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

Braak, B.J.

8 Displaced traditional authority and the reconstruction of order in Uganda (2016-2019)[1]

8.1 INTRODUCTION

After people had settled in Uganda's refugee settlements and lived there for a half year or so, a new phase of refugee life dawned.[2] The dust of 'running' and arriving had begun to settle. Houses had been built. People had received their monthly aid rations several times, and perhaps experienced a change of season. Experiences of time were not linear or universal, but generally this second phase of refugee life was more predictable, allowing people more time for idleness and boredom, and for the haunting memories of war. The picture was partly one of decay and missing. But burnt fields offer fertile soil, and refugees made new attempts at community and authority in Uganda. Western Equatorian refugees' attempted to not merely be objects of political power – pawns in a game played by the Ugandan state or UNHCR – but rather subjects influencing their fate.

This chapter explores a set of interrelated questions around authority and refugee governance during this second phase of displacement. What in this context of loss, confusion, and new possibilities happened to the relations between people and authority? What remained of Western Equatoria's traditional authorities in Uganda? And what other forms of refugee-led governance took shape? And how were these authority structures related to particular identities? To answer these questions this chapter relies primarily on qualitative research with Western Equatorians in Uganda's refugee settlements and towns (see Section 1.2, and Annex 3: Methods). The last section of this chapter zooms further out in both time and place, inviting Western Equatorians in South Sudan and across Uganda to do the same. It explores how in this episode of conflict and displacement people reflected on the future role of 'traditional authorities' in South Sudan, finding just how intimately visions of the past, present and future were connected (see Section 8.5).

Refugee camps are often presented as places of permanent legal and political exception, where 'a massive population of undesirables' is deliberately

1 Parts of this chapter were published earlier as 'Customary Authorities Displaced: The Experience of Western Equatorians in Ugandan Refugee Settlements' (2018) by the author together with John Kenyi.

2 Refugees did not arrive at the same time, so they entered this 'second phase' at different dates.

isolated from normal life (Agier 2011; 2002). People's lives in these places are then described as 'bare' (Turner 2015a; Agamben 1998) or 'wasted' (Bauman 2003), with people living in 'debilitating dependence' (Adelman 2008, 8). McConnachie critically notes the similarities in literature on refugee settlements with that on prisons and of ghettos, in that such places are 'de-politicized and de-historicized', overlooking the potential normality of everyday life from the perspective of their residents (McConnachie 2014, 2; Wacquant 1997).

Looking beyond loss, some scholars have found that social life can also be reconstructed in transformative ways in refugee camps (Agier 2011, 86; Duffield 2014b, 6). And that conflict, flight and exile, 'apart from causing losses and traumas, can also have some gains' (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers 2004, 3). Many Western Equatorians, too, held this view having experienced repeatedly that war, displacement and return can catalyse social mobility and change (see Chapters 3 and 7). This time, too, refugees' flight had been coerced by war, but also aspirational. Many refugees hoped to return to South Sudan with something more: like education, ideas, assets, or social networks. Governance structures, too, had repeatedly changed in response to war and displacement (Leonardi 2013). Many Western Equatorian traditional authorities and state ministers were returnees, which had shaped their ideas about their roles (see Chapters 4 and 5). So, when I came to Uganda, I was keen to discover to what extent Western Equatorian refugees would (re)construct old or new forms of governance or order in exile, and the connections that these forms would have with South Sudan across time and space.

Although 'order' carries different meanings, in legal anthropology it often refers to a combination of 'the existence of a shared set of norms, but also to a sense of predictability and feeling of security' (Von Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007, 1). By 'order', I do not mean the classical functionalist anthropological vision of a timeless, clearly-delineated and apolitical society or culture (see Section 1.2). Instead, 'order' may be in flux and subject to the competing politics of various actors pursuing their particular interests and vision. In this way, order is linked to concepts like 'authority', 'power', 'sovereignty' and 'control' (Agamben 1998). One person's sense of order and security, may come at the expense of that of another. 'Ordering' is associated with group-making, which involves boundaries and exclusion. In this way, 'order' may well require sacrifice or violence to enforce compliance or conformity (L.H. Malkki 1995; Douglas 2002). In much of (post-)colonial Africa – including its refugee settlements – ethnicity has been used as an ordering principle: With state authorities actively working to promote, entrench and utilize peoples' ethnic or tribal identities (see Section 1.3). Likewise, in contexts of rapid urbanisation, African rural migrants have often also set up 'town' or 'clan' associations in the city (Ekeh 1990, 685). , In contexts where the state does not provide peace and stability – much less social welfare – order may exist 'despite the state', and may in turn influence it (Von Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2007, 2). In the

Ugandan refugee settlements that this book explores, various parallel attempts at ordering were taking place.

Much has been written on the national and international authorities in governing refugee settlements (Slaughter and Crisp 2009; Kagan 2011). Yet the role that refugees play themselves in governing their settlements, has received much less attention (McConnachie 2014, 11; Jansen 2013). Two of the most insightful studies on the reconstruction of social order in refugee settings, were based on settings where the refugees hailed from the same sub-national (ethnic) group. The refugee camps in the Burma-Thailand borderland that McConnachie studied, were mainly inhabited by 'Karen people.' Similarly, Mishamo refugee settlement in Tanzania on which Malkki wrote her seminal 'Purity and Exile,' was inhabited primarily by Burundian ethnic Hutu (L.H. Malkki 1995). Both authors found that the camp environment was productive of a new 'thriving social capital and community' (McConnachie 2014, 39). But in both those cases, the refugees largely hailed from the same national and even ethnic background.

By contrast, in Uganda most refugee settlements were home to diverse national and ethnic populations (see Section 7.2). And the refugee settlements where South Sudanese were the clear majority were diverse still. South Sudanese refugees had come from all over their vast home country. This diversity was clear for all South Sudanese refugees to see and hear: in names, languages, styles of dress and building, facial scars and customs. Unlike the 'Karen' or Burundian Hutu of the refugee literature, the 'Western Equatorians' and ethnic Zande at the heart of this book were a minority in all Ugandan settlements. How would this position in the diverse settlements of Uganda affect the prospects of social ordering and governance? In terms of national and ethnic diversity, the Ugandan settlements were more akin to Kakuma camp in Kenya, where Jansen also studied social ordering. But like Malkki and McConnachie, Jansen conducted research in Kakuma many years after refugees' arrival, whereas this book is based on research with Western Equatorian refugees in the months and years after their arrival in Uganda. This means that they had had less time to (re)construct social orders, and everything was still very much in flux.

8.2 THE SECOND PHASE: 'SITTING AROUND WAITING TO DIE' OR 'LOOKING FOR GOD'S PLAN'

What characterized life in the refugee settlements in this second phase of refugees' displacement? In the first eventful weeks after refugees' arrival, many had experienced gratitude for having survived the war, for being in Uganda, and for receiving protection and aid: a post-flight 'honeymoon phase' of sorts (DeWolfe 2000). But with time such feelings gave way to sombre memories of the war and hopelessness about the future. Many disaster survivors

subsequently experience 'disillusionment' when, among other things, 'The reality of losses and the limits and terms of the available assistance become apparent' (DeWolfe 2000, 11). This coincides for many refugees with 'a period of hiatus after the shock of uprooting [in which] the loss of role structures means that [refugees] cannot know who they are or who anyone else is until new roles are constructed and people assigned to them' (Colson 2003). These two sentiments – disillusionment and uncertainty – were certainly prevalent among Western Equatorian refugees in Uganda.

Figure 14: Painting by James: A triptych of war, flight and arrival. Commissioned by the author, 2018.

In this second phase, time in Uganda's refugee settlements appeared to slow down: People woke up later, walked more slowly, and sat around more. Whereas both in South Sudan and in Uganda many people woke up before dawn (around 6 am), in the settlement some people did not leave their houses until 9 am. For many Western Equatorians the fall went much further. My key respondent Charles had been shot in Yambio in May 2016, and eventually arrived in Kiryandongo RS that year (see Annex 1: Portraits). At times he was hopeful about the possibilities of exile, and his future back in South Sudan. Yet at other times he was gloomy:

> When we see people moving over the tarmac roads wherever they want to go. They go around for their business. And ours is we kill doctors. We destroy everything every time. Life loses its meaning. It is like. It was a mistake to be born as a South Sudanese.

The existential crisis that Charles experienced at times, speaks to a paradox of Kiryandongo RS. People had settled in this settlement because it offered more prospects than other settlements, but now the proximity of progress and a better life in Uganda, tantalizingly close along Bweyale's tarmacked main road, added a layer to refugees' suffering. Many of my respondents loathed to be, again, refugees and aid-dependent. They complained that they now 'just sit idle' with 'nothing to do.' 'Sitting idle', meant that refugees had little to distract them from their haunting memories and the sombre messages from home. In this light, work or education were not just valuable as ways to make money or get degrees, but also to 'reduce the time for worries to when you come home and eat your beans, or when you lie in bed at night.'[3]

This second phase also brought into sharp focus the different goals that refugees and the 'refugee administration' had with the settlement, and their standards for success. For the refugee administration, the settlement was meant to host refugees and to keep them alive at minimum cost until a 'permanent solution' was found. Hence the emphasis on self-reliance. However, refugees had not just come to Uganda to survive (see Chapter 6). As Charles put it: 'You can keep us alive, but for what? If we have no education we just sit around waiting to die.'[4] These sentiment – the idleness, the despair, the morass of time, the lack of prospects – sometimes translated to a trope: of people wanting to 'go home to die'. Like this mother with too many mouths to feed in a refugee camp: 'I want to back to Yambio, Sudan. If I die at least there is someone who will take care of my dead body, and there is land to be buried on.'[5] Although people did hope to eventually be buried in Western Equatoria, this sort of expression by healthy people mostly served to speak to their discontent with the present.[6] The mother continued, 'Here there is no soap, no salt, no school fees. Food is not enough. None of my children are at school. They are just staying idle.'

'Sitting idle' became a feared enemy, and what psychologists term 'negative coping' was all too accessible in the refugee settlements (Hillary and Braak, forthcoming). Even as refugees were still arriving, sharp businesspeople – mostly Ugandans and 'old' refugees – offered quick distractions: pool bars, stores selling hard liquor and beer, video halls screening Premier League-football.[7] In various refugee settlements there were even slot machines (see photo).

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3 Interview with Charles, Kiryandongo RS, 9 February 2018.
4 Interview with Charles, Kiryandongo RS, 9 February 2018.
5 Interview with 34-year old female refugee, Kiryandongo RS, 13 May 2018.
6 Being buried abroad was seen by many refugees and stayees as a tragedy. The ideal was to repatriate the dead, but this was only affordable for a precious few. Some of the sick and elderly managed to return to South Sudan to die, others were buried in unfamiliar ground (Braak 2018). Conversation with Isaac, Entebbe, 13 September 2018.
7 Ugandans primarily, but refugees also ran shops – especially those who 'were old in the camp' (earlier arrivals).

Figure 15: Slot machine in Rhino Camp refugee settlement. Source: Photo by author, 23 April 2017.

From my field notes of 23 April 2017:

> In Eden trade center in Rhino Camp, I found a group of young guys sitting around a slot machine connected to a solar panel. They told me 'a Chinese' had brought the machines, and was coming every Sunday to collect his money with a lock he had installed on the slot machine. One of the guys estimated that the slot machine collects 500.000 UGX [some 135 USD] per week, which would mean that people would play 1.000 times per week (at 500 UGX per play). That would mean roughly 150 plays per day, or effectively 10 per waking hour. It's possible. It's also very depressing. These people have barely settled, and some guy finds a way to extract money from them through gambling. One of the guys was laughing – 'This gambling is the death of Africa!' – and continued to play. I told the group, 'But guys, you know there is only one reason the guy brought these slot machines? He makes profit off of it. Which means that on average if you play, you will lose.' They all agreed and smiled a bit. But then they said: 'Sometimes you win!' And that was that. They agreed to let me take a picture of the machine, and then I asked for directions for the Zande Chairperson.

