In the Shadow of Liberation

Equatorian Elites, Power, and Competing Nationalisms in South Sudan

Francois Sennesael
Lady Margaret Hall
University of Oxford

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil in Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford

Hilary Term 2025

96,529 words

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the nationalist ideology in shaping the dynamics of elite competition and political contestation in South Sudan, Africa's newest country. More often, the literature on South Sudan has focused on patronage networks, warlord politics, and state failure when it comes to understanding the politics of elites and their interaction with power. In contrast, this thesis argues that the politics of post-independence South Sudan cannot be understood without an analysis of the interplay between elites, power, and nationalism, thereby furthering our academic understanding of the role and endurance of the ideology of nationalism and nationalist projects in shaping the politics in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What is the role of nationalism in structuring interactions between elites, competition, and power? How do elites shape and deploy nationalist projects? How are these projects constructed, how do they play out, and how do they compete or converge over time? And ultimately, what do these patterns reveal about nationalism, domination, ideologies, and the nature of elite power? To address these questions, this thesis examines the attempt, between 2010 and 2015, by elites hailing from the Equatoria region of South Sudan to transcend their marginality, contest the hegemonic power of a post-liberation party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and reshape the post-independence political order by revamping and politicizing a significant idea, 'Equatoria'. Through a wealth of original interviews conducted in South Sudan and by introducing new empirical insights, this thesis shows how Equatorian elites have turned to the idea of nationalism to articulate their political project, contest their marginalisation, and compete within the South Sudanese political landscape.

Drawing on historical sociology, social theory and comparative politics, I show how the project of Equatorian elites emerged, evolved, and interacted with the militaristic nationalist project of the SPLM, revealing internal tensions and constraints that have shaped its expression and, eventually, its demise in post-independence South Sudan, ultimately triggering the largest displacement of civilians in Africa since the Rwandan Genocide. At the heart of these tensions lie overlapping interests, competing visions of the nation, and loyalties forged during the self-proclaimed 'liberation' struggle. I show that behind competing nationalisms lies in fact not two or more clear-cut, ideologically coherent, monolithic forces, but eclectic and deeply connected actors with overlapping, hazy, paradoxical, and constantly evolving solidarities and moralities. Nationalism appears thus not as a relic of the past in South Sudan, but the central arena where political elites wage their struggles for power.

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Table of Contents 3

Acknowledgements 5

List of Figures and Tables 7

List of Abbreviations 8

Maps 10

Introduction 12

'THE END OF HISTORY' 12

RESEARCH QUESTION, CASE STUDY, AND ARGUMENT 16

RESEARCHING SOUTH SUDAN 26

EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, METHOD 31

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS 48

Chapter 1 NATIONALISM, HEGEMONY, AND THE CENTRALITY OF POWER 54

'BIG MEN' AND THE POLITICS OF PATRONAGE 55

STATE COLLAPSE 60

THE ENDURING CENTRALITY OF NATIONALISM 63

NATIONALISM, HEGEMONY, AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY 82

CONCLUSION 85

Chapter 2 GENESIS OF AN IDEA: THE MAKING OF EQUATORIA AND THE POLITICS OF DISTINCTION 87

THE MAKING OF A GEOGRAPHICAL IDEA 89

COLONIAL DISTINCTION, COLONIAL INVENTION 93

DECOLONIZATION AND SOUTHERN NATIONALISM(S) 103

EQUATORIANS AND THE ETHNIC QUESTION 106

CONCLUSION 118

Chapter 3 (UN)NATIONAL REVOLUTION: THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION 120

THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT 123

EQUATORIA(NS) AND THE NATIONAL VANGUARDS 137

EQUATORIA AS TOOL OF AGENCY 151

CONCLUSION 156

Chapter 4 THE (RE)MAKING OF EQUATORIA: POWER, AGENCY, AND THE GUBERNATORIAL ALLIANCE 159

EQUATORIAN ELITES, VANGUARD NATIONALISM, AND THE SPLM 162

GENESIS OF A NATIONALIST PROJECT 178
PERFORMING NATIONALISM 191
NATIONALISM, LEADERSHIP, AND LEGITIMACY 204
CONCLUSION 210
Chapter 5 COMRADES GO TO WAR: EQUATORIAN ELITES, CONFLICT, AND COMPETING NATIONALISMS 213
INSTITUTIONALIZING EQUATORIAN NATIONALISM 215
TENSIONS AMONG THE VANGUARD 220
CIVIL WAR 234
NEGOTIATING GROUPNESS IN THE SHADOW OF CONFLICT 240
THE GEOPOLITICS OF EQUATORIAN NATIONALISM 250
CONCLUSION 264
Chapter 6 DOWNFALL AND AFTERLIFE: ELITE FRAGMENTATION AND THE COLLAPSE OF A NATIONALIST PROJECT 266
THE KAMPALA MEETING 269
DOWNFALL 274
EQUATORIANS GO TO WAR 284
AFTERLIFE 292
CONCLUSION 303
Conclusion 305
ELITES, POWER, AND NATIONALISM 306
EQUATORIAN ELITES AND POST-INDEPENDENCE SOUTH SUDAN 313
ELITES AND NATIONALISM IN THE HORN OF AFRICA 316
Appendix 323
Bibliography 325

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, for his invaluable guidance, patience, and unwavering belief in my potential. Your expertise and encouragement have been a cornerstone of this work. I would also like to particularly thank Dr. Harry Verhoeven for his unconditional support and for our passionate conversations about central and eastern Africa. More than a fellow compatriot, you have been a role model and a constant light in the tunnel, inspiring me to persevere through challenges and see the bigger picture.

To my parents Agnès and Géry, to my sister Anne-Laure, I feel fortunate to have received unwavering support for my intellectual endeavours throughout my life. From an early age, I was taught to love reading and learning—a gift that I believe is the best legacy parents can pass on to their children. In this regard, while they are not with us to witness this milestone, I hope that my grandparents, Michel, Odette, Adrienne, and Gilbert, are proud of me from wherever they are.

To my colleagues and friends, your camaraderie, insightful discussions, and moral support have been a source of strength during the highs and lows of this research. Special thanks to Alan Boswell, Vincent Foucher, Gérard Prunier, Marko Ferenc, Miklos Gosztonyi, Jerome Tubiana, Monica Camacho, Nadila Ali, Samuel Dong, Biruk Terrefe, Michael Woldemariam, Sandra Lamarque, Matai Muon, Miles Larmer, Christoph Sponsel, Nicolas Lippolis, Peter Brooke, Ali Al Youha, Danielle Del Vicario, and so many others for your advice, conversations, proofreading, and shared laughter in challenging moments.

I also want to acknowledge my college, Lady Margaret Hall, and Sciences Po Paris for providing me with the resources and environment to pursue my research, and the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, the Stapley Trust, the Santander Foundation, Lady Margaret Hall, but also my parents for their (much needed) financial support. I also thank Erwin De Wandel and H.E. Amb. Hugo Verbist from the Embassy of Belgium in Uganda, and Rebecca Richards, Chiara Pallanch, Christine Strassmaier, and Anja Palm from the World Food Programme for their support and enriching conversations.

Fieldwork was a critical component of this research, and it would not have been possible without the support of many. I am deeply grateful to Médecins Sans Frontières - Belgium, more particularly Sandra Lamarque and Jocelyn Yapi, for hosting me in Juba, South Sudan. I am very, very, very grateful to Steven, Bol, Michael, and David for helping me navigate the politics of Juba, and for so many hours of fascinating conversations. I also thank the many South Sudanese who welcomed me with open arms, shared their experiences, and trusted me with their stories. Your insights and perspectives were the heart of this study.

To Gaëtane - thank you for being my anchor throughout this difficult journey. You found yourself swept into the challenges of my DPhil and accepted the uncertainties of academic life. We were young when this journey started, and we are now a family, certainly the most precious success I've achieved in my life so far. Cheers to Congo, Oxford, and our future together – Merci!

Finally, to Léon - while you are, as I write these lines, too young to realize what is happening, I hope you will be as proud of your daddy as I am proud of you.

