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Overcoming ruptures: Zande identity, governance, and tradition during cycles of war and displacement in South Sudan and Uganda (2014-2019)

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2 | Ruptures: Traditional authorities, violence, and the state in Western Equatoria (1500s-2014)

Any choice for a beginning of history is political. Massoud starts his account of legal history of Sudan in 1898, with the invasion by the British and Egyptian militaries (Massoud 2013, 15). Leonardi starts her account on chiefship, community and the state in 1840, when the first Egyptian government expedition under the leadership of a Turk broke ‘through the vegetation in the Sudd marshes on the Nile, opening the way for the subsequent incursions’ (Leonardi 2013, 18). These choices are reflective of the extent to which South Sudanese history has been shaped by outside influences, and written by outsiders (Cormack 2014, 22). In this historical chapter, I do not present a comprehensive history, but highlight rather those historical elements and episodes that mattered to people’s discussions about the present and the future. I draw on oral histories, archival sources and secondary sources, and show where these sources are in agreement and where there are different interpretations.

For many Zande, history starts in the period when time was indicated by the lives of rulers, rather than dates on the Christian calendar. The end of that era came with the death of the last sovereign ruler, Gbudwe, at the hands of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial forces in 1905. This marked the beginning of colonial rule, and the end of Zande self-determination. But there was history before that – although its historiography is treacherous terrain, to be charted using fallible sources (see Section 2.1). Still, I want to ‘account for the social archaeology’ of the here and now, and to ‘discern the processes by which the past and the present [have] constructed each other’ (J. Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 160). And so I will explore some of the pre-colonial past, especially as narratives about it have gained new currency in the contemporary context of displacement (see Chapter 8). I focus on two elements of the pre-colonial time: the debate on the origin of the ruling Avungara clan of the Zande (see Section 2.2), and the politicking that surrounded the arrival of the first Europeans, Egyptians and northern Sudanese in the area (see Section 2.3). The section on Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule focuses on the state’s dealing with Zande traditional authority in this area, which I will argue was markedly different from that in other parts of South Sudan (see Section 2.4).

After Sudanese independence (1956), Western Equatoria’s history became submerged in the Sudanese Civil Wars (1955–1972 and 1983–2005), during which the area’s trajectory was not always in step with the rest of South Sudan (see Section 2.5). When after the long years of war, the promises of peace (2005) and independence (2011) dawned – particular violent conflicts plagued Western

Equatoria. These conflicts contributed to the election of a popular political leader, the mobilization of ‘Arrow Boys’-armed groups, and the emergence of a ‘moment of peace’ (see Section 2.6). The rich and turbulent Zande history described in this chapter, helps to understand both the enduring role of traditional authorities (see Chapters 5 and 8), and the role that Western Equatoria was to play the South Sudanese Civil War (see Chapter 6). Below is a table of events that shaped the history and historiography of Western Equatoria.

Table 1: History and ethnography of the Zande and Western Equatoria (until 2015)

| <i>Time</i> | <i>Events in history and historiography of Western Equatoria</i> |
|---------------------------|---|
| +1600-1855 | Ascent of Avungara, formation of Zande kingdoms, competition. |
| 1855-1905 | Arrival of foreign traders, explorers, missionaries, and colonial powers. |
| +1860-1905, Febr. 10th | Reign of King Gbudwe, ended when he was killed during or after an Anglo-Egyptian colonial military patrol. |
| 1910-11 | First colonial civilian district commissioners in Yambio, Tambura ¹ and Maridi. |
| 1914 | ‘Zande Uprising,’ four chiefs arrested. |
| 1921-6 | Colonial resettlement for sleeping sickness. |
| 1926-30 | Research by anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard. |
| 1945-55 | Zande Scheme and resettlement (1946-51), Nzara riot (1955). |
| 1952-55 | Research by anthropologist C. Reining. |
| 1956, 1 Jan. | Sudanese Independence. |
| 1955-72 | First Sudanese Civil War. In Western Equatoria mostly from 1964 to mid-1970s. |
| 1984-5 | Research by anthropologist S. Siemens. |
| 1983-2005 | Second Sudanese Civil War. In Western Equatoria mostly from 1990 to 1998. |
| 2005 | Comprehensive Peace Agreement between Sudan and SPLM/A. |
| 2006-2011 | LRA attacks and formation of Arrow Boys. Attacks peaked around 2008-9. |
| 2010, April | Election of independent governor Bakosoro. |
| 2011, 9 July | Independence of South Sudan. |
| 2013-present ² | South Sudanese Civil War. In Western Equatoria it peaked from 2015 to 2018, with a flare-up around Tambura in 2021. |

¹ Tambura is also sometimes written as ‘Tombura’ and ‘Tembura’.

² South Sudan’s president Salva Kiir declared a formal end to the war in February 2020, when he and opposition leader Riek Machar formed a unity government. Still, conflict has continued intermittently until the time of writing (2021).

This chapter is called ‘ruptures’ to emphasize just how profoundly and repeatedly things have changed over the last few centuries in this part of South Sudan. Often, everyday life was marked by ‘confusion and irregularity’ and ‘no one could predict what would happen next’ (Reining 1966, 12). Of course, in between these ‘ruptures’ there have been years of relative certainty and some continuities have persisted (Piot 2010). These themes of change, continuity and ‘confusion’ appeared repeatedly throughout my research – both historical and contemporary – and I will come back to them in the conclusion of this book. This chapter takes a meso- and macro-level view: It focuses on political leaders, rulers and governments, and ruptures like conquests, wars and separations. In this way, it builds the theatre floor on which the subsequent chapters will feature.

Throughout this writing I will use ‘Western Equatoria’ to refer to the geographical area that would later be covered by ‘Western Equatoria State.’ Within this, I focus in particular on the area that stretches from Tambura in the northwest to Maridi in the east. This area has had numerous names. The boundaries of pre-colonial Zande kingdoms had been fluid and often-changing. When the Anglo-Egyptian colonial forces occupied the area (see Section 2.4), they formalized what they saw as the boundaries between the former kingdoms, and established Tambura, Yambio and Maridi districts (Daly 2004, 140). Later, Tambura and Yambio Districts were joined together as the ‘Southern District’ of Bahr el Ghazal Province. Then in 1935, this district was dubbed the ‘Zande District’ – after its largest ethnic group – and added to Mongalla Province. Mongalla then became part of Equatorial Province in 1936, and of Equatoria Province in 1948 (Badiéy 2014, 41; Leonardi 2013, 72; D. H. Johnson, Verjee, and Pritchard 2018). This would prove significant later, in the formation of a pan-Equatorial political block and identity vis-à-vis the larger Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups (see Chapters 6 and 8). In Sudanese times (see Section 2.5), the area around Yambio reversed to ‘Yambio District’, and after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 (see Section 2.6), ‘Western Equatoria State’ was created – with the original colonial districts (Tambura, Yambio and Maridi) now becoming three of the state’s ten counties. From October 2015 to February 2020, ‘Western Equatoria State’ was divided in four.

Apart from these administrative denominations, the area of South Sudan that I am concerned with has also been called ‘Zandeland’ both by academics and Zande people. This term is not always qualified or defined, but generally used to refer to the geographical area in South Sudan where ethnic Zande are in the majority, although sometimes the Zande-majority areas across the borders with the Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo are also included. However, the area’s inhabitants are not solely ethnic Zande: there were non-Zande before the Avungara came, and people have moved here since. For this reason, I rather use the more clearly delineated and less political geographic unit ‘Western Equatoria’.

2.1 SOME NOTES ON HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE WORKS OF EVANS-PRITCHARD

The historiography of much of pre-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa is complicated by the scarcity of written records, the dearth of archaeological and linguistic studies, and the shortcomings of oral histories (Vansina 1968). South Sudan is no exception: The written records about 'Zandeland' prior to 1937 (when anthropologist Evans-Pritchard published his first book), were produced by foreign ivory and slave traders, explorers, missionaries and colonial officials, who had particular interests in the area, and often held racist dispositions. They came from northern Sudan, Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and European countries. Many spoke Arabic, but very few understood any Zande. Given the positionality of all the people producing written records at this time, we must approach such sources with caution.

Visitors to the region bought or coerced the assistance of southerners. These 'dragoman' (interpreter, guide) had an influential role in interpreting local politics and cultures to the visitors (Ivanov, 2002). Schweinfurth even argues that the term 'Niam-Niam' which was used by foreigners in the nineteenth century for Zande, originated with the Dinka guides of northern Sudanese (Leonardi 2013, 31). But Ivanov argues convincingly this was a general term used by Arab scholars for people 'living at the extreme edge of Africa' whom they considered backward, pagan, and cannibalistic (Ivanov, 2002: 92). Still, outside visitors through their contacts with neighbouring southern Sudanese people, had quickly stereotyped the 'Niam-Niam'. The first European to visit Western Equatoria – a Welsh trader – wrote in 1861 that neighboring people had described the 'Niam-Niam' as 'warlike and savage, invariably feasting on their fallen enemies' (Evans-Pritchard 1960b, 238), and as 'monkey-faced people with tails a yard long' (Ivanov 2002, 104).

The best academic works on the Sudanese Zande area were written during the colonial period by anthropologist Evans-Pritchard. From 1926, he conducted 20 months of fieldwork near Yambio, in the area of Prince Gangura (son of King Gbudwe). Evans-Pritchard spoke Zande and endeavored to live as much as possible for a white British man like the people he researched. Evans-Pritchard's first major publication, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937) brought global fame to the Zande, and remains essential reading for many students of anthropology and philosophy of knowledge to this day (see Section 1.2).

Evans-Pritchard has been severely criticized for relying too much on the romanticized accounts of elderly men, and for overlooking women's perspectives (S. D. Siemens 1993); for ignoring the importance of maternal relations and the domestic sphere (McKinnon 2000), and for his over-stated dichotomy between domestic and political systems (Richards 1941; Cormack 2014). Evans-Pritchard himself recognized a potential bias, when he wrote that 'what one brings out of a field-study largely depends on what one brings to

it' (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 241). This is an important caveat to keep in mind with any ethnographic study, and his are no exceptions.

