary context of South Sudan and theoretical background, then looking at the South
Sudanese diaspora in Des Moines, and finally narrowing the focus on national imaginaries and
its perception by the displaced community. Each component addresses a different aspect of the
diaspora’s experience, before highlighting the subjective conception of the community members.
The broad picture will analyze how the de-contextualization of the migrant opens a space for the
imagined nation.

Chapter two analyzes the history of ethno-religious and linguistic differences in Sudan,
and demonstrates how the recent conflict emerged through and reproduced these differences.
This is critical information for understanding who fled Sudan and how existing differences
among the Sudanese diaspora complicate, but also provide creative fodder for, imagining new
dynamics of national inclusion. Specifically, this chapter details the emergence of the
contemporary state of South Sudan, while creating a contrast with the people here in central Iowa.
and their capacity to imagine decentralized national boundaries with an unstable foundation of South Sudan’s contemporary statehood.

Chapter three uses the history of East Africa and applies them to the community living in diaspora to demonstrate differing relationships occurring in Des Moines. Here in Iowa, their lives reflect a variance in inter-ethnic dynamics of the country left behind in uncertainty and instability. Community dynamics in Des Moines are far different from back in Africa. At the community center, multiple ethnic groups mix and are civil to one another, despite escalating tensions in their home country. The diaspora ponder the future of South Sudan and discuss how it could best operate, by shifting their paradigm to encompass ethnic coexistence, political representation, and national inclusion. South Sudan’s problems do not seem impossible and there is a belief in the impact of the community, even from a distance.

Chapter four frames the discourse for national imaginaries rooted in the subtle reproduction of the stress that forced the diaspora to migrate, and the need to evade the state. South Sudan began its life with much promise and with the natural resources to give the new state a chance to prosper and participate with the international community. Former members of the rebel army split governmental power in an attempt to reconcile old divisions. However, South Sudan was no more than a mirage of possibility, which helped the diaspora in central Iowa find national opportunities through unification as migrants without the presence of the contemporary South Sudanese state.
CHAPTER 2
NATION, DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH SUDAN AND ITS DIASPORA

South Sudan’s\(^6\) contentious ethnic divisions shaped the modern country through a fight for independence perpetrated from the south, when the north emerged in a position of prominence out of the region’s British colonial history. Today, the South Sudanese government is dominated by the former Dinka and Nuer commanders of the SPLA who now seek to gain control of their resource potential from Sudan, though the distribution of oil producing lands complicates the relationships from within. In short, the state has yet to promote a singular national identity that includes and celebrates the country’s diversity. Through my study population, I witnessed a pluralistic community cooperating to alleviate the strains of an unequal power structure left behind in East Africa. Here in central Iowa, the diaspora works to redefine

\(^6\) Referred to as \textit{Bilad Al-Sudan} or ‘Land of the Blacks’ by “medieval Muslim geographers” during the Ottoman rule of Egypt, this defined territory remained under their control until the creation of the Anglo-Egyptian establishment in 1890 (Ryle, 2011:3-5; Holt, 2011:1). The land referenced by the geographers lay south of the Sahara. Later, the Suez Canal drew the focus of the colonial powers as the door way to the east, as did plans for the Aswan dam, eventually built in 1960 which converted the annual and variable flow of the Nile into a predictable source of water (Strzepek, Yohe, Tol and Rosegrant, 2008). The Nile however, was the lifeline of East Africa. In antiquity, the river provided passage through the arid regions north of modern South Sudan where “scarcely a drop of water falls for more than 2000 km of its course” (Schild, 1987:13), and presently, hydro-politics represent one of many obstacles in defining the new state of South Sudan (Salman, 2011). Peoples along the Nile did not remain stationary and migrated when necessitated by climatic change and outside political powers, thus creating a modern context with territorial and ideological quandaries: who belongs where and has access to what? The East African Nile River stands at an intersection of many ancient civilizations, their migrations, and their active influence on one another. Overlapping periods of dominance by the various civilizations such as the ancient Egyptians, Nubians and Assyrians shaped the land scape into a modern region that traces its current dynamic back into the deepest reaches of recorded history. The modern descendants of those who now live in Sudan and South Sudan engaged with storied empires and had experience with centralized forms of government, a strong contrast to their position on the lowest rung of stratification under Sudan’s government (Beswick, 2004; Draper, 2008). Dinka migration outside the Gezira began around 1300 C.E. with some final splintering occurring as late as the mid-1700s (Beswick, 204: xxvi). Nilotic Dinka migration south was due to population pressures and climatic changes leading to encounters and admixture with non-Nilotes of the south. The possibility of productive lands built both contentious and peaceful relationships amongst splinter groups from the larger Dinka Confederation – a loose organization of the many Dinka peoples – (Beswick, 2004:43) and against other ethnic collectives that had subsisted throughout the south prior to Nilotic migration. The Dinka migration re-shaped the power dynamic in the territories of modern Sudan and South Sudan, pushing out previous inhabitants and mixing with others (Beswick, 2004).
spaces of inclusion that welcome any socio-linguistic group that was forced to flee. In central Iowa, the Des Moines area community created a focal point for the dissolution of antagonistic barriers which inadvertently became a model for a larger attempt to unite the people in diaspora. This chapter investigates the creation of these divisions, not only between the north and south, but throughout modern day South Sudan.

Understanding South Sudan in its contemporary form through its colonial history illuminates the East African region as a space with multiple contentious ethnic identities. Before the modern Dinka and Nuer\(^7\) struggle to dominate the South Sudanese power structure, and the

\(^7\)It is impossible to speak of modern South Sudan and its ethnic diversity without starting at the beginning of recorded history and the societies that grew around the shores of the Nile. From ancient Alexandria at the shores of the Mediterranean to the vast web of tributaries in the south, the Nile has been the medium connecting peoples over a large expanse of land, fertilizing flood plains and transporting material goods and knowledge (Schild, 1987:13). The White Nile flows from Lake Victoria and the Blue from Lake Tana before meeting and emptying into the Mediterranean. The geography moving north from the Nile Valley is extremely varied with marsh lands and tropical forest turning into “an immense plain” containing different types of deserts (Holt, 2011).

Ancient Nubia begins around the meeting of the White and Blue Niles up towards the First Cataract near present day Aswan. The cataracts were shallow collections of rocks that created rapids and characterized the upper portion of the Nile (Holt, 2011). Nubia acted as the “corridor to Africa,” (Adams, 1977) connecting the civilizations of the Near East, the Mediterranean and Egypt to the inland of Africa (Burstein, 2003:137). Nilotic peoples – the modern Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, amongst others living in South Sudan – inhabited the area of the Nile River Basin at the confluence of the two Niles (Campbell and Tishkoff, 2010), and furthest southern extent of Nubia’s Cushitic kingdom. Between eleven and nine thousand years ago, Nilotic Agro-Pastoralist migrated north to the Eastern Sahara from their original homeland around East Africa’s great lakes, conducive to their subsistence practices. They grew in relation to the societies of Egypt as trading partners and later as a vassal state from 1539 to 1292 B.C.E. Favored Nubian elites adopted Egyptian culture via education at Thebes, changing their cosmology and strengthening ties with Egyptian institutions. Following this period of integration, Draper (2008) argues that Nubians felt their Egyptian neighbors pull away from the beliefs they had instilled into the educated Nubians. In 730 B.C.E. the Nubian king Piye took control of Egypt as the 25th dynasty (Bonnet, 2006; Beswick, 2004:13; Draper, 2008). The ruins of Menroe, Dongala and Napata in northern Sudan demonstrate the influence of Egypt by the use of pyramids. The building projects of the 25th dynasty can be found even as far north as Luxor and Karnak, but many monuments were defaced following the decline of the Nubian rulers. Nilotic peoples on the fringes of Nubian rule eventually made their way south towards the areas of modern South Sudan exiting the confluence of the Nile, an area known as the Gezira south of present day Khartoum (Beswick, 2004:25).

Nilotic ancient history connected the Dinka and Nuer societies with the influence and experience of centralized government and social stratification from ancient Egyptians and Nubians. The Dinka in particular and their oral histories tell of migrations south of the Gezira, taking with them funerary practices of ritual sacrifice and king killing (Beswick, 2004:109-114) implying a rich symbolism and belief in an extension of life into the beyond similar to the Egyptians.

Constituting the Dinka tribal majority is the subgroup known as the Bor, whose name is also a present day city in Jonglei state, an administrative division in the east bordering Ethiopia (Beswick, 2004:60-64). Bor, which means flood, was adopted from the lands they came to acquire that flooded annually. The Bor were once
later question of resource ownership and profit sharing within South Sudan, the southernmost reaches of the Anglo-Egyptian establishment through the mid-1900s aggravated already existing ethnic tensions (Smith, 2014a). Pluri-ethnic South Sudan does not assume a singular identity, and contemporarily the state’s population is forcibly reworking their power structure in the face considered "stateless" (Beswick, 2004:127) by Western scholars due to their pastoral dynamic and lack of centralized government – a criticism lacking the perspective of their oral tradition. The religious leadership, which represented an original institution that left the Gezira, used their knowledge of centralized government and organization to assert control over the areas they came to inhabit (Beswick, 2004:124). The religious order showed evidence of a “socioreligious culture derived from a historically more politically centralized society” (Beswick, 2004:127). Nilotic contact, specifically the Dinka and Nuer, have built mistrust through their contentious past and into the modern state. The dynamic of these two ethnic groups above all others united the south, while presently ripping it apart – a reality that the diaspora in central Iowa struggles to change.

Connecting the Nilotic peoples, the Dinka in particular, to the civilizations around the Nile attaches their history with centralized governments, thus removing a contemporary criticism of governmental inexperience. Furthermore, the Gezira, once home to the Nilotes, became the epicenter of modern Arab control by way of Khartoum. The period of Arabization starting around 650 C.E., began to shape the modern identities that today characterize the forced South Sudanese migrants living in diaspora. The Arab and Islamic migrants entering the region of the Nile found a territory fragmented with Byzantine Christianity and local traditions. The eventual mix of foreign and local beliefs laid the foundation for a long standing era of Islamic ideology, which marginalized the southern reaches of the Nile, where the Nilotes now inhabit and echoed in the sentiments of the contemporary central Iowa refugees who knew as displaced peoples, if nothing else, that their East African power dynamic did not favor them.

Nubia existed on the margins of Egypt, but was influential beyond its borders. The events leading up to the exile of the Hebrews in II Kings tells of the alliance between Judah and the Nubian controlled Egyptians, who held off the Assyrian destruction of Jerusalem (Draper, 2008; Bible II Kings). When the Assyrian king Sennacherib completed the re-conquest of Samaria and came to the walls of Jerusalem, he proclaims in II Kings 18 verse 21, “Now Look! You are trusting of the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his and pierce it. So is Pharaoh King of Egypt to all who trust in him.” In the following chapter the Assyrians flee miraculously after an angel of the Lord enters into the camp and kills over one hundred thousand Assyrians. The miraculous Biblical perspective is not a sufficient explanation; an advancing Nubian prince at the head of an Egyptian army could have been the reason for the preservation of the city and the retreat of the Assyrians (Draper, 2008). Told in the book of II Kings, chapter 24, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar placed the people of Judah into exile (Draper, 2008). Their society had grown since the siege by the Assyrians, and even as a rebellious vassal state, was too prominent in the region to be dismantled. The following period of importance for the Nubian controlled area at the confluence of the Nile introduced Medieval Christianity through Byzantine expansion.

“Between AD 500 and AD 600, the rulers of three Nubian medieval kingdoms, Nobatia, Makuria and Alwa, governed the Nile valley from the first cataract to just south of modern Khartoum in Sudan. Missionaries from the Byzantine Empire, sent by Justinian I and his empress Theodora, converted these kingdoms to Christianity. This introduced a marked cultural change into the region... After a brief period of conflict with their Arab neighbours in Egypt, the borders were secured, and the medieval kingdoms flourished for almost a thousand years. The introduction of the water wheel (saqia) allowed agriculture to expand. Villages, towns, monasteries and fortresses lined the banks of the river Nile. Artists attained new heights of achievement, particularly in the fields of mural art and pottery production, and there appears to be a dramatic increase in literacy in Greek, Coptic, Old Nubian and later Arabic” (Medieval Sudan, 2014).
of coup and corruption allegations from within the new government. In central Iowa, the situation is possibly unique; members of the various ethnic groups including the Dinka and Nuer are working to unite the diaspora under the common bond of forced migration. I argue that the history of South Sudan shows the development of polarized and contentious identities; in central Iowa, the community looks to ameliorate ethnic tensions and set the scenario for a reinterpretation of ethnic relationships. From the perspective of the central Iowan community, nationalism in diaspora benefits from a de-centralized and de-contextualized population that ignores the framework of the state, though the past is a complex mix of migration and power struggles.

The history of modern South Sudan and its diaspora emerged out of a post-colonial framework, where the nation exists on the margins of the old colonial powers (Buzinde and Yarnal, 2012). Before the development of the modern state, British native administration (Ryle, 2011) perpetuated ethnic divisions throughout Sudan and South Sudan that had been in formation over East Africa’s long history. Furthermore, colonial structures leading up to independence from Britain in 1956 facilitated imperial control of the fractured region of the Nile: profitable Egypt and access to water ways (Salman, 2011), Islamic Sudan and an African “other” in the south. In contemporary South Sudan, any notion of national homogeneity as a nation-state standard would contradict the pluri-ethnic and multi-religious make-up of the territory.

Today, what is considered Sudan and South Sudan follows the Nile and its tributaries down to the borders of Chad, the Central African Republic, Zaire, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea (Holt, 2011). The South Sudanese state, newest country on the planet as it currently is, has blurry borders with disputed resources held in areas under control of the many different

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8 See appendix for map of Nile River Basin
South Sudan has a number of socio-linguistic groups, the Dinka alone number twenty-six distinct tribes (Beswick, 2004:43), and are often the focus of government criticism since they constitute the majority in modern South Sudan and led the rebel faction during the most recent civil war ending with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. Complicating contemporary governance of South Sudan and the region in general is the location of resources under the control of groups not holding political power. The creation of an effective image of national belonging for South Sudan continues to be elusive, with large numbers externally and internally displaced, the history of the region lays groundwork for theoretical explorations of how contemporary members of the diaspora relate to and think about South Sudanese nationalism.