It was not all gloom and doom during the second phase of refugees' life in Uganda. Many refugees did go to school, some set up businesses or churches, others even acquired urban property. Refugees worked hard to keep the long view: To recall how wars had ended in the past, how returnees had taken up

good positions in South Sudan, and how in the future they, too, ought to return to South Sudan 'with something'. This chapter explores one of the ways in which refugees sought to regain control over the present and the future, by reconstructing social order.

8.3 SALATIN MA FI: WHY?

8.3.1 The remarkable absence of the chiefs

In Western Equatoria State, traditional authorities had played crucial roles in resolving disputes and connecting their communities to influential outsiders (including the state) (see Chapter 5). When people fled to Uganda, I was curious to see what remained of the traditional authorities in exile. The literature holds that refugee-led authority structures often mimic pre-flight structures, practices and identities (McConnachie 2014, 3). For instance in the 1990s South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma camp in Kenya set up customary courts run by elders who, often along ethnic lines, applied 'customary law' (Griek 2006; Jansen 2018), and sometimes even operated their own prisons (Jansen 2013). When Angolan refugees travelled to Zambia, they were joined by 'ethnic chiefs and elders' who swiftly set up dispute resolution systems in the camp (da Costa 2006, 25). Indeed even during this flight from South Sudan to Uganda, some communities had active traditional authorities (Vancluysen and Ingelaere 2020).[8] In part based on this literature, I had expected to find Western Equatorian chiefs among the displaced in Uganda.

This supposition was further strengthened by the fact that the majority of the chiefs we had interviewed in Western Equatoria in 2014-5 had spent years abroad, often during previous refugee crises (see Chapter 5). Given that mobility was a resource and not everyone was able to pay their way to Uganda, I had expected the chiefs and the Avungara more generally to be more able than most to pay their way. I had also expected the chiefs to have found new ways to be important for their communities in exile, and in particular to have taken up their roles as gatekeepers and dispute resolvers that they have played so skilfully throughout the turbulent history of Western Equatoria (see Chapters 2 and 5).

And yet when I reached Uganda and travelled around the various refugee settlements and towns, asking about the chiefs, I was invariably told that, 'salatin ma fi' (the chiefs are not there). There were very few customary authorities and Avungara men generally in Uganda, and especially so in the settlements. Some had brought their wives and children, but had subsequently returned to South Sudan (see Section 6.6). Intrigued by this absence of tradi-

8 In Rhino Camp and Adjumani, for instance, I was told there were active Dinka and Nuer chiefs. Interview with female elderly refugee, Rhino Camp RS, 12 August 2017.

tional authorities, I asked the refugees why that was, and my research assistants in South Sudan did the same there. We found myriad reasons. One former chief from Western Equatoria who now lived as a refugee in Rhino Camp shared his views:

> [Traditional authorities] will not leave the people behind. Like Jesus said, he cannot really leave his sheep for the [laughs] to be eaten by... [laughs] Yes! So some of them ... are really old in age. They think that they cannot bother themselves running from there... Long distance, coming on foot and this. So they think that this issue of death is from God. Yes. If his [any person] time has come, then there is no way.[9]

The last few reasons the former chief gave here, were mostly reminiscent of the reasons that old people in South Sudan generally gave us for wanting to stay: It is far, we are old, and is death after all not predestined (see Chapter 6)? However, the former chief started with another reason more particular to the chiefs: that they had a special responsibility to their people,

We found that many of our respondents – Western Equatorian refugees and stayees alike – regarded chiefs highly when they managed to shield their communities from the worst shocks of war. Even when there was little that chiefs could do to protect their people from the war, they were expected to show solidarity with 'their people.' In the words of a female stayee in Yambio: 'For Avungara what I know is that these people are always so sympathetic with their people, so it is very hard for them to go anywhere and leave their citizens alone.'[10] The same sentiment, but stronger, was expressed by an elderly woman in a refugee settlement in Uganda: 'You die with your people! That is the spirit we appreciate in them!'[11]

This appreciation was a double-edged sword. It also meant that Avungara were expected to stay during wartime, or risk losing their privileged position, be it to 'other invaders' or powerful insiders.[12] An elder in Yambio explained it well:

> About the Avungara what I know is that this tribe were given the title of Kingship a long time ago and most of them believe that if I run away and leave my people behind, it will be a shame to that clan ... [People] will just say, 'This fearful tribe cannot rule us anymore.' In this case the Avungara will lose their dignity ... The community will replace him immediately with any powerful person in the community. Hence he will lose his title and it will be a disgrace to his generation.[13]

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9 Interview with former chief, Rhino Camp refugee settlement, 12 August 2017.
10 Interview with female farmer, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
11 Focus group discussion (FGD) with elders, refugee settlement in Uganda, 12 August 2017.
12 'The Avungara ruling clans,' one 48-year old stayee explained, 'Most of them have not escaped [ran away] much due to fear of occupying their territories from other invaders.' Interview with 49-year old farmer, Yambio, 10 May 2018.
13 Interview with 53-year old secretary of church, Yambio, 9 May 2018.

This elder described a conditional social contract between the Avungara clan (or 'tribe') (see Section 3.2) and the rest of the Zande 'community'. Some people explicitly historicized this social contract. One civil society leader in Yambio wrote to me: 'Community leaders like the Avungara perceive running from the war as cowardice, because their ancestors conquered large parts of the land during the stone age.'[14] This 'stone age' referred to the 16th-19th century, when the Avungara established themselves as the ruling clan over the wider Zande society (see Section 2.2). Whether the Avungara had gained their privileged position through conquest, consent, or God, everyone seemed acutely aware of the conditionality of this privilege.

Refugees and stayees agreed that for a chief to 'abandon his territory and people, and run away [would] reflect his weakness'.[15] Stronger still, it would reflect 'moral decay and a loss of dignity.'[16] Such chiefly running would also be a harbinger of doom. In Yambio, one 49-year-old woman explains: 'If [the Avungara] run into exile, it implies to the communities that things have gone totally out of hand and all the rest will run because they are the 'flock and the shepherd'.'[17] For chiefs to run away would be interpreted as a captain abandoning the ship, signalling that all hope is lost.

The handful of chiefs from Western Equatoria that we did meet in Uganda, had a personal story of persecution or illness to justify their being in Uganda. Most emphasized, as did other refugees, that they would go back as soon as peace would come – or the political or medical issue that brought them to Uganda was solved. What is more, although they were often referred to as 'chief' by the people around them, there was no policy to actively involve chiefs in the governance of refugee settlements. Even Ugandan traditional authorities, although powerful, do not hold the same local government and judicial roles that chiefs have in South Sudan. As one respondent explained, 'chiefs have no freedom to call for meetings or reconciliation. [Ugandan] politicians interfere, making them fear to carry out their duties.'[18] Another respondent stated, 'from the time I came here, I do not know whether the chiefs are talking or not. The chiefs had never gathered the people and talked to them in relation to the conflict.'[19] On one occasion at an OPM office, I came across a great-grandson of King Gbudwe who had been with the SPLA when he was shot by the Arrow Boys. Now he was a refugee in Uganda. The note I wrote then illustrates much about the lack of authority of Western Equatorian Avungara in Uganda:

14 Email correspondence with Peter, 3 May 2018.
15 Interview with former state minister, Kampala, 13 June 2017.
16 Email correspondence with Peter, 3 May 2018.
17 Interview with 49-year old female cleaner, Yambio, 11 May 2018.
18 Focus group discussion with young men from Western Equatoria, Arua, 25 August 2017.
19 Focus group discussion with women from Western Equatoria, Bweyale, 5 August 2017.

> As I leave the office of the Refugee Desk Officer of OPM, I find a friendly face in the hallway waiting. Mr ..., great-grandson of King Gbudwe is also here. We greet each other friendly and walk outside to chat a bit. We exchange pleasantries, and I learn that he is here to see the Camp Commandant of Rhino Camp to request to be transferred from one section to another. From my conversation with the Refugee Desk Officer and my visits to Rhino Camp, I know such a request is not uncommon and I wonder if his request will be honoured. It is a bit strange to see this man [the offspring of King Gbudwe] now speaking in a humble voice to a relatively young Ugandan camp commandant. Talk about changing authority positions![20]

This encounter suggested that indeed Avungara or chiefly heritage counted for little in Uganda. But it is important to recall that the decline in chiefly authority long predated refugees' crossing of the border (see Chapter 5), and that in previous times, too, the individuals who played chiefly roles in South Sudan had often performed other roles in exile (Leonardi 2013). A Mundu chief now living in a Ugandan refugee settlement described the adapted role of chiefs:

> In the camp here we are not officially given that title or given that power ... Most of my people ... may be in other camps. ... So from time to time, I can visit them and they also used to visit me. We are like a community of Western Equatoria, in general. So on most occasions, we just sympathize. Like with funerals. We really have to sacrifice to go and to pay our respects or condolences there. And what is really difficult for us is to get our people on board to bring them together. Because here, most of these things are done by the local councils, according to the Ugandan system ... What we had before in South Sudan, which is a chief also has his own court in his area, and all this. It is not allowed. Because we are in another country. We are refugees. We have to abide by the rules and regulations of the UN and host community ... [We] also encourage our people that, 'No, this war has an end! And maybe soon.' We cannot discourage them. We also give them hope that soon we will go back to our area of origin. That is really our role here. But I did not see any chief in the camps who was practicing like in South Sudan. ... Some of our people, now they have already gone into the system like a chairperson, cluster chairperson, saving communities. Yes, our people are there. They are fully also engaged with some organizations.[21]

In some ways, he had ceased to be a chief. He described how some people like him had taken up positions in other 'systems', illustrating the flexibility with which people interpreted roles: As people moved, roles also shifted.

20 Anonymized diary entry, Arua, 14 May 2018.
21 Interview with 58-year-old refugee, Rhino Camp, 13 March 2018.

8.3.2 Dispute over drinking water, ethnic escalation, and resolution

Having found that 'the chiefs were not there,' I wondered what happened in the settlements when there were disputes. Who did refugees turn to? Before turning to a description and analysis of the new authorities, I will describe a dispute and its resolution in Kiryandongo RS. It illustrates well the diversity and hybridity of 'authorities' in the settlement, as well as the strained relations between generations and ethnic groups.

During one of my visits to Kiryandongo RS and Bweyale in August 2017, the talk of the town among my Zande friends was a clash between ethnic Zande and Nuer youth. In a manner quite similar to the eruption of violent conflict in Western Equatoria (see Chapter 6), this dispute had started relatively small but then escalated rapidly. I did not speak to the Nuer involved in the fight, or with the Ugandan police. My interest was not in the event as such, but rather in interpretations of it, and response to it, by various people in the Zande community: the youth, the Western Equatorian Chairperson, the Zande Chairperson, a church leader,, and a Zande elder.

The dispute had started when a Zande boy in Kiryandongo RS went to the borehole to fetch water. The queues were long, and people often waited for hours. Two Zande boys involved in the matter, explained what happened briefly: 'He [gestures to the other boy] went for water but the Nuer threw our jerry can away. When my brother asked, he was boxed and they followed us home to fight.'[22] In other words, the initial problem was that one boy had skipped the line. After the initial skirmish, key respondent Charles explained, 'the Zande and Nuer boys both jumped in and started fighting seriously.' The Zande boys claimed that they had been outnumbered.[23] One of them then cut a Nuer boy with a machete. Later that same night, 'the Nuer were even going door to door in some areas to find one particular Zande boy [the one who cut with the machete].'[24]

The Ugandan police came and arrested some of the boys from both sides. From a legal point of view, it was a criminal offense to cut somebody with a machete. But the Ugandan police, the community leadership (see Section 8.4) and church leaders quickly agreed that it was better to solve this problem

22 FGD with former Arrow Boys 1, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.

23 Interview with anonymous refugee, Kiryandongo RS, 5 August 2017: 'Just a few days ago, a Zande happened to go into fight with these Nuer. All of them came. About 15 people to come and fight 3 people. If the boys were not very strong I think they wanted to kill everybody.'