Two more fundamental connected critiques of Evans-Pritchard's work come from anthropologists Parker Shipton and Sharon Hutchinson. Parker Shipton critiques Evans-Pritchard's work on the Luo: 'Heavily influenced by structural-functionalism ... [they looked] for logical consistencies and continuities in culture and society, and not to place heavy emphasis on material concerns or constraints, long-distance contacts, or changes over time' (Shipton 2009, 87). In a similarly way, Hutchinson argues that Evans-Pritchard's work especially on the Nuer, focused excessively on order, unity and equilibrium and overlooks confusion and change, and additionally that he ignored the colonial context in which he worked (Hutchinson 1996, 28).

The second part of this critique is wholly justified. Evans-Pritchard's work was very much in the service of the colonial government: His first and most famous book, 'Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande,' was dedicated to Major Larken, 'District Commissioner in Zandeland 1911-1932, in admiration for his service to the Azande and in token of friendship.' And on the first page of that book he acknowledges that the cost of his 'expeditions' was mainly borne by 'the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, at whose invitation they were carried out' (Evans-Pritchard 1972, vii). This colonial context is even more problematic for his work on the Nuer, which was commissioned by the colonial state which struggled to establish control and hoped to get inspiration from Evans-Pritchard's study.

Hutchinson's first critique of Evans-Pritchard's work – that he understated change and took an 'ahistorical approach' (Leonardi 2013, 6), deserves some nuance. His student, Conrad Reining, wrote that Evans-Pritchard had decided that they would 'Divide the study of the history of the Azande so that he will concentrate on the pre-European period and I upon the European period' (Reining 1966, xv). Evans-Pritchard's academic interest was thus in the pre-colonial time. He was conscious that things had changed since then, if only because his research took place largely in villages that had been newly created by the colonial state in response to sleeping sickness (see Sections 2.4 and 3.2). In his 'The Azande: History and Political Institutions' he writes: 'A description of Zande political institutions has to be to some extent a reconstruction, for though I found that, in general, social life had not, so far as could be ascertained, changed much' (Evans-Pritchard 1965, 102). Elsewhere, he seemed much less confident that changes had been limited and that historiography, especially of Zande 'ancient history' was still possible. He confided in the reader: 'Hundreds of thousands of people of different origins all jumbled up – the ethnologist in Africa may sometimes sigh for some neat little Polynesian or Melanesian island community!' (Evans-Pritchard 1961, 121). Yet whatever the scope of change affecting Zande society, it is clear that Evans-Pritchard sought to describe a 'traditional order' which he supposed existed prior to

colonial conquest, something that could be recorded and saved through ethnography (see Section 1.2).

The critiques of Evans-Pritchard's work, and his positionality as essentially a colonial anthropologist, are important to keep in mind when reading and appraising his work. Despite his omission to deal with the colonial context, his works on (precolonial) Zande history, politics and culture remain unrivaled. They must be treated as a source – with its limitations – but still of crucial insight to any study on these topics.

Oral histories are an essential source for any attempt at historiography in Sub-Saharan Africa that aligns more with insiders' views of history. In this chapter, I will refer to a number of oral history accounts by Avungara elders or chiefs (2014-9). Oral histories, however, also have their shortcomings: They are often weaker than written sources on chronology, and can be as tainted by politics (Vansina 1968). Oral histories can be susceptible to romanisation and selective remembering. In a way not dissimilar to for instance Shaka in South Africa, the pre-colonial Zande kings have been remembered differently according to time, place and person (Hamilton 1998). Further, these oral histories are told some 115 years after colonialism began in Yambio, and it is impossible 'to draw clear distinctions between the versions of the colonized and the colonizers' (Hamilton 1998, 5). Oral histories and the people who hold most authority in this realm, have also suffered the consequences of conflict and displacement. In Arua, Uganda, I spoke with a Western Equatorian about the history and tradition of his ethnic group, the Balanda.³ Yet when I asked him about the pre-colonial history he apologized:

I am sorry. I was born at a time where there was a lot of trouble ... We could just know these [limited] things ... I don't have my Balanda [anthropology] book here. There also really aren't any Balanda elders here [in Uganda]. If not for the trouble in our place I would ask you to find an elder in Yambio. One was killed recently, he had a rich memory. Another was my uncle, he also passed on. He was 95.⁴

This says a lot: Many of the elders who knew history well have died, and they, too, have sometimes read foreign anthropology books which informed their oral histories. Here, as elsewhere, the historiographic lines have been blurred (Hamilton 1998, 6). Today many Western Equatorian elders admit that they, too, are confused about history. Many were humble about what they knew, urging me to talk for the 'real' history to particular others whom they

3 Balanda are a minority ethnic group in Western Equatoria. Balanda in Western Equatoria in 2014-5 and in exile in Uganda often spoke Zande (the language), and the two groups intermarried and attended joint church services. Over the course of the South Sudanese Civil War, tensions increased between some Balanda and Zande, especially in Tambura. The tragic murder of former county commissioner Charles Babiro, an especially helpful respondent to this book, was interpreted by many in this light.

4 Interview with Western Equatorian church leader, Arua, 17 June 2017.

considered more senior in age or hierarchy. Still, when treated with caution, oral histories can be essential complements for the equally fallible secondary sources and colonial-era archival records.

2.2 THE ORIGIN OF THE AVUNGARA AND THE FORMATION OF 'THE ZANDE' (1500s-1856)

The political history of the Zande is closely intertwined with that of its 'ruling clan' (sometimes called 'royal family' or 'aristocratic clan'): the Avungara. The provenance of the Avungara is subject to debate. Early colonial administrators suspected that they were originally a different 'tribe' or 'race', with a different language, 'a more refined type of face' and 'a general air of good breeding' (Larken 1926, 23) (see Section 3.1). In the histories written by Europeans, the Avungara were said to have conquered what are now the borderlands between South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) between the sixteenth to mid-eighteenth century (Gray 1961; Larken 1930; S. D. S. D. Siemens 1990; Evans-Pritchard 1957b, 341). Then they were said to lead the migration of Zande people into contemporary Western Equatoria from today's Congo, by crossing the Uele river and the Nile-Congo divide. The provenance of the Avungara before that was often traced somewhere in the west, sometimes as far as Lake Chad. This was in line with wider ideas about the 'Bantu expansion' (see Section 3.1). Lagae and Van den Plas proposed that 'Avungara' was etymologically composed of 'a = plural; vo = to bind, to unite; ngara = strength, force – which means that the Avungara are 'those who seized power' or 'the binders of strength' (Baxter and Butt 1953, 54). In sum, the Avungara in European accounts, were a group that through conquest seized power over other groups.

Oral histories by Zande themselves, present various different views. They insist that the Avungara are the descendants of a single young man who grew up among the Zande and got the right to rule when he proved his strength and wisdom in a fight with a strong man. There are a few varieties of this story. I will present here two versions of the story, and then offer a preliminary analysis.

*Version 1: narrated by Mr Wandu, an Avungara elder in Yambio*⁵

One night a stranger visited the house of a Zande Chief. As customary, the visitor was offered some time to settle in and offered water by the daughter of the Chief. The stranger then told the daughter, who was not yet pregnant, that she would

5 This history was narrated to me by Tertisio Wandu, an elder in Yambio, in January 2015. It is noteworthy that it overlaps to a very considerable degree with an oral history on the same topic told by Augustino sou Mvuto, formerly a paramount chief in Tambura written up by a Leitch, a colonial official who worked in Yambio from 1948 to 1955 (Leitch, n.d.).

give birth to a baby boy the next day. The chiefs' daughter was shocked and walked out of the room to get her father. When they both returned, the stranger had disappeared. The next morning, the chiefs' daughter gave birth to a baby boy, who was brought up in the chiefs' household. He grew up to be a smart if small boy. One day there was a powerful man and a brute, Ngara, who would *rob* people on the road. The boy was travelling with the sons and daughters of the chief, and the brute attacked them. Ngara overpowered all the chiefs' children and took their belongings. But he failed to overpower the boy, who outwitted him, tied his hands, and then redistributed back the belongings to the chiefs' children. From then on, the boy was called 'Vo-ngara': from the Zande word 'vo' (to tie) and 'Ngara', the name of the brute. After defeating Ngara, the small boy redistributed the goods that he had stolen to their original owners. This practice was new and much welcomed, and so the people decided to ask this young boy's advice and guidance whenever disputes would arise. This is the origin of the Avungara.

Version 2: narrated by non-Avungara former politician and refugee in Kampala⁶

Ngara was a powerful man, famous because nobody could put his head down in a fight. There was no element of robbery and things like that, he was simply a well-known fighter. One day, they called for a wrestling match. Everyone could compete. Then one ordinary young man – who did not look strong – took him down in the fight. It was a mystery, a miracle to the people. It was like the story of David and Goliath in the Bible. So Ngara asked for a second round, and again the young man brought him down. Then he called for a rope and he tied Ngara just to seal the deal. And everybody was puzzled. They said, 'From today, this young man is our king, he has done something so great!' And that is how the clan of the Avungara started.

There are notable differences between these two oral histories. In the first account, the mystery stretches to the boy's birth, whereas in the second he is an 'ordinary young man'. In the first, Ngara is a brute and in the second just a powerful warrior. In the second account, it his prowess in fighting that made the boy stand out, in the first there was an additional element of fairness in redistributing the stolen goods. Yet, both versions argue that the Avungara-clan originates with a single young man who was recognized for his merit by 'the people'. Present-day oral histories also insist that prior to Avungara-rule, other clans, such as the Ambokio, Abokondo and Giti ruled over some Zande-speakers but that those rulers were poor and cruel administrators.⁷ One Avungara elder told me that the other clans had resolved disputes unfairly – punishing both sides of any dispute – and that the young man gained respect by ruling in favour of one of the disputing parties.⁸

⁶ Interview with former state minister, Kampala, 13 June 2017.

⁷ Interviews with: 87-year-old elder, Makpandu, 2015; senior Avungara clan member, Yambio, 16 February 2015; paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015; and Western Equatoria community chairperson, refugee settlement in Uganda, 5 August 2017.

⁸ Interview with Gangura Isaya, Arua, 9 August 2017.

The oral histories present a much more agentive view of authority and leadership – as based on the consent of the governed – whereas the European accounts emphasize an ‘incoming invader’-narrative focusing on ethnic or racial difference. This is in line with historiography on other parts of Africa, where colonial authorities sought ‘to naturalise and justify colonial presence ... [and] to deny local agency, initiative or leadership potential’ (M. Hall 1984; Ashley, Antonites, and Fredriksen 2016, 420). The oral histories, one might add, might be motivated by the opposite desire to emphasize local agency and leadership potential, and to glorify the remembered past – making it a source of inspiration for the present and future.