**CREATION OF NATIONALISM**

The next important period in Sudan and South Sudan’s history led to the creation of nationalism against foreign rule, where the discourse of governmental representation could be said to have started – a parallel to the later war with the SPLA and a unification of ethnic groups throughout the entire region of modern day Sudan versus a common enemy. During this period beginning in 1880, the area that would eventually become Sudan attempted to define a unifying identity against Islamic colonialism.\(^9\) From this point forward, contemporary South Sudan

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\(^9\)Islam was first introduced by traders, later by military conquest and by the Sufis, an order of mystics who preached tolerance and integration. Over a long period of time preceding the death of the Islamic prophet Mohammed in 632 C.E. and during the spread of Islam into North Africa starting in 639 C.E. (Deng, 1995:35), the Arabization of many ethnic groups around the area of modern day Khartoum worsened an ethnic dichotomy between peoples of Arab and African identities.

These various Muslim adherents fused their beliefs with what already existed, setting the course for a future attempt of regional self-rule rooted in Islamic purity with the aim of unifying the Nile River Basin. Although the Arab identity in the modern context came to be regarded as superior by the Khartoum government and different from the African, not all encounters with the various Islamic groups were hostile. None the less, their introduction of their cosmology and culture altered social arrangements to coincide with new perspectives. The new stratification would impact the next phase of history in response to an imposing outside “other.”
would gain a counter identity that sought to exclude the southern population from the power structure Sudan fought for against a foreign regime.

An army of the Ottoman Empire filled a power vacuum in Egypt left by the Mamluks in the latter stages of the 18th century. The Mamluks rested control of Egypt from their former leaders, which lead to the dispatch of the Albanian Mohammad Ali. Ali’s control of Egypt and Sudan was imperial and repressive (Deng, 1995:46-49). An Albanian and Turkish army lead by

Before the period of Arabization, Northern Nubia had developed alongside Egypt differently than the southern reaches of the Upper Nile containing contemporary South Sudan. Building projects and infrastructure still exist in ruin, and the initial wave of Arab migrants used old Nubia as an outpost. The region retained a non-Arab identity leading up to Arabization (Perry, 2004). Christian kingdoms in Sudan introduced by the Byzantine were not influential to the majority of the population for they were seen as a caste for the elite (James, 2011:47). They came via Ethiopia and mixed into the area of the Nubians starting around 500 C.E. Their presence was restricted to the religious order and any contemporary influence of the period is only marginally visible today (crosses are used in popular culture) (James, 2011:47). The later religious identities of the Coptic Christians and the pagan-Hellenistic elite of Egypt lived side by side during the latter stages of the Byzantine Empire. Copts believed in a single natured divinity as opposed to god being both divine and man, having been introduced into Egypt in the 4th century C.E. (Perry, 2004:34-36).

Arab traders were the first to influence the kingdoms along the Nile, entering into the region of the Nubians before 650 C.E. (Deng, 1995:39). They had not come behind military might, but were motivated economically. This early period led to a positive view of the Arabs who brought knowledge of agriculture and trade. These traders settled and intermarried with the local population, integrating lines of secession and changing social positions.

A more violent episode of Arabization came with the expansion of the successor caliphs after the death of the Muslim prophet Mohammed in 632 C.E. (Perry, 2004). Egypt was invaded by Amr ibn-al-As, who began raiding the territory in 639 C.E (Perry, 2004:38-39), which then became the staging ground for incursions southward. After defeat of the Egyptians by the Arabs in 651-52 C.E. and then the nomadic Beja much later in 831 CE (Deng, 1995:39), the Arabs found avenues for unequal synergism. The new rulers of the Nile were free to move down into their newly acquired territories, after which the Arabs lived amongst their new subjects in a generally peaceful co-existence. Military strength kept hostilities minimal and intermarriage gave both the many local ethnic groups and Arab prominence through lines of secession (Deng, 1995:40): matrilineal through the African and patrilineal for the Arabs “perpetuating the Arab-Muslim identity” (Deng, 1995:40).

Entering the Nile River Basin in the 12th and 13th century, Sufi religious leaders were “eclectic” and tolerant of local beliefs that they coopted to ease transitions into Islam (Deng, 1995:41). Sufi views were structured contrary to orthodox Islam, which was “distant from the lives of the ordinary people. Sufism rested on the belief that a holy man could experience God personally and have God’s blessing, baraka, bestowed on him. He could then pass this blessing on to his descendants” (Deng, 1995:41). What Sufism’s perspective gave to the native Africans was a familiar feeling with Islam, one that could be integrated peacefully.

The introduction and integration of religious establishments manifested an identity dialectic between institutions and native “others.” Arabization and Islam worked together to position those unintegrated elements of East Africa against a new power dynamic rooted in economic motivation and religious ideology. The people left out of the new structures faced uncertain treatment by colonial powers, which necessitated unification against common enemies.

10 Mamluks were slave soldiers from Georgia who rose to the high ranking offices in service of the Ottoman Empire around 1750 C.E. Weakness in Ottoman control of their frontier allowed the Mamluks to take dominion of Egypt (Crecelius and Gotcha, 2002:320-3).
Ali, adherents to Islam, was non-the-less seen as foreign invaders. They entered into the region in 1801 C.E. to re-take Egypt from the French who had invaded the Mamluks in 1798 C.E. The Albanian leader Mohammad Ali wanted a slave army (Ryle, 2011) loyal to him as he went in and out of favor with the Turkish Ottomans. His loyal contingent of Albanians troops allowed him to hold a strong position, even as he lost favor from all sides of his territories. Taxation of subject ethnic groups grew resentment against the corrupt Ottomans who horded the wealth. Slave raiding defined their use of the southern reaches of the Nile into modern South Sudan, the source for their slave armies. Ali’s power passed to his children and comprised the Alawiyya dynasty which lasted until the Anglo-Egyptian war of 1882 C.E. Discontent for the invaders from the African subjects included their interpretation of Islam, which could have built a bridge between the ruled and the ruler, though merely added to their perception as foreigners. This laid the scene for a unifying rebellion from the Al-Mahdi, a messiah of sort that would bring about the end of Ottoman rule and who would lead an Islamic Kingdom that would envelope all other kingdoms (Deng, 1995:49-52).

The Mahdist rebellion brought together the north and the south against the common foreign enemy who controlled the length of the Nile into modern South Sudan. Muhammed Ahmed Al-Mahdi declared himself the successor to the prophet and future ruler of the whole world under an Islamic prophesy. In 1885, the Mahdist defeated the Turco-Egyptians under British leadership in a siege of Khartoum. They were victorious with low-tech weaponry against a superior army, which further inspired the rebellion. Muhammaed Ahmed died shortly after his success and his successor, Khalifa Abdullah of the slave-raiding western Baggara Arabs, was unable to succeed in his mission to bring the world under Islamic law (Deng, 1995:51), however

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11 The Baggara Arabs are the semi-nomadic pastoralist who are presently contesting the rule of Abyei from South Sudan, a resource rich administrative region between the two Sudans (Johnson, 2007).
the Mahdist victories cemented nationalism unifying the area of modern Sudan. It showed the Mahdist followers that they could overthrow foreign rule, but the disaster that followed independence from the Ottomans deepened tribalism. The skeleton government of the Mahdi inherited chaos caused by lack of territorial control and a famine created by drought (Deng, 1995).

Sudan came under colonial status in 1899, but neither British or Egyptian colonizers were allowed to enter what is today South Sudan. Instead, the British used the structure of idarra ahliya, or native administration, that brought prominence to “local elites and perpetuate[d] and sometimes deepen[end] ethnic distinction” (Ryle, 2011:38). British involvement into Sudan was not motivated by concern for the condition of the territory, but out of a desire to halt French expansion and to protect their interest in the Suez Canal (Deng, 1995:51-52). Conquest of Sudan cost many lives on the side of the East Africans, but Anglo control eventually relieved the suffering of the post-Mahdist victory. British control sought to halt the Arab influence introduced by the Ottomans in 1815 C.E. (Breidlid, 2010) from further expansion by using local leaders, while increasing missionary work. The north and south were considered by the British too different to comprise a single nation and a separatist policy defined the administration of the region (Deng, 1995:62-67). Each part of contemporary Sudan and South Sudan’s identity grew out of contrast to the other. Religion was one aspect, further defined by the proliferation of the European missionaries.
MODERN SOUTH SUDAN

The British controlled the area of Sudan and South Sudan from 1899 to 1956, differentiating the two sides throughout their rule (Sarwar, 2012). The north and south were split in 1924, due to vast differences in culture, and then later reunited in 1946. Arabic is widely spoken throughout Sudan and South Sudan, stemming from the influence of the Arabs in the north. The British promoted English and Christianity in the south, thus dividing the two halves into their understood modern dichotomy. A Muslim versus Christian discourse would gloss contemporary Sudan and South Sudan’s history and negate their pluri-ethnic population. British colonial legacy, marginalization and independence led to the modern South Sudan in question.

After Sudan achieved independence from Britain in 1956\(^{12}\), the southern portion of Sudan took a position in the shadows of the new government that remained in the north (Sarwar, 2012). Southern Sudan’s political, racial and economic marginalization culminated in a seventeen year civil war, ending in 1972 with the Addis Ababa Agreement (Sarwar, 2012). South Sudan was granted autonomy but not sovereignty, and peace lasted only ten years. In 1983, uneven distribution from resource profits coupled with forced religious conversion by the Arab government of Sudan led to another armed conflict between the north and south. Leaders in the south created the SPLM (Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement) to achieve increased representation in a united Sudan. The war conducted by the SPLA (Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army) and led by the rebel figure Dr. John Garang\(^ {13}\), an Iowa State graduate\(^ {14}\), ended in 2005.

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\(^{12}\) Egypt gave up claims of sovereignty over Sudan and the British withdrew shortly thereafter. British control relied upon Egypt rule of Sudan (Sarwar, 2012).

\(^{13}\) Dr. Garang was a member of the Bor line of Dinka. The Dinka were and are the majority ethnicity of the SPLM/A.

\(^{14}\) John Garang earned a bachelor’s of science from Grinnel College, in Iowa in 1969. Rather than accepting a fellowship from the University of California, Berkeley, Garang became a research fellow at Dar es Salaam University in Tanzania. Later, as part of the Sudanese army, he went on to train at infantry school in Fort Benning, Georgia, and then attended Iowa State University receiving an MA in agricultural economics and then his doctorate in economics in 1981 (Flint, 2005).
officially with the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) and was followed with a six year
interim period (Sarwar, 2012; Gasim, 2011) culminating in a referendum that would decide the
outcome of the south. In 2011, South Sudan became its own country with a 98 per cent vote in
favor of independence.

Recognized as the father of the modern state of South Sudan, Dr. John Garang became
synonymous with the struggle he would never live to see completed. He was killed in a
helicopter crash on July 30, 2005, after a meeting in Uganda (Womakuyu, 2011). Dr. Garang
was a member of the Anya Anya, a military division of southerners who split from the then
British controlled government in 1955 and began fighting as guerillas. During periods of peace,
Dr. Garang earned a scholarship to study economics at Grinnell College in Iowa, and later earned
a PhD in agricultural economics from Iowa State University (Womakuyu, 2011). In 1983, he
went to quell a rebellion in Bor, South Sudan but instead joined them and began the SPLM. Dr.
John Garang, lauded as the face of the opposition to the north and as one of the creators of the
modern Southern Sudanese state, fought for unification and increased participation of South
Sudan but not for independence. His mistrust of the northern Arab government influenced his
decision to fight for a united Sudan, where the north would be held accountable by increased
southern representation (Womakuyu, 2011). Garang believed that Khartoum would play a part
in resource management of land-locked South Sudan and felt it best to keep his adversary close,
however the referendum in 2011 made South Sudan independent. Dr. Garang’s death rippled
throughout region, and many believed the civil war would re-commence.

The NCP (National Congress Party) led by Omar Al-Bashir has been the leader of Sudan,
since 1989 (Gasim, 2011). South Sudan, however, has been able to self-determine their status
with international aid, although problematic with oil resources in the south and refineries in the
north. Both modern countries need each other to benefit from the extraction and refinement of oil. Salva Kiir\textsuperscript{15}, a former commander of the SPLA, is the current president of South Sudan and comes from the Dinka Rek tribe of Bar El-Ghazal a different branch of the Dinka (Sarwar, 2012), who now hold multiple seats in the government. The Rek hold power from their former comrades in the SPLA, specifically the Nuer. Riek Machar, another former commander in the SPLA and ethnic Nuer, split from Dr. Garang’s leadership in 1991 due to difference in objectives. Although he later returned to the SPLM, tension between the Nuer and Dinka remain\textsuperscript{16}.

Further complicating the ethnic relationships in South Sudan is the material from which the modern state can flourish. The resource curse affecting Africa not only provides a space for outside investors but stagnates long-term plans in favor of short-term meteoric gains. Diamond and Mosbacher see oil in particular as

Booms [that] poison the prospects for development in poor countries. The surge of easy money fuels inflation, fans waste and massive corruption, distorts exchange rates, undermines the competitiveness of traditional export sectors such as agriculture, and preempts the growth of manufacturing. Moreover, as oil prices fluctuate on world markets, oil-rich countries can suddenly become cash poor when booms go bust (since poor countries rarely save any of these revenue windfalls). Oil booms are also bad news for democracy and the rule of law. In fact, not a single developing country that derives the bulk of its export earnings from oil and gas is a democracy. Rather than fostering an entrepreneurial middle class, oil wealth, when controlled by the government, stifles the emergence of an

\textsuperscript{15} Salva Kiir succeeded Dr. Garang, winning the election before independence in 2011. Kiir was a commander in the SPLA from the Bar El-Ghazal Dinka and was considered a purely military minded individual. After the death of Dr. Garang, Kiir assumed the role of SPLM/A leader, and his election as South Sudan’s first president was thought of a rigged by international observers (BBC News Africa, 2013). The Nuer community has remained on the periphery of the direct translation of SPLM/A leadership into the new government.