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Map of Eastern Africa *10*
Figure 2 Map of South Sudan *11*
Figure 3 Map of Colonial Sudan *97*
Figure 4. The Democratic Republic of the Sudan. Equatoria Region *116*
Figure 5 Banknote with the face of John Garang *168*
Figure 6. John Garang Mausoleum, next to the National Parliament in Juba *172*
Figure 7 Joseph Bakosoro in 2009 ..... *180*
Figure 8 James Wani Igga in 2010, in the center *209*
Figure 9. Joseph Bakosoro (left), Clement Wani Konga (second from left), and Louis Lobon (far right) at the second Equatoria Conference, February 2013 ..... *218*
Figure 10. Cartoon of the day in The Citizen newspaper, South Sudan, 3 June 2014 ..... *250*
Figure 11. Louis Lobong, Clement Wani Konga, and Joseph Bakosoro (from left to right) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia *259*
Figure 12. President Salva Kiir and President Yoweri Museveni shaking hands in 2017, at the launch of the National Dialogue *297*
Figure 13 Louis Lobong (Right) in 2022 ..... *298*

List of Abbreviations

AFDL	Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo
ANC	African National Congress
ARCSS	Agreement for Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
AU	African Union
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
ECC	Equatoria Cooperation Council
EDF	Equatorian Defense Forces
EIC	Equatoria Intellectual Committee
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESUU	Equatoria Students Union in Uganda
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertaçao de Moçambique
GoSS	Government of Southern Sudan
HEC	Southern Sudan High Executive Council
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KANU	Kenyan African National Union
NAS	National Salvation Front
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OPC	Uganda People's Congress
NCP	National Congress Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement for Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SANU	Sudan African National Union
SSDF	South Sudan Defence Forces
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army

SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement – In Opposition
SSU	Sudanese Socialist Union
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union

Maps

Figure 1. Map of Eastern Africa

Source: https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/eastern-africa

Figure 2 Map of South Sudan

Source: https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/south-sudan-1

Introduction

‘THE END OF HISTORY’

On 9 July 2011, which marked the independence of South Sudan, President Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan was seated alongside Sudanese President Omar al Bashir, both wearing smiles and matching suits, with Kiir sporting his iconic cowboy hat, a gift from American President George W. Bush. At the John Garang Mausoleum in Juba – the capital of South Sudan, after more than twenty years of a civil war that displaced millions of people and on the brink of a new era, thousands had gathered since dawn and were waving placards reading 'SPLM/A: The New Beginning'. Large screens repeated the hopeful message 'Free at Last- Republic of South Sudan'. Amidst the throng, the statue of John Garang, the deceased founder of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), the party that would come to dominate the politics of post-independence South Sudan, stood tall, his outstretched arm and pointing stick directed towards the officials. After a parade of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) soldiers, each wearing a red

military beret symbol of the 'Red Army' that fought against the Sudanese government, Kiir addressed the crowd, frequently wiping his face as the heat was intense:

> For many generations, we have been made to suffer, have been bombed, maimed, enslaved, discriminated against, and treated worse than a refugee in our own country.
>
> […] We have waited for 56 years for this day. It is a dream that has come true! My dear compatriots, today is the day to take off our hats in saluting and honoring our martyrs, heroes and heroines.
>
> […] It is a day to ponder how much Dr. John Garang de Mabior, founder of our nation, and all our martyrs whose blood has cemented our national foundation, have done for us.
>
> […] We may be a Zande, Kakwa, Nuer, Toposa, Dinka, Lotuko, Anyuak, Bari and Shilluk, but remember you are South Sudanese first.
>
> […] May this day mark a new beginning of tolerance, unity, and love for one another. Let our cultural and ethnic diversity be a source of pride and strength, not parochialism and conflict.[1]

At this key moment in South Sudan's history, the promise was that of a new domestic politics free from (post)colonial oppression, tribalism, sectarianism, conflicts, marginality, and mass hunger.[2] The two key words were *national reconciliation*: the unity of South Sudan was indeed paramount. During the ceremony, self-styled 'liberation' heroes were honoured, their sacrifices symbolized by the red colour in the new national flag—a testament to the blood shed for South Sudan's newly achieved freedom. As the event continued, the lines between the SPLM, the nation, the army, and the state began to blur. The battle cry 'SPLM Oyee!' that had echoed in the southern Sudanese bush

[1] Salva Kiir Mayardit, Speech on the Occasion of the Proclamation of Independence, 9 July 2011
[2] Jonathan Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, African studies series, (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 25.

through years of struggle against Khartoum now transformed into 'South Sudan Oyee!'; a linguistic evolution that captured the idea that the SPLM was the nation, and the nation the SPLM. An identity, they argued, that goes back not only to the early colonial era but also to ancient times and beyond. On 9 July 2011, SPLM senior leaders asserted, South Sudan was eventually liberated; it was, simply put, the 'end of History'. As the New York Times reported that day, 'a new nation was being born in what used to be a forlorn, war-racked patch of Africa, and to many it seemed nothing short of miraculous'.[3]

***

On 14 April 2011, three months before the pompous ceremony where the SPLM claimed legitimate sovereignty over South Sudan, a group of elites from Western Equatoria, Central Equatoria, and Eastern Equatoria provinces gathered in Juba. They were invited for a three-day conference by the three elected governors of the Greater Equatoria region: Col. Joseph Bangasi Bakosoro, Maj. Gen. Clement Wani Konga, and Brig. Gen. Louis Lobong Lojore. Known for its ethnic diversity, the Equatoria region is situated in the southernmost part of South Sudan, stretching across the country's southern border; it shares borders with Uganda, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic. The region contains some of the country's most fertile lands, characterized by higher rainfall patterns and more tropical vegetation than the northern part of South Sudan.

The meeting, convened at the Nyakuron Cultural Center in Juba, aimed to discuss the political situation in South Sudan, voice grievances against senior SPLM leaders, and strategize ways to prevent - or at least attenuate - marginalization in post-independence South Sudan. The conference indeed took place against the backdrop of growing

[3] Jeffrey Gettleman, "After Years of Struggle, South Sudan Becomes a New Nation," *New York Times* (Juba) 9 July 2011.

dissatisfaction among Equatorian elites since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the SPLM and the government of Sudan in 2005, effectively ending the civil war. Equatorians had been marginalized within the SPLM dominated by Dinka and, to a lesser extent, Nuer elites.[4] Moreover, Equatorian elites were largely absent from the country's official history, often relegated by the SPLM to second-class citizens or even labeled as 'anti-revolutionary'.

Governor Joseph Bakosoro, representing Western Equatoria, claimed during the conference that 'if we don't get [power] right now then we will not get it in future, so we have to prepare ourselves'.[5] Presenting an alternative vision of South Sudan's future and mobilizing different strands of history, Equatorian elites emphasized the need for South Sudan to adopt a democratic and federal system of government. A model, they argued, that had always been at the heart of southern demands. They moreover emphasized that the top leadership positions—President, Vice President, and Speaker of Parliament—should be equitably distributed among the country's three historical regions, namely Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal, and Upper Nile. Ultimately, Equatorian elites decided to challenge their political and economic marginalization with unwavering determination. To do so, Equatorian governors insisted on the 'unity of the people of Equatoria', effectively attempting to revamp an Equatorian nationalist project aiming to compete for power with other groups, challenge the SPLM and its senior leaders' hegemony, contest the idea of the monolithic nation projected by the SPLM, and transform South Sudan. The project was supposed to lead to a new era for Equatorians in South Sudan; yet it ended with the largest displacement of civilians in the region since the Rwandan genocide. Contrary to President Salva Kiir's aspirational narrative at the John Garang Mausoleum

[4] "Equatorians hold pre-independence conference," *United Nations Mission in South Sudan* 17 April 2011, https://unmis.unmissions.org/equatorians-hold-pre-independence-conference.
[5] "Equatorians hold pre-independence conference."

on 9 July 2011, history seemed in fact far from finished – and even contested - in South Sudan.

RESEARCH QUESTION, CASE STUDY, AND ARGUMENT

For the past three decades, the relevance of nationalism in shaping elite competition has been called into question when it comes to the analysis of elites and power in Africa. What nationalism and its imaginaries have meant for elites, legitimacy, authority, and the practice of power in Africa has received little attention, with few exceptions. Nationalism has indeed often been solely understood as 'false consciousness', obsolete in times of post-Cold War globalisation, mere instrumentalism, or a derivative phenomenon tied to the era of independence movements in Africa—a phenomenon that, it is argued, quickly failed to persist after both the adoption of the *uti possidetis* principle, freezing colonial boundaries, by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the so-called 'collapse' of many state- and nation-building projects in the 1970s. Most analysts, moreover, predicted the decline of nationalism as a relevant political force in an era marked by the growing financialization of politics.

The literature, influenced by the modernization and dependency theories, has thus rather overwhelmingly emphasized the prominence of material interests, state failure, and neo-patrimonialism when it comes to understanding elites and political power in Africa, often believed to be structured in terms of instrumental ethnic loyalties rather than various nationalisms. In both the academic and lay literature, Africa has become the prototypical case of kleptocracy, a 'politics of the belly', and warlord politics, understood as being the *real* drivers of political interactions both among elites and between elites and their networks in Africa. This thesis does not fundamentally reject these perspectives. However, they offer, at best, only an incomplete picture of the political reality in Africa. Poor attention has indeed been paid to how African elites function as ideological agents

and how nationalism has been an integral part of how they shape their political ambitions, collective agency, and practices of (re)production of power. Elites have rather been merely perceived as architects of disorder with an obsession for resource extraction—figures who deliberately foster unpredictable environments, chaos, and anarchy, purely self-interested actors who operate outside the influence of cultural values, ideological frameworks, or broader worldviews.