Whether through conquest or enlightened rule, the Avungara came to rule over countless smaller ‘confused and conflicting groups’ – among whom Zande-speakers and Bantu-speaking people (Gray 1961, 14). A British district commissioner later wrote that the Avungara would maintain ‘Roman-style rule’, incorporating elders in leadership positions and youth in their armies (Larken 1926). According to Evans-Pritchard, this rule was based on a social contract of sorts, in which ‘subject people’ kept ‘the peace, and a payment of tribute in labour and in kind,’ and the Avungara would provide security and give gifts of food and spears (which were used as brideprice) (Evans-Pritchard 1971, 33).

Ruling as they did over diverse groups of people, the Avungara appointed non-Avungara to ‘[administer] and bring about the assimilation of foreign peoples (*zoga auro*) or, as they often put it, of pacifying them (*zelesi yo*)’ (Evans-Pritchard 1960a, 25). Over time, the various groups united under Avungara rule amalgamated into the Zande group, which later became regarded (and self-identify) as an ethnic group itself (Evans-Pritchard 1957b; R. O. Collins 1983; Lloyd 1978; Øystein H. Rolandsen and Daly 2016). In this way, the history of the Zande group is reminiscent of that of the Luo about whom Shipton writes, ‘To ask how Luo people got where they are on the map is also to ask how other people there became Luo’ (Shipton 2009, 60). To this day, though, some Zande people still differentiate between ‘pure Zande’ and others.

Evans-Pritchard suggests that the authority of the kings may have been relatively weak, and only increased over the century or so before European ‘penetration’ of the area (Evans-Pritchard 1957b, 337). In the historical memory of many Western Equatorians today, however, the pre-colonial kings held near absolute power. Certain is that the Avungara kings and princes would rule over courts, hear disputes, and compete with other Avungara rulers for authority and territory. Many towns in the region are named after these rulers: Ezo, Tambura, Yambio, Ndoruma, Gangura. It is hard to ascertain now to what extent the kings lived in peace or fought ‘dynastic rivalries’ prior to the arrival of Arabs and Europeans (as is suggested by Evans-Pritchard and Gray). But both oral histories and the European sources indicate that it may be more accurate to speak of a patchwork of polities speaking Zande, ruled by Avungara rulers, than of a singular kingdom (Ivanov 2002; Poggo 1992).

2.3 A TALE OF TWO KINGS AND THE ARRIVAL OF IMPERIAL POWERS (1856-1905)

For a long time, Western Equatoria's geography had shielded it from the ivory and slave traders, and from the Turco-Egyptian,⁹ Belgian, French and British imperial powers. This changed with the 'opening up' of the Bahr-el-Ghazal river in 1855-56, and the establishment of the first *zara'ib* (fortified trading station, singular *zariba*) (Gray 1961, 59) – most notably Deim Zubeir. By most accounts, the Avungara elites initially managed to engage the foreigners on an equal and pragmatic footing (Gray 1961, 62). Many rulers engaged in profitable trade: offering grain, ivory, slaves,¹⁰ and military support in return for firearms, cloth, copper, and beads. King Bazingbi (father of Gbudwe) even married one of his daughters to a northern Sudanese (Evans-Pritchard 1957a; Poggo 1992).

The Avungara rulers quickly appreciated that the foreigners could be of help in domestic politics. For instance, in 1881 King Ndoruma enlisted the military support of Turco-Egyptian soldiers in a battle against King Gbudwe (Poggo 1992, 49).¹¹ Over the course of the 1870s and 1880s, however, the relations between the Zande rulers and the foreigners with their *zara'ib* became less equal and cordial, as trade made way for raiding and pillage (Leonardi 2013, 36–37; Wassara 2015, 57). Around the turn of the 19th century, Belgian, French and British colonial powers each sought to establish control over the Zande areas – defeating or co-opting Avungara rulers in the process (Poggo 1992). How the various Zande kings fared in this turbulent time, is perhaps best illustrated by the two kings that are most famous today: King Gbudwe and King Tambura.

King Gbudwe (or 'Gbudue,' later named 'Yambio' or 'Mbio'), remains the most famous of the Avungara rulers of the Zande. He was born in Ezo around 1835 as the youngest son of King Bazingbi. His elder brothers were given territories to rule, but Gbudwe remained in his father's court.¹² After King Bazingbi's death, Gbudwe traveled to an area then called Berekewe (now Yambio) where he ruled from around 1865 to 1905 (Evans-Pritchard 1957a; Kujok 2015). Evans-Pritchard spoke some 22 years after Gbudwe's death with people who had lived under his reign, and concluded that 'Gbudwe was the Zande ideal of what a king should be and his name epitomizes to them all that they are proud of in their past and all that they have lost by European

9 In South Sudan, the term 'Arab' is used quite widely to refer to northern Sudanese and Egyptians. Whether those people self-identified as 'Arab' is beyond the scope of this book.

10 Wassara estimates that some 80,000 slaves were taken from Bahr al-Ghazal alone (Wassara 2015, 57).

11 Later, Anglo-Egyptian Condominium officials promised Ndoruma that in return for his cooperation, they would grant him 'non-interference with his own system of government on the condition that it was efficient and to the satisfaction of Government and that he and his people should give the Government their unqualified loyal support' (Badal 1977).

12 Interview with paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015.

conquest: their independence and the stability of their political and domestic institutions-all that they look back to with pride, longing, and regret' (Evans-Pritchard 1957a, 65).

Gbudwe has gone into history as being 'hostile to any foreign intruders' (Poggo 1992, 53) or even 'xenophobic' (Øystein H. Rolandsen and Daly 2016, 40). However, for a long time the King also maintained diplomatic correspondence with colonial government: First with Emin Pasha, then governor of Equatoria Province (Ivanov 2021), and later with the Governor-General himself (Wingate 1902b). Gbudwe's hostility was likely fomented by his imprisonment at least once by Turco-Egyptian forces at Deim Zubeir, the zariba which later became the capital of Bahr El Ghazal.¹³ During his reign, Gbudwe demonstrated military prowess in battles with Dinka, Moru, Turco-Egyptians, Mahdists, Belgians and British. Some go so far as to claim that King Gbudwe gave Juba its original name (*Zungbe*).¹⁴ He also fought wars with the neighbouring Zande kingdoms, notably that of Tambura and his brother Ndoruma. However, Gbudwe's wars were to weaken his kingdom in the long run. In February 1904, one of Gbudwe's sons, Rikita, clashed with an Anglo-Egyptian patrol under Captain Wood. The same year, in late 1904, Gbudwe fought an ambitious but ultimately disastrous campaign against the encamped Belgians at Mayawa in today's DR Congo.¹⁵ In response, the Anglo-Egyptians took decisive action in February 1905. The Governor-General wrote:

Another and stronger patrol under the command of [Governor of Bahr El Ghazal] Major Boulnois has now been sent into the Nyam-Nyam [Zande] country to assert the authority of the Government, and to reassure those who are well disposed. Major Boulnois has been instructed to do all in his power to secure the allegiance of this fine tribe of savages, without a recourse to force.*

13 According to paramount chief Peni, Gbudwe was captured 'And taken to Deim Zubeir, with two children. Where he spent two years in prison. When he was in prison, one of his sons also died in prison. After two years, he was convinced to come and talk to the people so that they be loyal to the British regime and the Arabis.' Interview with paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015. The paramount chief – like many contemporary speakers – conflates British, 'Arabes', and the Turco-Egyptians. But broadly, his account seems to be confirmed by another source, which writes that Turco-Egyptian forces imprisoned Gbudwe in 1882 in Deim Zubeir until 1884 (Kujok 2015). Deim Zubeir became Deim Suleiman in 1876, and was ruled by Romolo Gessi from 1879.

14 One key respondent made this claim, saying that King Gbudwe and his army were traveling east and reached the Nile River. There Gbudwe allegedly ordered his people to cut trees to try and cross the river, but they failed. So the king sat down and said '*Zungbe*'. My respondent explained: '*Zungbe* means you have done everything but you are tired, and you cannot go ahead.' Interview with Western Equatoria community chairperson, refugee settlement in Uganda, 5 August 2017.

15 Interview with paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015. The dates are unclear. Wassara writes about August 1904 (Wassara 2015, 60), Evans-Pritchard about December 1904 (Evans-Pritchard 1960a, 17).

During this effort to bring the Zande, 'this fine tribe of savages', into the fold, Gbudwe died. The asterisk is explained at the bottom of the page: 'Information has now (March 15) been received which shows that Major Boulnois has been completely successful in attaining the objects of his mission. A trifling engagement took place, in which Yambio [Gbudwe] was mortally wounded' (Baring 1905, 8).¹⁶ What a way to characterize the death of a king, the end of an era, and a monumental rupture in Zande history. The death was later reported as having occurred on 10 February 1905.

Figure 1: Colour Sergeant F. R. Boardman (Egyptian Army, Liverpool Regiment), pictured between 1900 and 1904 during a patrol against the Zande (the 'Nyam Nyam patrol'). Source: the F.R. Boardman collection, Sudan Archive Durham (SAD.A98/1). Reproduced by permission of Durham University Library and Collections.



¹⁶ One source narrates how the force 'comprised of 4 companies of the Tenth Sudanese Battalion with a detachment of artillery' (Kujok 2015). A more elaborate report of the campaign against Gbudwe is offered by Governor-General Wingate (Wingate 1905, 5).

Figure 2: Captain P. R. Wood pictured around 1900 with Maxim Battery and gun during the 'Niam Niam patrol'. Wood led a 'strong patrol' from Tonj to Gbudwe from 27 January 1904 which was met with a 'treacherous and hostile reception' (Gleichen 1904, 278). Source: the F.R. Boardman collection, Sudan Archive Durham (SAD.A98/15). Reproduced by permission of the Durham University Library and Collections.