\textsuperscript{16} As of recently, Riek Machar was accused of inciting a coup against Kiir’s government. Machar, along with the rest of the cabinet, were removed from office prompting accusations of Kiir having dictatorship ambitions (Pearson, 2013).
independent business class and swells the power of the state vis-à-vis civil society (2013:87).

As the new state of South Sudan emerged, the country’s long term viability rested on development and extraction of its many natural resources. Focusing on extraction over the country’s ethnic divisions problematized an already incoherent picture of disunity amongst the land holding ethnic groups throughout South Sudan. Citing scholars from the 1950s, Ross (1999) noted that commodity exports prices were unstable, hurting the prospects of foreign investment, and if foreign investment found the resource rich space profitable, then the chances of re-investment into the country of export would be unlikely. Those profiting within South Sudan are not the local populous, but rather Ethiopians, Kenyans, Ugandans and the Chinese. A young Dinka Bor informant knew that despite the dangers of instability, the opportunity to invest in South Sudan is the now.

Remarks by Hillary Clinton in December of 2011 to the recently independent country of South Sudan, stressed proper management of their natural resources along with the building of institutions and a halt on corruption – all funded by South Sudan’s resource abundance. Though declarative and full of developmental rhetoric, Clinton’s words focused on the growth of the private sector with the aid from extra-governmental organizations, and although Clinton urged inclusion of all of South Sudan’s population, ethnic quarrels characterize the current state hurting the government’s capacity to reflect the promise of a progressive and modern institution. Furthermore, oil producing areas lie in control of multiple tribes. Comparing the map of oil production in the appendix with the distribution of ethnic groups shows a conflict of profitable areas. Much in the manner of Dr. Garang’s hope for a unified Sudan, the south cannot exist fragmented if it wants to generate capital from its resources, but the curse of abundance within a corrupt context and compounded by ethnic animosity is an issue not easily solved.
CONCLUSION: SOUTH SUDANESE HISTORY AND DISPLACEMENT

Proximity to the border during the civil war influenced refugee destinations. My informants either came to the U.S. via Khartoum, Egypt, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Kenya, or directly from South Sudan with American sponsors and with some outlying examples via Japan and Cuba. The diaspora is divided by migration experience, and is as much a part of their narrative and identity as tribe and clan affiliation. The manner of their arrival and the unrest that preceded it forced people in a variety of directions with my research population ending up in central Iowa.

Many of the SPLM/A supporters came to the U.S. by way of Ethiopia. The western boundary of Ethiopia with South Sudan hosted multiple refugee camps: Tonga, Lokchop, Okugo and Bambasi were those closest to the border (2014 UNHCR country operations profile – Ethiopia, 2014). Some of my informants chose to leave their homes for the possibility to train with the SPLA in Ethiopia before the fall of the communist regime that led to the cessation of SPLM/A influence (Valentino, 2004). My informants who were in Ethiopia then had to flee back to South Sudan before leaving the country again, many of who went to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya or to Uganda. The UNHCR maintains quotas for each of the countries they operate in, and seek to resettle people based on possibility of integration. Australia and Western Europe were possible destinations through the UNHCR.

Resettlement opportunities being few, sponsorship and the growing community in the U.S. assisted emigration to the U.S. The families of my informants have concentrations of

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17 Many of the internally displaced went to Khartoum before entering refugee status in Arab countries like Egypt and Lebanon. The communities in those countries and the ability to speak Arabic eased transition before resettlement in the U.S. I heard that some even came through Libya but I did not meet anyone who had done so.

18 According to two gentlemen on May 24th, 2013, Dr. Garang cultivated relationships with multiple powers, one of which was the Soviets. I met with two individuals at the center who quickly struck up a conversation with me because they assumed I was Cuban. They said that those that passed through Cuba were military recruits. They also knew a bit of Spanish and proper pronunciation.
relational groups in central Iowa. Two of my college age informants, one Dinka and one Nuer, arrived in the U.S. with their immediate families intact, and now reside amongst extended kin groups (From field notes on May 18th and 24th, 2013). In both of these families, ties to the SPLM/A remain with family members still living in South Sudan. For another of my Dinka informants, the chance to join the army slipped past him due to his age. He could have remained with the SPLA as a reserve but soon lost his opportunity after fleeing further away from the civil war. All three are now in central Iowa and are recent graduates of universities; they represent the educated generation and any others older than this group who I met with degrees were educated outside the U.S.

One of the senior members of the USASSCA leadership received his doctoral degree from a university in Japan and spent the latter portion of the civil war studying and working outside of South Sudan. He arrived in Iowa from Japan to work in one of the genetics lab in Ames, and comes from the Bari tribe in Equatoria (From interview on October 24th, 2013). During the USASSCA meeting on the 25th of October, 2013, two older gentlemen from Blue Nile and Nuba had educations from Khartoum and were now in masters’ programs in Des Moines. They had arrived with refugee status while the Equatorian came for work, and are all part of the push for unity regardless of ethnicity.

Age plays a crucial part of the diaspora’s dynamic in central Iowa. Whether they arrived as families or individually, the chance to begin school young enough to later pursue higher education with similarly aged cohorts produced an educated generation. They view South Sudan with optimism, and feel that they will be the ones to return and influence the new country. Their parents and elders work to maintain the families they came with, and the two generations support the family that could not make the journey to the U.S. The diaspora, divided by education, age
and ethnicity, form the community I engaged with. Imagining a nation in central Iowa required the refugee community to be unaware of one another, not their presence, but anything about the other ethnic groups. The U.S. and refugee camps had been the places where the different ethnic groups first interacted.

The population I used for the purposes of my study found their past internalized to varying degrees. Whether the informant knew their history well or not, the effects of identity formation through the colonial period and ending with the emergence of the state polarized the diaspora’s attitudes initially in accepting people from opposing groups. The beginning of the community center, which became the focus of my participant observations, was filled with mistrust between groups who had not experienced prolong contact either as neighbors in South Sudan or in the refugee camps. Furthermore, the central Iowan diaspora community realized that communal spaces dissolved tensions between and within ethnic groups. Those stresses motivated the transformation from a shaded meeting place under a tree to a community center that welcomes any visitors.
CHAPTER 3

NATIONALISM IN DIASPORA

In this chapter, I show how South Sudanese refugees in central Iowa are re-interpreting ethnic relationships despite a history of marginalization from Sudan and acute tribalism within the new country of South Sudan. I argue that the diaspora uses the community center in central Iowa to construct the imagined ideal of peaceful inter-ethnic relationships by separating spaces of communication, while recreating familial interactions in communal areas. In turn, these supportive relationships figured into plans generated from a number of the community leaders residing in central Iowa to connect all the South Sudanese communities throughout the U.S. under the umbrella of their forced exodus. The diaspora articulates different futures in the U.S. and for their home in Africa from their community focal points throughout the Mid-West. As peoples in flux, the community in Iowa looks inward for familiarity. The South Sudanese ethnic groups, concentrated in locations throughout central Iowa, see the future here through their new social dynamic.

The South Sudanese community in central Iowa congregates in spaces of their own creation and interpretation. For the most part, the community organizes its gathering at churches and at the South Sudanese center in north Des Moines. Iowa is 92.8% white with 4.2% foreign born (Quick Facts Census, 2012). Central Iowa is not synonymous with diversity, and the relocation centers – as in the UNHCR – create pockets of ethnic groups throughout the city\(^9\).

\(^9\) Loescher (2001) is critical of the UNHCR since the organization depends on governments and host countries for funding and intervention parameters. Euro-American states supply the majority of the UNHCR’s budget, and many countries such as Russia, India, including “developing” countries limit interference using sovereignty as the boundary. Furthermore, budgets for European refugees tend to be higher than for African.
The UNHCR is aware of the necessity to build concentrations of their clients. Grouping communities’ together aids social networks, and in my study the South Sudanese form connections with their ethnic groups throughout the world. As a people in diaspora, the South Sudanese maintain strong ties amongst their people, which raise awareness of community focal points in all towns and cities with a presence of South Sudanese refugees. The South Sudanese diaspora know the points of interaction in central Iowa even when living beyond the limits of Des Moines. For this study, I chose to focus on South Sudanese in Des Moines and Ames. My main point of entry for studying this diaspora was the community center in north Des Moines and the South Sudanese Student Association at Iowa State University in Ames. These points of entry functioned as effective sites for interacting with a broad range of South Sudanese because they are the main points of contact for the South Sudanese diaspora in central Iowa. Therefore, I was able to use them as effective means for establishing a representative sample of research participants in the Mid-West.

The community in central Iowa comprises the many ethnic groups represented in the major regions of South Sudan: Bar El-Ghazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria, including the other

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Financial vulnerability and reliance on powerful donor governments as well as host states also impede the UNHCR in carrying out its principal function of providing protection to refugees. Response to refugee emergencies is absorbing most of the limited funds available for international assistance. To meet its huge financial and relief responsibility, the UNHCR sometimes feels compelled to remain silent about human rights protection problems. In recent years, in order to demonstrate its ‘relevance’ to states the UNHCR has regularly co-operated in the containment of the internally displaced within countries of origin and in the enforcement of repatriation programmes that are often less than voluntary. Such instances of ‘humanitarian pragmatism’ as well as the rapid expansion of the UNHCR’s mandate and programmes have caused widespread concern. Many observers fear that in becoming a general humanitarian agency and a more overt instrument of state policy, the UNHCR has diluted its primary function of protecting refugees (Loescher, 2001:4).

Loescher concludes that post-Cold War perception of refugees conflicts the prior and more tolerant period, where refugees were welcomed to further political connections.
marginalized peoples of Sudan who are of African descent such as the people of Nuba, Darfur and Blue Nile.20

Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Darfur21 surround the North’s center and share the plight of the south but whose compromised voice – due to their placement in the socio-religious hierarchy with Arab atop of Muslim, followed by the purely African – contribute to the blurry geographical boundary between Sudan and South Sudan. Some of the border areas are currently contested, and control of the whole of Sudan is illusory. Members of the western and southern shaded regions on the following map made up the majority of Sudan’s army during the civil wars ending in 200522. They fought against the south, convinced that the region should unite under the umbrella of Islam. The following case study shows the South Sudanese diaspora’s American context in relation to their experience as forced migrants.

Thomas’s (2012) study on the refugee resettlement process in the Congo touches on inter-ethnic tensions and resulting insecurities. The refugee’s ethnic group, the Banyamulenge, had to prove descendent from a population living in the Congo in 1885; otherwise their status with the Congo and stigma from other ethnic groups within their country was that of an outsider. For the South Sudanese diaspora, autochthony is not an issue for the entire country but ethnic animosity persists today stemming from organization and goals of the rebel army versus Khartoum, and from problems developed while in refugee camps, as in the case of the Kuku and Madi and their competition over resources in Uganda23 (Moro, 2004), resulting in separate

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20 The Sudanese-African/Sudanese-Arab distinction (El-Tigani, 2001; Deng, 1995; Idris, 2005) recognized the inter-marriage areas of the southern, western and eastern reaches of modern Sudan who are Muslim, but not Arab. Ruling groups within Darfur, Blue Nile and Nuba may claim descent from prominent Arab tribes but those claims are difficult to substantiate.
21 See appendix for map of Sudan and South Sudan
22 See appendix for map on ethnic concentrations
23 Both of these groups come from the southern Equatorian states of South Sudan, same as the Azande from the writings of Evans-Pritchard (1976).
refugee camps for the two ethnic groups. Regardless of inter-ethnic turmoil for the South Sudanese, the refugees suffer from “their extreme vulnerability, [and] the complexity of their relationship with the host state” (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007). In 1991, those ethnic groups who had found refuge in Ethiopia had to return because of the coup in Ethiopia that same year (Valentino, 2004). Shandy’s (2005) comparison of two “Lost Boys” documentaries, featuring Nuer and Dinka, reinforces the insecurity in refugee camps, and later, racial hurdles with African-Americans. Deal’s (2010) article describes ethnic interaction through strong social ties and community responsibility, called Cieng. Grievances arising in South Sudan come to haunt the diaspora as told by my informants. One of my limitations sprung from this form of accountability, where the fear of reprisal made disclosure uncomfortable from a number of those I encountered. In diaspora, the South Sudanese need not exist on the margins and insecure as in east Africa, however their social dynamic arrived to the U.S., the same as they did, with new racial and social obstacles.

To parallel my study population I turned to cases of South Sudanese living in other locales as refugees. Idris’ work on the perspective of displaced groups opposed to Sudan in Cairo used Egypt as a base of operations (2005:58). A common Southern Sudanese experience built a bond amongst these migrants in relation to the identity creation politicized by the Sudanese government and British colonial projects. "Cairo has become a kind of melting pot for Southern Sudanese ethnic groups, and as a leveler of differences and conflicts, which have been present before displacement and exile" (Idris, 2005:71). The shared experience that brought them outside of their homes to Egypt is the same that formed the context in Des Moines, Iowa. The difference in my work from when the book was written is that they now have an internationally recognized state to belong to and a focal point for nationalism.
Copeland-Carson (2004) looks at “African diaspora” as an imagined and shared identity that unifies people of a similar experience outside of their original cultural context. The perception of Africans having one homogenous experience is a de-complicating generalization. The African community in Minneapolis appears similar and is thus represented as behaviorally alike. Similarly, the U.S. census of 1980, 1990 and 2000 ignored the individual contexts of the various African ethnic groups, creating a pan-African illusion. Upon closer analysis, each ethnic group fared differently on frequency of placement in higher education – Kenyans and Tanzanians achieving higher levels of education than Sudanese, Ethiopians and Somalis.