In such a context, questions of competing nationalisms appeared irrelevant, mere theoretical abstractions and empty rhetoric divorced from brutal realities. Yet, this thesis argues that nationalism has remained fundamentally crucial in shaping discourses, narratives, and practices of power, authority, and legitimacy in Africa - a central arena where political elites wage their struggles for power. The interplay between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic nationalist projects, this thesis highlights, is the main driver structuring the politics in Africa. Elites, it contends, are the most prominent agents and mobilize, politicize, (re)imagine, (re)negotiate, (re)articulate, or contest these discourses to attempt to change or maintain their positions within the political order; studying elites, their aspirations, and their networks is therefore key to understand the political dynamics behind competing nationalisms in Africa.

Revisiting the role of nationalism and studying nationalist projects, their visions, and the backlashes to them is therefore not an anachronistic lens to understand the contemporary politics of Africa, as nationalistic imaginings – and the interaction between them - remain fundamental in shaping political orders across the continent. Nationalist projects are thus not a relic of the past in Africa, nor are they more, or less, 'invented' than in any other part of the world. Such projects have on the contrary continuously waxed and waned, allowing socialist revolutions to happen and conservative regimes to survive, while enabling marginalized groups to fight back and elites to (un)build states. Emerging and often

violently fragmenting across Africa, from Asmara to Luanda, daring nationalist projects, rooted in imaginaries, (re)constructed pasts, and potential futures, have decisively challenged the notion that African politics has remained static in the post-colonial period. Because of elites' belief in the transformational potential of nationalism to collectively maintain or contest political authority, new collective imaginaries have continuously clashed with and evolved within (and beyond) the 'official' nation-state, sculpted and transformed by elites, their ideas, their imaginations, and their aspirations to recast political orders. How nationalist ideologies emerge, how they are operationalised by political elites in their quest for political legitimacy, and why they fail (or not) is at the core of this research. What is the role of nationalism in structuring elite competition in Africa? How do elites shape and deploy nationalist projects? How are these projects constructed, how do they evolve, and how do they compete or converge over time? And ultimately, what do these patterns reveal about nationalism, the nature of elite power, and political authority in Sub-Saharan Africa?

***

This thesis highlights the enduring salience of nationalism in shaping the dynamics of elite competition and political contestation in South Sudan. It argues that the politics of South Sudan cannot be understood without an analysis of the interplay between elites, power, and the idea of nationalism, offering a novel lens through which to view the country's political dynamics since independence, too often viewed as a narrow power struggle between 'Big Men'. In 2011, South Sudan became independent and the so-called 'newest nation' in the world. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), a post-liberation party, seized control of the political landscape, mobilizing nationalism to support a profound transformation of South Sudan. Despite the SPLM's claims of representing the nation, the question of *who* belongs to *what* nation has been fiercely

contested, structuring the politics of both material and immaterial redistribution in the country. This has resulted in the marginalization of different groups, creating deep fractures in South Sudan and undermining the grand promise to radically break from the past and build a new and prosperous nation. Only fifteen years after independence, South Sudan has experienced the full spectrum of challenges witnessed by other post-colonial African states, therefore making it an interesting case study: bitter constitutional deadlocks, a devastating civil war, ruthless power centralization in the hands of military elites, and explosive inter-ethnic violence that has torn many communities apart.

To explore the salience of nationalism in South Sudan, I study the attempt by Equatorian elites, a social group largely neglected in the literature, to coalesce to transcend their marginality. Such a focus, I argue, offers an interesting and novel window as a point of entry to study the role of nationalism in South Sudan. I more particularly analyse the political life, that is the construction, appeal, development, and collapse, between 2010 and 2015, of a political project led by the three governors of the Equatoria region of South Sudan, namely Joseph Bakosoro, Clement Wani Konga, and Louis Lobong. This research shows how the governors attempted to contest the hegemonic nationalist and militaristic narrative of the SPLM and reshape the post-independence order by revamping a politically significant force, 'Equatoria', in South Sudan. The governors, it demonstrates, turned to the idea of nationalism to build their political project and attempt to *reify* their identity. The objective was to be recognized as a fixed political group to compete within the post-independence political landscape. Marginality was thus not understood by Equatorian elites as a fixed condition and nationalistic imagining, it shows, was at the heart of a project to mobilize elites, build legitimacy, and compete for power in South Sudan. Why did the Equatorian governors launch a nationalist project a few months before independence? How did they organise themselves? How was their project received

by the SPLM that considered distinct regional identities as a disease to cure? And, perhaps more importantly, could Equatorian elites succeed in changing their status from non-dominant to dominant elites? Why, or why not?

Taking the idea of 'Equatoria' seriously, this thesis investigates how Equatorian elites engaged with various incarnations of Equatoria, the idea of liberation, and the dominant SPLM nation- and state-building project rooted in militarism, demonstrating that the interactions between elites, nationalism, and power are at the heart of the contemporary political dynamics of South Sudan. To do so, this thesis examines the challenging and fundamentally contradictory relationships both *among* Equatorian elites themselves and *with* SPLM senior leaders, focusing on the distinct role, agency, and acute challenges of the Equatorian governors in the making of 'Equatoria' as a unifying political group in South Sudan. This research thus aims to provide a nuanced and empirically grounded account of Equatorian nationalism and its internal (in)coherence in post-independence South Sudan, exploring what it reveals about how competing nationalist projects are shaped by elites, evolve over time, and interact with each other in Africa.

The political project of Equatorian elite under study featured secret coalitions, local feuds, unlikely friendships, betrayals, and internal rivalries. It also involved diplomatic manoeuvres across Eastern Africa with President Museveni of Uganda and President Kenyatta of Kenya, meetings with international peace negotiators or armed rebels, the displacement of millions of people, and, ultimately, the unravelling of Equatorian elites' dreams and aspirations. The story is to that extent not merely a local, insignificant project taking place on the margins of *national liberation* in South Sudan. Indeed, not only did the governors make extensive efforts to insert themselves—not always successfully—into the local, national, regional, and international politics of South Sudan, but their project left a definite mark in the South Sudanese political order. The project of

Equatorian leaders aimed to fundamentally transform the post-independence order in South Sudan through their particular understanding of nationalism. Hence, studying their political project offers an incredibly powerful, unique, and, more importantly, new, perspective on elites, competing nationalisms, and the nature of political authority in South Sudan. While uniquely *modern* and inserted into the politics of its time, the Equatorian project must also be understood against the backdrop of a long history of political thinking about the environment, identity, nationalism, and power in the region; a history that must be recognized as fundamentally shaping both the ideological foundations and practical manifestations of the Equatorian response to the SPLM's vanguard *nationalist* agenda.

Merely five years after its enthusiastic launch, however, the Equatorian project of the three governors receded into the realm of distant aspiration for Equatorian elites. Rather than realizing the envisioned autonomy and prosperity, Equatorians found themselves entangled in a maelstrom of conflicts, with millions of refugees traversing the border into Uganda; Equatorian elites failed to cultivate the political capital necessary to assert influence within the national arena. Deemed too threatening to the SPLM's self-styled 'progressive', unitarian, and homogenising vision of power, the project of the governors was indeed marginalized and ultimately co-opted during the second phase of the South Sudanese civil war, plunging Equatoria into a maelstrom of violence and fragmentation, representing a heavy blow to the dreams of a *different* South Sudan. Indeed, despite promises to radically break from the past, the SPLM eventually reproduced the exact same nostrum it once criticized: the centralisation of politics through the idealized idea of a modernist nationalist homogenization and the continuous denial of alternative imaginaries, relying on long-established ideas about power, ideas, and hegemony in the

Horn of Africa.[6] Hegemony, not national representation, has in fact been at the heart of the SPLM project.

In the end, however, if the Equatorian project failed, it was due to endogenous factors: as this thesis demonstrates, Equatorian elites proved indeed unable to build a cohesive group to *reify* – or at least project the idea thereof - their nationalist project, embroiled in internal power struggles and elite rivalries. Equatorian elites have simultaneously served as both midwives and destroyers of their political project, torn between two competing imaginaries—Equatoria and South Sudan—to which they all lay claims. The nationalist alliance of Equatorian elites stayed, in contrast to the SPLM, *ad hoc*, *informal,* and *personalized,* almost exclusively reliant on the three governors. Such a lack of organisation did not allow Equatorian elites to develop a stable and integrated arena to deal with internal disagreements, leading to the fragmentation of the project. Such fragmentation, it shows, was however not a predetermined outcome - it stemmed from competing agendas, shifting alliances, and specific choices made at critical junctures. Equatorian nationalism as an idea remains nonetheless far from a forgotten aspiration: almost a decade after its apparent demise, Equatorian elites remain wounded, with feelings of marginalization persisting and resentment simmering, giving the impression that the project could resurge at any moment. In fact, almost all Equatorians agreed it should resurge, demonstrating that the (temporary) abandonment of the Equatorian nationalist project does not mean that the idea of Equatoria has lost its appeal.