How Gbudwe died remains disputed. Foreign academics insist he was either killed in battle during the above-mentioned British 'patrol' (Evans-Pritchard 1960a; RO Collins 1971; Warburg 1971; Simner 2017) of 'gunshot wounds' (Badal 1977) or 'of wounds suffered while reportedly trying to flee' (Øystein H. Rolandsen and Daly 2016, 40). Paramount Chief Peni acknowledged that Gbudwe was shot during the patrol, but stresses that Gbudwe foresaw his death, and instructed his children not to fight. He awaited the British and the accompanying Zande, sitting alone on an anthill by the riverside:

So, when [the soldiers and officers] reached, he opened fire on them. And six people died. Then one of the soldiers shot his right hand. And the pistol fell down ... From

there, he was taken to Yambio, to his residence, for treatment. So maybe because of what happened, because of how he suffered in prison. He did not feel like going back to prison again. Some people said he refused to take the medication. As a result, King Gbudwe died. So that is how he died.¹⁷

When I discussed the death of Gbudwe with Zande refugees in Uganda, they, too, told me that they heard that Gbudwe was wounded and captured but not killed during the British attack. In one version the king asked one of his sons or guards to kill him because he refused to live under the British or go back to prison.¹⁸ Whereas the British accounts emphasize that Gbudwe was killed in combat, in the Zande accounts the king knew what was coming, according to some sources because an oracle had foretold his death (Kujok 2015). The king then chose death over subjugation, much in line with his contemporary reputation as a symbol of resistance to foreign rule. His reputation extends beyond the Zande areas: One scholar describes him as 'a colossus figure in South Sudan's history'¹⁹ and John Garang, the leader of the Sudan's Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), named a battalion after Gbudwe 'to invoke the fighting spirit of the king' (Kujok 2015). In unambiguously contemporary terms, one Zande refugee leader in Uganda told me, '[Gbudwe] started this rebellion movement, right from Central Africa.'²⁰

King Tambura found himself in slightly different conditions, and charted the risks and opportunities posed by the foreigners differently. Like Gbudwe, Tambura was captured by Turco-Egyptian troops and imprisoned at Deim Zubeir, probably in the 1970s. Upon his release, Tambura fought on the side of the Turco-Egyptian army. One historian argues that the army installed him in the territory that his father, Liwa, had ruled (Poggo 1992, 89), whereas another holds that Tambura joined the army, and 'Proved to be a brilliant soldier and quickly progressed within the ranks to an officer position' (Kujok 2015). In either case, after captivity he returned to become a powerful King, who built close ties to the colonial government.

17 Interview with paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015.

18 Interview with Western Equatoria community chairperson, refugee settlement in Uganda, 5 August 2017. Another version was given in a FGD with former combatants from Western Equatoria. A 23-year-old former Arrow Boy narrated how, 'The first time the Arabs captured [Gbudwe], they shaved his hair. The second time they captured him, they circumcised him. The third time they were about to capture him he thought they would surely kill him. So he asked his son to put a weapon in the fire, and then push it in his anus to kill him.' FGD, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.

19 He continues: 'King Gbudwe's achievements were unprecedented for an African traditional leader, and they earned him a place in history as one of the most influential African figures of the nineteenth century' (Kujok 2015).

20 Interview with Western Equatoria community chairperson, refugee settlement in Uganda, 5 August 2017.

When I spoke in 2015 with the paramount chief of Tambura about his illustrious great-grandfather, he insisted that Tambura had resisted colonial occupation, 'The colonists faced severe resistance here, so they used the missionaries to calm King Tambura.'²¹ This oral history is at this point at odds with other oral histories from Yambio, and with the available archival sources on the matter. They suggest rather that King Tambura sought friendly contact with the colonial government, and in return received gifts of silk clothing, and even a big drum inscribed with 'A present from Sir Reginald Wingate Pasha, Sirdar of the Egyptian Army and Governor-General of the Sudan, to Sultan Tembura in the Nyam Nyam country' (Wingate 1902c). Badal writes plainly that:

Tombura *voluntarily* sought accommodation with the British right from the start by agreeing to place himself and all his resources at the disposal of the Government ... These included his army estimated at 1,000 rifles of all sorts and some 3,000 bow and spearmen. He also made gifts to the Sudan Government of eighty tusks of ivory valued at well over £ 1200, undertook the construction of a garrison at the site of a former French post, and promised to open trade relations with Khartoum' (italics are mine) (Badal 1977).

The extent to which the King's cooperation was 'voluntary,' is a matter of dispute. It was clear that resistance would be met with violence. As the Governor-General wrote to King Tambura in 1902: 'I advise you to avoid all disturbances which result in destruction only, and wish you every happiness and prosperity under the shadow of my just Government' (Wingate 1902a). It appears that having assessed the power of the foreigners, Tambura sought to avoid a military confrontation with them and instead to benefit from their presence. A Zande student from Tambura told me how an elder from his area had told him about Tambura's reception of the colonial powers:

When the British colonizer came, they came through Tambura. [He] accepted because he had no choice. He had seen the machines they had. They showed him. He sent his *bazire* (messenger) to Gbudwe. Instead of Gbudwe replying accepting, he cut the ears of the messenger and told him not to come back. When the messenger returned to Tambura, he said 'I have no problem now with the colonizers attacking Yambio.'²²

The colonial files and secondary sources confirm that Tambura sent an emissary to warn Gbudwe, and that the latter had him mutilated (Wassara 2015, 61). The Governor of Bahr-el-Ghazal Province reported that in June 1904, a colonial force under Captain Bethell visited 'Sultan Tambura, the friendly Niam-Niam chief ... with a view to making arrangements for a future effort

21 Interview with paramount chief, Tambura, 21 March 2015.

22 Interview with 22-year-old male student from Tambura, Kampala, 17 March 2017.

to deal with Yambio ... Tambura was re-assured and promised his support in the Government undertaking' (Boulnois 1905, 2). The paramount chief of Yambio – a great-grandchild of Gbudwe – told me the history as follows:

The princes or kings who were around [Gbudwe], were already deceived by the whites. By the time King Gbudwe was killed, Tambura had already 1,000 guns which were given to him ... The British started coming from Tambura. And [you go through] the history, the British were accompanied by some Zande.²³

This is a crucial point: This paramount chief as well as the academic sources on the matter suggest that by 1905, the colonial powers had divided the Zande rulers to the extent that Zande soldiers were involved in the final overthrow of Gbudwe. These accounts suggest that Tambura chose a route of cooperation and diplomacy with the colonial government, partly because he gathered military resistance was futile. This is probably best understood in the context of the rivalry with his fellow Avungara rulers, and the pressure from non-Zande subjects within his kingdom. In the analysis of Poggo, 'Peaceful submission to the Anglo-Egyptian government was therefore the only alternative left to him' (Poggo 1992, 7).

These two Avungara kings, Gbudwe and Tambura, were relatives, but they steered the turbulent waters of the late 19th century very differently.²⁴ One opted for military resistance, the other for tactical engagement. One died in combat or shortly thereafter, the other became a paramount chief or 'sultan' in the new colonial administration (Daly 2004, 140). One has become a symbol of resistance, the other less so. The dilemmas and histories of Gbudwe and Tambura foreshadowed how throughout the 20th and 21th century, Western Equatorial leaders were often confronted with powerful outside forces, vis-à-vis they positioned themselves differently. Sometimes cooperating, sometimes resisting, but often running the risk a violent death or losing the support of 'their people'.

2.4 ANGLO-EGYPTIAN COLONIZATION AND THE POSITION OF CHIEFS (1905-1955)

The death of Gbudwe is used both in contemporary oral history accounts and in secondary sources about the Zande people as a turning point, a moment of rupture that symbolizes the end of Zande sovereignty and the beginning of colonial era (Warburg 1971; Wassara 2015, 62). Based on fieldwork in 1926-30, Evans-Pritchard wrote that for the Zande 'before and after Gbudwe's death

23 Interview with paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015.

24 Today Gbudwe and Tambura are often said to have been 'brothers.' From Evans-Pritchards' kinship chart it appears that in English terms they were second cousins (their grandfathers were brothers) (Evans-Pritchard 1957a, 62).

is not to them just a difference in time before and after an event. It is a deep moral cleavage' (Evans-Pritchard 1957a). In 2017, many Zande still speak of 'those days' and associate it with an order of culture and identity that is seen to have been lost through colonization, wars and displacement (including the present day).

Yet the transition from 'Zande sovereignty' to 'colonial control' was not as clear-cut. Historical records and oral history accounts indicate that Zande resistance to colonial administration continued after the death of Gbudwe. In 1914, colonial intelligence reported that four sons of Gbudwe were plotting to overthrow the British colonial administration in Yambio. They were arrested and imprisoned in Wau, and later Omdurman.²⁵ And in 1916, Zande ruler Bangazagene (son of Mopoi) captured a French outpost in Mopoi, French Equatorial Africa. Eventually a joint force of British, Belgians and French troops cooperated to recapture the outpost. Banzagene was either killed or escaped.²⁶ Some authors argue that many Zande 'believed as late as 1918 that the Sudan government was not permanent and would disappear like the Turks and the French' (R. O. Collins 1983). Colonial forces had defeated the Zande rulers militarily, but their control over Western Equatoria remained weak for some time.

25 Paramount Chief Wilson Peni told us how, 'In 1927, the Prince [sons] of King Gbudwe decide to attack the British again. So before the final arrangement was done, some princes were arrested and taken to Khartoum. Among the princes were Prince Mange and also Prince Mange died in prison in Khartoum.' Interview with paramount chief, Yambio, 8 April 2015. This event comes up – albeit dated in 1914 – in various colonial sources in the Sudan Archives of Durham University. The precise story is hard to reconstruct, but almost certainly Prince Mange (Mangi) was involved, together with at least two other chiefs. In Leitch' documents, there is a summary of the proceedings against 'Sultan Basungada, Sultan Gungora, and Shaykh Mopoi of the Avungara tribe for their involvement in the Azande uprising.' (SAD.315/6/20-21). There are also letters from R. G. C. Brock, Inspector of Maridi District to R. M. Feilden, the governor of Bahr el-Ghazal, 'concerning unrest amongst the Azande and ... plans to drive the government out of Yambio' (1914). One chief died in prison in Wau, the other three chiefs were found guilty and sentenced to ten years imprisonment by a Mudir's court. This sentence that was later suspended by Governor-General Reginald Wingate, who instead fired the three chiefs and exiled them to Khartoum. T. A. T. Leitch, Letters from colonial officials R. G. C. Brock, R. M. Feilden, and W. R. G. Bond pertaining 'unrest among the Azande'. Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections. Reference code: GB-0033-SAD.315/6/1-30, 1914 January 21 and November 30. More information at: http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s13t945q83c.xml. See also (Kujok 2015).