24 He adds, 'We discovered that the Nuer are very organized. They have a group from Bentiu and Malakal, and so on.' Interview with Charles, Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 4 August 2017.

'at home.'[25] Elizabeth, the Zande Community chairperson (see Annex 1: Portraits, and Section 8.4.2.1), recalled: 'Because we were many, we went to the church with the Nuer chairperson, chiefs and community, and with our Zande community. There were also pastors from both sides.'[26] First, the group discussed how and why the dispute happened. Then the youth were advised not to fight again. The chairperson of the Western Equatorian Community recounted: 'We told them, 'This is not the custom. This is not good' ... If you come and fight, that means it will bring a big fight between the two people.'[27] The latter 'people' referring here to the wider ethnic communities.

Once the youth had been advised in this way, the Zande chairperson addressed the Nuer community: 'The issue has finished, and we need peace. The Bible says that to fight is not good. If we did not want peace, we would have stayed in South Sudan. But because we wanted peace we are here.' The Nuer accepted this plea for peace, and only demanded that the Zande community paid for the medical treatment of the boy who had been cut with the machete. Elizabeth: 'It was 100.000 UGX [some 28 USD]. So everyone was asked to chip in. But it was not enough, so the church also helped with 20.000 UGX.'[28] Once all this was agreed to, Elizabeth went back to the Ugandan police, and told them 'we are finished.'[29]

The dispute was resolved, but people continued discussing it for weeks. The Zande youth seemed less concerned than the elders, and kept their analysis of 'root causes' short. The week after the incident I spoke to a group of Zande boys and young men, some of whom had been directly involved in the fighting. Their relations with youth from other ethnic groups came up:

> Youth 1: The relation with other youth in the camp is somehow OK. Others have their own characteristics. But we like everybody.
> Youth 2: It is a bit good. Some tribes also, maybe it is in their culture? Or it is in their habit. But when you tell them reality, they take it bad. They are quick to fight.
> Bruno: But I heard about the incident at the borehole last week, where some Zande boys fought with Nuer boys, and cut the Nuer with a *panga* (machete)?
> [Laughing]
> Several: He is even among us!
> Youth 4: Some of them may lack understanding. They may think they are the best, but it is not like that.[30]

25 Interview with Charles, Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 9 February 2018, and Interview with Elizabeth, Bweyale, 9 February 2018. Elizabeth specified that this was done by the officer in charge (OIC) and the officer of the criminal investigations department.
26 Interview with Elizabeth, Bweyale, 9 February 2018.
27 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 5 August 2017.
28 Interview with Elizabeth, Bweyale, 9 February 2018.
29 Interview with Elizabeth, Bweyale, 9 February 2018.
30 FGD with former Arrow Boys 2, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.

The way the youth spoke about the dispute was in cloaked terms, and although they used ethnic stereotypes those were not so explicit. The conversation with the boys quickly turned to other topics, like their football team and hopes for schooling. One of them explained that more than anything, 'We want to learn. We are just sitting like this from morning to evening. Then we get bad thoughts.'[31] Again, they saw 'sitting idle' as their main problem.

The older generation of Zande, by contrast, offered extensive analyses why such a small quarrel could escalate violently so quickly. Often, these analyses gravitated around two connected structural causes: tribalism and generational disorder. Both of these phenomena predated flight, and also figured prominently in the elders' analyses of the war in South Sudan. Many older Zande saw certain ethnic groups – especially Nuer and Dinka – as predisposed to violence, and contrast that with their self-image of restraint and dialogue. A Zande church leader who was involved in the resolution of the borehole-incident, argued that: 'Tribalism among the Azande is not common ... If there are individual differences, we try to solve them. We don't mobilize all. But the Nuer and Dinka, anything happens, everyone gets involved.'[32] Tribalism, to him, was the process by which some 'tribes' fail to analyse small disputes properly before escalating to collective self-defence. In the view of many Western Equatorians, this kind of tribalism was aggravated by the novel proximity of 'others' in the refugee settlements. Charles offered: 'Some people who are conflicting in South Sudan are here in one place. So small things can easily escalate.'[33] The Western Equatorian Chairperson (see Section 8.4.2), speaking just days after the borehole incident, also complained of Nuer tribalism, and added another factor to his analysis:

> Like what I have seen from the Nuer. That you come and see your son fighting the son of your neighbour, and [then] you yourself jump into the fight and just fight without knowing what happened. It is normally not like that. When they fight, they separate them. They will bring their father and the other father and say, 'Let's talk this one out. Me and your father were friends.' Like that one. Start teaching the youth about the mentality they have been living in .... So this is about the connection between the youth and the elder people in our place there.[34]

His 'normally' referred to what in his view ought to have happened: Sons, who inevitably fight, ought to have been corrected by their fathers. And so in the chairperson's eyes, the escalation was due in important part to generational disorder and the erosion of parental and elderly authority over the youth. This mirrored wider debates about the genesis of South Sudan's conflicts, in which generational friction have often been attributed a central

31 FGD with former Arrow Boys 2, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.
32 Interview with 40-year old Zande refugee/church leader, Kiryandongo RS, 9 May 2018.
33 Interview with Charles, Kiryandongo RS, 9 February 2018.
34 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 5 August 2017.

role (Leonardi 2007a, 392). Previous periods of conflict and displacement had also affected changes in South Sudanese gender and generational relations (Kaiser 2006b), and were also reported this time around (Braak and Kenyi 2018, 18). But to what extent these changes were cause and/or consequence of violence and displacement, remained heatedly debated among refugees.

Youth and elders frequently shifted the blame for violent conflict back and forth. Both in South Sudan and exile, the youth were often the ones holding the machete or gun. The elders, however, typically gave the orders or shaped the combustible context of fear, tribalism and distrust.[35] As one former Arrow boy explained, 'Our leaders started the war and pushed it to the youth. Because we do not have education, we do not understand.'[36] In displacement, youth were widely seen to be more open to contact with other ethnic groups than their parents or elders. They organized inter-ethnic football tournaments, hung out in similar places, attended schools and NGO activities together, and even set up small civil society groups. Still, the tribalism that was rife in South Sudan and among their elders, was also affecting the youth. In the words of a church leader in Rhino Camp: 'Although the [youth] are here together, the parents will teach them to hate.'[37]

And so this single incident threw light on a number of important themes in the settlement's dynamics. What started as a minor transgression – line-skipping at a borehole – escalated quickly and violently due in part to the ethnic lens with which youth and elders interpreted it. These two boys were cast to represent 'their people.' This ethnic frame appeared much harder for the older generations than for the youth, who in the settlements often forged inter-ethnic and international friendships. For the elders, meanwhile, the dispute was also about a lack of parental control. Strikingly, the Ugandan police referred the violent incident back to be resolved 'at home' where a variety of refugee authorities became involved. This illustrates well how the most powerful Ugandan authorities in the settlements – the settlement commander and the Ugandan police – often relied on refugees to govern themselves.

8.4 Abundance of aspiring authorities in the settlements

So the Western Equatorian chiefs were absent in exile, but the borehole-dispute illustrated that there was no vacuum of refugee-led authority. Far from it.

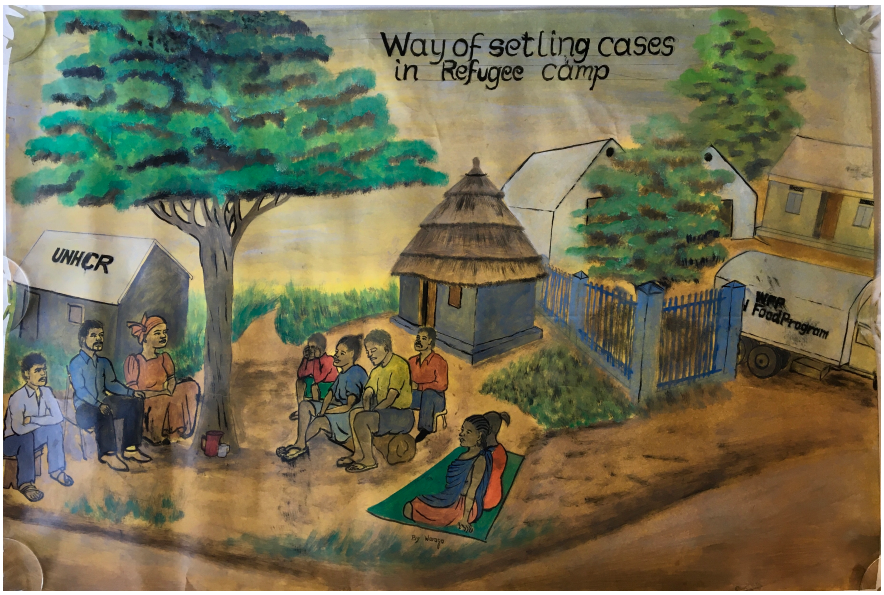
35 In Western Equatoria, for instance, while the members of non-state armed groups such as the Arrow Boys were predominantly young, their leaders were older. The few dozen former Arrow Boys who were interviewed for this study said that they were either abducted or persuaded to fight by those leaders.

36 FGD with former Arrow Boys 1, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.

37 Church leader during FGD with elders, Wanyenga, 12 August 2017.

Already upon arrival, not all Western Equatorian refugees were equal – with some deriving privileged status, wealth and knowledge from their education or socio-cultural standing (e.g., 'elders'), or their work with NGO's, churches,[38] or the South Sudanese government and its institutions. In the second phase of displacement refugees began to set up new authority structures in Uganda. This chimes with McConnachie's finding in refugee camps on the Thailand-Burma border, that 'Through refugee-led camp committees, community-based organizations and political organizations, refugees also exercise and negotiate authority' (McConnachie 2014, 3). However, those camps were already much more established, whereas in Kiryandongo RS (and Uganda more broadly) refugees were still arriving and constructing refugee-led authority structures.

Figure 16: Painting by James: Dispute settlement in the refugee settlement. Commissioned by the author, 2018.



In this section, I will analyse two refugee-led authority structures that were prominent in Uganda, especially in the settlements: the 'Refugee Welfare Councils (RWC) and the Community organizations. I will compare how they were set up, who ran them, the work they did, and some popular perceptions and experiences. The last part of this section will analyse how refugees used the community organisations to lobby for more prominent positions in the RWCs.

38 There were numerous churches in the refugee settlements catering to the religious needs of the refugees and undertaking various development initiatives. They were often set up as a franchise of a South Sudanese mother church, typically with congregations predominantly from a particular region and/or ethnic group.

8.4.1 Refugee Welfare Councils

Refugee Welfare Councils (RWC) or Refugee Welfare *Committees,* were set up by the Ugandan government to help govern the refugee settlements. This system predates the Refugees Act (2006) and Refugees Regulations (2010), and has legal roots in the Control of Alien Refugees Act (1960). 'CARA' gave the 'Director of Refugees' (in today's terms, the 'camp commandant') the power to order a refugee, mostly to aid in the 'orderly and efficient' administration of the settlement.'[39] But scholars have noted that Ugandan state officials have since interpreted the Act to 'allow refugees to settle disputes according to their own cultural norms and traditions ... in their own language, and costs were lower than in national courts' (Verdirame et al. 2005, 186–87). RWCs already existed in Kiryandongo RS and other settlements prior to 2013 (Ahumuza, Odokonyero, and Outeke 2012), but many new ones were set up after the South Sudanese civil war led to a mass influx of new refugees into Uganda's settlements (see Section 7.3.1).