The generalization of African identity is unknown to the South Sudanese diaspora, though their opinions of Americans reinforce an outsider perceived homogenous African experience. To deconstruct the diaspora, I first turned to a Sudanese student from Khartoum. Dialoguing with him would not only give me the opportunity to pose my questions to a close, but outside perspective, it would also counter balance the forced migrant from an affluent foreign student. The result would add complexity to the question of what is means to be a forced migrant in central Iowa, through the lens of East African alterity.

**IMAGINING FUTURES IN CENTRAL IOWA**

On October 28, 2013 I began my new study drawing on a contact that I had made before I knew any other student at ISU. Lionel is a North Sudanese undergraduate student whom I first knew of from a facebook page created for all new students of the ISU class of 2015 (The semester of our meeting was the Fall of 2011). A few earnest voices, desiring to play soccer/football, called out for a time and place to play pick-up games. I went out to meet this possible gathering a week or so before classes began at the dormitories called the Towers, south
of campus. Only two others were present that day, Lionel and another incoming freshman of Latino descent. We conversed and kicked the ball around before giving up on the venture and deciding to grab a bite to eat. It so happened that on this day was one of the most important and politically charged derby matches of the football world, the super-clasico between Barcelona and Real Madrid. We ate first at the memorial union on campus and returned to the dorm to watch the game. Later, we exchanged numbers and our initial meeting had ended.

We meet to discuss my project and the conversation first revolves around football. We talk about two teams, Al-Mareikh and Al-Hilal, who were in the CAF (Confederation of African Football) version of the UEFA Champions league. Both teams are from Khartoum and are considered fierce rivals. South Sudan’s recent secession meant a new national team in the region. Sudan’s league uses South Sudanese nationals, but South Sudan had yet to build large scale support and infrastructure for the team. Despite the shortcomings in budget, South Sudan organized a match against a Kenyan club soon after independence (Rice, 2011), but with many of their players residing in Khartoum restricted from attending. One South Sudanese international playing in India, provided his own means of transportation because of his enthusiasm in representing his side. Spectators exuded pride in spite of the three to one loss, and the match expressed a visible banner of the South Sudanese nation.

Our discussion turns to culture in general and I ask Lionel about Sharia and his contextual interpretation of Islamic custom. Diffused knowledge often mixes with local belief, and my initial research into the history of the Nile compelled me to ask for his paradigm. He did not question his upbringing although he disagrees with some aspects such as polygamy, which has become increasingly uncommon in Sudan. In the late 80s (House, 1988), polygamy in the whole of Sudan was supported by Sharia, where in general marriage came later for men than for
women with ten years as the average difference in age. Women were predominantly responsible for domestic duties and child rearing; their capacity to do so was the yard stick for judging the individual. The inability to reproduce quickly could be cause to acquire another wife. Lionel paints a different picture for his family, his parents work in the formal sector as architects. One distinction within the social structure of Sudan is that of urban and rural families, the former’s women having higher rates of secondary education (House, 1988).

His response prompted me to ask about the position of women in his immediate Sudanese context. He replies that women have a lower status and fewer opportunities than the men. His mother is the only woman in his neighborhood who works (both parents are architects) and he mentioned that while the new generation of women attend universities, the older generation tend to not hold employment. Sudan’s act of installing Islam into the south meant that gender roles would clash, because my South Sudanese informants considered their gender relationships to be more egalitarian than in the north. Another potent clash with the South Sudanese was Osama Bin Laden’s residence in Sudan. Lionel informed me that Bin Laden lived in Khartoum integrated with the local population. Bin Laden lived in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, the up-scale Al-Riyadh neighborhood of the capitol, close to the city center (Reeve, 2002). His presence was liked, according to Lionel, and did not cause concern by his stance and actions in world events. My affluent Sudanese informant foreshadowed the direction of my study by juxtaposing his context with South Sudan. The South Sudanese presence in central Iowa paralleled the illustrated image of the region given to me by Lionel. Sudan was a space open to Islamic militant ideology and the diaspora rid themselves of this hard-lined discourse by welcoming every kind of person to their community points in central Iowa.

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24 Bin Laden invested heavily in Arabic gum— an all-purpose substance used in commercial products and medications – during his time in Khartoum. From Sudan, Bin Laden invested heavily while courting allies in his holy-war to remove Americans from Saudi Arabia following the end of the Gulf War in 1991 (Reeve, 2002).
Later that day, I drove down to Des Moines to meet up with the then president of the ISU Sudanese Student Association. We met in north Des Moines, and she showed me the community center. She explained to me that the center is usually always open, though the larger gatherings occur around seven in the evening on Saturday and Sunday. During this visit, I entered and met a few people and she showed me the Ethiopian food store next door. I then followed her to a Christian church in the Drake neighborhood where a Sudanese congregation meets to hold services in Arabic. A pluralistic linguistic model emphasizing outside influence and code switching best describes the Arabic of the South Sudanese (Jaffe, 1999). Contrasting the binary model equating to a monolingual context and its associated nation, the South Sudanese pluri-ethnic diaspora reflects the former. How the diaspora negotiates language will determine the extent of Americanization, evidenced by the control of language by the women who arrived at a younger age than the majority of the men. The central Iowan community felt themselves judged by the American reactions to the sound of their voices, and in one particular case an informant believed himself denied for a job based on a phone interview and his ability with English. Given the current example of the use of Arabic as a lingua franca, the South Sudanese in central Iowa remain connected to their subjugation by Khartoum. The new state lists English as its official language (CIA World Fact Book, 2014) and the community in Des Moines, as of yet, rely on both English and Arabic for communication. The diaspora utilizes their capacity to communicate verbally to bridge divides and include everyone. At the center, I was able to

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25 At the church I met with an American pastor who allowed me to sit in on the service. The congregation was completely Southern Sudanese and the hymns, messages and part of the formal service were said in Arabic. The pastor delivered his own sermon, in English, about Jonah and the whale. Elders spoke in turns, using passages (it seems) with elaboration of a point or with a prayer. I was brought up, obviously looking like an outsider, and asked to sit in the front row with the elders. The pastor told the congregation why I was there and what I studied. I was received in the warmest manner. The openness of the service was welcoming and both elders and congregation alike grabbed the microphone for singing and delivering messages. Many introduced themselves and seemed genuinely happy about my presence. Without delving further into the context of the church, I can only speculate at the hierarchy of the congregation and whether the South Sudanese joined out of convenience or other motives.
engage in conversation and play board games without ever fully removed from the exchange of
information, because people would switch between languages and would eventually utter phrases
in English. The history of the region marks the forced migrants with the prevalence of Arabic,
but also influenced South Sudan enough through British colonialism to facilitate conversation.

My initial impression of the community in central Iowa and their willingness to accept
my presence prompted me to hold a round-table discussion with the students in Ames. On
November 8, 2012, I conducted a group interview with the South Sudanese Student Association.
As I was made to understand, the student organization acts as a meeting point for the South
Sudanese student community and any affiliates, but has yet to progress much further. The
leadership for the group has been unstable but they hope to participate in the various “cultural”
events on campus. Participation with the club had dwindled when the funding for pizza dried up,
and there seemed to be a divide between the male and female South Sudanese students.26

The president for that semester, a Dinka woman who had grown up in Khartoum whose
family was part of the internally displaced, said I could gather them all if I brought pizza. I spent
about twenty dollars on pizza and drinks, and ten South Sudanese students showed up: seven
men and three women.27 The format for the interview was informal, with only general questions,
and I let the interview dictate itself.

The general sentiment from the interviewees was that the issues concerning the friction
between the people of Sudan versus the South Sudanese had more to do with the government
than any other reason. Freedom of religion was a topic but did not affect all groups, though it

26 Many of my student male informants acknowledged a negative stigma in America of sexual and extroverted
South Sudanese women. Their socializing, drinking and dating – as any other university student – has a negative
connotation with the men, many of whom are loosely related to one another.

27 Men spoke with more conviction about the situation in South Sudan, while the women admitted to be removed
from the politics and tensions characterizing the modern state. Their responses were minimal, though their silence
showed a generational gap that they explained through a lack of experience with forced separation from their
families.
was known to be one of the tools for southern subjugation. Depending who one asked, the conflict with Sudan was either purely religious or solely about allocation of resources, but the dichotomy between the north and south was strong, but not without the capacity to further define geographical distinctiveness. An important distinction articulated by the group was that of the south thought of in relation to a north. To call Sudan, North Sudan was to remove east and west out of the discourse, the regions of Darfur, Nuba and Blue Nile. Those areas that fought against Sudan fought for various degrees of freedom. Darfur in the west was late in the power struggle, but it was a war of rights not religion, since they were Muslims.

The discussion revealed the diversity of perspectives on the civil war among the Southern Sudanese diaspora. One described the reasons for the north/south dichotomy as an “identity crisis” due to some in the north making claims of being Arab28. Hierarchically, Arabs sit atop, with followers of Islam below and indigenous Africans occupying the lowest rung. Black skin color has been associated with slavery since the time of raiding by Egyptians and Ottomans. In general, the south had fewer institutions, religious and otherwise. In the U.S., the slate is clear for active involvement in all aspects of civil life, which diverges from the discourse of religious determinism, one of the mechanisms for Sudan’s control over South Sudan.

DISSOLVING, REPRODUCING BORDERS/BARRIERS

To push my research forward, I needed to engage with the space most representative of the central Iowan community. Since the identities created in East Africa grew from a supposed

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28 An important distinction currently manifested as an identity crisis within both Sudans is that of the Sudanese-Arab and the Sudanese-African (El-Tigani, 2001; Deng, 1995). Arab groups have come into territories that they had not previously occupied by trade and conquest, and mixed with the existing inhabitants, whose association with Arab culture was strengthened by the implementation of Islam (Deng, 1995). Identity became complicated when appearance and features of the African tribes could not be accepted as an indicator of African-ness (Deng, 1995:3). The regions long history with slave raiding meant that assuming a black African identity was to show relation with a race of slaves.
religious and then colonial dichotomy (Sarwar, 2012), the diaspora works to change the ethnic dynamic with a general welcoming attitude when their community gathers. However, ethnic relationships are not the only obstacles for the South Sudanese; the perception of African-Americans and other Africans depends on the history with those people and first impressions in the U.S. A study looking at African immigrants in Catalan middle schools deconstructs the “rhetoric of exclusion” to a constituent of violence (Salame, 2004). Because space is demarcated through violent intent, both verbal and physical, the immigrant students’ space becomes constrained. The South Sudanese refugees experienced inclusion between the various tribes but in diaspora felt exclusion from the rest of central Iowa. For this reason, the constructing of a space to cultivate relationships introduced a unifying element of communal zone, even though nationalism is decentralized through the diaspora. The space to recreate familiar interactions serves as a barrier from the outside while reproducing the various ethnic dynamics within into a new South Sudanese milieu.

Starting on November 10, 2012, I began spending my Saturday evenings at the community center in Des Moines. My first solo arrival on this evening felt imposing mostly because of my lack of fieldwork experience, but soon my fear dissipated after realizing that my preliminary contacts frequented the center every weekend. I was given another tour of the center and I was introduced to many people including other Iowa State students. I saw many other familiar faces mostly and elders I had previously met. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the community had been conditioned to welcome reporters and journalist interested in topics made popular by the media, such as the “lost boys,” but my continuous contact time and differing

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29 “Lost Boys” were any male children separated from their parents over the course of the ongoing wars (Gettlemen, 2012). First used to refer to a group of fleeing children in the 1990s, the term was appropriated from the story of Peter Pan. It appeared to me that anybody could claim “lost boy” status, and the popularity of the label in western media made the status relevant by its use of popular fictional imagery to a wider audience.
interests eventually led to a rapport with the South Sudanese at the community center that revealed fears of reprisal. The center became the focus of my observation, and I was able to participate in games and conversations.

An interview with a Catholic Deacon community leader on January 29, 2013, from the Shilluk30 tribe of Upper Nile, introduced me to the history of the community center before moving to its present location. The Deacon in 2000 co-founded the center. A few South Sudanese, including some “lost boys,” young men of any tribe who were separated from their families at any point during the civil war of the SPLM, began to meet under a tree to play dominoes, but weather was a detriment. They later rented an apartment in 2001 under the Deacon’s name. The results of interaction with one another were the dissolution of ethnic barriers. “Lost boys” helped bring other South Sudanese ethnic groups together because some were perceived as Arabs but in reality were of African descent whose cultures had been converted to Islam at different points throughout the region’s history. The South Sudanese moved to another site until 2003, before finally moving to their present location. After the center’s location seemed permanent, the Deacon stated that the visiting South Sudanese used the space for familiarity and fellowship. The interconnected South Sudanese in the Mid-West and the U.S. learned of the center’s location and now different groups come to the center from Des Moines and also from surrounding areas when visiting central Iowa.

The center sits under a row of dilapidated apartments and attached to the aforementioned Ethiopian food store. Entering the center, to the left sits the main and largest room with satellite television and Arab language programming. Continuing through the foyer is the game room

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30 The Shilluk are the third largest ethnic population of South Sudan behind the Dinka and Nuer. They are also Niolotes and fought alongside the SPLM/A (Welsh, 2011).
where people play dominoes and a board game called Ludo\textsuperscript{31} of Indian origin. Adjacent to the foyer and game room is a hallway leading to three other rooms: one meant for political discussions, another for a particular tribe that chooses to isolate their group and at the end of the hallway is a barber catering to the South Sudanese. The barber cuts hair in familiar styles and receives business from the community, including women despite the male-centric space of the center. Upkeep of the center is controlled by unofficial staff who charge people a monthly fee of either ten or twenty dollars based on whether they have full-time employment or not. The grocery store next door is also charged around twenty to thirty percent of the center’s rent, because business is generated by the continuous presence of the East Africans, thus swelling the grocery store’s clientele base.