***

By emphasizing the centrality of nationalism as a political idea in Africa, this thesis takes elites' ideas, sociologies, and imaginaries seriously, even when they eventually failed to

[6] Francois Sennesael and Harry Verhoeven, "Breaking from the past? Environmental narratives, logics of power, and the (re)production of food insecurity in South Sudan," *Disasters* 49, no. 1 (2025).

materialize – a perspective that has surprisingly been marginal in the political science literature.[7] Instead, the thesis gives particular attention to elites' ideologies, aspirations, imaginations, and their conscious efforts – thereby emphasizing their agency - to lead and transform political orders across the continent. This offers a robust rebuttal to recent literature that has prematurely proclaimed the end of ideas in Africa, therefore challenging the simplistic narrative that financialization has reduced politics to a mere 'management of decay'.[8] As Dye argued, 'ideology is systematically underplayed or dismissed in the study of politics in Africa in favour of either hard materialist insistence on the primacy of 'pure' interest or structuralist accounts in which deep historical paths of institutional development obviate almost any role for agency'.[9] In this thesis, political ideology is understood, drawing on Erikson and Tedin, as 'a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved'.[10] To be sure, focusing on elites and the power of ideas and ideologies often elicits skeptical dismissal among political scientists, who tend to view it as mere instrumentalism or as a shallow rhetoric. However, highlighting ideas and ideologies does not – and should not - mean seeing ideology as an all-encompassing, static, abstract, and atemporal driver of political action, a trap scholars too easily fall into. Such a perspective, often embraced by scholars of nationalism, would irremediably lead to a simplistic study of competing nationalisms in South Sudan, putting aside the complexities of elite coalitions, evolving interests, and the need for accommodation over

[7] See for instance Blessing-Miles Tendi, *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Philip G. Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Harry Verhoeven, *Water, civilization, and power in Sudan : the political economy of military-Islamist state-building*, The African studies series, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[8] Alex de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa* (London: Polity 2015); Jean-Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[9] Barnaby Joseph Dye, "Introduction: The ideology of the illiberal modernisers in Africa," *Critical African Studies* 14, no. 3 (2022): 222.

[10] R.S Erikson and K.L. Tedin, *American Public Opinion (6th ed.)* (New York Longman, 2003), 64.

time. This study is hence fundamentally about, as Fisher articulated, ‘what ideology does and enables as much as what ideology is’ and recognises the ‘everyday promiscuity between ideology and pragmatism’.[11] Put differently, this thesis focuses on the interplay between elites, ideology, and strategic interest. This thesis therefore examines Equatorian elites’ early aspirations, their personal relationships, their differences, their embeddedness in historical, social, and political structures, but also on the challenges and competing pressures they faced in the *pragmatic* implementation of their competing nationalist project in post-independence South Sudan.

This thesis shows that nationalist projects are not fixed, coherent ideological constructs, but rather dynamic social processes that emerge from specific historical circumstances, adapt to changing contexts, and are constantly renegotiated – dynamics only visible, I argue, through an in-depth analysis of elites and their accommodation to changing political contexts. If there is one thing that the study of elites and their nationalist projects in South Sudan highlights, it is that nationalism is fundamentally a *contingent* process, as it emerges (or not) from specific historical circumstances. Nationalist projects change, adapt, and even disappear over time, depending on new contexts, internal power struggles, actors' perceptions of political change, and the material (re)distribution of power; a process ‘in which setbacks, reconfigurations, and resistance deserve as much attention as consolidation’.[12] The expression 'competing nationalisms' might in fact be misleading, as it seems to imply, as it is done in much literature, a static confrontation between two neatly defined and seemingly homogeneous ideological projects within which all actions of political actors are rooted. One of the major contributions of this thesis is to show that behind competing nationalist projects lies not two or more static,

[11] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 13.
[12] Biruk Terrefe and Harry Verhoeven, "The road (not) taken: The contingencies of infrastructure and sovereignty in the Horn of Africa," *Political Geography* 110 (2024).

ideologically coherent, monolithic forces, however, but eclectic, overlapping groups and deeply connected actors embedded in power struggles and shaped by local, national, and regional dynamics, opposing imaginaries, and the sometimes, if not often, fluctuating and antagonistic material interests of elites. As Awenengo-Dalberto contends, such a claim alone is enough to deconstruct romanticized notions of nationalism and demand rigorous engagement with political actors, their aspirations and relations over time, as well as their inherent complexities.[13]

This research hence seeks to break new ground by examining the intricate and often ambiguous interactions between elites with multiple and competing nationalist visions. Such an approach allows us to highlight the complex and dynamic processes *within* and *between* competing nationalist projects, also highlighting how contesting marginality is far from being a linear endeavour and how the distinction between dominant and non-dominant elites is far from clear-cut in practice, challenging subaltern theories rooted in structuralist critical studies. This phenomenon emerged as a central finding during fieldwork with Equatorian elites in South Sudan, who have demonstrated remarkable agility in navigating divergent moral frameworks, social networks, and nationalist narratives simultaneously, rendering monolithic interpretations of nationalist ideologies irrelevant. This thesis therefore uses a social approach, anchored within elite theory, to illuminate the complex interplay of formal and informal elite networks, the significance of interpersonal relations, and the critical role of socialization processes in both the making and unmaking of Equatorian nationalism.[14] Verhoeven and Roessler, in their study of the 2003 Congo War, for instance insisted on 'placing elite relationships and interactions at the center' of the analysis of the Congo War, insisting on the 'personal ties

[13] Severine Awenengo Dalberto, *L'idée de la Casamance autonome* (Paris Khartala, 2024).
[14] This approach draws on Fisher's study of liberation elites in East Africa, Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.

and social relations that connected them to each other'.[15] It is indeed fundamental, this study contends, to scrutinize how political actors *situate* themselves in the nationalist narratives, as well as, crucially, how they *relate* to each other over time. The focus is hence on the processes, embedded in power struggles, through which *groupness* happens (or not), evolves, is made salient (or not) around a specific ideology, and how they interact with elite networks over time.[16] By tracing the intricate webs of patronage, kinship, party or institutional affiliation, and shared historical experiences that connected Equatorian elites—particularly the three governors—this thesis reveals how nationalist mobilization depends not merely on ideological appeals but on the activation (and maintenance) of social networks.

RESEARCHING SOUTH SUDAN

Booth and Golooba-Mutebi argued that 'different African countries attract different kinds of research'.[17] In this regard, South Sudan certainly stands out as a compelling example. The 'newest country in the world' has attracted considerable attention on ethnicity and violence, with scholars being captivated— not to mention obsessed— by the (assumed) enduring primacy of the Dinka-Nuer divide, leaving the experience of Equatorian elites unexplored. What it shows is that Evans-Pritchard's shadow extends beyond mere ethnographic documentation, revealing the complex colonial gaze that transformed pastoral societies into objects of scholarly fascination. As Johnson, in his introduction to his book *Empire and the Nuer*, rightly recognized, 'the structural hostility between the Nuer and the Dinka (…) has received exaggerated emphasis'.[18]

---

[15] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*, 13.
[16] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
[17] David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, "Developmental patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda," *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012): 379.
[18] Douglas H. Johnson, *Empire and the Nuer: Sources on the Pacification of the Southern Sudan, 1898-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016), 7.

South Sudan has also steadfastly embodied the quintessential depiction of 'Big Man' politics and transactional politics, with some researchers even disregarding macro-level dynamics because of their supposedly 'emptiness'.[19] Pinaud has for instance argued that 'military kleptocracy' best defines the political system of South Sudan, insisting more particularly on how the 'marriage market became part of the broader circuit of predation by different armed groups'.[20] Roach also argued that 'armed conflict [in South Sudan], in fact, reflected a larger trend of Africa's endless wars in which nonstate armed groups fought to extract resources and rents from the government and international donors'.[21] Studies have revealed that the country's leadership is involved in opaque mineral deals, how companies with ties to the President's inner circle have secured billions in foreign funding, and how money laundering has fundamentally supported brutish military operations.[22]

As a European Ambassador once conveyed, 'there is nothing to see here but the worst'.[23] It is indeed impossible not to notice that the country seems to align with the catastrophist narratives often projected by political scientists onto Africa—a realm where ethnicities collide with warlords, corruption, despair, and the grim specter of violence and extreme

[19] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*; Clemence Pinaud, "Military Kinship, Inc.: Patronage, Inter-Ethnic Marriages and Social Classes in South Sudan," *Review of African political economy* 43, no. 148 (2016); Clemence Pinaud, "South Sudan: Civil war, predation and the making of a military aristocracy," *African Affairs* 113, no. 451 (2014); Sharon E. Hutchinson, "A Curse from God? Religious and Political Dimensions of the Post-1991 Rise of Ethnic Violence in South Sudan," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39, no. 2 (2001); Sharon E. Hutchinson and Naomi Pendle, "Violence, Legitimacy, and Prophecy: Nuer Struggles with Uncertainty in South Sudan," *American ethnologist* 42, no. 3 (2015); Sharon E. Hutchinson and Jok Jok Madut, "Sudan's Prolonged Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities," *African Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (1999); Naomi Pendle, "Contesting the Militarization of the Places Where They Met: The Landscapes of the Western Nuer and Dinka (South Sudan)," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2017).