During my research there were typically three layers of RWCs, overlapping with the spatially-delineated administrative levels of the settlement. In Kiryandongo, for instance, the lowest administrative level was the 'cluster' with a RWC 1, followed by the 'range' with a RWC 2, and lastly the 'settlement' with a RWC 3.[40] The chairperson of the RWC 3 was the most powerful refugee in the settlement's governance structure. This configuration mirrored to some the five-level 'Local Council'-system that was operative outside the settlements in Uganda. That system had inspired NGO Oxfam in the 1990s to set up a predecessor system of 'refugee committees' in settlements with Sudanese refugees (Payne 1998, 61). During my research, some refugees referred to the RWCs as 'LC'.

RWCs were run by a chairperson and various other members, such as 'vice, general secretary, [and] secretaries of the treasury, defence, education, youth, women, and people with disabilities.'[41] These portfolios varied. RWC members were in principle elected by other refugees (Hoff 2019; Ogeno and O'Byrne 2018), although some had been appointed by OPM – for instance in the early phase of arrival when they had need for a refugee representative and no time

39 The relevant clause reads: '(a) to ensure that the settlement is administered in an orderly and efficient manner; (b) to ensure the performance of any work or duty necessary for the maintenance of essential services in the settlement or for the general welfare of the refugees; (c) to ensure that all proper precautions are taken to preserve the health and well-being of the refugees; (d) to preserve orderly conduct and discipline in the settlement' (CARA, 1960: Article 13, 2).

40 Divergent terminology was in use in Uganda's various refugee settlements. In some places the units were called 'bloc' (?RWC 1), 'village' (RWC 2) and settlement (RWC 3). In Bidi-Bidi RS people spoke of 'Tanks', 'Blocks' and 'Zones'; and in Rhino Camp of 'Clusters,' 'Zones,' and 'Blocks.'

41 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.

to organise elections. Where elections were held, they sometimes followed the South Sudanese chiefly electoral system described by Chief Zaza (see Chapter 5), with supporters lining up behind the candidate of their choice.[42] RWC positions were for a two-year tenure, although many members left early. Many RWC leaders had prior experience in the South Sudanese government and/or with aid organisations.

Precisely what RWCs did, depended largely on their members and the various demands made of them.[43] The settlement leadership called on RWCs to communicate policies to the refugee community, to participate in settlement coordination meetings, and to aid refugees in dispute resolution. (I)NGO's would use the RWCs to 'mobilize' or 'sensitise' refugees about their programmes (UNHCR 2019a). Refugees meanwhile looked to the RWCs for the resolution of disputes, for council, to help access and navigate other authority structures (such as the Ugandan police and OPM), and to bring opportunities – like scholarships and trainings. In this regard, they were quite similar to chiefs in South Sudan.

The Ugandan government envisioned RWCs as the first port of call for dispute resolution in the settlements. Common problems included domestic violence, adultery, theft, and friction over water, firewood and land (ownership and boundaries), although some people would also bring assault, rape and defilement. Sometimes, disputes in the settlements were echoes of problems back 'home' in South Sudan or in the DR Congo. In Kiryandongo, the RWC 1 chairperson explained, 'The Congolese who live down there [gestures in a direction] have a lot of problems they bring from home. There they are divided between rebels and government, and they bring that here.'[44]

RWC procedures for hearing and resolving cases differed, also depending on the amount of people and cases in their area. Some chairpersons worked on an ad hoc basis, hearing cases whenever anybody knocked on their door at home in the settlement.[45] Others used a more formal procedure, as one chairperson explained: 'Usually my secretary of defence brings the accused. Then the complainant registers his case, and you write it. Then we hear the accused, the secretary of defence, and then we resolve it.'[46] This procedure – with the 'secretary of defence' bringing the accused – is common across the region in customary and statutory courts. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, researchers found that the RWCs had even appointed armed *askaris* (soldier, guard, police officer) to bring in suspects (Verdirame et al. 2005). I did not

42 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.
43 Interview with RWC 1-chairperson, Rhino Camp RS, 18 May 2017.
44 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.
45 Although many RWCs said they keep written records of the disputes they resolved, I was unable to access those so I cannot say much about the precise caseload of the various RWCs. That would be interesting follow-up research. One cluster chairperson estimated that he heard some five disputes in an average week.
46 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.

see this in person, but one RWC chairperson in Rhino Camp told me they had a structure 'and security personnel within the refugees' as well as youth who 'patrol at night' to arrest thieves and bring them to the police.[47]

The RWCs jurisdiction was limited in terms of persons and substance. Their focus was on refugees. When a case involved also a Ugandan national, OPM required that the RWC referred it to the relevant Local Council (LCs) who would then lead, but might still consult with the RWC. This instruction appeared to be by and large abided by. OPM also required that RWCs refer criminal matters to the Ugandan police, a restriction which was often ignored. What exactly constituted 'criminal' was not always clear to RWCs. And even when it was, the police presence was extremely limited in the settlements (UNHCR 2018b, 14; Parliament of Uganda 2020). At the time of my research, Kiryandongo RS with a population of over 60,000 was policed by 7 officers who were stationed at an office at the entry gate of the sprawling settlement. Where Uganda's general 'police to population ratio' stood at 1: 772 in 2015 (Uganda Police Force 2015), in the settlement it was less than 1: 8500. In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that RWCs also took on serious cases, such as assault, rape and defilement.[48] RWC members were often uncertain about the sanctions that they could impose. Some insisted that they could only mediate and not impose fines,[49] whereas others said they imposed hefty fines of up to 500,000 UGX (some 137 USD at the time).[50] In the late 1990s and early 2000s, researchers found that RWCs would administer corporal punishment and even imprisonment (Verdirame et al. 2005). I did not come across either during my research.

Refugees' perceptions of the RWCs were ambivalent. People generally told me that RWCs resolved disputes for free.[51] This was contrary to the customary court or chief in South Sudan, and contrary to RWC practice in other Ugandan settlements (Ntegyerize and Onyoin 2016, 14). In the refugee settlements I studied, refugees generally believed that the RWCs had good links to the police. Even if, as described above, the police presence in the settlements was extremely limited this perceived link between RWCs and the police somewhat supported the authority of the former. One refugee explained:

> The person to whom you report is the one who refers you to a higher level. I have not reached there but I have seen it with my neighbours. I heard people are given a final warning before they are referred to other levels. Since my neighbours were given the final warning, they did not repeat the problem. ... I have never heard of a case that has reached the police or the OPM.[52]

47 Conversation with refugee chairperson in Rhino Camp, Bweyale, 12 May 2017.
48 Interview with OPM official, Arua, 14 May 2018.
49 Interview with RWC 1-chairperson, Rhino Camp RS, 18 May 2017.
50 Interview with RWC 1-chairperson, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.
51 For instance in interview with 27-year-old female refugee, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017.
52 Interview with 27-year-old refugee, Bidibidi RS, 18 August 2017.

One common allegation against the elected RWCs, however, was that they were practising ethnic exclusivism and favouritism when aid organizations brought opportunities like scholarships or vocational training to the settlements. Western Equatorian, let alone Zande, refugees were a clear minority everywhere to other groups – especially Nuer, Dinka and Central Equatorians. One refugee in Bidi-Bidi RS complained, 'We are few from Western Equatoria here. The [ethnic group X] and [ethnic group Y] are many here, and they send their people for trainings. There is no good communication with them from our side.'[53] Another refugee agreed and added, 'Since we came to the camp, there are programmes but you only hear that people are taken elsewhere. They talk to us as well, but we do not get what we are supposed to get.'[54] Whether these sentiments were justified and reflective of actual practices was difficult to establish. The settlements were sites of unlimited needs and limited means. Ethnic and, to some extent, regional differences had been politicised and militarised in South Sudan. In the settlements, people from all over South Sudan lived in close proximity. The sense of ethnic marginalisation and victimhood – shared by so many – combined with real existing poverty to produce a particularly toxic brand of jealousy.

Another fundamental problem with the RWCs was that they were often seen to be weak and unable to address the structural factors undermining peoples' lives in exile. Particularly, they had little power vis-à-vis OPM and UNHCR. One particularly sobering account came from a young South Sudanese refugee and civil society activist, during a workshop on the political participation of refugees held in Kampala:

> RWCs don't represent our voices. They just give us information from above. One way ... There is not a single refugee at UNHCR. These people are working on a system, global. They are accountable to their states. They account to the people that give the money, but not to us who are receiving. RWC are not being given an ear ... If we don't create the space ourselves, no one will give it to us.[55]

The image he painted – of UNHCR [and OPM] not attributing weight to the voices of RWCs and refugees more generally – chimes with earlier literature on refugees in Uganda (Kaiser 2005, 357).

53 FGD with non-Zande men from Western Equatoria, Bidibidi, 19 August 2017. The names of the specific ethnic groups referred to here have not been included, the intention being to highlight attitudes of ethnic exclusivism in general, rather than in relation to specific ethnic groups.

54 FGD with non-Zande men from Western Equatoria, Bidibidi, 19 August 2017.

55 Contribution by a South Sudanese civil society activist and refugee during a workshop by IDEA and IRRI, Kampala, 26 April 2018.

8.4.2 Ethnic and regional community organizations, pursuing unity

8.4.2.1 Community organisations

In the absence of customary authorities and confronted with the weaknesses of the RWCs, refugees set up 'Community organisations' along ethnic or regional lines.[56] Whereas the RWCs were initiated from above, by the Ugandan government, and had a formal role in refugee governance, the 'Communities' were mostly initiated by their members and had no formal role in the settlements' governance. Still, the Communities mirrored the RWCs in that they had a 'chairperson', and a 'cabinet' including 'secretaries' and 'members'. A single refugee could be, and often was, a 'member' of various Communities. In Kiryandongo RS, for instance, there was a 'Zande Community,' an 'Azande Traditional Association,' a 'Western Equatorian Community,' . .and a 'Equatorian Union.' The Communities in the settlements were comparatively new at the time of my research, but they were based on historical precedents. South Sudanese people had set up similar, often ethnic, associations in previous periods of exile to Uganda and elsewhere (Moro 2004; Thomas 2015; Edward 2007, 127; Idris 2005, 65). Members of the Zande Community in Kiryandongo RS told me that they had taken inspiration both from the very well-organized Nuer community in Kiryandongo RS, and from the diasporic Zande in the US and the UK.

The use of the word 'community' in this context may be somewhat confusing, as refugees used the same term also to refer to a set of people that can be grouped together based on origin, locality, livelihood, religious orientation, and so on. The term was also frequently used by (I)NGO's – with or without 'refugee' before it. Social scientists have long found that 'communities' while appearing 'natural' and self-evident, tend in fact to be 'imagined,' historically formed, under construction, and imbued with power and politics (Anderson 2016). That was abundantly clear in the refugee settlements. Here, refugee-initiated 'Community organisations' or 'Communities' (I will use a capital letter to distinguish the formalized version) aspired to be more than simply a group of people sharing a particular characteristic. They presented attempts by particular group members to reify the importance of group membership and belonging, making the 'community' more salient, and steering thinking and behaviour of both its 'members' and the outside world. In other words: *Communities* were like the political manifestations of *communities*.