Ethiopians and Eritreans also go to the center to watch the satellite television that broadcast channels in Amaric, one of the widely known languages in Ethiopia and related to the language of Eritrea. They are not charged the fee that the South Sudanese pay simply out of good will and generosity, a similar reason that I was not billed for my time there even though I asked to pay the student rate. The ethnic group that separate themselves in the back room is something I did not see first-hand. When I asked about this other tribe the response I received was vague, and since I never saw anybody going in or out of that room, I tended to forget about that particular corner of the community center. Access to this isolated group could have changed my perception of the community, especially if the reasons for isolation bled into other aspects of long standing ethnic divisions. What was clear was that South Sudanese appeared tolerant of many different peoples, a testament to efforts of inclusion regardless of ethnicity and a result of influences from the context in which they are immersed in the US.

\textsuperscript{31} Derived from the Indian game Pachisi, the game consists of four colored pieces that must travel along a path to reach a center square. Dice move the pieces, which may be removed from the board if landed upon by another players piece (Merriam-Webster, 2014)
On January 5, 2013, a Dinka informant born in Khartoum but residing in the U.S. for many years, said that the younger generation looks to African-American culture as the one to emulate. Styles of dress, music and language are the parts of the assumed identity. The “other” becomes the skin color that is starkly different from the black African one and is the point of opposition in identity construction. Morris (2003) attributes the African “pan-ethnic identity” to one that was imposed by European and American slavers, which dehumanized the captured and justified the harsh treatment they enacted. While this African-American identity does not saturate the community center, traces are apparent. “Thus, we claim that identity operates in such a way that it fosters individuals’ preferences to favor certain behaviors that, if violated, would cause psychological costs or frustration. Furthermore, it is responsible for social inclusion” (Costa-Font and Tremosa-Balcells, 2008:2465). The younger generation clearly shows signs of adopting western attributes, the women at ISU exhibiting the most Americanization. The three I first encountered at the South Sudanese Student Association, along with others I met throughout the university, all had perfect English. It had been easier for a male to become separated from his social networks, and end up somewhere in Euro-America as a refugee; the popularization of the “lost boys” hinted at a strictly male migrant. The truth in the label is the separation of males from their families.

The people visiting the center live in a pluralistic community that exists in contrast to the central Iowan homogenous context and against any South Sudanese notion of a nation-state, though none is promoted by the country. South Sudanese and their affiliates represent distinct ethnicities without the pressure to conform to any national idea, and in doing so, interpret a space devoid of prejudice based on race, even though older hostilities exist but are rooted in history.

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32 At the center, the South Sudanese are very welcoming of other ethnicities, the Eritrean and Ethiopians visiting without any problems. On two occasions, November 10, 2012 and June 1, 2013, I attempted to communicate with
not race. My Nuer chief informant, on July 5, 2013, drove home this version of a non-racist mentality when I joined him that night at a nightclub in Des Moines with heavy security – the concern seemed to be fire arms and every patron passed through a metal detector – and he eagerly told me, “don’t worry, no one is racist here!”

Nuer relational ties, as described by Evans-Pritchard (1940; 1951), depend on kin groups both for survival and community solidarity. Evans-Pritchard’s observations from the 1930s in Anglo controlled Sudan, presented the Nuer in relation to intra-ethnic sub-groups and the Dinka. Gender dynamics, cattle-raiding and warfare can equate to mistrust between ethnic groups exercising cohesion based upon a circular continuity, what is received must be returned. Within the central Iowan community, this relational fragility between ethnic groups with long histories of conflict addresses the compartmental nature of isolation through communal spaces with obvious interpretations – spaces of conversation and emotional expression, if only within the context of a board game or while watching television. I found the parallel with Evans-Pritchard’s studies relevant because the Nuer/Dinka relationship remains contentious in East Africa, and the historical mistrust in central Iowa is aggravated or ameliorated based on how they conduct their interaction.

What the community center symbolizes for the diaspora is a space of their own creation with an ethnic dynamic that attempts to encapsulate East Africa’s history and the South Sudanese in relation to a challenging past complicated by competing ethnic groups looking to occupy prominent positions within the South Sudanese government. Within the center, the tensions of the same Eritrean individual to no avail and I was not able to find help in corresponding with him. Many of those I met at the center claimed to speak Amaric and Swahili from their time in the refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya respectively. The lack of communication seemed unnoticed, the Eritreans watched television unmolested. Sudanese-Africans from the outlying regions in Sudan have no problems mixing with the South Sudanese; one in particular operates a clothing operation in the foyer. He sells clothes that appeal to the center visitors, who enjoy dressing in formal attire.
the civil war and refugee camps, and the present political climate work in tandem to alleviate the pressures of displacement. Lustig (1997) states that lacking intercultural education builds friction between different ethnic groups in a closed setting, such as in education. She goes on to say that language barriers and ethnic specific events form chasms amongst the various groups. The community center, however, uses Arabic and English as the lingua francas while generally avoiding the ethnic languages. The different ethnic groups also advertise in the community center for their specific events and festivals. The new dynamic shields itself from the outside – the greater Iowa culture they see as homogenous. Through that rationale, the diaspora positions the community center in opposition to the rest of Des Moines and central Iowa, in so far as their ability to fuse with their new context is concerned.

Gender dynamics in the community center and with the students at Iowa State use avoidance that keep men and women separate. The level of which depends on whether the individuals are closely related, and can include eating patterns and the avoidance of certain members of the extended families (Evans-Pritchard, 1951). Within Evans-Prichard’s study (1951), courtship in Nuer society separated members of the two families involved through interaction taboos, such as the segregation of the suitor and the woman’s family during times of eating. The funeral I attended on February 16th, 2013 demonstrated the domain of women in creating the food for the event. During the event, I asked if I could learn the cuisine and was informed that cooking was the work of women, though connecting with one of the older ladies was a possibility. The student community, however, was less restricted in food preparation duties since making food became a necessity for all. Furthermore, the women were not as learned in the creation of recipes brought over from South Sudan.
The avoidance at the center was more extreme, the space being male-centric. I found the exclusion of women to be unforced and mutual between the two genders. When two women who appeared to be prostitutes came through the community center doors on March 6th, 2013, the treatment by the men was sarcastic and playful, though all comportment was meant to get them out of the center. The two seemed drugged in some way and they requested help in obtaining travel to some undisclosed location, and when they refused to go, they were threatened with a call to the police. When ladies from their community stopped by for the barber or to buy groceries next door, everyone occupied their own space without issues. Minneapolis African immigrants reinterpret communal habits of reciprocal aid in the Mid-West (Franklin, 2006). Help between social circles separated by sex within Minneapolis, use tax exemptions to increase the amount of aid circulating back to Africa but also within the U.S. As such, the women in the communities have the ability to funnel help directly to issues they feel important. In the context of central Iowa, separation of the sexes grants an opportunity to address an immigrant interpretation of America based on renegotiated gender divides. Avoidance as a part of the social dynamic would facilitate seamless gender evading at the center and elsewhere. The younger generation maintains a gender based distance when consuming alcohol, a possible throw-back to food avoidance.

Gender dynamics for the central Iowan community paralleled communal relationships from the time before displacement. Some ethnic groups considered their behavior as moderate or extreme in comparison to other groups from South Sudan. The sub-group of a Dinka Bor informant finds their community dynamic egalitarian when compared to other Dinka (from interview on May 6th, 2013). He goes on to explain that his group’s attitude translates into how men treat women in daily life. One does not use harsh language towards women and even
arguing is a negative. This attitude may infer cordiality over outright egalitarian behavior. Gender double standards mean that the men drink openly, although not in the center, but the women are afraid to be seen by the guys because of the possible opinions generated and spread throughout the community by their male family members, though this is only the opinion of the men. Also, there is a disconnection to topics of sexuality and the knowledge of contraceptives from the college age Iowa State South Sudanese students (from a conversation on November 11th, 2012). These differing spaces of gender respect and double-standard have become problematized further in central Iowa by the separate waves of gender migration as refugees and even before as internally displaced. “Lost Boys” were separated males from homes and families during the escalation and chaos of the civil war ending in 2005. Those same males were often the first wave of immigrants to the U.S. because men were considered capable of treacherous journeys over women. The absence of potential partners frustrated the men who had arrived alone to the U.S.

According to my previously stated Dinka Bor informant, the years of 2007 and 2008 saw a sharp increase in marriages as more women arrived in central Iowa. Differing in American experience, older men who came after the influx of young men into central Iowa could not speak English well and turned to those who first arrived as translators between older men and younger wives, their age difference a product of separate migrations into the U.S. Initially, these older men looked to their community for help in maneuvering their new context, but eventually felt mistrust out of suspicions of adultery between the young men and their wives. Shame is the common element throughout the divides of male and female behavior that leads to the dissolution of communal ties. Adultery shames all the participants leading to anger from the
offended. In the early days of the community center, men came searching for revenge but those at the center were adamant about restricting drama from the communal space.

Avoidance norms determines the level of communication between the genders, and although my Dinka Bor informant felt his sub-group egalitarian, the genders did not seem totally equal. In the group interview on November 8th, 2012, I asked for a female perspective on the questions that sparked such lively debate amongst the males, but the female voice came via the males much to the laughter of the groups once I pointed out that they were not women. Through later discussions, sexuality was a topic somewhat taboo between the men and women, especially since the women in central Iowa arrived at a younger age and were therefore thoroughly Americanized, which changed their views of gender roles. As far as I could determine, the women college students\textsuperscript{33} went out as often as any average person experiencing university life. Running into them at bars in Ames when I was accompanied by my South Sudanese informants was an instantly awkward confrontation. Furthermore, since many of the South Sudanese students at Iowa State are related, the men feel that the women deserve space which keeps their lives compartmentalized. Shame in confronting similar behavior in one another divides what would be a cohesive college age community, and creates a new divide rooted in western acculturation, producing a fear in spreading knowledge to the extended families throughout central Iowa.

\textsuperscript{33} During the interview, we only spoke about the independence of South Sudan. I never thought to question the relationship they had with the men of similar age in the community.
DOMINOES AND POLITICS: ADDRESSING MISTRUST AT THE COMMUNITY CENTER

The community center attracts various ethnic groups throughout central Iowa, and the focal point within the center is the game room. On December 1, 2012 I joined in a dominoes game at the center, knowing well that this would break down any barriers the community may have with me. Dominoes are a significant part of the community center. It is a way to de-stress, and according to my informants, a remnant of the refugee camps, a way to let the hours slip away with sometimes little else to do. The rules are two paths emanating from the double six and play continues until everyone is stuck or one player has gone through all his pieces. The remaining dominoes are counted and scores are tallied. Four or five rounds are played and then the two to three of the highest scores are out, and new players come in. Banter revolves around who can remain in the longest, while telling your opponent that he is not good at the game. Games are quick and it’s obvious that players know the patterns by looking at the pieces on the table, many times attempting to guess the pieces one may have. Games are very animated, and it attracts a crowd to watch and laugh. Players put down each other to raucous fits of laughter.

During my first time at play, I lasted through one round without being eliminated. After my ousting, I struck up a conversation with a pharmacy student from University of Iowa doing rotation in Des Moines. We spoke of each other’s work and motivations. He believes that people should always remain in contact with their roots, and this is why he continues to come to the center despite his hectic schedule. He is the first to tell me about the context of Dominoes at the center. The game was introduced to the community during their time at various refugee camps. Later in my observations and conversations, others gave me more insight into how the game affects interaction of the various tribes. A similar case of Jewish communities living in Morocco details the theoretical “contraction”- that is, the simultaneous demographic decrease and
practice of self-seclusion in sociocultural enclaves where people identify with exterior poles of identification,” (Levy, 1999:632) for my purposes the U.S. and South Sudan, where dialogue bypasses old hostility in favor of amiable competition. In Levy’s study, the minority Jewish community appropriates the space for playing card games from the larger Muslim community, and is then able to dictate the terms of interaction imbuing a sense of control.

Refugee camp life did not offer many activities and the groups that kept the camps funded provided little for the inhabitants. One of my informants reminisces on his time in a refugee camp in Ethiopia as being without responsibility. No one knew where the food came from, yet they were all aware when the trucks carrying resources came. The trucks distributed food, and did not ask for work or any contribution to the camp in return, aside from the upkeep of their living quarters. Dominoes became one of the chief ways to pass the time. People would play for hours since they had little else to do. Although the camps had been designed as a space removed from violence, the civil war with the north was not and is not the only point of ethnic tension.

On January 9, 2013, one of my Nuer informants tells me a violent episode of tribal and clan hatred within the camps. The camps were divided based on tribal and clan affiliation, the organizers conscious of groups with animosity towards one another. Two hostile groups would not be placed next to each other, but that did not keep violence out of the camps. If a member of a tribe or clan hurt or shamed a member or another, then any member of the offending group could be targeted for reprisal, though vengeance typically required a raising of the ante. “The concept of the bodily ‘self’ and body of others was in the context merged with the group (section, clan, or tribe) identity so thoroughly that the individual self is subordinate to the group and could be sacrificed to satisfy a corporate need for revenge or penitence,” therefore attributing
the individual to the whole sometimes unbeknownst to someone (Deal, 2010:567). My Nuer informant experienced a raid on his section of the camp in Ethiopia, and he personally witnessed a man struck with a machete in retaliation for another’s crime. Neither the camp context nor the SPLM’s civil war, which displaced them into the camps, could unite them as neighbors, and as mentioned before, the camp context could breed new tensions where none had previously existed.

Mistrust, the community, and the possibility of shame within the community appeared early on in my fieldwork. The community center, as a place for fellowship and the negotiation of the central Iowa context, also acts as a funnel for economic woes. I personally witnessed a large sum loan transaction on March 16th, 2013. Three individuals placed forth enough cash for one other to buy a car from another South Sudanese (not present at the center, nor was I aware of his ethnic affiliation). The topic of money was not particularly sensitive, though the loaning of cash required a certain element of trust. One of the founding member of the center, the Deacon and a Shilluk along with one of my ISU informants a Dinka Bor, loaned money which they regulated through the mechanism of shame. The Dinka Bor lender gave me an explanation of his method on January 28th, 2013. First he begins with a small loan of twenty dollars which must be returned within a week; interest accumulates on a weekly or monthly basis depending on the size and verbal agreement of the loan. After the first small loan is repaid, the lender increases the amount possible, going as far as a thousand with a month repayment verbal contract. Punishment for failing to repay the loan is shame within the community. The individual will find trust difficult to re-cultivate amongst his peers, and the avenues of aid constrict based on the community’s perception. The loan I first mentioned meant to buy the car hit a snag in the amount agreed upon. The South Sudanese over the phone, the owner of the car, refused to budge
on the exact amount. Deonna, Teroni and Rodgno (2012) see the use of shame in punishment as the catalyst for an apology (when shame has done its job) in which the shamed submit to the offended in hopes of restoring a relationship. Shame for the central Iowan community breaks the bonds of affiliation, leaving the individual outside of trust. In the case of the car, the amount pooled together was only twenty short of the agreed price, but the seller was insistent. At the time when I left the center on that day, it appeared that the deal could fall through, the verbal contract holding the greatest weight in this minor struggle for absolute definition of material value.