[20] Pinaud, "Military Kinship, Inc.: Patronage, Inter-Ethnic Marriages and Social Classes in South Sudan," 243.

[21] Steven C Roach, *South Sudan's Fateful Struggle: Building Peace in a State of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 94.

[22] *Untapped and Unprepared: Dirty Deals Threaten South Sudan's Mining Sector*, The Sentry (April 2020); *Sanctioned South Sudanese Businessmen Are Skirting US Sanctions*, The Sentry (New York, October 2021); *Cash Grab: How a Billion-Dollar Credit Scam Robbed South Sudan of Fuel, Food, and Medicine*, The Sentry (New York, October 2022); Sara de Simone, "Playing the 'fragile state' card the SPLM and state extraversion in South Sudan," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 56, no. 3 (2018).

[23] Interview with a European Ambassador in the Republic of South Sudan, Paris, August 2023

poverty. Widely regarded as the archetypal 'failed state', South Sudan serves as an extreme case that hides many others, a convenient template for cross-national analyses. To be sure, the ambition to build strong institutions after the signature of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement has faltered. More than ten years after independence, the South Sudanese state does not fulfill any of the Weberian functions. The state does not control its territory, struggles to raise taxes, and heavily relies on humanitarian aid to provide social services. Moreover, the civil war and the subsequent lack of access for proper academic research, combined with the authoritarian turn preventing any divergent voices from emerging within the South Sudanese civil society, has left the production of knowledge on South Sudan to foreign journalists and conflict analysts, sometimes so focused on local feuds, the urgent present, and short-term political accounts that a more comprehensive, historically situated, and de-centered political science analysis of political dynamics has so far failed to emerge. The result has been a disproportionate obsession with crisis and complex emergencies and a monolithic outlook rooted in presentism that, as Desrosiers and Russel argued, 'mobilizes historical knowledge in an uncritical fashion, reducing authority to a set of historical clichés and building on a familiar focus on crises and the state'.[24]

While Chemouni recently criticized the excessive focus on *intentionalism* and v*oluntarism* in the study of post-genocide Rwanda,[25] this thesis contends that the academic literature on South Sudan, by overwhelmingly focusing on short-termism, greed, corruption, and despair, grapples with the exact opposite issue. Without minimizing other aspects of the politics of South Sudan, this research precisely aims to fill this empirical gap in the literature. The contribution of this thesis to the literature on

[24] Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Aidan Russell, "Histories of authority in the African Great Lakes: trajectories and transactions," *Africa* 90, no. 5 (2020): 971.
[25] Benjamin Chemouni, "Introduction to the Issue: the Debated Research on the Rwandan State," *Politique Africaine* 160, no. 4 (2020).

South Sudan is thus fourfold. First, it reemphasizes the importance of elites' ideas and imaginations in the politics of South Sudan, thereby bringing *intentionalism* back into focus beyond state failure narratives, offering an account on South Sudan that starkly diverges from overwhelmingly dominant Hobbesian perspectives on the country. Focusing on nationalism indeed brings an understudied theme to the fore, one that aims to decenter the study of South Sudan from a fixation on violence, failure, and primordial ethnicity. Second, it attempts to situate South Sudan in the broader comparative politics literature without 'de-localising' its politics in overly abstract, analytical, and rational concepts or *grand theories*, therefore 'de-enclaving' the country from its 'exceptionalism' while preserving local specificity, an approach that enables a meaningful academic dialogue.[26] South Sudan, despite what the literature sometimes suggests, is not an outlier nor an 'exception to the rule'. Understanding the SPLM as a nationalist vanguard movement offers, for instance, much insight, as the following chapters will demonstrate, into its internal and external politics. Similarly, apprehending the Equatorian project as a competing nationalist endeavor inserts the Equatorian governors' idea into a broad range of other competing nationalist projects in Africa and beyond.

Third, the thesis carefully historicizes the politics of South Sudan. As Tilly emphasised, 'every significant political phenomenon lives in history and requires historically grounded analysis for its explanation'.[27] The SPLM's ambition to radically 'break from the past' created a politically motivated perception that the 2005 peace agreement would represent a *tabula rasa*, similar to Rwanda's genocide and subsequent political

[26] See on this a very interesting article by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan on the relationship between anthropology and political science, and how their interaction could develop meaningful perspectives to apprehend complex realities, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, "Science politique et anthropologie : une formule gagnant/gagnant ?," *Politique africaine* n° 161-162, no. 1 (2021).

[27] Charles Tilly, " Why and How History Matters," in *The Oxford handbook of contextual political analysis*, ed. Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 16.

transformations.[28] While it is commonly asserted that the SPLM built institutions 'from scratch', this narrative overlooks political continuities and taken-for-granted path dependencies that need to be accounted for. As Fisher put it in his study of post-liberation politics in East Africa, 'it is critical […] not to overlook the durability and resilience of ideas and practices of statehood even within polities where their physical architectures were decimated'.[29] Independence, this thesis shows, did not erase the past and the political debates attached to it, despite what the SPLM would want us to think. Historicizing goes beyond simply recalling the past, as it is too often the case in teleological, nationalist accounts of the 'liberation' of South Sudan; it involves exploring power struggles, alternative possibilities and imaginaries, their emergence and decline, and assessing their impact on the trajectory of specific political processes, including attempts to build competing political projects. This thesis therefore aims to deconstruct the 'nationalist history' propagated by the SPLM, rooted in a modernist thinking of the nation-state; in doing so, it offers an account of 'liberation' that goes 'beyond the nation'.[30]

Fourth, this thesis strategically shifts focus from the well-trodden narrative of pastoral and ethnic politics in South Sudan to centre on Equatoria, a region systematically overlooked in existing scholarship influenced by dominant nationalist histories.[31] In fact, while South Sudan's struggle for independence, the life of its charismatic leader John Garang, its fraught state-building endeavours, its Dinka-Nuer fault line, or its catastrophic

[28] Chemouni, "Introduction to the Issue: the Debated Research on the Rwandan State."
[29] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 14.
[30] Jocelyn Alexander et al., " Liberation Beyond the Nation: An Introduction," *Journal of southern African studies* 46, no. 5 (2020).
[31] Only local and anthropological narratives have been produced on Equatoria. See Peter Hakim Justin and Lotje De Vries, "Governing Unclear Lines: Local Boundaries as a (Re)source of Conflict in South Sudan," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 1 (2019); Mareike Schomerus and Lotje de Vries, "Improvising border security: 'A situation of security pluralism' along South Sudan's borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 3 (2014); Nicki Kindersley and Øystein H. Rolandsen, "Civil War on a Shoestring: Rebellion in South Sudan's Equatoria Region Civil wars," *Civil wars* 19, no. 3 (2017); Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, "Winning the War, but Losing the Peace? The Dilemma of SPLM/A Civil Administration and the Tasks Ahead," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, 1 (2005).

civil war have garnered substantial attention, the story of Equatorian elites and their complex political engagement with the idea of *national liberation* has never been told, let alone understood. It represents, as Allman would put it, an 'intellectual dead-zone' in the contemporary political analysis of South Sudan that has for long taken the nationalist discourse of the SPLM for granted.[32] This silence – encouraged by the SPLM - is particularly striking, given the pivotal role of Equatorian elites in the history of southern Sudanese nationalism, the fact that Juba, the capital, is situated in Equatoria, and that the region encompasses approximately one-third of South Sudan's population. In this regard, this thesis represents an important *corrective* to the Dinka-Nuer and SPLM centred political accounts of post-independence South-Sudan; the story of a linear history towards independence is a myth, and exploring Equatoria and its politics offers an alternative 'imagined future' that fully deserves consideration.