26 In February 1916, Zande sultan Bangazagene (also Ngbangazegino) captured a French outpost in Mopoi, French Equatorial Africa. Sultan Bangazagene (son of Mopoi) reportedly 'refused to surrender unless permitted to settle in the Bahr-el-Ghazal' (which at that time included what is today Western Equatoria). Poggo writes that 'This time the threat he posed drew the forces of the French, Belgians and the British into alliance in order to challenge him. He was subsequently captured and killed as he tried to flee.' (based on Gain and Duignan, *The Rulers of Belgian Africa*, 114). Newspaper clippings suggest, however, that Bangazagene was not killed but in fact escaped (*Unknown Newspaper* 1916). See also Ivanov, 2002: 193.

Zande today often stress two colonial strategies that undermined their resistance: border-drawing and missionary activity. Three colonial powers – the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, France and ‘Congo Free State’ – met in this area in the late 19th century, and drew most of the borders that remain in place today.²⁷ Although colonial competition seems to explain the location of those borders, many Zande today are not convinced. They argue instead that the borders were drawn deliberately to divide and weaken the once powerful Zande. In the words of one elder in Makpandu, ‘When the British colony came in, they saw that these people were not easy to handle or convince. So they had to divide them into three countries in order to handle them properly.’²⁸

Rather than military defeat, some elders today argue that it was the spiritual conversion of some Avungara princes by the missionaries that was instrumental to their surrender. In this regard, the settlement of Comboni missionaries at Prince Mupoi’s court in 1912-4 is often cited (Agostoni 1996).²⁹ A great-grandson of Gbudwe emphasized the change this affected, by pointing to my own presence as a white foreigner: ‘History records that the relation between the Azande and the people who colonized Sudan were not good. We could not sit side by side then like we are sitting now. But then the missionaries came.’³⁰ The missionaries preached Christianity and peace, and in the words of a Zande elder in Kampala, ‘[tried] to tame the community. And that is how now the Azande received Christianity so much ... they left all the battles of those days and basically from there until now there has been no Kingdom.’³¹ In this account, there is a direct link between Christianity, the ban on warfare and the end of the Zande kingdom(s).

In most of South Sudan, colonial authorities did not find readily-available chieftaincy structures to rule through ‘indirectly.’ Leonardi writes that, ‘These were among the most famous ‘stateless societies’ of early political anthropology; the notion of a single chiefly authority was inherently at odds with political tradition here’ (Leonardi 2013, 4). She is likely referring here to the pastoral ‘acephalous’ societies which constituted the majority of the southern Sudan (Dinka, Nuer, Murle, Mundari, Toposa, etc)’ (D. H. Johnson 2003, 12). Evans-Pritchard’s ethnography on the Nuer described the political structure of such ‘segmentary’ societies (Evans-Pritchard 1940). Other parts of Southern Sudan, however, were exceptions to this general rule: Notably

27 The most significant border-drawing exercise took place at the Berlin Conference in 1884-5. But the borders especially between Sudan, ‘Congo Free State’ and Uganda kept shifting until the death of King Leopold II and the end of the Lado Enclave in 1910.

28 Interview with 87-year-old Zande elder, Makpandu, March 2015. Interview with Charles Bangbe, Kiryandongo RS, 4 August 2017.

29 Interview with Western Equatoria community chairperson, refugee settlement in Uganda, 5 August 2017.

30 Interview with Gangura Isaya, Arua, 9 August 2017.

31 Interview with elder, Kampala, 13 June 2017.

the kingdoms of the Shilluk, Anuak and Zande (D. H. Johnson 2003, 12). Here, the colonial state first had to defeat the pre-colonial rulers militarily, before installing a skeletal civil administration.³² The assertion that 'different Zande kings became government chiefs after the British model, with Gbudue's powers limited, despite being the last to be called king' (Schomerus and Rigterink 2016, 15) is true for Tambura, but false for Gbudwe – who was, after all, killed by the British.

A common assertion in the scholarship on chieftaincy under British colonial administration in Africa, is that chiefs were typically left, 'to carry on local government with relatively little interference' (Ubink 2008, 8). This, indeed, was the practice and rhetoric in the Zande areas of South Sudan in the first years after Gbudwe's defeat. The district commissioner of Tambura District, for instance, wrote in 1910 that it was government policy 'to support the sultans and chiefs in their dealings with their own subjects – allowing them to administer according to their tribal custom as far as possible' (RO Collins 2005). Evans-Pritchard writes that 'no effective [colonial] administration was established in Gbudwe's kingdom – though a military administration of a kind dated from 1905 – till about 1920' (Evans-Pritchard 1971, xi).

Gradually the governing ambitions of the colonial administration increased, and so did its influence on the chiefs. The Avungara rulers were no longer *abakindo* (kings), but *salatin* (chiefs), made subordinate to the colonial administrators. Becoming a 'traditional authority' now depended on the state, more than on blood relations and succession wars. The colonial administration side-lined powerful Zande rulers, or replaced them with weak but loyal ones (Warburg 1971). Chiefs' dependence on the state is likely to have meant a decline in their authority (Robert Collins and Herzog 1961; D. H. Johnson 1991, 1990). The two British district commissioners who were stationed in Yambio between 1914 and 1951 relied on the chiefs to some extent, but simultaneously distrusted the Avungara royal clan – and wanted to keep them sufficiently weak. As one colonial official described it,

There lurked a suspicion in the minds of the [colonial] authorities that any drastic handling of the Azande might lead to revolt, and that the chiefs restored to power might foster any tendency in that direction (Maurice 1937).

As a result, the chiefs grew weaker and more insecure. In 1925, two decades after the defeat of Gbudwe, the British district-commissioner of Tambura wrote that:

32 Just how small this administration and the colonial investments in Southern Sudan were, is summarized by Badal: 'Until 1949, the Southern Sudan had no secondary school [and] in an area only slightly less than the size of Kenya there were, by 1934 only 42 British political officers and 18 senior technicians' (Badal 1977).

The chiefs appeared to have retired into their shells and to have lost interest in public affairs ... The Avongara are the only section who have nothing to gain and everything to lose by our occupation ... Decentralisation seems to be called for, but the prestige and power of the chiefs had so suffered from their being, in practice, misused or ignored by the direct action of so many minor officials of differing nationalities and ideals that one was faced with a pathetic lack of suitable material for the reconstruction of the edifice of (dependent) native rule. (Philipps, 1925, pp. 4, 5, 10 in Johnson, 194)

The insecurity of chiefs, centred in important part on their relation to government and the extent to which it would condone their role in the administration of justice. The district commissioner of Tambura describes how:

Most of the chiefs, especially Avongara well-stricken in years, had suffered in property, pride of prejudice, and no definite set of government rules were known to them to enable them to feel sure of legal validity (since our breaking down their own code) or our approval, of their judgements under the new conditions. People spoke openly of 'Government judgements' and 'Zande judgements' – in cases where native law alone was involved – as if the two were necessarily incompatible and the former as incomprehensible as the Trinity. In these circumstances the senior chiefs were in many cases refusing to settle cases, and the people were frequently reduced to hawking their legal grievances from one petty chief to another (Philipps 1925, 7).

The result of the refusal or inability of (senior) Zande chiefs to resolve disputes, meant that many people sought help wherever they could find it. According to district commissioner Philipps, European and Sudanese military, medical and political personnel of the colonial government were 'besieged' by disputants looking for justice:

Any official showing the slightest patience, interest or sympathy, was inundated by requests for legal pronouncements. Medical officers on tour, European N.C.O.³³ passing through, and casual Sudanese Officers, all produced the most astonishing and variegated sets of judgements and sentences, coloured by Syrian, British barrack-room, or Omdurman conceptions of Zande law. TRUTH, alas, was often coy and, dissimulated by an alien tongue, seldom emerged from her WELL for their benefit (Philipps 1925, 8).

All this, in the commissioner's words, made it difficult 'to get on with more productive labour, or the proper work of a Commissioner' (Philipps 1925, 9). In part to save time, and in part to counter what colonial administrators at the time termed 'detribalization,' the colonial government sought to again bolster the position and role of traditional authorities, and to strengthen 'tribal

33 Non-commissioned officer, an army rank.

discipline.' It took various steps to do so. The district administrator noted with concern that 'ex-servicemen behaved as if they were no longer bound by native custom,' and adopted a strategy 'Whereby the discharged soldier, on reporting his arrival to the District Commissioner was immediately sent off with a chief's policeman to the chief concerned for his acceptance or rejection of the newcomer, which made it quite clear that detribalisation was not looked on with favour' (Badal 1977).

The colonial government started to establish Chiefs' Courts in Bahr el Ghazal from 1922. Their purpose was 'to teach the Chiefs and the people that the former are responsible for their country and that the latter must look to their Chiefs in the first instance' (Badal 1977, 104). The Chiefs' Court Ordinance (1931) further expanded the powers of the Chiefs' Courts and the Hut and Poll Tax Order (1938) gave them a role in taxation. The Chiefs also 'began to receive salaries ... while sub-chiefs and headmen were entitled to a percentage of the taxes they collected' (Leonardi 2013, 70).³⁴ Chiefs or elders were 'empowered to try minor cases. Provincial governors and district commissioners continued to serve as judges in major criminal cases' (Massoud 2013, 71) and could be appealed to. Different sources debate the success of these Chiefs' Courts, and their legitimacy and effectiveness in the eyes of the state and the population. Badal argues that the 'Native Courts' in the Zande area 'grew from strength to strength.' He cites the trial of Chief Renzi in Tambura's Chiefs' Court in 1937, 'without partiality or favor' which was upheld on review by the district commissioner (Badal 1977, 105). The chief court system, with minor changes, has remained a constant in the century since, and a cornerstone of chiefs' contemporary legitimacy. Together with other colonial policies to combat 'detribalization' they are also likely to have contributed to a renewed homogenization of the Zande identity.