Though dominoes came from the context of the refugee camps common to many ethnic groups, and now serve to ease ethnic tension at the community center in Des Moines, a history of mistrust compels the central Iowan community to make spaces of comfort that double as tension alleviators. The banter that surrounds the games does not often contain political or ethnic jokes, but does focus on the individual. While actions are important, verbal language makes or breaks community cohesion. Since the center has been described by many as a place of rehabilitation as much as fellowship, dominoes puts smiles on faces and helps the visitors to the center build rapport. I used Dominoes to build rapport with the center’s community members and I made sure to attempt to play every chance I had.

THINKING SOUTH SUDAN IN DES MOINES

On January 5, 2013 one of the Iowa State students led me to a room within the community center where elders and community leaders meet to discuss issues in the Sudans. The room is bare, but with a large South Sudan flag spread out from wall to wall. Chairs are loosely spread out in a semi-circle around a desk. The center helps integrate into the community
individuals who were traumatized by the events in their homeland. I take their discussions on
the politics of South Sudan to be therapeutic, aided by the rapport created by games in the
adjacent room; however the space for political discussion is removed from the common areas of
the game room and foyer so not to offend an individual. As in most every corner of the
community center, anybody is welcome to participate in discussions or merely observe the
dialogue.

The people in this particular space discussed the definitions of administrative territories
in both Sudans. My impression on this day was that all believe there will be more administrative
divisions created by the two countries. For example, Abyei lies sandwiched between the north
and south and is a territory claimed by both sides since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of
2005. Messriya Arabs – also called the Bagarra of Kordofan – use Abyei as traditional grazing
land during the dry season of their pastoral migrations. Current majority inhabitants of Abyei are
the Ngok sub-group of the Dinka. The Ngok population is sedentary and an upcoming
referendum to determine to which country the territory will belong to has been postponed due to
Sudan’s desire to have the nomadic Messriya registered as residents of resource rich Abyei
(Human Rights Watch Organization, 2008). Similar conversations over representation echoed
often throughout the center – in lively discussions outside the center and around the Arabic
television programming in the foyer – but the discourse concerning divisions of administration
have a counter-discourse of unity. Having the ability to mull over the geographical lines of the
country and the represented populations within each administrative division empowers the
people in the center.

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34 Reference history chapter: Dinka and Nuer have been divided throughout the civil wars up to 2005, and groups
within the larger tribes can also be at odds.
Every moment a person at the community received a space to speak about these divisions, their words projected strong conviction imagining political agency and constructing the unity the South Sudanese diaspora never had. In an extreme example regarding the notion of utopia in an older work by Plath (1966), groups wanting to change the world and at the same time remove their community from it, reinterpret the societies that they came from by internalizing accelerated modifications to their communities. Plath suggests “that utopian communities put more stress… on primary-group intimacy and communal routines of life” (1966:1160). He goes on to conclude that improbable objectives and incapable leaders render utopian movements short lived, which begs the question whether the state of South Sudan is the real imaginary and not the unity of a nation?

**LEADERSHIP AND THE PUSH TO UNIFY**

On January 29, 2013 I found myself in an opulent and seemingly historical building (according to the architecture), I am rendered excited to experience traditions of the old world, and the titles and positions that give it life. I am reminded of Catholicism’s power to influence people with awe and grandeur of construction and by the singular feeling invoked of being small in the processes of the unseen world.

I met with the Deacon at a universal congregation open to anyone who wishes to attend. He is Shilluk from the northeastern part of South Sudan in the state of Upper Nile, and the Father of the congregation is from Equatoria in the south. I only briefly met the Father, and I spent the next few hours with the Deacon, and he informed me of South Sudan’s history from his perspective. He emphasized the violent transitions of the civil wars, but stated that South Sudan is different from the rest of East Africa because of its long contentious history with Islam.
The Deacon viewed contention between Sudan and South Sudan through the role of the government, but threaded his argument with religion. As an individual who helped create the community center and a current leader in Des Moines, the Deacon broadened the scope of diaspora inclusion for all those marginalized by the government of Khartoum. The war internally displaced many, some of whom went to Khartoum because it was safer since the war was conducted in the south. In 1986, Dr. Garang tried to move the war to the northeast in Darfur; he wanted to involve as many people as possible. Dr. Garang may have been assassinated, though the official cause of his helicopter crash was ruled an accident (Phombeah, 2005). The evidence the Deacon cited was extra people in the helicopter he crashed in on July 29th, 2005 however information is difficult to come by because the SPLM conducted their own investigation. Dr. Garang was with four western ambassadors; his death happened immediately after leaving a meeting in Kampala, Uganda. Possible motivating factors were access to resources according to the Deacon. Dr. Garang’s death brought fear to a people who believed the war to be over, and then felt the struggle to be at square one. The day of his death in Sudan caused the internally displaced Southern Sudanese to riot in Khartoum35.

35 Dr. John Garang’s death from the perspective of Lionel is chaotic and telling of the leader’s symbolism. He was young that day but the memory was vivid. He tells me the story:

That day was crazy. I was at school, and some parents started to come in and take their kids home. And some guy came in and said I’m taking Lionel, and the teacher was like alright get out and I was like, I don’t know him. And the teacher was ‘hold on!’ The guy turned out to work at my dad’s office. As we’re on our way, we see South Sudanese people killing northern Sudanese, killing, raping. They chopped up a girls head off going back from school. My friend saw it and I saw it on the news. They started throwing bricks at the cars, people, houses. I don’t even remember the police doing anything. I remember the neighborhood, the guys who were in their twenties came out with their weapons and shit. It was scary. I was young. 2005. I was in 6th or 7th grade. They just randomly killed random people saying that they killed their president.

Me: How did they protect you? Did you go to your dad’s work?

They weren’t in our neighborhood but they were in my cousin’s neighborhood. My uncle was at a hospital, he’s a doctor. There was someone who looked just like him on the TV with a bullet in his head, on the ground. My mother and her sisters saw it and just started crying, and I said ‘no
Dr. Garang was a particularly potent symbol for the South Sudanese and he stands larger than life as a statue in the capitol of South Sudan, Juba (Smith, 2014). The former SPLM leader did not envision a sovereign South Sudan and he did not live to see what became of the war with the north. The central Iowan community makes a point to not replicate the past. Due to the size of Des Moines, the center shrinks the size of the city to an enclave of familiarity but its purpose does not end with social integration. A group of community leaders from the various ethnic groups represented in central Iowa have begun to gather and express the need for a pan-Sudanese and South Sudanese association in central Iowa and throughout the U.S. The Deacon is amongst the leaders and he feels the space is open for organization and action.

On October 24th and 25th of 2013, I met with South Sudanese community leaders in Des Moines, Iowa. These leaders were discussing the benefits of unifying all the Sudanese cultural organizations in the U.S. into chapters to include all the communities who were forced to migrate. To do this they created the United Sudanese and South Sudanese Communities Association (USASSCA), with the purpose of “working together for the benefit of the communities in the diaspora, as well as working toward the achievement of justice, equality, liberty and peace for the peoples of Sudan and South Sudan” (USASSCA, 2011).

wait, that’s not him.’ He wouldn’t pick up until like three hours later, he said he was sowing people’s heads and shit.

Me: How long did it last?

It was just that day. I don’t remember the police. I think they were late, like four hours later. Or maybe there weren’t enough. I remember people got their weapons and just waited for them outside.

Lionel was a firsthand witness to the ensuing madness after the death of a South Sudanese icon.
CONCLUSION

The South Sudanese center is a place for solidarity among the refugees, and a familiar space offering emotional and financial assistance. However, it is a space that also evinces the delicate balances made by individuals of different tribal and national affiliations, genders, and political ambitions. As such, the center represents an important site for examining the way in which diasporic imaginaries of South Sudan are crafted and how they both aspire to utopian futures of unification while subtly reinforcing historical divisions. The national identity is dependent on familial ties evidenced by tribal and clan affiliations. This presents a contradiction since the current government does not mirror the whole of the country. What then binds the diaspora together is the avoidance of the South Sudanese state with empty aspirations of development over inter-ethnic relationships, which circumvent the people for outside investors.

The final chapter uses the context of the diaspora in central Iowa to circumvent the failed state, while realizing that they have fought for and achieved the space to conceive their version of events not in isolation, but with an international audience.
CHAPTER 4
UTOPIAS REINFORCING IMAGINARIES

After meeting with the group in Des Moines of South Sudanese and Sudanese community leaders who are attempting to unify all those in opposition of Khartoum: leaders from Equatoria, Bar El-Ghazal, Upper Nile, Nuba, Blue Nile and Darfur, I realized my study population traversed all former ethnic and political barriers. To my surprise, the SPLM/A has chapters in the U.S. but I did not meet anyone before or during this meeting affiliated with them36. My understanding of their presence is also limited, but the leaders forming USASSCA (United Sudanese and South Sudanese Communities Association) believed that the continuous partition of the peoples in the region will only hinder the future of South Sudan and its neighbors. Here in Des Moines, the leadership is headed by a member of the Bari ethnic group whose population originates from the South Sudanese state of Central Equatoria. The South Sudanese diaspora built the context from where to imagine the future for an idealized nation. In this chapter, I examine the fusion of the

36 My impression was that the SPLM follow their own agenda, even the chapters outside the country. The following is an article from a mission statement posted on a website titled SPLMToday.com, which attempts to explain skepticism in the SPLM. A conversation with the Deacon on January 29th, 2013 led me to believe that the south was an anti-Islamic space, the only one in East Africa. This excerpt echoes that idea.

II.3.7 Those who are skeptical about the New Sudan vision are not confined to the SPLM membership. There are those, particularly in Northern Sudan, who condemned out rightly the vision merely because it came from a source unfamiliar to their minds and hearts. Most importantly, there are forces that benefited, and continue to benefit, from the Old Sudan. They are well aware that the New Sudan is a threat to their interests, be they in power or the opposition. These forces are, thus, bent on propagating a distorted image of both the Vision and the SPLM, thus misleading and frightening away their respective constituencies by insisting that the New Sudan is a mere euphemism for an African, Christian, anti-Arab and Islamic entity, which, in collaboration with Zionism, is intent on doing away with the Arab-Islamic identity of the Sudanese (the North, in particular). Such unfounded suspicions, fueled by racism and religious bigotry, have been adequately responded to elsewhere and would not stand the test of time. Contrary to what the critics and skeptics think, the concept of the New Sudan has no racial, ethnic or separatist connotations. It is rather a framework, a national project, for building a true and sustainable Citizenship-State capable of accommodating the multiple diversities of Sudanese society. Above all, the concept is an intellectual and scholarly contribution to the unfolding political discourse on the rebuilding of the Sudanese State (The Rise and Evolution of the SPLM, accessed in 2014).
community emerging through the long-standing tensions simmering within the East African region, culminating in unifying imaginaries that circumvent the state.

Dr. John Garang – however different his reasons for the civil war ending in 2005 – remains the icon of an independent South Sudan. The statue, unveiled on the day of independence on July 9, 2011, ushered in a promise of hope and prosperity (Smith, 2014). As of the beginning of 2014, South Sudan has once again become a place of insecurity and violence. Now more than ever in the country’s short history, the imaginaries that bred hope for the future of South Sudan resound with importance. The push to unify as a state has at the moment failed, due to the replication of ethnic divisions since independence.

Drawing on a literature base from the work of Charles Piot (2010), I realized that my experience with my informants, insightful as it was, came full of bias. As I mentioned in the layout of the region’s history, contemporary South Sudan and its diaspora is not comprised of a homogenous group, rather there are many ethnic populations embroiled in struggle to define the population and geography of the new country. Piot’s work on Togo considers the “fantasies of exile” as the national obsession (2010:4). He situates his analyses after the Cold War, where
religion replaced foreign aid as the catalyst for imagining the Togolese quotidian reality. Piot states that he would

Want to refuse the position that sees such religious imaginaries as mere response to or reflection of a ‘crisis’ that lies outside and beyond. These imaginaries themselves play a constitutive, generative role in the making of that crisis. But more, they are that crisis – not so much in the sense of having invented it, but rather as having taken it over and amplified it and spun it along lines of their own choosing (2010:129-30).

I see the imagining of the nation as a response, and a manner of circumventing the state. Thus, they find hope without the reality of a state and without the support of contemporary South Sudan. The most cohesive form of South Sudanese nationalism occurs outside the country. What South Sudan has continuously demonstrated is tribal and clan affiliation over all others. The South Sudanese state speaks an esoteric language of inclusion and development through despotism – the commanders in the SPLM/A inheriting power signaling to their population who holds the reins. The reality in Africa is chaotic, volatile and toxic for the attitudes of the diaspora as faraway bystanders.