EPISTEMOLOGY, METHODOLOGY, METHOD

Epistemological and Methodological Approach

A Historically Grounded Study of Politics

This research positions itself at the convergence of three scholarly traditions to create an in-depth analysis of Equatorian elites, their ideas, their political aspirations, and their political interactions with the nationalist project of the SPLM. Firstly, it draws upon the insights of political sociology, with its emphasis on the significance of historically-situated social networks and interpersonal relations among elites in understanding how power is distributed and contested, illuminating the intricate – and constantly evolving - web of relations that shape power dynamics. As the following chapters reveal, the main protagonists inhabit a complex web of shared history—their relationships poisoned by

[32] Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine : Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison, UNITED STATES: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

lingering memories, fractured trust, and the ghosts of former friendships forged across decades. Secondly, it embraces the perspective of comparative politics, aiming to contribute to a broader understanding of nationalism across diverse contexts. Thirdly, this research recognizes the crucial role of history in shaping current dynamics in South Sudan. It hence underscores the intricate interplay between past events, identity formation, power, and nationalist narratives, acknowledging that historical factors are not merely footnotes but active forces that shape – and somewhat constrain - contemporary political realities; a historical sociology approach that enables an in-depth account of Equatorian elites and their project in South Sudan. Such an approach builds on outstanding academic works like Fisher's *East Africa After Liberation,*[33] Roessler and Verhoeven's *Why Comrades Go to War,*[34] but also Adebanwi's *Yoruba Elites and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria,*[35] Lynch's *I Say to you,*[36] Larmer's *Rethinking African Politics,*[37] or Tendi's *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe,*[38] which, rooted in what one could call the 'British school of African politics', all emphasize the need to adopt a historically grounded perspective to approach elites and politics in Africa.

A Social Constructivist Study of Elites and Nationalism

This research follows a social constructivist approach and emphasises the 'social construction of interests'.[39] Constructivism is founded on the ontological premise that reality is socially constructed through interactions and discourse, in contrast to more

[33] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.
[34] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*.
[35] Wale Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awọ́lówọ̀ and corporate agency* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[36] Gabrielle Lynch, *I say to you : ethnic politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).
[37] Miles Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (London: Routledge 2011).
[38] Tendi, *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker*.
[39] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*, 15.

naturalist conceptions of knowledge. Constructivism is in this regard 'centrally concerned with the role of ideas in shaping social and political life'.[40] Constructivists believe that norms, ideas, and shared understandings influence the interests and behaviours of actors, and that these actors, in turn, also shape those norms and ideas.[41] This contrasts with the view that interests and behaviours are determined solely, as too often assumed in rationalist and economistic approaches of social sciences, by objective or material factors. Rationalism, argues Green, is 'trumped by the need to first determine preferences and goals, which are contextual and socially constructed'.[42] Reality is thus viewed as an ongoing process of social interaction, rather than an objectively given *state of affairs*. In order to focus on the ideational and discursive dimensions of Equatorian nationalism, social constructivism provides an interesting, novel, and valuable lens to analyse how Equatorian leaders (have) made sense of political events in South(ern) Sudan, how shared understandings on what *Equatoria-ness* really means emerged, and how these understandings can enable - or constrain – action in South Sudan. This research therefore highlights the power of language, narratives about the past, and framing in shaping social and political outcomes in South Sudan and beyond.

Agency, Elites, and Structural Individualism

This thesis adopts structural individualism as an approach, one that emphasizes 'the causal role of both individuals and the broader relational context in which they are situated'.[43] As Lefevre argued, structural individualism 'helps to overcome the binary

[40] James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, "Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth Simmons (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 57.
[41] Alexander Wendt, *The Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[42] Daniel M. Green, *Constructivism and Comparative Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 6.
[43] Raphaël Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City: Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 30.

debate in contentious politics between partisans of structures and of agency, and instead places the analytical focus on the mechanisms linking one to the other'.[44] Moving away from structuralism does indeed not negate the fact that political agents are embedded within a historical framing of events and culture; as Archer suggested, 'agential powers are conditioned, though not determined, by the socio-cultural context in which people live'.[45] Maximalist perspectives on agency have too often missed the 'durability and resilience of ideas and practices' when studying political projects and their implementation.[46] While Equatorian nationalism in South Sudan is not a random structural outcome but, rather, a deliberate idea orchestrated by specific individuals, elites, the project of the three governors remained embedded in structural settings – the most important one being the legacy of the self-proclaimed 'liberation' struggle – that would constrain their actions. 'Writing on nationalism', wrote Spencer in his study of Sri Lanka, 'has concentrated on disembodied "readings" of nationalist symbols and ideology, with little or no attention to the contexts and agents involved in their use'.[47] This thesis attempts to address this issue by integrating the sociology of agency within structural constraints. In fact, one of the major focuses of this thesis is to understand how Equatorian elites balanced their ideas and aspirations with the structural and political reality inherited from decades of civil war, providing a nuanced understanding of Equatorian nationalism and its integration within existing power relations.

Elites are here defined as 'those who occupy the most influential positions or roles in the important spheres of social life'.[48] 'The very idea of elites', wrote Shore, 'suggest qualities

[44] Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City: Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli*, 30.
[45] Margaret S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), 22.
[46] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 14.
[47] Stephen Nugent and Cris Shore, *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Routeledge, 2002), 107.
[48] Nugent and Shore, *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, 2.

of ‘agency’, ‘exclusivity’, ‘power’, and an apparent separation from ‘mass society’.[49] While academic discussions of elites have been relatively scarce since its peak in the 1960s and 1970s,[50] renewed attention to ‘studying up’ elites has spurred within the sociological and political scholarship.[51] It must be recognized that the criminalization of elites, coupled with the local turn in social sciences, have reduced the appeal of elites theories in political science;[52] Daloz even argued that ‘elite perspectives have never been given a priority in African Studies’.[53] Moreover, as Pina Cabral argued, ‘partly because of complications resulting from access, scholars have tended to focus on groups affected by elite governance rather than on elites themselves’.[54] The assumption that ‘all politics is local’ has gained prominence in the literature.[55] Although Bayart's 'politics from below' argument emerged within a specific temporal and intellectual context dominated by ahistorical, universalizing approaches embodied for instance by dependency theories,[56] it has nonetheless left an indelible mark on the study of post-colonial societies.[57] Foucher, in his seminal PhD research on the birth of Casamance nationalism in Senegal, for instance demonstrated how locally constructed the idea of Casamance was, focusing on

[49] Nugent and Shore, *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, 4.
[50] See notably Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Marshall Singer, *The Emerging Elite: A Study of Political Leadership in Ceylon* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1964); M. Roberts, *Cast Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of Karava Elite in Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
[51] Robert Miller, "Elite Formation in Africa: Class, Culture, and Coherence," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 12, no. 4 (1974).
[52] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*; Wale Adebanwi and Rogers Orock, *Elites and the Politics of Accountability in Africa* (Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 2021).
[53] Cited in Adebanwi and Orock, *Elites and the Politics of Accountability in Africa*, 7.
[54] João de Pina-Cabral and Maria Antónia Pedroso de Lima, *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession* (Lisbon: Etnográfica Press, 2000), 5.
[55] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nation Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (Heinemann, 2005).
[56] Achille Mbembe, Comi Toulabor, and Jean-Francois Bayart, *Le Politique par le Bas en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Khartala, 1992).
[57] See for instance Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

football associations, primary schools teachers, urban educators, etc.[58] This thesis however takes the (unpopular) position, without denying the benefits of local perspectives, that the politics of nationalism in South Sudan is predominantly driven by elite agents and their horizontal relationships. This rests on the observation that the story of Equatorian nationalism and its consequences is the work of only a handful of powerful individuals. Such an approach embraces Clapham's argument that 'a very great deal of politics is concerned with the activities of a very small number of people'.[59] In his anthropology of Nigerian-Chinese elite exchanges, Onomake also insisted that 'researching elites provide[s] insight to not only the larger picture but also how those with greater access to power impact society at large'.[60] This research is thus primarily concerned with the agency and impact of elites and their imagination in shaping the interplay between nationalism, power, and identity in South Sudan.

It is no surprise that scholars working on elites and competing nationalisms have sometimes embraced the style of political biographies to understand how elites inscribe themselves within broader nationalist ideologies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni for instance edited a superb volume on the life and legacy of Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo to shed light on elites, leadership, and nationalist histories in Zimbabwe.[61] Chandra focused on the political life of Jagat Narain Lal, a Hindu and prominent member of the Indian National Congress, arguing that 'his life and times give us a glimpse into the intersecting, competing and mutating idioms of nationalism' in post-colonial India.[62] Importantly, Chandra shows how Jagat Narain Lal had 'multiple loyalties and multiple affiliations', making him what

[58] Vincent Foucher, "Cheated pilgrims: Education, migration and the birth of Casamançais nationalism (Senegal)" (School of Oriental and African Studies, 2002).
[59] Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1985), 61.
[60] Umoloyouvwe Ejiroghene Ovbije Onomake, "Elite exchanges: the cultural politics of Chinese business in Nigeria" (University of Sussex, 2023), 24.
[61] Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo of Zimbabwe: Politics, Power, and Memory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[62] Rajshree Chandra, *Competing Nationalisms: The Sacred and Political Life of Jagat Narain Lal* (Gurugram: Penguin Random House, 2022).