Both the foundation of Community organisations and the leadership selection, differed from place to place. Consider for instance Elizabeth (see Annex 1: Portraits). When I first met her, she already held various positions: as adviser in a church, translator for the camp management, and as the

56 I came across such organizations in Bidi Bidi, Kiryandongo and Rhino Camp refugee settlements, and in Kampala and Arua.

chairperson for the Zande Community in Bweyale and Kiryandongo RS. The Ugandan government had set up RWCs to be ethnicity-blind representatives of geographical parts of the settlements. Yet when Elizabeth arrived in Kiryandongo RS in April 2016, she was installed in her position as Community chairperson by the settlement commandant precisely because of her ethnicity. She explained:

> Zande were not here ... But if there is a dance that organizations want to organize, they want the Zande to also participate. And I was then in the reception [centre] to do interviews. So this is why the Camp Commandant made me the Zande chairperson.[57]

A year later in April 2017, more Zande had arrived in Kiryandongo and an election was held. Elizabeth was re-elected. 'The community chose me again. They said that I was the one who started it, so I should also stay. The election was only among us Zande, there was no one from OPM.' Later the respective 'Community organisations' of Zande in Kampala, Arua and Kiryandongo RS met in Kampala to hold a 'Zande General Assembly'. There, Elizabeth's tenure as chairperson was extended by three years. By comparison, the Zande chairperson in the city of Arua was first elected ('by show of hands') during a 'general meeting of the community' chaired by the previous chief who was going to return to Yambio.[58] Later his tenure, too, was extended at the General Assembly. These examples illustrate just how fluid and diverse the Community organisations and their leadership selection processes could be.

The precise work of Community organisations prominently included representing the group to outsiders and dispute resolution (see Section 8.3.2). Outside the settlement, in Arua, I interviewed the chairperson of the Zande Community who had been in office since 2014. When I asked him if upon his election, he had been given a specific mandate, he explained:

> Yes, they [did]. But also, if you have been close to the office, you will know what they are supposed to do. And you can ask the former one. The key is to solve problems in the community before it goes somewhere, to the police. So solve things in your own language. Solve it within![59]

This element of 'solving problems within' was echoed by various ethnic Communities in the refugee settlements. One ethnic Moru from Maridi explained: 'Somebody cannot come in and solve something in your house or tribe. We can solve our own problems. Like marriage, sickness, fighting ... To raise a complaint to other tribes is not OK.'[60] Even an RWC-chairperson, ethnic

57 Interview with Elizabeth, Bweyale, 9 February 2018.
58 Interview with chairperson Zande in Arua, Mvepi, 13 March 2018.
59 Interview with chairperson Zande in Arua, Mvepi, 13 March 2018.
60 Interview with Moru former SPLA, Rhino Camp, 11 August 2017.

Zande, concurred with this logic of first trying to solve problems 'within' the confines of ethnicity:

> When someone has done something wrong, you first go to his chairperson of the culture. He then corrects that person in their customary way. If he fails to listen, that is when you bring the law of the country to deal with him.[61]

The RWC chairperson painted a dichotomy between solving problems 'within' using the 'customary way' versus taking problems 'outside' and involving 'the law' and, by implication, government institutions. This related to the dispute resolution forums in South Sudan, where people often also tried to deal with disputes first 'within' (with family or clan members or with neighbours) before taking them to customary or statutory courts.

8.4.2.2 Scattering and unity

Community Organisations' main preoccupation, however, was the unity of the group. This had four main facets: practical, outward-political, trans-local and generational. First, on a practical level refugees were often 'scattered' from the people that they had lived with before flight, and now left to suffer the desolation of exile alone.[62] As one RWC chairperson put it: 'those who didn't come with relatives are left alone.'[63] This meant that work that used to be shared (with the family, clan, village) in South Sudan – construction, cultivation, child raising – in exile often had to be shouldered alone. It also meant that as one 27-year-old female refugee put it, 'everyone is 'free' and lives on his or her own way'.[64] This 'freedom' and individualisation, to many refugees, was a worrying form of rudderlessness. Without groups to belong to, what remains of the self? Many refugees were cosmopolitan at least some of the time – insisting 'we are all Africans, we are all brothers and sisters.' Yet there were communitarian people and moments, too: When a shared humanity did not count as much as proximity – family, clan, ethnicity, religion.

This relates to the second and more outward-political facet of unity: Community organisations were often established on the premise that unity – be it ethnic or regional – offered strength vis-à-vis the other, bigger and more organized groups who in the view of many Western Equatorians dominated the politics and economics of the settlements as well as back in South Sudan. As a former chief from Western Equatoria in Rhino Camp put it: 'The Nuer and Dinka are in big numbers out here. And they have their associations. So

61 Conversation with refugee chairperson in Rhino Camp, Kiryandongo RS, 8 March 2017.
62 WES community leader, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017; and Interviews with James, Kiryandongo RS, 5 August 2017 and 7 February 2018.
63 Conversation with refugee chairperson in Rhino Camp, Kiryandongo RS, 8 March 2017.
64 Interview with 27-year-old female refugee, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017.

they are really getting support.'[65] The establishment of ethnic Communities was not unlike an arms race, in that once bigger ethnic groups (i.e. Dinka, Nuer, Zande) had formed Communities, smaller groups felt compelled to follow. The Balanda community in Arua held a general meeting which was paid for by one man who stays in the US, with the express purpose of 'com[ing] together like the other tribes do, to help ourselves.'[66] Western Equatorians of smaller ethnic groups (e.g., Baka, Avukaya, Mundu) often saw the establishment of Zande Communities as a threat, as they feared it would weaken their shared 'Western Equatorian' Community and identity.

The reasoning of strength-through-numbers was particularly clear with the various 'Equatorian' inititatives. My key respondent Charles explained that they had founded the Equatorian Union, 'With the purpose to bring all Equatorians together for peace and development. We can take that home, and unite the divided people back home!'[67] His vision was that by establishing a strong Union in exile, the Equatorian refugees would be better equipped upon their return to South Sudan to also bring peace and unity there. Again, although the Equatorian Union was newly established in Kiryandongo RS, it built on a long history in which the ethnically diverse people from South Sudan's three southernmost Equatorian states had sought to unite and gain more autonomy from South Sudan's central government, which they often perceived as dominated by especially the Dinka ethnic group (Copeland 2016; D.H. Johnson 2014). On the extreme end, some Equatorians had even called for the independence of the three Equatoria states (Gimba 2018). In the refugee settlement, the Equatorian Union would soon prove very effective indeed in refugee politics (see Section 8.4.4).

A third and trans-local facet of the Communities, was that they aimed to connect the 'scattered' community members across the globe. In Uganda there were sizable groups of Zande in Kampala, Arua, Bweyale, Kiryandongo RS and Rhino Camp. 'Communities' fostered close social ties with and through Zande churches, politicians, and (in Kampala and Arua) with the Zande student associations.[68] When powerful diasporic Zande living in the West – especially the US, Australia, Canada and the UK – would visit Uganda, the 'Communities' sometimes brought their members together to facilitate dis-

65 Interview with 58-year-old former chief, Rhino Camp, 13 March 2018.

66 Interview with Western Equatorian church leader, Arua, 12 March 2018.

67 Interview with Charles, Kiryandongo RS, 29 May 2019.

68 The Zande student associations (e.g., 'the Azande Student Union Uganda') were active, and had a similar formality as the Zande Communities. In Arua, the 'chief' of the Zande community said that 'The Department of the Chief sometimes calls all the students and talks to them on behalf of their parents who are not here. We also organize career guidance events ... Mothers tell their daughters to control themselves. We call nurses to come and talk to the girls to teach them how to control themselves, and how to clean themselves as ladies. Because some girls mess up and get pregnant.' Interview with chairperson Zande in Arua, Mvepi, 13 March 2018.

cussions about the group, about proper behaviour, and about the future of South Sudan. There were also various active Facebook-groups bringing especially ethnic groups together (i.e. 'Zande Kingdom', 'All Azandes in the World', 'Balanda USA').[69] Some of these groups were quite open – allowing me to become a member – whereas others policed their membership much more strictly, even in some instances removing members after their ethnic 'purity' had been called into question. Contact with the diaspora was also a material safety net for refugees. As a former chief from Western Equatoria put it: 'If the community is well-organised and in touch with those out there [diaspora in the West], this can really improve life! You don't want to wait for the UN.'[70] Communities tried to tap into diasporic solidarity.

There was also a fourth and generational facet to the Communities, and their insistence on 'unity'. Especially elders and parents appeared to feel a strong need to consolidate ethnic boundaries and discipline. The refugee population was predominantly young, and some children were staying without parents. The adults often feared that the children would 'get lost' by adopting Ugandan languages and customs. One Zande refugee in Kiryandongo RS reasoned that Communities should help to 'teach our children our culture. Otherwise when we go home they will struggle to adapt.'[71] In a way reminiscent of Malkki's 'Purity and Exile', some refugees argued that cultural order and alienation were also tied to one's place of displacement. The former chief explained:

> Most of us in the camp are still living our traditional life. We are speaking our own language, singing traditional songs. So to keep our people here connected with our origin. In town there are different communities ... So if the family head is not serious by taking care of the children.. He has to keep them connected to the country. After 5 to 7 years the time will be there for us to go back. Then our children should not speak Lugbara and Swahili.[72]

Especially older refugees viewed town as a site of educational and work opportunities, but also as a place of cultural alienation and moral decay. Even if elders, too, acknowledged that what they considered the youth's 'getting lost' did not start with Ugandan town life, or even with war and displacement. Instead, they linked it to a rift between youth and elders which had been growing for decades in South Sudan. This account by my key respondent Charles Bangbe was illustrative of the views that some Zande elders held of

69 Many refugees had (access to) smart phones, and Facebook offered data-free access to a light version of their site in Uganda. One could update one's status, share photos and send messages without data charges. To see photos and videos one would have had to use data.
70 Interview with 58-year-old former chief, Rhino Camp, 13 March 2018.
71 Interview with Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 8 March 2018.
72 Interview with 58-year old former chief, Rhino Camp, 13 March 2018.

the adverse effects of war, displacement and modernization generally on children's discipline:

> C: Before the 21st century, youth were supposed to follow their elders, parents or guardian. The guardian chooses your career, and the father chooses your partner ... You have to obey. But all of that changed. Now it is all about the consent of the two people.
> *B: And how did that change come about?*
> C: Partly because people went to school. Some even to Uganda, where they met all sorts of other people. But also more generally through the integration and interaction with other cultures. Then human rights came to Africa. And people watch the TV, these Nigerian soaps and so on.
> *B: When exactly did this happen? Did your parents choose your partner?*
> C: No. When I was young the system was evaporating. In rural areas the system is still strong ... Back then, children were not supposed to ask their parents 'why.' But now those questions are there. Then respect was wholesale. Now a child can move out of the home ... This is leading many elders to give up on their young ones.[73]

Like Charles, many active members of the Community organisations were elders and parents, who felt that much was being lost in exile. Their authority over the youth was to some extent tied to the strength of the ethnically-defined 'group,' and so consolidating its boundaries and 'unity' was one of their goals. Very similar patterns and perceptions were observed during the previous period of South Sudanese exile in Kiryandongo RS by Tania Kaiser. Writing about the establishment of 'youth discos' in the early 2000s, she wrote:

> Religious and secular leaders and elders approved only of those discos which they could directly control because of concerns about changing social and sexual mores in the younger generation, and associated fears of a breakdown in their own structures and institutions of authority. For the older, more conservative group, what was at stake was not merely their own authority with respect to these particular situations, but the maintenance of familiar and culturally sanctioned ways of organising social life. (Kaiser 2006b, 198)

In a similar vein, the Community organisations that I found a decade later were not *just* about dispute resolution or even diasporic remittances – they were also attempts to reify the group and consolidate or restore a sense of cultural order. Through these communities, elders tried to encourage youth and children to stay close to their own. For instance, during a Zande meeting in Kampala, one senior politician who flew in from the US advised the Zande

73 Interview with Charles, Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 4 August 2017.

youth in Kampala not to 'intermarry,' saying 'When the tribe mixes, it will diminish.'[74]

8.4.3 Comparing the RWC, community organizations, and customary authorities

A first difference between the RWCs and the Communities, was that the former were established by the Ugandan settlement authorities and given a formal role in refugee governance. The Communities have more diverse origins but were typically initiated by their leading members, and had no formal role in refugee governance. RWCs' authority was tied to respective administrative sub-units of the settlement – it was geographically confined. Community organisations often coupled a geographical delineation with another either ethnic or regional characteristic of its members: The Zande Community of Kiryandongo RS, for instance. As a consequence, the RWCs were focused a lot on harmony between various ethnic or even national groups living in the same geographical area, whereas the Community organisations prioritised the unity of the own group, and its connections to co-ethnics elsewhere. The two represent the archetypes of respectively territory-based and ethnic-based authority (Mamdani 2004, 41; 2018). Authority and belonging in the former were based on place, in the latter on birth and conceptions of 'blood'.