Mbembe (2001) called the post-colony a “simulacral regime,” able to piece together an old identity but not to the benefit of either the ruled or ruler. The subaltern, people not privy to hegemony construction (Gramsci, 1971), coopt official structures when living in diaspora and undermine its legitimacy especially since the Dinka from Bar El-Ghazal lead the current government. Though the SPLM/A fought for representation and later won independence, the key figures do not represent the ethnic diversity of modern South Sudan. Since 2007, Salva Kiir has been criticized as resting the majority of control in the hands of the Dinka. Riek Machar, a Nuer, has held the position of Vice President and Dr. Garang’s widow Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior began as presidential advisor on Gender and Human Rights, both were recently sacked
by Salva Kiir in December 2013 as instigators of a coup. These three of the most influential members of the South Sudanese government were key figures in the SPLM/A (Sudan: Salva Kiir Consolidates Power, 2007). In 1991 paralleling the lastest civil unrest, Riek Machar separated from the SPLM/A and was accused of a massacre of Bor Dinka that same year. Despite the SPLM/A’s sordid relationship and the violent use of their authority, these few still hold power but the diaspora are hopeful about their new state, and the possibilities that can arise.

The Comaroffs (2006) and their idea of “performance” by the state to convince a population of its existence rings true for the South Sudanese attempts to gather support: for the rebel factions in the war of the SPLM/A and today in effort to unify the people in central Iowa and back home. Schieffelin states that “through performance, meanings are formulated in a social rather than cognitive space, and the participants engaged with the symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality” (2009:707). Gestures of unity for the community through their cultural center can be fanciful and hopeful if compared to what presently occurs in South Sudan. The imaginaries of a successful state and future national ideal become the goals of South Sudan, whether attainable or not, therefore developing into the themes in the conversations I heard for the South Sudanese diaspora in central Iowa. Furthermore, the South Sudanese refugees do not exist in a vacuum to themselves, the marginalized of Sudan have as much a presence though not the focus of my work, nor do they represent the majority of the informants I came in contact with. Considering the above, the unreliability of the informant is important because the accounts of life in the diaspora were naturally full of emotion. In an article by Beatty (2010) that tries to reconcile the bridge between the ethnographer and the story teller, he turns to writers of fiction and though “they are not ethnographers; they don’t have to explain; but like ethnographers they need to convince, and one of the ways they do this is through the
evocation and portrayal of emotion” (2010:436). I interpret this form as bias inclusive, without hyperbole and part of the goal-oriented state imaginaries. If the South Sudanese central Iowan population expresses similar ideas over the function of the community and its focal points, then the influence of the imagination over a colder reality back in Africa is an emotional product of their forced migration.

THE NATION, IS PEOPLE AND THE ILLUSION OF THE STATE

In her study of Eritrea nationalism in exile, Bernal states, “while globalization is thought to render borders meaningless, transnationalism to render nationhood passé, and the internet to have ushered in a new era of openness and connectivity” (2004:3) the members of a community living in diaspora are able to circumvent geographical and oppressive obstacles in search of self-determined continuity, adjusting identity through the re-territorialization of places left behind during migration (Malkki, 1992). Nationalism need no longer be rooted in a bounded national territory, now that the roots of nationalism are as much displaced as the people and turn into an abstraction detached from a geographical location.

Bernal states that a “nation is about boundaries, about inclusions and exclusions, about members and outsiders, about where one sovereignty ends and another begins” (Bernal, 2004:4). Neoliberal globalization blurred the distinction of state control by over-emphasizing private interest by redistributing wealth in the hands of few (Aalbers, 2013:1084). My study population saw the secession of their homeland during a time of accelerated globalization, similar to the Eritrean diaspora, although not as connected online. The South Sudanese and Sudanese diaspora, as a marginalized group from the capital in Khartoum and their Arab elite, differ in how they construct meaningful interactions in central Iowa and in the greater U.S. Separating
the elite from the subaltern and in the case of my study the displaced, further sheds the veil of state infused nationalism. Considered part of a formal governing structure, the ruling center of Khartoum and Juba preforms as a “strongman\(^{37}\)” figure, but rather than being the intermediary between de jure governance and the population, they are the direct links and the de facto sovereigns (Hansen and Stepputatt, 2006:306). The South Sudanese and Sudanese refugees I studied in central Iowa are actively engaged in the diasporic imagination of a South Sudanese nationalism and, therefore, provide an interesting case study for thinking about how South Sudanese nationalism is emerging from multiple sites both within and outside the physical boundaries of the new nation-state. South Sudan’s ascent through turbulence and into independence is fresh on the diaspora’s thoughts.

**FUSION THROUGH TURMOIL**

“Chaos,” was how one saw South Sudan after the recent secession (November, 8\(^{th}\) 2012).

He went on by saying:

Sudan was a colony of Britain and British were the ones drawing that line. South Sudan existed even before, even when Sudan....there was a border but it was pulled together by British and then Egyptians. I feel like international community is not being very clear telling the people the truth where the border is, what we[‘re] supposed to do, and that is causing a lot of friction between the two countries (November, 8\(^{th}\) 2012).

His answer came easily and uncontested during the group interview of South Sudanese students, the argument that ensued this one-word label of current South Sudan was a testament to

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\(^{37}\) “...Fragmented systems of authority are found all over the postcolonal world where local strongmen occupy strategic positions between state institutions and the population... In many cases, such local slumlords, strongmen, and quasi-legal networks have been de facto sovereigns from colonial times. They have at times been tamed and incorporated into governmental structures and have at other times been nodes of opposition to the state” (Hansen and Stepputatt, 2006:306).
the emotion attached to the present and future. Economic neoliberalism passes under the radar of political unrest (Fagotto, 2011). Chinese, Ugandans, Ethiopians and Kenyans operate in the wake of independence, while the rest of the country fights for political representation and security. One of my Dinka informants feels that now is the best time to introduce business to south Sudan (November 10th, 2012). He knows that this particular moment is treacherous for entrepreneurs, but foreign workers are acquiring the spaces for business before the local, and South Sudan is being lost to outsiders.

The sovereign tool of the “strongman” is reinforced through the void of widespread control and institutions not produced locally. Therefore, globalization is shifting power to foreign investment, further distancing the reigns of sovereignty from the formerly marginalized, ethnically and economically.

Migration brought ethnic groups in contact with one another including early Arabs. Introducing fusion through fictive kinship ties, the story of a tent and camel depicts the people of the region as kin who lost land due to misplaced goodwill. What the intruders established was autochthony for their descendants, while converting segments of the population to Islam. Many of the Sudans populations are semi-nomadic, and a Dinka informant told me a proverb symbolizing the meeting of Arab and Africans.

People use to say that they are our nephews and nieces, those people that came, the Arab colonist that came there. Somebody mad a reference of a tent and a camel. A tent, when you go camping you usually have a tent to protect you from the bad weather. So, that’s what people used a lot when you live in the desert, there is a saying, when the Arabs first came there was an African guy with a tent. So they asked the guy if he could come in, I’m cold, let me come in. The African guy was nice enough to let him come into the tent. So the guy asked, my

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38 See Akol, 2012 for another mention of this story, where the person asking for help was instead a large camel.
camel is also cold, could you let me camel come in. And the African guy was nice enough and said; yeah your camel can come in. And then the Arab guy kicked the African guy out and took over the tent. When you look at the saying, their talking about the whole Sudan country in general… People with African descent, it was their country. Just because these people came and said that they were superior and they had more education. They could exploit them. The years passed by and they considered themselves to be from there. But they actually came and visited…According to Islamic culture, you are allowed to marry outside your religion, but the opposite guy has to convert to marry an Islamic woman. So it’s a double standard. That’s why we call them our nieces and nephews, because they were able to marry our daughters or maybe sisters…that where that saying came in (May 18th, 2013).

Divisions between north and south are more salient than in South Sudan, but war-time associations with the SPLM/A acted as the glue of national synthesis against Sudan and simultaneously deepened the rift from those who would govern and the population of the new country.

South Sudan is very complicated. The reason is because all the different ethnicities. Some group of people, especially the Dinka people are similar. During the struggle, how the war was fought…the SPLA fought the war for like twenty-one years. The majority of these people were Dinka from Bor and Bar al-Gazal. There were some other groups who joined and fought like the Nuer. Some others fought, but the majority was Dinka. During the struggle these ethnicities turned around and they were in support of the Arab, with the people that actually called themselves Arabs. They took information and relayed it to Arabs, saying maybe the SPLA were in this region. They basically just communicated back and forth to Arabs, in essence helping Arabs. In Dinka and Nuer community, there is a sense that now we have our own country, but it’s for us all. But in the back of the mind you think, you were not involved in the struggle and so there is always that sense, you might have a say to some extent because when we were struggling you tried to turn around and tried to kill the
Dinka people because of their cause, you thought they were not going to succeed. Now we have the country and this is your country, and I think that this your country too, but there is this human factor where you think that I’m the one who fought for that country, so I should be the one to benefit the most from that country. Sudan is very complex, South Sudan is very complex because you have very different ethnicities, and different ethnicities have different ways of doing things. If you put them all together in one country and ask them to come together, there are gonna be clashes. I think that South Sudan is gonna get better, but it’s in the early stages. It’s in its infancy, and I feel like there are gonna be growing pains. As far as disagreements, and who is gonna be struggling for the power. I feel like once years pass by, and the majority of the population become[s] educated, it’s not gonna be as segregated with different issues, but more your ability on what you can do based on your education and qualifications. Right now, I don’t think that’s the case. Those people that were struggling for twenty-one years were not getting paid, free of charge. They didn’t have anything to eat…there won’t be able to have benefits from what they were fighting for. So we just have to give it time, in order for it to grow….We love our country, people who are here as diaspora want what’s best for South Sudan. You grew up in this country and you were educated here, then you have this sense… of equality. I have this sense of people being treated based on their level of education….not discriminated against because of tribe (May 18th, 2013).

This particular passage illustrates a very subtle divide in South Sudan between the participants in the SPLM/A and everyone else who now wants their voice heard. Furthermore, the Dinka from Bor and Bar El- Ghazal dominated the leadership in the SPLM/A during the civil war, and later felt betrayed by the Nuer switch in allegiance. The ethnic complexity of Sudan and South Sudan is largely ignored by the new state and its biggest players who keep power confined to a small group. The new leaders, chosen from the SPLM allied South Sudan with countries in the region – Dr. Garang having died after an announced meeting with Uganda. South Sudan entering into the global community via investments benefits the former SPLM and excludes the people they
were supposedly fighting for. South Sudanese cultivate more options when not bound to their homeland. The stated opinion above demonstrates the ownership of the struggle that members of the SPLM/A chose to internalize, and although the leadership and country recognize plurality, South Sudan must introduce an equalizing constituent to complement sovereignty.

South Sudan’s multiplicity is the filter for the country’s ethnic animosity, but many other contexts celebrate ethnic plurality yet bemoan official recognition. In Chiapas, Mexico (Speed, 2006), indigenous communities – unlike their counterparts in Ecuador (Viatori, 2009) – face fewer restrictions because they constructed their parameters of government inclusion outside structures of the state. In Ecuador, acknowledgement of ethnic distinctiveness by the international community created restrictions on expenditures meant to revitalize waning aspects of the Zápara people. International recognition of the most recent South Sudanese civil war labeled the forced migrant as refugees, able to flee under legal definitions and the subject to receive aid as a refugee. The displaced found anger in their experience and used the lack of civil order to express discontent. Government did little to gain the trust of its people, many of whom lived as semi-sedentary pastoralist and had little experience with formal divisions of the government. The South Sudanese, to imagine a utopia, must avoid South Sudan, physically and ideologically.

CIRCUMVENTING THE STATE

Two of the major exoduses from South Sudan were to Kenya and Ethiopia. Both countries are connected to land locked South Sudan, and housed refugee camps. One of my Dinka Bor informants was separated from his parents when he was very young, and he remained in his village while his parents sought work in Khartoum. The war broke out in the area of the Bor, cutting him off from his parents. Sudanese forces stopped anybody from entering the
village. Outside, the Bor were persecuted as aggressors of the war, since they comprised the majority of the SPLA. His parents were safer in Khartoum than anywhere in South Sudan. Violence against the Bor was common, even in the South Sudanese capitol of Juba. He did not find his parents until he was eight, and at eleven he experienced a draft of sorts. SPLA rebels took young kids from the communities they controlled to be trained and educated in Ethiopia, which at that time was tolerant of the refugee/training camps. These sixty-five thousand kids were considered “lost boys” because they had been separated from their parents.

The Ethiopian government was overthrown in 1991, and he was forced back into South Sudan which had grown more violent. His escape this time was Kenya where he lived until 1995 when he tried to re-enter South Sudan and join the army. Rejected for his age, he stayed in Kenya until 2001 when the peace process began. On January 9th, 2005 the peace treaty was signed, but the leader of the rebels would not live much longer. My informant arrived in the U.S. on the day that the SPLA leader Dr. John Garang’s helicopter crashed. Desperation gripped the South Sudanese, and they feared renewed hostilities (May 6th, 2013).

Another of my Dinka informants had a similar story. Resettlement was a bureaucratic process and his family was lucky enough to have sponsors in Iowa. His family was separated from their father, but not by chance. My informant’s father had been a commander in the war, and survived it to be a part of the new country. The rest of the family fled to Kenya before having the opportunity to emigrate to the U.S. His thoughts on participation with the rebel factions were strong.

I was young when we came here, sixteen years old… We were in a refugee camp in Kenya. If we were back in Sudan and I was older, I would probably join the war. The training camp was in Ethiopia, but that relationship was sabotaged when the government was overthrown in 90 or 91, the country was overthrown by
a different group. So that relationship between SPLA and Ethiopia fell apart (May 18th, 2013).