Bourdieu called a 'collective individual', someone who 'embodied the many possibilities and contradictions of nationalism'.[63] While this research does not focus on the biography of one individual to illuminate processes of nationalism, it still gives much room to individuals, their agencies, their backgrounds, their sociologies, and their social networks to understand how and why they decided, at some point in time, to inscribe (or not) themselves into a bigger collective nationalist project. This forces us to recognize that elites, as Fisher put it in his study of Easter African liberation movements, have 'their sociologies and historical, deeply personalised, linkages'.[64] Tendi, in his research on liberation fighter Solomon Mujuru, emphasized the importance of focusing on human agents, individual motivations, personality idiosyncrasies, and internal political relations to illuminate important political dynamics in civil-military relations in Zimbabwe, insisting in this regard on the utility of biography in political science.[65] Wallis, in studying the role of the architects of the so-called *Akazu* in organizing the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, also demonstrated how focusing on individuals—their biographies, personalities, and motivations—can bring an immense wealth of knowledge to specific political events.[66] We indeed do not gain a good understanding of competing nationalisms by viewing them as a simplistic clash between two abstract, homogenous, and static ideologies. Instead, nationalism is a complex, evolving, and historically situated phenomenon driven by a constellation of emotional, social, and sometimes (if not always) irrational individuals socialising with each other.

[63] Chandra, *Competing Nationalisms: The Sacred and Political Life of Jagat Narain Lal*, 170.
[64] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 16.
[65] Tendi, *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker*.
[66] Andrew Wallis, *Stepp'd in Blood : Akazu and the Architects of the Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi* (Winchester: Zero Books 2019).

In-Depth Description as a 'Source of Theoretical Ideas'

This thesis adopts a qualitative, inductive, and *descriptive* approach. Some may contend that the descriptive nature of this study inherently limits it to ideographic explanation, thus potentially being perceived as an antitheoretical endeavour and mere chronicle of events.[67] I however argue that description has the capacity to generate theoretical generalizations.[68] As advocated by Gerring, description should be capable of 'proceeding independently of causal propositions' and should encompass more than merely serving as an initial step towards causal inference. [69] To be sure, the primary focus of this research lies in examining the distinctive dynamics of Equatorian elites and competing nationalisms in South Sudan, acknowledging their unique context and complexities. My theoretical framework, instead of invoking abstract potential causalities that relegate the case to secondary importance, primarily enables me to make sense of the broader 'Equatorian question' in South Sudan. Yet, this research project also illuminates other circumstances and develop arguments, as Pierson puts it, 'that can "travel" in some form beyond a specific time and place',[70] because it is fundamentally a story about politics and competing nationalisms that speaks to a range of other cases. As Lefevre put it in his study of Jihad in Lebanon, 'it avoids putting forward general laws and, in the tradition of middle-range theory, instead privileges the partial explanation of social phenomena'.[71] It therefore contradicts Munck and Snyder's assumption that single-case studies are hostile

[67] James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[68] Robert Bates et al., *Analytic Narratives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); E. G. Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, "Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry," *Educational Communication & Technology Journal* 30, no. 4 (1982); Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, "Transforming Qualitative Research Methods:Is It a Revolution?," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 24, no. 3 (1995).
[69] John Gerring, "Mere Description," *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2012).
[70] Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[71] Lefèvre, *Jihad in the City: Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli*, 28.

to generalization.[72] In an interesting contribution published in *Comparative Politics Newsletter* in 2015, Kanchan Chandra expressed concern that the growing hegemony of large-n studies (more particularly in the United States) prevent academics from becoming country specialists, as it prevents researchers from developing what she calls a 'deep contextual knowledge of an area'.[73] In this sense, the internal validity of this research is high, as it delivers results based on a comprehensive analysis, representing an 'in-depth' corrective to universalism. The in-depth single case study is hence, to summarize, used 'both as a means to expand our fount of observations and as a source of theoretical ideas'.[74]

Positionality

This research is based on several field trips, ranging from three weeks to two months, conducted in South Sudan between 2022 and 2024. It must, however, be emphasized that the study also leverages over eight years of experience working in or on South Sudan, but also in Central and Eastern Africa, within the diplomatic and humanitarian sectors. Such experience has undeniably proven to be an asset: it allowed me to have an already developed network of contacts and a good prior knowledge of my case study, even though the research process behind this thesis – fortunately - deconstructed many assumptions I held about elites, conflict, and ideas in South Sudan. It is however clear that I do not write as an insider and cannot claim to possess that perspective. As LaRocco, Shinn, and

[72] Gerardo L. Munck and Richard Snyder, "Debating the Direction of Comparative Politics:An Analysis of Leading Journals," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007).A good example of such an argument is Parkinson's qualitative study on clandestine mobilization during war time in Lebanon, using a single-case study, to challenge existing theories and add new, generalizable propositions, see Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013).
[73] Kanchan Chandra, "Redefining the Relationship with the Field," *Comparative Politics Section Newsletter* 25, no. 2 (2015).
[74] Ariel Ahram, Patrick Köllner, and Rudra Sil, *Comparative Area Studies : Methodological Rationales and Cross-Regional Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

Madise argued about their research on Botswana, ‘no matter how much time we spent living in their village […], and no matter how many times we return, we always eventually leave again’.[75] Drawing inspiration from Srinivasan's characterization of his role in studying peace-making in Sudan, I could at best be considered an 'involved outsider'.[76] As a Belgian national writing from Oxford, I also acknowledge that my thesis inevitably participates in the structural inequities that characterize the production of knowledge on Africa.[77] Moreover, recognizing that there is no pretense of being a so-called 'neutral observer', I took particular care to acknowledge the 'white gaze', understood as the existence of specific discourses on Africa rooted in what Mudimbe calls a dominant 'Western epistemological order'.[78] Similarly, while ‘it is impossible to know how our gender influenced our research experiences’,[79] it undoubtedly had impact. These likely manifested in how interviewees perceived me and how access was granted or denied. To mitigate these influences, I rejected a neo-positivist epistemology that flattens complexity, and consistently adhered to Bourdieu's call for *reflexivity*, which urges researchers to maintain a critical stance toward their own assumptions and perspectives. As Bourdieu argues, reflexivity ‘is the fact for social science to become its own object of study, therefore using its own method to control itself’.[80] It signifies, as Howlett and

[75] Annette Alfina LaRocco, Jamie E. Shinn, and Kentse Madise, "Reflections on Positionalities in Social Science Fieldwork in Northern Botswana: A Call for Decolonizing Research," *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 3 (2020): 858.
[76] Sharath Srinivasan, "War by other means: the politics of peace negotiations in Sudan " (PhD University of Oxford, 2010).
[77] Amina Mama, "Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom," *African Studies Review* 50, no. 1 (2007); Robtel Neajai Pailey, "De-centring the ‘White Gaze’ of Development," *Development and Change* 51, no. 3 (2019).
[78] Adam Branch, " Decolonizing the African Studies Centre," *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 36, no. 2 (2018); Valentin Mudimbe, "African Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge: An Introduction," *African Studies Review* 28, no. 2:3 (1985); Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa " *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977); Ali Mazrui, "The re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and beyond," *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 3 (2005).
[79] LaRocco, Shinn, and Madise, "Reflections on Positionalities in Social Science Fieldwork in Northern Botswana: A Call for Decolonizing Research," 851.
[80] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992).

Kurylo argued, 'a refusal to efface ourselves from the research process, where we, instead, openly grapple with our own subjectivities and the ways they are manifested in the inevitably partial stories we tell through our research'.[81]

Fieldwork

Fieldwork – even though such a term invokes 'latent connotations of otherness'[82] - was conceived as more than a trip to 'collect information and generate data',[83] as Kapiszewski et al would argue, for the purpose of confirming or refuting hypotheses. In fact, I found myself applying, somewhat involuntarily at first, an approach akin to 'grounded theory' methodology, albeit without fully embracing it.[84] Throughout my research, fieldwork served a dual purpose: primarily to collect information, as the scarcity of research on Equatoria and the project of the three governors necessitated starting nearly from scratch, relying almost exclusively on primary sources. However, another function quickly emerged. This second role transformed fieldwork into an iterative process wherein conversations with Equatorian elites continually reshaped the research question and informed the most suitable angle to adopt in making sense of their perspectives. It is in fact Equatorian elites who insisted on Equatoria being understood as a nation, something I at first did not want to, mistakenly, give too much attention to. In this vein, South Sudan transcended the notion of a mere 'field site', evolving into an interactive space where my research was discussed, critiqued, and refined. I would not go as far as saying that my research was *co-constructed* with South Sudanese elites, as that would misrepresent the

[81] Marnie Howlett and Bohdana Kurylo, "Reframing Reflexivity: Collaborative Ethics, Collective Responsibility, and Learnings from Researching Russia's War against Ukraine," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (2025): 2.
[82] LaRocco, Shinn, and Madise, "Reflections on Positionalities in Social Science Fieldwork in Northern Botswana: A Call for Decolonizing Research," 846.
[83] Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Lelan Read, *Field Research in Political Science : Practices and Principles* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press., 2015), 380.
[84] On the Grounded Theory methodology, see Julianne S Oktay, *Grounded Theory, Pocket Guides to Social Work Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012).

reality and certainly romanticize my experience in Juba. However, the social sciences literature has certainly not sufficiently developed the extent to which research subjects actively shape the contours and content of research through their engagement, and shared discussions.