There were also similarities. Members and leadership of both were refugees who with limited means sought to perform some quite similar functions: resolving disputes and gatekeeping between 'inside' and 'outside' (or 'below' and 'above', including to diaspora, government and INGOs). These roles were in turn reminiscent of those of traditional authorities in Western Equatoria (see Chapter 5). When it came to dispute resolution, the role of all these authorities was limited on paper to civil disputes, but sometimes extended in practice to criminal cases as well. In the day-to-day life of refugees, the differences between the authority structures were not always clear. Although only one Community chairperson I talked to referred to himself as 'chief,' colloquially many refugees did refer to them in this way. Often, RWC members also occupied positions of leadership in a Community, and refugees sometimes referred to RWCs as 'community structures.'

There were also similarities in the kinds of people who led the Communities and RWCs. For this research, I spoke with thirteen RWC leaders and Community chairpersons. None of them had worked as chief in South Sudan before, and compared to traditional authorities they were often young, well-educated and experienced at dealing with NGOs. They were motivated in part by the ability to do something for the 'community,' and partly because they felt that the role would teach them useful skills for the future may learn skills that may

74 Interview with Zande student, Kampala, 5 March 2018.

be of use in the future. As one RWC chairperson in Rhino Camp put it: 'Those who were elected as leaders here in Uganda are not paid, but they are given trainings. That will help some of us. They will have the knowledge to do something.'[75] Indeed, after previous return migrations former refugee leaders were sometimes able to secure new positions in South Sudan (Leonardi 2013). Another difference between traditional authorities and these new authorities in the settlements, was that the latter counted more women among their ranks. While chiefs in South Sudan were almost exclusively men (see Section 5.3), UNHCR estimated that some 50,6 percent of the RWC leadership were women (UNHCR 2019a).

The Community organisations, RWCs, and traditional authorities shared an interesting sense of reluctant leadership. Leaders often emphasised that they were elected, appointed or 'pushed by the people' to 'serve', emphasising their self-sacrifice for the common good. Like James, who told me that 'The people wanted me to run ... But I was reluctant ... They even wanted to submit it for me, but I went myself.'[76] While traditional authorities in South Sudan had received some remuneration, the refugee-led authorities in Uganda did not. For this reason, some refused to be (re)elected – feeling a responsibility to provide for their own families before engaging in unpaid labour for the RWCs or Communities. Key respondent Charles, for instance, was more than qualified and had been asked to become a member. When I asked him about this, he explained:

> C: There are clusters, like X, where they didn't elect anyone. So the people came and presented a list. In cluster X, the elders say that they tried to work in the community structure [RWC], but it takes all their time and they get no money. And yet they also have to put food on the table. They need to be motivated.
> *Q: Some people say it is also good to get that experience, and to do something for the community..*
> A: Yes, but for how long will you continue to do it at the expense of your own life? They are not supposed to charge refugees.
> *Q: Perhaps paying them would also be expensive. For these 17 clusters there would be many RWC members.*
> A: Yes, but motivation needs not just be money. It could be soap, salt or just 15 or 20,000 UGX [some 5,40 USD].

The economic deprivation of settlement life, meant that many eligible leadership candidates had to focus on survival. In some ways, this was reminiscent of South Sudan, where already prior to conflict rural areas were struggling to find enough good customary court members, for instance, and where after the eruption of war some government officials and traditional authorities returned to farming to supplement their meagre salaries.

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75 Interview with RWC 1-chairperson, Rhino Camp RS, 12 August 2017.
76 Interview with James, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.

There was some prestige in holding a leadership position, but this was counteracted by the widely perceived weakness of the RWCs and Communities to do much about the root causes of misery in the settlements. As one RWC chairperson summarized:

> There is no development. People are not stable. There is hunger ... Without peace, people are just in a traumatized state. Everything is a problem. Suffering creates more vulnerability. There is no education. This lifestyle is not all that easy.[77]

The problems that refugees faced were of a scale far beyond the reach of their own traditional or new authorities to resolve. Peace in South Sudan was often seen as a prerequisite for structural change, and for an eventual return home. Meanwhile, many refugees saw their lives in Uganda as a temporary – if prolonged – state of exception, one in which they were 'pushing' to survive and perhaps send their kids to school, but in which the future was often unclear. There was little that the RWCs or Community organisations could do to bring the future back in focus.

8.4.4 The politics of community: 'the battle for camp chairman'

The settlements were thus home to an abundance of aspiring authorities, including ethnic and regional Communities. I soon found out that these authorities also engaged in complicated settlement politics. In December 2017, an election was going to be held in Kiryandongo RS for the coveted position of RWC 3 leader, the highest refugee in the settlement. OPM organised the election, but was persuaded by a group of refugees to change the electoral design. It is worth explaining in some detail what happened, because the run-up to this election illustrated a lot about the practical workings of ethnic and regional Communities in interaction with the RWCs and the Ugandan government. The Western Equatorian Community-chairperson explained the situation:

> I was the chairman for the Western Equatorian Community. And one of our original aims when we arranged ourselves, was that we wanted the chair of the RWC 3 ... We [Equatorians] united ourselves here to fight the battle for the camp chairman [RWC 3 leader]. The previous one [name] was a corrupt Dinka. He would only help his own people with water, electricity, youth centres, scholarships. You know the camp chairman has more power than the OPM – he can call directly with [UNHCR] Geneva.[78]

77 Interview with RWC 1-chairperson, Rhino Camp RS, 18 May 2017.
78 Interview with Western Equatorian Community-chairperson, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.

The numerically large Nuer, Dinka and Shilluk communities had agreed on a single candidate, and so did the 'Equatorians' (a regional identity spanning dozens of ethnic groups, including Zande). Then, the 'Equatorian Union' came up with a strategy. 'Everything is politics,' the chairperson recalled. 'Some of us tried to play through the OPM and they sided with us.'[79] The Equatorian Union lobbied OPM to conduct the election with their chosen electoral system: Instead of a popular vote (one refugee, one vote) they lobbied to conduct the election 'like an electoral college' (where RWC 1 and 2-members voted for the RWC 3 chairperson). As there were comparatively many Equatorians in RWC 1 and 2-positions, this allowed the Equatorian Union to 'defeat the planning of the Nuer, Dinka and Shilluk.'[80] And then, the 'secretary-general' of the Equatorian Union was elected to become the chairperson of the RWC 3.[81] In sum, the informal 'Community organisations' had skilfully united the group, mobilised its 'members', and lobbied the Ugandan government, ultimately contributing to the election of their SG as 'chairperson' of the RWC 3.

Interestingly, I was told a very similar story around an election at a university in Kampala, where the South Sudanese Student Union was divided between Equatorians on the one hand, and Nuer and Dinka on the other. The Dinka and Nuer jointly supported a Nuer candidate for the general Student Union, and the Equatorians agreed on another. However, then the Equatorians managed to get the support of the Kenyan students – who I was told considered the Equatorians 'the most reasonable South Sudanese' – and win the election.[82] Both in the student election and for the RWC 3, the Nuer and Dinka agreed on a single candidate. That was remarkable given the politicisation and militarisation of the Dinka-Nuer distinction in South Sudan. What is more, these two groups united to compete with the 'Equatorians' – a regional block of smaller ethnic groups.

The refugee politics in exile to some extent mirrored longer-standing histories of the politics of ethnicity in South Sudan. In exile as at home, identities were often formed (or at least invoked) contextually and in opposition to one another. And group membership, boundaries, leadership and allegiances were periodically fixed and hardened, but at other times reconstructed. At home and in exile, South Sudanese communities and their various aspiring

79 Interview with Western Equatorian Community-chairperson, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.

80 'This election was not up-down (where you first elect RWC 3 and he selects those under him), but down-up (you first have the payam administrators, then the county commissioners, and then the governor). When OPM told us, it was too tough on our competitors, and they complained that they wanted to elect a community leader directly. But OPM didn't want the chaos ... [The Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk] had no people on the cluster level, those are all Equatorians. Because they were aiming only for the top place.' Interview with Western Equatorian Community-chairperson, Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018. This story was confirmed to me in interview with RWC 3 member, Kiryandongo RS, 8 February 2018.

81 Interview with Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 7 February 2018.

82 Conversation with Isaac, Entebbe, 4 July 2019.

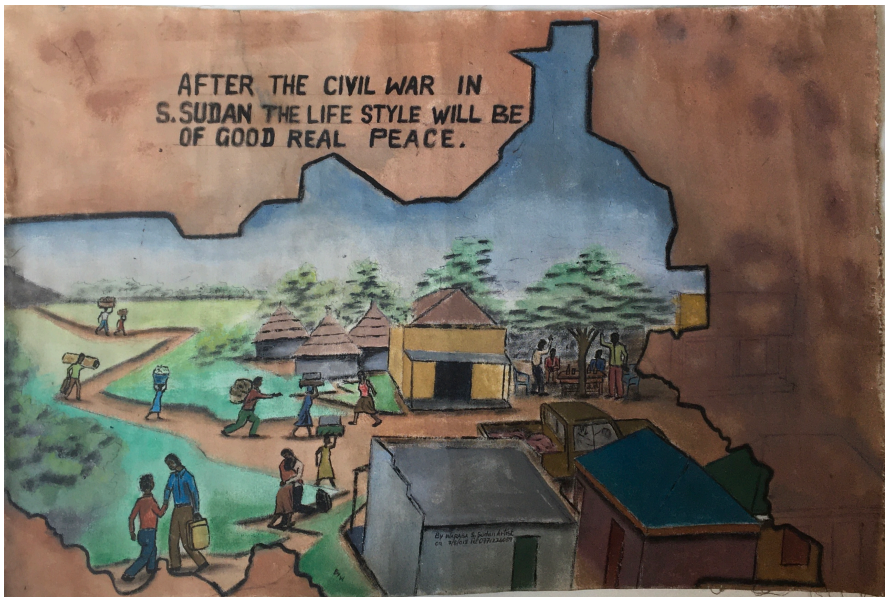
authorities were faced with questions around identity that are familiar in anthropology: To what extent are (ethnic) identities 'essence' or 'positioning' (see Section 1.2)?

Yet it was also interesting to see how the context of exile offered different impulses to the formulation and construction of ethnicity and ethnic politics. Sometimes ethnicity seemed to matter less in the settlements, as all inhabitants shared the 'refugee' characteristic and were united under RWC leadership. Even the regional Community organisations – Western Equatorians, Equatorian – united different ethnic groups that at home may have competed. Yet both the RWC's and the regional Communities were understood by many refugees through the prism of ethnic politics, still. The establishment of regional structures was partly driven by the 'scattering' of smaller Equatorian ethnic groups over the Ugandan settlements, and by fear of other large ethnic groups, such as the Nuer and Dinka. Similarly, the perceived ethnic favouritism practised by majority-elected RWCs motivated ethnic and regional groups to also organise as 'Communities'. The 'battle of camp chairperson' illustrated well how political the linkages between authority and identity were, and how effective some refugees were at framing debates, lobbying government, and winning the post.