It seemed that the people I talked to wanted to be a part of the struggle had they the chance. One of my Nuer informants also had family involved with the SPLA and his opinions of the opposition were hostile. On June 6th, 2013 we discussed the extreme hatred towards Arabs based on the dehumanizing dichotomy that occurs during violent conflict between ethnic groups, and in believing that it is one’s duty to protect that feeling of blinding hate – internalized into a marker of identity. Later on June 11th, 2013 we spoke again about the violence between tribes, clans and sub-clans, or large extended families. At his refugee camp in Ethiopia, the various tribes had to be separated from each other because of old hatred or petty quarrels that escalated. Once he saw a group of people attack his sub-clan. He ran as the attackers came and witnessed a man attacked with a machete which left his scalp flapping, though he did not die. Similarly, he knew of a former teacher from the refugee camp who was killed for what a family member did. A cousin or brother impregnated a married girl and the vengeance required upping the ante. In return, the teacher’s family looked to kill two of the other’s people. Bound to the community by Cieng (Deal, 2010) in violence more than peace, the players in these conflicts defined justice in their own terms. Deal (2010) continues by stating that “within this system of justice, individual innocence was not relevant. Nor was it relevant that the object of vengeance might be unaware of the events which he was being punished” (2010:567). John Comaroff (1994) sees justice through the tensions of social groups interpreting laws, the capacity to determine identity within greater power dynamics. In Bolivia (Goldstein, 2003), corrupt legal institutions have not been widely accessible to the general population. The global drug war separated people from legitimate functions of the state through the people’s fragile mechanisms of control, such as bribes for small offenses. The availability of justice hinged on the decision of an individual to
act, and therefore served as the executor of control, where the state had failed to do so. With the diaspora in central Iowa, the state did not facilitate migration and justice for the benefit of its people. Instead, independence became a fixation unto itself likened to an unfulfilled promise of a better future.

As much as there was deep animosity toward Sudan’s government, South Sudan’s tribal tensions produced violence as well. The South Sudanese diaspora left East Africa for fear of insecurity. Tension within South Sudan is still polarized, and each ethnic group looks for their share. Ethnic groups in South Sudan are typically concerned with how they can benefit from the secession, and how the government is mistreating them above others. The South Sudanese center itself once harbored these ill sentiments. I asked one of my Bor informant how he saw the center different than the Deacon.

You have seen it…our people are real. When they [others] talk, they always talk about their own tribe, how their tribe is mistreated in the government. You see now, the complaining is now on the side of the Bar al-Gazal, because they are…[in] power. There’s too much problem in Southern Sudan. There is killing…there is corruption. And how corruption comes, is the same they are practicing…[A Dinka student] was mad because it’s kind of too close, but not from that clan…we are almost the same Dinka, but because we are talking about people that are close to the state. It’s like talking bad about Iowa, and you say ‘why are you talking about Iowa,’ because they are from the same state. Some people feel bad, that’s why you see there is too much isolation. There are people that isolate themselves, because they don’t want to hear criticism of the government…They sit there and talk shit but …When you go there and not from there, you have to go and argue with them about how they mistreated others.

Me: Do you like that division in the center?
Sometime we try to eliminate it…people have to be honest to each other. We try to make that center very nice. The first time we tried to open that center, it was on the other side of [of the neighborhood]. People didn’t know each other. There were people with tempers, you joke with them and they tried to fight. They react to you and you have to fight them….Now we tell those people, ‘if you don’t want to joke, then don’t come here. Or don’t joke with people. Those people isolate themselves, they don’t come. Some people joke with you like ‘I see you go to Chinese, and Chinese kick you out of the restaurant because you eat a lot.’ ‘And you get fired because you’re lazy.’ We always make up a lot of things. That’s how we do it. When you [hear] people talking and looking at each other [during dominoes] they are talking bad things.

That center, we were a group of six…but we consider him [Deacon] a part of it... We use to play dominoes… on the other side behind [gas station]. We use to play every summer under a tree. It used to be at the park… by the church. I wasn’t there; I was in Africa at that time. People use to have problem with African-Americans. They would say that ‘you are so dark,’ they would make fun. Our people, they look skinny, but they fight very good. They started beating up all African-Americans. There was a gun involved, African-American come with a gun. (May 6th, 2013).

The animosity eventually melted away enough for the center to become a space for refuge. Imagining the nation required a level of trust that South Sudan’s institutions had not granted its people, through the civil war or following independence. Piot (2010) uses the concept of imaginaries as the funnel for daily troubles, which serves to intensify the reinterpreted aspect of Togolese society. For the diaspora, the imaginary avoids the obstacle of the South Sudanese state – its ethnic tensions, corruption, and deceptive promise for a cohesive nation – and bestows the capability to self-determine. USASSCA’s (2014) website – even in the face of the recent upsurge in violence over control of certain key cities in South Sudan – expresses unity through
plurality as the hallmark of the democratic process, ironically the element of hostility hindering the country.

CONCLUSION

The diaspora acted on their own to solve the issues they encountered in Des Moines with the friction between ethnic groups and against African-Americans. Their mistrust of institutions and the despotic nature of South Sudanese politics meant that they, if only momentarily, became the “strongman” (Hansen and Stepputatt, 2006) and personal enforcer of will – subtly reproducing the type of authority they mean to evade. South Sudanese leaders acted with their ethnic group in mind and unabashedly projected social network loyalty: the sub-clan more important than the clan, which was more important than the tribe. What the community center in Des Moines did for the diaspora was offer a space to re-consider ethnic affiliations and to imagine a nation through the center, its games, and political discussions previously un-concentrated.

USASSCA is taking the next step forward to unify the people in central Iowa and throughout the U.S., beginning with Nebraska, Minneapolis, Georgia, and Washington D.C. Atlanta, Georgia is furthers along and has a functional chapter awaiting the Des Moines committee to organize a national event. The meeting I attended on October 25th, 2013 in Des Moines formatted USSASCA’s incremental approach to establish the larger entity. Members of the various ethnic groups from Nuba, Equatoria, Upper Nile, Darfur attended the gathering along with two consultants from the Jewish community and a representative of the World Food Prize39

39 “The World Food Prize was conceived by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize. Since 1986, The World Food Prize has honored outstanding individuals who have made vital contributions to improving the quality, quantity or availability of food throughout the world. Laureates have been recognized from Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, China, Cuba, Denmark, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Israel, Mexico, Sierra Leone,
in Des Moines. USSASCA hopes to use certain ethnic holidays to host a preliminary gathering of community leaders from other cities in the U.S. The organization acknowledges the fragmentary nature of the communities throughout the U.S. and actively travels to other cities for face-to-face dialogue. Central Iowa may very well be the epicenter for a new South Sudanese nationalism, without the burdens of the state in East Africa and with a renewed sense of encompassing community open to all those that suffered throughout the years.
The South Sudanese diaspora, and those other groups situated on the margins of the power center in the north that precipitated the struggle for representation, use social and political discourse in central Iowa to differentiate the refugee population from national participants of contemporary South Sudan. Efforts emerging from Des Moines which intend to bridge long standing ethnic divides utilize displacement and history to construct new criterion of social relationships resulting in a semblance of a nation. The diaspora is therefore “stateless,” my interpretation differing from the legal definition which after World War II recognized “the legal status of persons who do not enjoy the protection of any government, in particular pending the acquisition of nationality, as regards [to] their legal and social protection and their documentation” (UN Document E/600, paragraph 46, 1951). Placement of the individual within the state, in this case, is a matter of perception and intent, not an absolute association based on citizenship. Idris argues for unity through the state coming from the bond of citizenship, but that the “colonial construct... [d]e-individualizes citizenship and makes it more of a group or community entitlement” (2005:11). “Stateless” for the central Iowan diaspora is not simply a legal designation but also a choice in rejection of the state building hegemonic powers. Although the diaspora migrated legally recognized and therefore found protection while fleeing the effects of the war, their attachment to an identity with increased national inclusion came about through the insecure context of forced migration. Based on the work by Gomez, et al. (2011) in the field of psychology, attachment to a larger group depends on whether the society values the individual or the familial unit; when emphasizing the latter, attachment acknowledges
the irreplaceable nature for various members of the larger group\textsuperscript{40}. Valued individuality, in contrast, sees their contemporaries as replaceable. I suggest that to re-define “stateless,” there is a synthesis of these two concepts: familial ties dominate social categories but from a distance the state and its players are interchangeable equating to a failed political structure. Gomez et al. go on to “suggest that identity fusion consists of a sense of connectedness and reciprocal strength that is commonly experienced by people who develop relational ties to their group” (2011:930). The South Sudanese state, its national imaginaries from the diaspora, and the fusion to those entities represents the milieu of their current context developed from civil war and now a failed state.

USASSCA efforts to combine the various communities throughout the U.S. plan to rely on familial ties to construct this unity. Members of the many ethnic groups represented at the meeting I attended on October 25\textsuperscript{th}, 2013 agreed to pull in the people of their tribes and clans to consider the idea of a pan-Sudanese and South Sudanese organization that finds equal footing in displacement and marginalization from the government of Khartoum. I find this long and continuous thread from the identities created in the East African region, to the war of representation with the SPLA and finally still present with the decentralized community I encountered in central Iowa as a population plagued by the imposing of a state packaged with the rhetoric of a nation. I argue that the nation can only exist without the state, as long as the socio-linguistic separations remain intact; and as that is the current reality, the South Sudanese community and their affiliates in Des Moines are constructing an idealized version of their homeland that strongly contrasts the region’s past and present. Where before outside invaders raided for slaves in the south and the later Arab rulers considered their southern neighbors

\textsuperscript{40} Gomez et al. likens the suicide bomber to this idea of “relational orientation,” where they “express willingness to sacrifice themselves for their group” (2011:918).
second class political participants, the recent discontent projected through civil war and a resulting displacement, opened a space for the USASSCA leadership to attempt a unification I saw as utopic because the possible decentralized nation negates the function of the state – no resources to fight over or power relationships to fuel ethnic animosity.

Rejecting the nation-state structure generates the capacity for unity outside the limitations of the state institution, and binds people together to a common association of shared circumstance, but more importantly negating the power structure of the state, thus manifesting the many diaspora experiences into a utopic idea of South Sudan. The state, but more importantly the capacity to be sovereign, signals to the international community that “there is ‘no higher power’ than the nation-state” (Jackson, 2003:782). However, proposed decentralized nationalism by the South Sudanese diaspora – created through the process of state construction via civil war that legitimized one set of rulers while ignoring the greater population – situates the imagined nation outside of the power and resource struggle in East Africa. The SPLA commanders remain the most potent members of South Sudanese government, which mimic the government they fought against – the unilateral will of Khartoum’s oligarchs. In the south, Dr. Garang cultivated enemies on both sides of the civil war and now two of his former top commanders vie for power. SPLM membership is ethnically based, and loyalties follow relational ties. Different leaders represented the Dinka Bor and Dinka Bar El-Gazhal in the SPLM and now their territories are at odds with one another (Conflict in South Sudan, 2014). My research sought to differentiate the ethnic relationships amongst the diaspora and the one happening in South Sudan. My time spent with the community and the questions of inclusion I posed showed that the concept of the state, and the nation which drives it, are not fixed but fluid categories. The South Sudanese community as a research community further emphasizes the
fragile bonds in present day Africa that require a new way of conceptualizing structures of governance for a sustainable future.

South Sudan’s voyage through history up to the present has been filled with marginalization and obstacles for the diverse region on the hinterland of ancient and colonial powers. Renewed hostilities amongst the former members of the SPLM threaten to send South Sudan further away from the peaceful sovereignty it once wished for. The vision of the former SPLM leader Dr. John Garang did not approximate what South Sudan became, and its exposed fragility is now clear to the international community and its peoples. Inter-ethnic hostility stemming from disagreements during the war with Sudan tears at the fabric of the new country, its multiplicity the vehicle for chaos. South Sudan teeters on the brink of failure after the careful balance of power shifted to prey on the insecurity and mistrust of a population conditioned to act quickly and survive.

Salva Kiir, the former SPLM commander and current president, is a cavaliering figure complete with cowboy hat given to him by the American president George Bush. As successor to Garang, Salva Kiir saw the birth of his country, though Garang fought for a united Sudan with increased representation of southern ethnic groups (Allison, 2014). What South Sudan became, however against the desires of Garang, is now symbolically tied to the former SPLM leader. Kiir, and his government, has been accused of fast tracking the government and opting for development over reconciliation (Smith, 2014a). The war for independence united the south against a common foe concealing ethnic animosity that has not been addressed. UN ambassadors, along with National Security Advisor Susan Rice, pushed development in South Sudan avoiding the other social ills that are beginning to resemble the enemy they fought against.
The western media construction of the polarized struggle between Sudan and South Sudan is presently without its veil of labels. Kiir, a member of the Dinka, and Machar, the former vice-president and former Nuer warlord, operate under the radar that persisted in demonizing a Sudan who once housed Osama Bin Laden (Smith, 2014a). Machar’s “white army” faces the former SPLM/A aided by Ugandan troops, a staunch ally of Kiir’s government (Smith, 2014b). South Sudan’s civil unrest is not a simple story of Dinka against Nuer, Garang’s former wife and a Dinka herself is an opponent of Kiir. She attempted to broker a cessation to hostilities on December 22nd, 2013 but failed to do so (Sudan Tribune, 2013).

Reports estimate ten thousand civilians have been killed with another half million forced to flee the combat zone (Smith, 2014b). Juba, the capital and hub for development, NGOs and the UN, currently houses close to eighty thousand civilians, including family members of a key informant throughout my study. While residing in the UN compound, his family is safe from the violence occurring outside but are free to leave if they so choose. On Thursday January 23rd, 2014, Kiir and his opponents reached a ceasefire during talks held in Ethiopia (Smith, 2014b). Under the deal, Kiir is to release detained opposition members, but much of the violence is not against two formal combatants. Militias, child soldiers and accusations of rape abound in the contested provinces.

The murky situation resonates in central Iowa and through social media. One of my key informants reports relative calm at the community center, but facebook conversations are heating up. One particular informant currently working in Juba disseminates critical words and is then the subject of harsh responses. I have witnessed discussions that rapidly evolved into inflammatory projections of the community’s frustrations. The reactions are understandable,
most everyone has been touched by the new conflict and the death of friends and family has the community on edge.

Insecurity, in the government and one’s neighbor, will be an immediate problem that South Sudan, and by extension the diaspora, must contend with going forward. Whether the region has always been at odds is irrelevant, the truth is that the region is dependent on itself under the current structure of the state. South Sudan, its diaspora and its envisioned future must reconsider the role of its people, and must be willing to consider alternate power dynamics to generate an ideal context where the imaginary goes beyond a mere apparition.
APPENDIX

( Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection South Sudan Oil Locations, 2013)
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