Western Equatorial chiefs were ambivalently affected by their closer involvement in colonial rule. The colonial administration intended to increase Chiefly authority, but had simultaneously undermined their popularity by coercing the chiefs to implement the unpopular resettlement orders in the 1920s and 1940s (see Section 3.2). The colonial state and chiefs had a shared interest in more controlled, orderly and sedentary 'subjects'. When non-Avungara organized in 'secret societies', for instance, the chiefs were quick to report these gatherings to the District Commissioner as foreign, subversive and indecent (D. H. Johnson 1991). Whereas prior to colonisation people had likely been free to move away from bad rulers, such mobility was curtailed (see Section 3.2). Unsurprisingly, when Conrad Reining conducted research in Western Equatoria in 1952-5, he found that chiefs' close connection to the colonial

34 As this salary was linked to the number of tax payers under a chief, the introduction of salaries 'created incentives for both DCs and chiefs to reduce the number and enlarge the size of chiefships' (Leonardi 2013, 114).

government had made them unpopular and that their authority had declined (Reining 1982, 221).

The colonial era had also brought the advance of a small non-chiefly elite through the introduction of wage labour, mission education, military service and labour migration (Leonardi 2013, 126; D. Johnson 2016). Some of these urban-based literate elites 'expressed a certain disdain for the politics of chiefship and for chiefs' courts, depicting themselves as above such matters' (Leonardi 2013, 162). The dichotomy between chiefs and other elites ought not to be overstated – there was and remains some overlap and considerable connections between the two. Still, just prior to Sudanese independence in 1956 this friction was to escalate violently:

In 1955, the 'trouble' started in the recently developed small textile production town of Nzara in the Zande Scheme of western Equatoria, following the chiefs' unpopular expression of support for the government, and the subsequent arrest of MP Elia Kuze and the four chiefs who had refused to sign the pro-government document. A protest by textile workers against mass redundancies at the Nzara factory in late July 1955 was met with military force and six people were shot dead. (Leonardi 2013, 136)

This incident is often cited together with the Torit Mutiny as the beginning of the First Sudanese Civil War.³⁵ It illustrates among other things how chiefs often navigate the treacherous political space between various powers and loyalties, and that individual chiefs chart that space differently – not unlike King Gbudwe and Tambura (see Section 2.3). It also illustrates how the (South) Sudanese civil wars from the very outset involved friction and rivalry within ethnic and regional groups, as much as between them. The Anglo-Egyptian colonialization of Sudan ended in 1956, some 50 influential years after the defeat of Gbudwe.

2.5 THE SUDANESE PERIOD: CIVIL WARS (1956-2011)

The historiography of the five 'Sudanese' decades were dominated by two long Sudanese Civil Wars (1955/1963-1972 and 1983-2004/5).³⁶ Even during Khartoum's more democratic periods, 'southern Sudan ... remained a security state and war zone ... giving it the legacy of violence that continues to plague the nation' (Massoud 2013, 15). The wars meant that large parts of Sudan were inaccessible to academic researchers. Anthropologist Siemens, for example, wrote how his research in Yambio took place during the last two years of 'the

35 For a more detailed account of the politics around independence, and the incident involving colonial administrators, Elia Kuze and the Zande chiefs, refer to (Ruay 1994).

36 The precise periodization of the civil wars varies slightly between authors. Leonardi writes 1963-1972 and 1983-2004 (Leonardi 2013, 144).

few years (1973-1985) available for research between conflicts' (S.D.S.D. Siemens 1990, 210). Like Siemens, many scholars in the subsequent decades had find ways to work around or during periods of war (see Section 1.2.3).

In other African societies, independence was typically followed by a push by new elites to modernize or in some instances eradicate chieftaincy as reckoning for their collaboration with the colonial administration, or in a bid to do away with sub-national identities like ethnicity and to forge national identities (Allott 1980). In southern Sudan the situation was different. Many southern Sudanese continued to feel colonized. Rule moved from London to Khartoum, but the rulers offered little hope to the governed in southern Sudan that they would be regarded as full and equal citizens, and Southerners were discriminated against for their ethnic and religious identity. In the words of one of my key respondent James:

When Gbudwe ended, the British together with the Egyptians came and ruled for some time ... And the British left this colonialism to the Egyptians, or the Arabs. Until when we last got our independence as South Sudanese from the Arabs.³⁷

The 'Arabs', here, refers to the northern Sudanese. This is, of course, a crude summary of a complicated history. Yet it does illustrate well the sense of continued colonisation that many of my interlocutors spoke of.

The root causes and dynamics of the wars have been described in more detail elsewhere (D.H. Johnson 2003; De Waal 2019b), as has the position of chiefs at this time (Leonardi 2013). In brief: The Sudanese state focused its resources on the centre, at the expense of peace and prosperity in the 'peripheries', and periodically it favoured 'Arabs' and Muslims over others. One influential such example, is President Numeiri's proclamation of countryside sharia law with the 'September laws' in 1983. This was one of the causes of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005), and so self-determination and cultural and religious autonomy were at the root of resistance and the visions for independence (F.M. Deng 2011).

During the First Sudanese Civil War, battle lines were drawn between areas controlled by the Sudanese government and the Anyanya-rebels. In Western Equatoria the 1960s saw intense fighting and the occupation by the Sudanese government of Rimenze, Nzara, Ezo and Tambura, while more remote places like Naandi remained largely out of reach of 'the Arabs'.³⁸ The dichotomy between 'town' (the realm of the state, intellectuals and town people) and 'the village' (beyond the state, the realm of the rebels) was rooted in colonial time, but certainly strengthened during the Sudanese war years, and it remains current today (Leonardi 2013, 153, 155). Traditional authorities were somewhere

³⁷ Interview 5 August 2017.

³⁸ See for instance 'Letter from P. Girolamo Bidai to Reverend Ferrara' dated 19 November 1965, available in the Sudan Open Archive.

in between: Engaging with the towns and with government, while also maintaining their link to the countryside with its supposed stronger bond to custom and tradition.

The First Sudanese Civil War ended with the Addis Ababa peace agreement (1972). Southern Sudanese now formed a 'Southern Regional Government', which generated new employment opportunities and spurred a process of urbanisation. There were various legal challenges at this time to the position of traditional authorities (Norris 1983). The Local Government Act (1971) and People's Local Courts Act (1977) sought to replace the 'native administration' with courts and elected councils (Leonardi 2013, 150; Leonardi et al. 2010, 24). However, these laws were unevenly implemented, and many of the new councils were still dominated by old local elites who often had been part of the Native Administration. In much of the south, 'there was little alternative to the chiefs and they continued to act as principal government intermediaries, tax collectors, village administrators, and court presidents' (Leonardi et al. 2010, 24).

Diversity and unity were central challenges for any (southern) Sudanese rebel movement. Eventually, the 'tribalization' of politics in southern Sudan led to the break-down of the Southern Regional Government, which in turn contributed to the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War (D. H. Johnson 2003). In particular, the Southern Regional Assembly was divided 'between a Zande-led Equatorian faction and groups associated with the majority of the Dinka' (Allen 2007, 1:364). The regional 'Equatorian' block was divided, too. Its two biggest constituent groups – Zande and Bari-speakers, respectively – supported different political parties in the early 1980s, and were divided on whether to cooperate with the Regional (Southern) or transitional government in Equatoria (Lesch 1998, 69).

The leader of the SPLM/A, Dr John Garang advocated for a 'New Sudan' (not secession) where religious and ethnic diversity would be accommodated by a secular state. His agenda was not just for the south, but transcended region, race and religion and thereby appealed to people in Darfur, 'the three Areas',³⁹ East Sudan and even central Sudan. The SPLM/A only began to call for self-determination when the Sudanese government resisted talking seriously about secularism (D. H. Johnson 2003). By then, the SPLM emphasized the homogeneity of the south (Christian and African) and the comparative differences with the north (Muslim and Arab). This framing overlooks the endlessly more complicated reality of race, ethnicity and mobility in the Sudan.⁴⁰ Still,

39 South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei – three areas that supported the SPLM/A, but were either disputed (Abyei) or acknowledged to fall on the northern side of the border between northern and southern Sudan.

40 There were and are still Muslims living in the south, Christians in the north, violent conflicts among Christians in the south (i.e. SPLA vs SPLA-IO) and Muslims in the North (i.e. Darfur). And yet in my interviews many South Sudanese echoed the framing of the Sudanese Civil Wars as in essence between a Christian, African South and an Islamic, Arabic

it was adopted both by many of my Western Equatorial interlocutors, and in foreign media and policy circles (Pimentel 2010, 11; Mamdani 2018, 3).

By many accounts, Western Equatorians were reluctant to choose sides during the Second Sudanese Civil War. Many had 'no sympathy for the northern government' (Allen 2007). Yet when Yambio and Maridi were occupied by the SPLA in 1990s, 'many felt simply that one occupying army had been replaced by another' (Wheeler 2005, 70). Individual political and military leaders faced the choice to join the SPLA or stay close to government.⁴¹ Most people I spoke with appear not to have had strong political convictions at the time. Both warring parties forcibly recruited people, demanded food, intelligence and shelter, and abused their power (Kuol 1997, 21; Leonardi 2007a; Gordon, Vandewint, and Lehmeier 2007, 46). People wanted above all calm and stability, employment and education.

The chiefs were again in an especially difficult position. They continued to work like gatekeepers, deriving part of their strength from moving around and being able to talk to different parties. This made them vulnerable to suspicion, reprisals and attacks by both government and rebels (Rift Valley Institute 2016). Chiefs were forced to supply recruits, food or intelligence with varying degrees of coercion and violence, (Leonardi 2013, 166; Ø.H. Rolandsen 2005, 69). Often, my interlocutors contrasted chiefs' cordial relations with the Anyanya-rebels, with the more tense ones with the SPLA. Daniel, a former state minister recounted how,

Some chiefs were made to carry loads in front of their subjects. Some were lashed ... You know when a chief is lashed in front of his people ... He loses a certain dignity. And this was done deliberately to weaken the traditional authority.⁴²

Whereas the individual chiefs often suffered, over time the idea of chieftaincy and of customary law gained SPLA-support. The SPLA declared in areas it controlled that state laws were 'irrelevant', and appointed judges who would administer customary law (Kuol 1997). In the early 2000s, the SPLM 'began to associate chiefs and traditional authority more explicitly and formally with its claim to be fighting for rights and freedoms of culture and custom' (Leonardi 2013, 187).