8.5 Looking to the future: The enduring currency of tradition, the canvas of the past, and the Zande kingdom

This book takes the long view of war and displacement, trying to understand how these processes have affected societal change in Western Equatoria. From that history, it is clear that what happens in exile is likely to affect the return (see Chapter 3), as returnees take up key positions in government and traditional institutions (see Chapters 4 and 5). Particular to 'Community organisations', the founder of the Zande Cultural Association in Uganda in the 1990s, Joseph Bakosoro later became the governor of Western Equatoria State (S.D. Siemens 2010). In this light, this last section is devoted to Western Equatorian refugees and stayees' contemporary ideas about the future, and the role of 'tradition' and 'history' therein.

Figure 17: Painting by James: a future peaceful South Sudan. Commissioned by the author, 2018.



I had found that Western Equatoria's traditional authorities were largely absent in exile, and that other authorities like RWCs and Community organizations had come up. Then I wondered how this would affect people's ideas about the future of 'traditional authority', both among refugees in Uganda and stayees back in Western Equatoria. I had expected that traditional authorities' self-proclaimed weakness in Western Equatoria in 2014-5 (see Chapter 5) and their absence in Uganda, would have eroded peoples' support for them. The opposite was closer to the truth. To explain why, this section will combine material and insights from South Sudan and Uganda, 'home' and 'exile', to show how especially ethnic Zande envisioned the future of traditional authorities, and the possible reinstatement of a Zande Kingdom.

8.5.1 The enduring currency of tradition: A future more like the past?

Most Western Equatorians I spoke to South Sudan and in Uganda supported the idea of, once again, having stronger traditional authorities in both countries.[83] This widespread support was also reflected in a quantitative survey

83 Methodologically, it is of course possible that people would have felt they had to support 'their' traditional authorities when asked about them by me, a white foreigner. Even when my South Sudanese research assistants or colleagues conducted the interviews, respondents

in Western Equatoria (Rigterink, Kenyi, and Schomerus 2014). In the refugee settlements, traditional authorities were associated on the one hand with urgent practical functions which the RWCs and Community organizations were not now providing effectively (e.g., dispute resolution, gatekeeping vis-à-vis the government and NGOs), and on the other with a proud historical past. In South Sudan, traditional authorities had worked to restore this association with the pre-colonial past, and to de-emphasise the diverse and sometimes problematic roles their predecessors have also played in the last century of foreign occupation and marginalization (see Section 2.3 and Chapter 5). In the uncertain and alienating present, traditional authorities' visions of a future resembling a more stable and comprehensible imagined past have gained currency among Western Equatorians in exile and at home.

However, the meanings of history and 'traditional authority', as well as their proper role in the future, are subject to debate. It is clear to all, including to chiefs themselves, that their claims to 'tradition' and historical rootedness do not rule out future change and reform. The extent of that change, is debated quite heavily by Western Equatorians at home and in exile – with subjects including selection criteria, the position of women, and that of Avungara clan-members (Braak and Kenyi 2018). Beneath the widespread support for the abstract concept of 'traditional authorities', I found that people's reasons and expectations varied quite widely, depending on people's societal position, present troubles, and future hopes and fears. Elderly men often emphasized that traditional authorities were the custodians of culture, language and customary law. They saw the present weakness of traditional authorities in Western Equatoria and their absence in Uganda, as connected to a larger cultural and generational disorder – one which in Uganda they sought to restore through the Community organisations (see Section 8.4.2). Conversely, young men expressed hopes that restored traditional authorities would reverse the inflation of bride prices. As one former combatant explained, 'in those days of [King] Gbudwe, they helped the youth. Unlike now, where people marry using money.'[84] Further, younger people hoped that chiefs would resume their roles as conduits between the people and the (central) government. Another former Arrow Boy explained:

> It is the chiefs who know and present issues to the government. Many people are far from the government and the government does not know about them or their challenges. If anything happens, the government will not know ... It is the chief who knows.[85]

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may have felt that it would be disloyal to their family and/or wider community to express criticism. Yet in my experience people were quite happy to critique individual chiefs (see Chapter 5) as well as government (see Chapters 4 and 7). Against this background, I take their support for traditional authorities seriously.

84 Group discussion with former Arrow Boys 1, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.

85 Group discussion with former Arrow Boys 1, Bweyale, 6 August 2017.

This illustrates how for many people, strengthened traditional authorities and even a reinstated Zande Kingdom, were not envisioned as authorities *replacing* government, but rather *engaging* government. This applied both to Western Equatoria (see Chapter 5) and to the refugee settlements, where people wanted to influence OPM, for instance.

Young women constituted another group that I had expected to be sceptical towards traditional authority, presently a male-dominated and partly hereditary form of authority. And yet they, too, appeared positive about stronger traditional authorities – both at home and in exile. The reasons were again varied, but included that as one young female refugee, ethnic Moru, put it: 'It is very important for the chief to be there, but war separated us. If the Chief was here, he would give us advice and security, it would be better.'[86] There were some reasons women gave only for the restoration of the Zande Kingdom, which I will elaborate below.

People's nostalgia for the past and the desire to shape a future in line with visions of tradition, history and cultural order, were not just spoken, they were also performed and materialised. Both at home and in exile, Western Equatorians seemed conscious that identity, belonging and community required *work*, and that in the absence of traditional *authorities* they might still draw on *tradition* and history as sources for inspiration and social ordering. Examples abound. Some were light on tradition, and more focused on unity – such as the many football teams like 'Gbudwe FC'[87] or the musicians.[88] Others, like the 'Azande Traditional Association' had elaborate narratives linking a restoration of the traditional past to an improved future. Founding member Charles explained:

> As we all know people without knowledge of their past history, origin and culture are like a tree without roots, we (Azande Traditional Association) have come to revive and preserve the Azande culture, customs and tradition. If we are to preserve culture, we must continue to create it. For tomorrow belongs to people who prepare for it today.[89]

86 Interview with 19-year old female refugee, Rhino Camp, 11 August 2017.

87 With for instance Gbudwe FC in Kampala and Bakindo (King) FC in Bweyale being formed by young Zande. Both teams included members of other ethnic groups.

88 Zande musician Emmy J Yoere released a song in support of the campaign to crown paramount chief Wilson Peni as King. The song is called 'Kindo' (King). A digital copy, transcript and translation are available with me upon request. Upcoming musician and producer 'Bazande King' is also releasing music from Uganda, always in Pazande and at times explicitly acting like a 'Zande King' resolving disputes. See for instance his 'Mbori Akusi Dee' (2019) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0xh06k9_kM [accessed on 5 February 2020].

89 This is from the official website, https://azandetraditionalassociation.com [accessed on 5 February 2020].

ATA was formed in Kiryandongo RS in 2019 by, among others, my key respondent Charles and musician Bazande King, neither of whom was Avungara or had past chiefly credentials. In a similar way, young writer Isaac Hillary was one of two Zande writers working on Zande language-learning books for children in Uganda. Yet in the refugee settlements most people were scattered and too poor to afford the necessary organization (e.g., transport, airtime, food, drinks, airtime). In the cities, better-off refugees were able to afford various 'functions' that brought Zande together. Churches of various denominations in Kampala and Arua served as meeting places for Zande living in and passing through these cities. Urban youth also formed various Zande student associations[90] and a dance and theatre group performing in traditional bark cloth.[91] When Zande politicians or wealthy diaspora came to Uganda, they would often visit Kampala and sometimes sponsor get-togethers for the Zande.[92] The reinvention and reconstruction of tradition, here, was a decidedly modern and globalised affair.

8.5.2 Debating the Zande kingdom, decentralisation, and belonging.

Popular future visions were not limited to the restoration of strong chiefs as 'traditional authorities', but also included the reinstatement of a Zande King in Western Equatoria. In this section I will highlight how these calls for that ostensibly most traditional of institutions, were nonetheless embedded in a very contemporary 'politics of belonging' which was fuelled by national policies and politicians in the context of war.

8.5.2.1 Zande voices favouring a kingdom

The popularity of 'the coronation of a new King' among Zande predated conflict. In 2013 a survey found 94.5 percent of respondents in support (Rigterink, Kenyi, and Schomerus 2014, 60). Political initiatives towards resettlement had been shelved when war came to Western Equatoria in 2015 (see Section 5.3.2), but stayees and refugees continued to speak hopefully about a future Zande Kingdom. The death of King Gbudwe at the hands of the British in

90 Like the Azande Student Union Uganda (ASUU) in Kampala, and various Zande Student Unions of the separate universities. Interestingly, a chiefs' son was elected in January 2020 as president of the ASUU.

91 There were at least two such groups in Uganda doing traditional Zande dances, in which the members would dress in bark cloth attire. Such groups were also active in South Sudan in schools and churches, for instance in Naagori church in Yambio.

92 Governors Bakosoro and Nunu both visited Kampala while I was there, and also met with various churches and the Zande Student Union. In April 2019, a young Canadian Zande visiting relatives in Kampala sponsored a football tournament with majority-Zande football teams from across Uganda.

1905 was a watershed moment in Zande history (see Section 2.2), and continued to be experienced as such by contemporary Zande. Looking back at pre-colonial history, many saw King Gbudwe at the helm of an era of pride, sovereignty, cohesion and hierarchy. In the midst of lifetimes of war, displacement, and confusion, many Zande were drawn to those proud historical visions – and the idea of a future reinstated kingdom. As with traditional authorities more generally, the form and function of a reinstated Zande Kingdom were widely debated.

Since colonial times, traditional authorities in South Sudan had faced scrutiny and competition from new elites: people whose credentials were not based on heritage and tradition, but on (mission-)education, government service, and trade, for instance (Leonardi 2013). I had expected them to be critical of traditional authority and the possible reinstatement of a Zande Kingdom. It would, after all, likely give new impetus to inheritance-based authority and the elevated status of the Avungara clan. But I was wrong. On the possible reinstatement of the kingdom, for instance, two of my key respondents (non-Avungara Zande) argued:

> Charles: When the reinstatement of the Kingdom was discussed, I felt good about it. Without it, the politicians can divide us and crush us in any way. But a local leader talks about local things, not about the government, he talks about his land, his people, their life, how it should be. He is not looking for any position outside there.[93]

> Albert: Restoring it is better ... To restore the respect and dignity the Zande used to have. A government can come and go and reverse policies of previous governments. But the King is permanent, unless he dies. He would help the Azande to develop economically, socially. Once we have a Kingdom, it can give scholarships ... All of this would be done peacefully. Not encroaching on the government system. The Kingdom could be based in Ezo, because it is the centre between the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the DR Congo.[94]

These two older men both had had senior positions in government before the conflict. And yet they expressed distrust and dissatisfaction with the South Sudanese government and the ruling SPLM-party, which they associated with divide-and-rule politics, self-interested politicians, and discontinuity. A kingdom, conversely, to them represented permanence, and its king a genuine representative of local (ethnic) interests who would bring a variety of good things: from dignity to development. The female refugees I interviewed said they supported a reinstated kingdom because they reasoned that a King would

93 Interview with Charles, Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 19 June 2017.
94 Interview with Albert, Arua, 7 June 2017.

help people to rediscover, appreciate, and restore their 'culture,'[95] and would perform good things for his people: help, teach, care for, defend, 'bring things from outside.'[96] Young men, conversely, argued that restored traditional authorities would help reverse inflated bride prices, and represent their interests to government.

8.5.2.2 'Going where you belong': Dissenting minorities and debates about belonging

Western Equatorian minority groups, in contrast, generally expressed fear about what a reinstated Zande Kingdom would mean for them.[97] In Uganda, non-Zande worried that the Western Equatorian group identity, that was proving very useful in the refugee settlements, was under threat by the aspirations of its biggest ethnic group, the Zande (see Section 8.4.2). The Zande, a minority in South Sudan and in the settlements in Uganda, were still seen by many other Western Equatorians as the hegemon.

Imagining life under a Zande King in South Sudan, some non-Zande felt that, 'other tribes in Western Equatoria would be voiceless and that will bring problems. There will be no unity among Western Equatorians anymore.'[98] Similar to the 'arms race' of Community structures in the refugee settlements, some non-Zande speculated that they would have to respond to the reinstatement of a Zande Kingdom with a kingdom of their own.[99] Contemporary Western Equatoria State was multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, just as the Zande kingdoms had been in precolonial times (see Section 2.3) (Schomerus and Rigterink 2016). However, non-Zande Western Equatorians feared that the reinstatement of a Zande kingdom would undermine their right to remain, or at least their right to remain culturally distinct. Already in 2015, some Zande traditional authorities had argued that minorities ought to abide by Zande customary law: 'You cannot beat a drum within a drum. Whoever stays here has to abide by local rules.'[100]

This idea that ethnically defined people belong in a place, and therefore ought to abide by a given authority structure and customary laws, had been promoted since colonial times in South Sudan and Uganda, and again in more recent decentralisation policies (Justin 2020, 6). In Uganda, a 1993 decentralisation policy created new 'ethnic districts' coupled with 'a territorial regime

95 Interview with 27-year-old female refugee, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017 and Interview with 47-year-old female refugee, Rhino Camp, 11 August 2017.
96 Interview with 30-year-old female refugee, Bidibidi, 19 August 2017.
97 Interview with WES community leader, Bidibidi, 18 August 2017. Of several dozen non-Zande Western Equatorians we interviewed only one thought a reinstated Zande Kingdom would be good: 'so that the Zande get back their culture.' Interview with 27-year-old female refugee, Arua, 24 August 2017.
98 FGD with non-Zande men from Western Equatoria, Bidibidi, 19 August 2017.
99 FGD with non-Zande men from Western Equatoria, Bidibidi, 19 August 2017.
100 Group interview with payam chief and court judges, Yambio, 1 October 2014.

of citizenship and rights' (Nsamba 2013, 49). Administrative units were divided and boundaries redrawn to map more closely onto the perceived (sub-)ethnic groups. In South Sudan, too, President Salva Kiir decreed the creation of 32 states (instead of the constitutional 10) in 2015 (Schomerus and Aalen 2016). The former Western Equatoria State was between 2015 and 2020 subdivided into Tambura, Gbudwe, Maridi and Amadi States, with the first three named after Zande kings (see Footnote 3).

Dividing Western Equatoria State in this way partly answered to popular and elite demands, but it also planted seeds for further divisions. In the minds of some, the 2015 division of states had to be followed by a division of assets (*Radio Tamazuj* 2017), and even of people. One 46-year-old non-Zande Western Equatorian was despondent:

> Our government of SPLA has come to poison and kill us with their states. My paternal uncle was chased from Yambio to Maridi after the creation of the many states, because they said he does not belong there. We cannot not accept the Zande kingdom, for it will make the war continue. Now, everyone is trying to see who to kill or to die with.[101]

His uncle was 'chased' away from Yambio because he 'belonged' to a different city or ethnic group, or both. The speaker's testimony clearly understood this 'chasing' in the context of both the division of states and to the debate about a Zande Kingdom: Both proposed a new, more autochthony-focused reading of identity and authority. In this reading, one could not take up government positions in an area one did not 'belong. As one MP from Tambura put it:

> You know in politics you have to go to where you belong. You cannot pick somebody from somewhere to rule somewhere ... Those pure indigenous citizens of Yambio are the ones now to take political positions [in Gbudwe State].[102]

This close connection between 'purity' and legitimate authority is familiar to scholars of African politics, and often understood as part of the 'politics of belonging'. The logic described in that wider literature, is that national politicians divert opposition:

> From the national to the regional or even the local level. Citizenship is more and more defined in local rather than in national terms. The old ideal of nation-building seems to be superseded by ideological oppositions between *autochthons* and *allogenes* (or "strangers") (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 1998, 71).

In South Sudan and Uganda, many people adopted this framing at least part of the time. Yet it was also resisted. Many refugees continued to cultivate good

101 FGD with non-Zande men from Western Equatoria, Bidibidi, 19 August 2017.
102 Interview with former MP in Western Equatoria, Arua, 15 June 2017

relations with neighbours from other ethnic groups and other parts of South Sudan, decrying these politics of belonging as a tool that national politicians used to divide and rule: 'They poison us with states'.

In the refugee settlements in Uganda as back in Western Equatoria State, people had experienced and initiated various forms of authority, each with particular ties to identity. Many refugees juggled multiple and ostensibly incompatible identities and memberships, and composed stories that gave their life meaning and direction. They did not need to be exclusive, or coherent.

Talking with refugees about traditional authorities and the Zande Kingdom, often led to conversations about the larger (hi)story of which their own lives are a part. Such conversations were like a canvas on which people painted their visions of history – past, present and future – based on their personal memories, present trouble, and future hopes and fears. In this decidedly personal and subjective effort, some common themes nonetheless emerged. Many people drew on Christianity – comparing their lot to that of the Israelites in Egypt – or on history and tradition – the proud heritage of King Gbudwe. Some did both. My key respondent Charles, for instance, contextualized the attack on his life in Yambio, and his subsequent displacement to Uganda in the following way:

> When something happens to me, I want to believe that God has a purpose for me. And I am looking forward to the plan that God has for me in Uganda. Like this ATA [Azande Traditional Association], perhaps that is one of the reasons that God has kept me alive. Also, the Equatorian Union. We founded that with the purpose to bring all Equatorians together for peace and development. We can take that home, and unite the divided people back home![103]

In Charles' view, things could go together: His belief in God, adherence to ethnic tradition, and inter-ethnic cooperation. Perhaps, if God willed it so, he belonged for some time in Uganda. Above it all, Charles *wanted to believe* in a purpose for his life: designed by God, but to be realised by him. It was in this way that people searched in the rubble of war and displacement, for more than just enormous suffering. To emerge from this experience with 'something more', and to make war and exile productive of new orders and meanings.

8.6 Conclusions: The fertile soil of a burnt past

This chapter has explored the 'second phase' of Western Equatorian people's displacement to Uganda, and what in this context happened to the relations between people and authority. After a brief characterisation of this 'second phase' (see Section 8.2), three sections each offered one main finding. The first

103 Interview with Charles, Western Equatorian refugee in Kiryandongo RS, 29 May 2019.

main finding was that Western Equatorian chiefs were remarkably absent among the refugees in Uganda (see Section 8.3). Most chiefs (and Avungara more generally) had not come to Uganda, or had returned to South Sudan after dropping off their family. Chiefs were seen as obliged to stay in war to protect their communities or at least to suffer in solidarity, so as to safeguard the social contract they had established with wider Zande society. Crucially, most people emphasized that chiefs' 'running' would not just mean 'other invaders' could take over, but than their own people would appoint different leaders. Crossing the border, then, would mean a certain decline in power. This reflects my general finding that some people stayed in South Sudan not because they were too poor to go, but rather because they had too much to lose from leaving (see Chapter 6).

The second main finding of this chapter, was that in the absence of traditional authorities in Uganda a complicated tapestry of new aspiring authorities was taking shape among Western Equatorian refugees (see Section 8.4). The Ugandan state authorities prescribed and installed 'Refugee Welfare Councils' as elected governance bodies performing minor governance tasks over refugees in particular parts of the settlement (see Section 8.4.1). Quite rapidly, however, some of the RWC structures were becoming (seen as) partisan, often along ethnic or regional lines. Partly to counter-act the weaknesses of the RWC and to overcome the 'scattering' of 'their people', refugees set up various 'Community organizations' along ethnic or regional lines (see Section 8.4.2). Although these Communities did not have a legal basis, various Ugandan street-level bureaucrats encouraged their creation so that they could address particular communities, and refer disputes to them to be solved. This illustrated that in Uganda, as in South Sudan, state officials sometimes used ethnicity as the 'ordering' logic, and sanctioned the work of non-state authorities. Non-state authorities then interacted in complex ways, as illustrated in the 'battle for camp chairman' where refugees used the Community organisations to influence the election for the highest RWC-post (see Section 7.3.4). These sections also illustrate how various refugee authorities are tied to particular sub-national identities (ethnicity, region). Refugees carried with them their troubled pre-flight histories, and the civil war echoed on in exile. Many refugees held negative stereotypes about other ethnic groups. And yet new alliances were also possible in exile. The close cooperation between Western Equatorians and Equatorians is an example, but perhaps more surprising were the block of Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk who united both in settlement and student politics in Uganda. This illustrates how refugees constituted various overlapping sub-national 'communities,' the membership of which was invoked contextually.

This chapter's third main finding concerns how Western Equatorians – both refugees in Uganda and stayees – looked to the future of (traditional) authority in South Sudan. Here I found that despite traditional authorities 'weakness' in 2014-5 (see Chapter 5) and their absence in Uganda, most people continued to look forward to a future with strong traditional authorities. For many ethnic

Zande– including youth, women, and non-chiefly elites – this even included a reinstated Zande Kingdom. Beneath this near universal support, though, I found that people's support was based on very different reasons. Some of that was quite practical: lower bride price, obedient youth, etc. However, much of it was also associated with unity, stability, and cultural order. Critically, non-Zande Western Equatorians feared how the aspirations of the Zande would affect them, as they had much to gain from the common 'Western Equatorian' identity and much to lose from intensified 'politics of belonging'.

The construction of history and the role of traditional authority therein, has been squarely part of perennial debates in South Sudan about diversity, identity and citizenship, and their relationship to government and governance. This relates too to John Garang's vision for a 'New Sudan', voiced in opposition to Khartoum's violent and exclusionary politics and economics, and to the debates around 'kokora' and federalism in the 1980s (D.H. Johnson 2014) (see Section 4.2.3). More recently, this chapter noted how Western Equatorians debated the 2015 division of states (and the 2020 unification) in connection with calls to reinstate a Zande Kingdom, and the right of ethnic minorities to remain (see Section 8.5.2). In this way, the 'politics of belonging' were very much alive in South Sudan, built on contemporary interests and historical narratives (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 1998). In the words of Malkki: 'The construction of a national past ... claims moral attachments to specific territories, motherlands or homelands, and posits time-honoured links between people, polity, and territory (L.H. Malkki 1995, 1). As such the construction of (ethno) national pasts influences not 'just' identity, but also social ordering and the legitimacy of authority.

It is in this light that all the elements of this chapter – the absent traditional authorities, the reconstruction of 'unifying' new authorities, the refugee politics of the settlement, and the enduring appeal of tradition and history – make sense. In the face of war, displacement and the 'dehistoricising' experience of 'refugeeness', the Western Equatorians at the heart of this chapter strived as individuals and in various Community organisations to keep the long view of their predicament (see Chapter 7). This depressing present, then, became more than just rupture, loss and victimhood, and instead part of a longer history and lifetime into (and out of) exile. In a complex way, chiefs' contemporary absence and weakness may have enabled them to remain popular, romanticised even: They, too, had suffered in the war, and were not powerful enough to stop or start it (see Chapter 5).

In a way, talking with refugees about the larger (hi)story of which their life was a part, offered them a canvas on which to paint based on historical memories, present troubles, and future hopes and fears. It seems that refugees whose present is full of hardship and uncertainty, often cope by shifting their temporal perspective away to the past or future (Hillary and Braak, forthcoming). The construction of such meaningful histories had in South Sudan often been the purview of the Chiefs, acting as 'brokers of the present and

the future' (Adjaye and Misawa 2006). Now that the Chiefs were absent in Uganda and people lamented being 'scattered', many refugees became nostalgic for the kinds of order and certainty that they associated with 'home' and 'tradition'. They looked to the past to keep hold of the future.