Western Equatoria played a special role in the Second Sudanese Civil War. The SPLA had already wrestled Yambio and the surrounding areas from Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) control in late 1990. Subsequently, this area became something of an SPLA-stronghold, especially after the SPLA lost control over many other towns during a government offensive in 1992-4 (Ø.H. Roland-

North.

41 Some Zande leaders who joined the SPLM in this time include Samuel Abu John, Jemma Nunu Kumba, Patrick Zamoi and Joseph Bakosoro.

42 Interview with former state minister, Kampala, 13 June 2017.

sen 2005, 38; Gordon, Vandewint, and Lehmeier 2007, 15). By 1998, the south-western part of Western Equatoria – including Yambio, Ezo and Tambura – were somewhat stable and even termed by some observers a ‘zone of stability’ (O’Toole Salinas and D’Silva 1999; Tecle 1998).

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 brought a formal end to the war between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A. The CPA also marked the beginning of a transitional period (2005-2011), in which the Sudanese government was to try and ‘make unity attractive’ to the southerners. It failed to do so: In the independence referendum on 9 January 2011, 98.83 percent of the southern Sudanese voted for separation. When South Sudan became independent on 9 July 2011, ambitions were sky-high. The Transitional Constitution (2011) was ‘to lay the foundation for a united, peaceful and prosperous society based on justice, equality, respect for human rights and the rule of law.’ Independence was envisioned to be more than a change of rulers, as Sudanese independence had meant for many southerners. This time, people hoped independence meant a change of rule, ‘to more equitable modes of governance that would accommodate diversity’ (F. M. Deng 2011).

2.6 VIOLENCE AND CONSTRUCTIVE CRISES IN WESTERN EQUATORIA (2005-2014)

In Western Equatoria the violence would continue after the CPA. Friction and violence boiled up between Western Equatorian communities and three groups of people: the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), cattle keeping Dinka and Mbororo⁴³ communities. This section will briefly describe the first two conflicts, and then analyse how the insecurity served to build a social contract between Western Equatorians and their local government (governor and lower), while simultaneously increasing the alienation and distrust between them and the central government in Juba.

First, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), originally a Ugandan rebel group, had been making incursions into Western Equatoria since 2005. This intensified after failed peace talks in Juba in 2008. The Western Equatoria State administration and local communities felt that the SPLA was not protecting them adequately, and that they had to fend for themselves. In the words of the state minister of local government, himself a returnee from the UK, in Yambio in early 2015:

In 2005, the LRA entered Western Equatoria from Uganda. The SPLA did not respond to those challenges. The chiefs sat down and said we need to find a way to protect

43 The Mbororo (a sub-group of the Fulani ethnic group) are a somewhat nomadic people, who live in Cameroon, Chad, CAR and the DR Congo. They keep cattle and trade. Near Western Equatoria at the time of my research, they lived mostly in the borderlands with CAR and DRC. The LRA was also active in these areas, leading many Western Equatorians to suspect the Mbororo of cooperating with the LRA.

our people. This is how they came up with the Arrow Boys. Sort of like the British Home Guard. They are very effective. Until today, Western Equatoria is peaceful.⁴⁴

This positive image of the early Arrow Boys was widely shared by 2015, as they had effectively countered the LRA (Schomerus and Rigterink 2016; Willems and Rouw 2011). This translated to popular legitimacy with local communities: a survey in Tambura and Ezo counties that found that 85,1 percent indicated they trusted Arrow Boys 'always' or 'most of the time'.⁴⁵ Their initial legitimacy was undoubtedly helped by the fact that, 'fighters came directly from local communities and, in most cases, were defending their own families and assets' (Danish Refugee Council and Danish Demining Group 2013, 8). The Arrow Boys started out poorly organized, armed and funded. However, through combat with the LRA, they captured better weapons and improved 'both tactics and command structure' (Danish Refugee Council and Danish Demining Group 2013, 8).

The organisation of the Arrow Boys changed, too. Based on research in 2012 and 2013, two researchers argue 'there is no central command, however, that unites all heads of arrow boys under one hierarchy, with groups staying relatively independent of each other and negotiating individual relationships with authorities in their area' (Schomerus and Rigterink 2016). Still, the various Arrow Boys-factions enjoyed the support of countless senior Western Equatorian leaders: successive governors like Patrick Zamoï, Jemma Nunu Kumba and Joseph Bakosoro, catholic Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro, the county commissioners, as well as traditional authorities. The paramount chief of Yambio, for instance, organized a recruitment and funding drive for the Arrow Boys, 'so that we can join together and comb the bush once and for all' (R. Ruati 2011). Over the years, these relationships started to formalize: There were Arrow Boys committees in Yambio, Tambura and Maridi, and financial contributions were made by state-level members of parliament and 'sons and daughters of Western Equatoria abroad'.⁴⁶

Governor Bakosoro and his Western Equatoria State cabinet sought to mobilize central government support for the Arrow Boys, both for political and financial reasons. To mitigate the worries that policy makers in Juba and abroad might have about arming non-state groups, Bakosoro's cabinet often

44 Interview with minister of local government, Yambio, 27 February 2015.

45 In their 2013 and 2014 survey of Tambura and Ezo counties (western WES), Rigterink, Kenyi and Schomerus found the following: 80,7 percent of households had given food to the Arrow Boys in the past year; 55,9 percent had a household member who had been a member of the Arrow Boys in the past year; 34,6 percent reported they would go to the Arrow Boys when they are afraid of being physically harmed by a person outside their family; and 8,4 percent had reported an issue or concern to the Arrow Boys in the past year (Rigterink, Kenyi, and Schomerus 2014).

46 Interview with former MP in Western Equatoria, Arua, 15 June 2017.

drew the comparison between the Arrow Boys and the British Home Guard.⁴⁷ In 2009, the South Sudanese central government promised 2 million US dollars in financial support to help train and arm the Arrow Boys (Richard Ruati 2009), but that never materialized. As time went by, this lack of support and the enduring lack of protection by the SPLA, were interpreted by many Western Equatorians as signs of indifference. This quote from a former state minister is illustrative:

The [central] government did not trust the Arrow Boys. The Arrow Boys were seen like a hidden force being prepared by the Azande maybe to topple the government. So they were always suspicious and they did not like the Arrow Boys. [When SPLA forces wanted to arrest an Arrow Boy for having killed an LRA-combatant] it brought some tension, some commotion between the army and the local community. The local community were saying, 'Yes you are the army but you don't give us any protection. These young men went on to defend, and now you come in to say that you want to arrest him for defending the community. So what does it mean?'⁴⁸

The Arrow Boys were later supported by, and cooperating with, the Ugandan army and United States special forces stationed near Nzara.⁴⁹ By then, however, the worst of the LRA-violence had already subsided from Western Equatoria, and the LRA had largely retreated back to the Congolese and Central African sides of the border.⁵⁰ The insecurity posed by the LRA and the relatively successful response to it by the Arrow Boys, served to strengthen a sense of pride, and ties between local government officials, traditional authorities

47 In an article on Sudan Tribune, Governor Bakosoro was cited saying: 'The home guard units will be trained and armed so that they can provide effective defense until the regular forces can intervene' (R. Ruati 2010). The Minister of Local Government used the same phrasing when I interviewed him in Yambio, 27 February 2015. The British Home Guard (first Local Defence Volunteers) were an armed citizen militia which was meant to protect the UK during the Second World War in case of a possible German Invasion. Whereas the Home Guard were typically too young or old for regular military service, the Arrow Boys were not.

48 Interview with former state minister, Kampala, 13 June 2017.

49 US military advisors were sent to the DRC, CAR and South Sudan borderlands under President Barack Obama in 2011, 'to assist in the military operations against the LRA' (Schomerus and Rigterink 2016, 7).

50 Apart from attacks on Yambio and Ezo, the LRA had mostly been active in the countryside. By 2011 most LRA had moved across the borders to the DRC and CAR, and to the border area between South Sudan, CAR and Sudan. In 2015, there were only two parts of Western Equatoria where people feared LRA-attacks. One was near Gangura, close to the border with the DR Congo. The other was on the forest-surrounded road between Tambura and Source Yubu, on the South Sudanese border with CAR. When asked about LRA-activity along the road between Tambura and Ezo, the county commissioner of Tambura at the time told us that the LRA had left, 'and they should also know that this is our road, so it is important for us to use it!' Interview with county commissioner, Tambura, 18 March 2015.

and youth. These factors would later contribute to Western Equatoria's position in the South Sudanese Civil War.

Western Equatoria also saw clashes between various communities claiming indigeneity (including especially Zande and Moru) and Dinka, who had come to Western Equatoria especially from the 1990s as part of the SPLA, or when they were displaced (especially from around Bor). In 2005 Patrick Zamoi was appointed governor of Western Equatoria. His first address to the people of Yambio was both in Juba Arabic and Zande. One of my key respondents was there at the time, and recalls how in the Zande version of his speech:

Zamoi asked: 'If a snake enters your house and refuses to come out, will you leave your house and run away?' To which the audience, including myself, cheered the answer: 'We kill it instead of leaving the house!'⁵¹

Later, people interpreted this to refer to the Dinka, a comparison which was recycled again in 2015 (see Section 6.2.2). On 14 November 2005, violence started in Mundri and spread in the following days to Ezo, Tambura and Yambio only to subside in mid-2006.⁵² UNOCHA writes that after initial fighting in Yambio, 'Dinka soldiers within the SPLA also started attacking the Zande residents of town' (UNOCHA 2005). In response Governor Patrick Zamoi was dismissed by President Salva Kiir and placed under house arrest in June 2006. The central government in Juba distrusted his loyalty, and his role in the violence. As Zamoi had also been supporting the establishment of the Arrow Boys in 2005-6 (HSBA 2016).

What precisely happened in the clashes of 2005 remains unclear. One Zande commentator (and later politician) in the UK described it at the time as 'an explosion waiting to happen due to the tension which had been building for sometimes between Dinka Bor displaced community and Western Equatoria local residents such as Moru and Azande' (Kisanga 2006b). A popular online news outlet, Gurtong, noted that 'Similar chaos occurred in 2001 and 2002 in Yambio when a group of Dinka and Zande students clashed ... but this year guns were used' (Gurtong 2005). Many Dinka had come with cattle, which led to friction with farmers – when cattle trampled or grazed crops, and drank scarce water. Most of my interlocutors were ethnic Zande, and emphasized the importance of claims to land and autochthony. Around the CPA, various Western Equatorian communities wanted ethnic Dinka to leave, and the latter refused to do so. In the words of one of my key respondents:

⁵¹ Email correspondence with key respondent in Kampala, 28 October 2020.

⁵² The end-dates are not entirely clear, but may have stretched into mid-2006. One of my respondents in Uganda said she had been displaced by 'the 'Dinka-Zande war' in 2006. Interview with catholic sister from Yambio, Kampala, 23 March 2017. Another was working on the Yambio-Gangura road, 'But then halfway 2006, there was the conflict between Zande and Dinka. That destroyed everything and the project was cancelled.' Interview with refugee chairperson from Ezo, Rhino Camp, 18 May 2017.

The Dinka were many in Yambio and we did not mind them at first. But in 2005 they took plots from the Zande by force. They also killed a Zande. They wanted to take the land the way they have taken Juba from the Bari and Mundari. So then the Zande fought back, and they burned one Dinka near St Mary church in Yambio. Then the Dinka came to bring those remains to Juba to the office of the president of South Sudan. Since that time the Dinka fear Zande.⁵³

This idea that a homogenous group of Dinka was after the land of Zande (and other South Sudanese) has recurred in the recent civil war (2013-present). The importance of land and indigeneity in various phases of conflict, and a particular land dispute between 'locals' and ethnic Dinka in Maridi will be explored in Section 4.4. In addition to land, the above speaker emphasizes the connections of 'ordinary' Dinka in Yambio to the president's office in Juba. This is not accidental. Many Western Equatorians (and other South Sudanese) distrusted Dinka (and to a lesser extent Nuer) people for having 'captured' the SPLA and central government, and for cultivating a close ethnic network that now largely excluded or marginalized others. In Western Equatoria many felt that even for security, the SPLA was to be feared rather than trusted (de Vries 2015). Many Zande politicians sought to bridge the political divide between Juba and Yambio, but risked losing legitimacy and credibility in both places (see Section 5.6).

In 2010, gubernatorial elections were organized throughout Southern Sudan. In Western Equatoria, the main contenders were the incumbent SPLM-candidate (and veteran party member) Jemma Nunu Kumba and Colonel Bangasi Joseph Bakosoro.⁵⁴ Bakosoro was a returnee, having lived in the US and in Uganda, where he was involved in the establishment of the 'Zande Cultural Association' (S.D. Siemens 2010, 8). Bakosoro was a SPLM-member, but because his party nominated Kumba as their official candidate he temporarily resigned from the party in order to run in the elections as an independent candidate. Bakosoro won with 46 percent of the vote, and immediately applied to become SPLM-party member again.⁵⁵

The election of an independent candidate was 'head-spinning' in Southern Sudan, as all 9 other gubernatorial elections were won by SPLM-candidates (*Sudan Tribune* 2010). Bakosoro ran with a campaign prioritizing security (especially against the LRA and Mbororo) and agriculture (SOSA 2010). Right from the start, Bakosoro sought to strike strategic alliances with the other two Equatorial governors to bargain with Juba for a more federal system of government (Radio Tamazuj 2015a; HSBA 2016).

53 Duo-interview with Zande interlocutors, Bweyale, 9 March 2018.

54 Both candidates were Zande from near Tambura. Neither was of the Avungara clan.

55 Bakosoro received 78563 votes (46 percent); Mrs. Nunu Kumba (SPLM) 73057 (43 percent); Abbas Bullen Ajalla Bambey (UDSF) 8815; Natale Ukele Alex Kimbo (Independent) 5510; and Awad Kisanga Said Ahmed (NCP) 4893 (*Sudan Tribune* 2010).

Many Zande that I spoke with saw Bakosoro's election as a watershed moment in their community's recent history. Upon his election he had been wearing traditional bark cloth attire (*bagadi*) over his suit.⁵⁶ Bakosoro's government worked closely with traditional authorities and the church to promote a revival of culture: clothing, songs, customary law. When one of my key respondents looked back on this period, he spoke of the empowering leadership of Bakosoro in the face of external threats and internal complacency:

Before the Azande were becoming very weak. But when Bakosoro came he started giving them some freedom to become men! ... Before he could come to the chair, we were treated badly. And we were all keeping quiet ... But when he came there was already this issue of Arrow Boys and ... Because we were running from the LRA. But when he came, he said 'We cannot leave ourselves to run. Where do we want to run to from our land? We must stand and fight back!' This gave courage to the people.⁵⁷

He recognized that the Arrow Boys predated Bakosoro, but attributed a revitalized sense of pride and community security and sovereignty to his period as governor. The governor was popular among Zande because his election and tenure represented a measure of self-determination that had been lost for over a century. This is, however, also what made some in 'Juba' distrust him. Over time, Bakosoro's loyalty to his Western Equatorian constituents (Zande in particular) became hard to combine with his loyalty to 'Juba'. Eventually this would lead to the governor's arrest and dismissal, and the renewed outbreak of violence (see Section 6.2).

In Yambio, the celebrations for Independence Day on July 9, 2011 began with an early gathering at the grave of King Gbudwe (S.D. Siemens 2015). The crowd then moved to Gbudwe stadium where Governor Bakosoro held a speech: 'We are no more slaves and we will never be slaves again. We are free citizens in our own country; the Republic of South Sudan' (Sudan Tribune 2011). And so at the dawn of independent South Sudan, Western Equatorians paid homage, too, to the king whose defeat in 1905 now to many symbolizes the end of Zande autonomy and sovereignty. As the post-war and post-independence reconstruction began in earnest in Western Equatoria, both state and traditional authorities sought to forge such paths drawing both on the traditional past and their particular visions of modernity. This thematic will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

56 Reminiscent of earlier African leaders, such as President Mobutu of the DR Congo with his 'retour à l'authenticité' campaign (Verweijen and Van Bockhaven 2020, 12).

57 Interview in Kiryandongo RS, 5 August 2017.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered a history centred on Western Equatoria, in particular its Zande-dominated western part. Zande people now live on the peripheries of three conflict-affected states: South Sudan, the DR Congo, and Central African Republic. And yet this area has a rich pre-colonial history which continues to inform people's ideas about the present and future. Rather than a comprehensive history, this chapter has focused on those elements of history that are of special importance for the rest of this book: the origin of 'the Zande' and the Avungara clan, the tale of the two emblematic Kings – Gbudwe and Tambura – and post-colonial chiefs' relations with successive governments.

This chapter has reflected critically on secondary sources, colonial-era archival material, and original interviews (including oral histories), to show how historiography itself is contested. There is no single story, also not among Zande. Often there are marked contrasts between oral histories and secondary sources. For instance, foreign scholars have argued that the Avungara were originally a different 'race', migrating from elsewhere to conquer the Zande by force. Contemporary oral histories, instead, argue that the first Avungara was an individual boy who grew up within, and rose to power when his merit was collectively recognized (see Section 2.2). In this way, oral histories present a more agentic version of history, in which authority rests on a social contract rather than on force alone. In a similar way, there is discord over how Zande kings navigated the arrival of powerful outside forces (ivory and slave traders, colonial forces) in the late 19th and early 20th century. Two rivalling Zande kings, Gbudwe and Tambura, cultivated different relations vis-à-vis these outsiders (see Section 2.3). Gbudwe was in the end killed after a battle with the Anglo-Egyptian forces (the circumstances of which remain, again, debated). Tambura became a paramount chief. Whether, when and how resistance or cooperation with powerful outsiders would be wise and legitimate, was a key concern for the Zande kings. And it would remain a crucial question for Zande leaders in the turbulent century that was to follow.

After the colonial conquest of Western Equatoria there was a period of military rule, followed by four decades of intrusive civilian administration (see Sections 2.4 and 3.2). During this time, chiefs assisted the district commissioners with both judicial and executive functions: e.g., ruling in Chiefs' Courts, levying taxes. While most chiefs could still trace descent to the Zande kings of before, the form and function of traditional authority was profoundly reconstructed under colonial administration. Colonial administrators were wary of 'detribalization' and bolstered chiefly authority and ethnic categorisation.

Since Sudanese independence and throughout the subsequent decades of war, chiefs walked the tightrope between various armed factions, governments and 'their people' (see Section 5.6). Not unlike the Zande kings before them, they strategized around volatility and uncertainty (Leonardi 2013). Chieftaincy, in a word, became about broking and gatekeeping. The violence described

in this chapter, was often consequence and cause of strained relations between Zande leaders, and various outside governments and armed forces. The sense of lost autonomy and violent domination shared by many Zande, would hardly improve with Sudanese or even South Sudanese independence. Instead, civil wars and displacement reinforced peoples' sense of difference (see Section 2.5). Relations with the SPLA were also not unequivocally good, which planted some of the seeds of distrust and alienation between 'Yambio' and 'Juba', which would also contribute to the riots between Zande and Dinka in 2005 (see Section 2.6).

Perhaps there are times and places where people can forget about politics and unfolding history, living lives that are more or less stable and certain. Western Equatoria has for the knowable past not been such a place. During anthropologist Evans-Pritchard's research in the 1920s, the Zande kings had only recently been defeated and the colonial administration had forcibly resettled people away from the countryside to live in 'model villages' (see Section 3.2). And yet Evans-Pritchard only mentioned such changes in prefaces and passing. Likely because he and his Zande respondents were so disconcerted about the cultural 'erosion' that colonialism and globalisation were bringing about, his work constructed a picture of cultural order, coherence and stability (see Sections 1.2 and 2.1). In the century since, there have been two independences, decades of civil war and a closer engagement with globalisation. The pace of change has left many people confused and uncertain.

For all their destructiveness, war and displacement had also been constructive of new ideas. South Sudanese people had travelled across the world, and would return in numbers around independence in 2011 (see Section 3.4). Western Equatoria was relatively stable and under the leadership of an independently-elected governor (see Sections 2.6 and 3.5) and a team of ambitious ministers (see Chapter 4), many of whom had returned from 'outside' (e.g., Sudan, Uganda, US, UK). And so Western Equatoria emerged from a long and violent history with a new-found sense of autonomy and pride, and set out to reconstruct (see Chapters 4 and 5) and to overcome the ruptures.