Navigating the research landscape in heavily militarized states is not without its challenges. As Fisher pointed out, 'this is not to exoticize or trivialise this kind of research, but, rather, to underline its difficulties and unpredictabilities'.[85] These challenges are particularly pronounced in South Sudan, a country that has recently experienced a civil war and is grappling with the slow implementation of a (very) fragile peace agreement. In this regard, the lack of existing research on South Sudanese elites can be attributed, in large part, to the prevailing insecurity in the region. As Rivas and Ciaran Browne asserted, 'embedded in these unique [violent] places are particular sets of issues that researchers, research participants and communities each face'.[86] Conducting research in South Sudan – in Juba - entails adhering to a self-imposed curfew at 6:00 p.m., routine police checks, and even visits to the National Security office; but also ensuring that 'those who participated in the project did not run any greater risk as a result and that potential research subjects made their own informed decision to participate'.[87] During my fieldwork, I experienced first-hand the precarious nature of the situation. The abrupt end of my fieldwork in 2022 was, for instance, prompted by Vice-President Riek Machar's threat to withdraw from the 2018 peace agreement, leading to the deployment of notoriously violent Tiger militias loyal to President Kiir throughout Juba. As a result, after consulting with government and UN officials through a series of phone calls, the decision was made

[85] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 24.
[86] Althea-Maria Rivas and Brendan Ciarán Browne, *Experiences in Researching Conflict and Violence : Fieldwork Interrupted* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), 1.
[87] Elisabeth Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones," *Qualitative sociology* 29, no. 3 (2006): 379.

to evacuate to Nairobi for safety reasons. Again, in 2023, rumors of a coup allegedly led by the head of National Security (who has since then been sacked) against President Salva Kiir stranded me for a few days and significantly increased tension during my stay. In such a context, securing an interview with any politician proved to be a formidable challenge unless I could provide a recommendation from a trusted friend or colleague. In a society where deep-seated fear of espionage persists, both as a remnant of the Bashir era and because of a military culture within the SPLM/A, building trust was a time-consuming endeavour; undoubtedly, the protracted struggle for so-called 'liberation' and the subsequent five years of civil war greatly influenced this cautious approach. While trying to set up interviews, I quickly lost count of how many times I was asked to go through background checks. Some of the people who were open to speaking with me early on later refused, pointing to the rising atmosphere of fear in the country as the presidential elections drew closer.

Methods

Elite Interviews

To construct a new narrative of (post)liberation in South Sudan, I conducted 62 in-depth interviews. While the majority were with South Sudanese elites, I also interviewed other actors possessing extensive knowledge of South Sudan's internal and external politics, including experts from reputable think tanks, former diplomats, experienced NGO workers, and members of the South Sudanese diaspora in the United Kingdom and the United States. I used the snowball technique to identify relevant interviewees. This technique did pose potential challenges, as relying solely on 'friends of' could limit the perspectives presented and make the sample unrepresentative. However, I took measures to establish separate entry points into various networks, attempting to speak with Equatorians from different political affiliations and ethnic backgrounds; unsurprisingly,

the more radical Equatorian elements were difficult to access, either fighting in the bush or unwilling to draw attention to themselves. Obtaining rich information hinged on building trust and rapport with interlocutors. During fieldwork in Juba, establishing trust with South Sudanese elites was signaled when interviewees insisted on sharing meals - a culturally significant gesture that frequently led to the sharing of personal memories and opinions. Without romanticizing them, these informal exchanges, sometimes even more insightful than the formal interviews themselves, provided useful information, bottom-up insights, and additional layers of understanding. In this regard, informal conversations should be more widely acknowledged as a valuable source of data in qualitative research, and not only considered as part of ethnographic approaches.[88]

Interviews were conducted primarily using open-ended questions. As Aberbach and Rockman rightly argued, ‘elites especially – but other highly educated people as well – do not like being put in the straitjacket of close-ended questions. They prefer to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think’.[89] Such a format was not solely a matter of practicality, however. In fact, understanding 'why South Sudanese elites think what they think' is central to this research, as the objective has never been to find an ultimate, rational 'truth' in political events. Subjectivity was clearly central to this research; not a bias that needed to be corrected or mitigated. For instance, this research embraced the idea that, as White asserted, ‘secrets and lies are not forms of withholding information but forms by which information is valorized’.[90] The objective was hence to give political actors space to narrate *their* views and *their* experiences in making sense of political and social events in South Sudan and across the central and eastern Africa

[88] Jon Swain and Brendan King, "Using Informal Conversations in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 21 (2022).
[89] Joel F. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, "Conducting and coding elite interviews," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35, no. 4 (2002): 674.
[90] Luise White, "Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History," *History and Theory* 39, no. 4 (2000): 11.

regions. As Jovchelovitch and Bauer explained, the 'basic idea is to reconstruct social events from the perspective of informants as directly as possible'.[91] In such an approach, 'the power and importance of the made-up and make-believe are precisely that they are made-up and make-believe'.[92] This emphasis on narrative agency is crucial as it highlights how political actors have been driven by emotions linked to treasons, friendships, hope, and despair – aspects that have been underemphasized. Roessler and Verhoeven, in their research on the collapse of the AFDL in the Congo and the subsequent 'Africa's Great War', explained that 'one striking feature of many interviews is that they revealed just how deeply invested in the dreams of revolution […] the comrades were. The disappointment, sadness and anger that accompanied the evaporating of these reveries continue to influence both the memories of the AFDL period and contemporary politics'.[93] This resonates strongly with my experience interviewing South Sudanese elites.

I encountered two challenges during my interviews in Juba. Firstly, it became evident that Equatorian elites perceived my research as an unexpected form of publicity for their nationalist cause. Indeed, they have felt deeply misunderstood and isolated, both in the post-independence order itself and in *accounts* about the making of that order in South Sudan. To my initial surprise, several respondents congratulated me on purportedly championing their cause against the Dinka, although, as Roessler and Verhoeven explained in their book, my story is 'a story of empathy but not sympathy'.[94] Some Equatorian politicians sought my opinion on what they should do and inquired whether

[91] Sandra Jovchelovitch and Martin W. Bauer, "Narrative interviewing [online]. London: LSE Research Online," (2000).
[92] White, "Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History," 13.
[93] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*, 422.
[94] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*, 424.

similar 'marginalized' (in their own words) groups existed in other parts of Africa. Secondly, or should I say subsequently, some Dinka elites began labelling me as an 'Equatorian'. Initially, this was disheartening, as I feared it would undermine my credibility as a researcher. However, by demonstrating a genuine interest in their perspective and actively seeking to understand South Sudanese politics, while emphasizing my lack of affiliation or preference for any political group, many of them recognized my sincere efforts to grasp the complete picture. I am fully aware that I may have been used as a tool by both sides to support their ideological narratives. Researching conflict, liberation, and identity is inherently political, and while this has sparked ongoing debates within the anthropological literature, sometimes leading to excessive navel-gazing narratives, I could only mitigate this risk by remaining conscious and exercising caution in my approach. I believe that triangulation with secondary sources, combined with efforts to balance narratives and interests, allowed me to produce a nuanced and well-rounded analysis that gives voice to diverse perspectives while maintaining analytical rigor.

Archives

During my stay in Juba, I had the privilege of accessing the National Archives of South Sudan, a long-term project that began in 2008. The archives, now well-organized, were immensely valuable in understanding the internal debates surrounding Equatoria during the colonial period. The University of Juba also played a crucial role, providing me with access to their library and archives, more particularly newspapers such as *Nile Mirror*, *Sudan Now*, and the *Sudan Times*. Accessing personal archives of Equatorian elites proved particularly challenging, not due to their reluctance, but because they either maintained poor record-keeping or their documents were destroyed during the conflict(s). For instance, Clement Wani Konga, the former Governor of Equatoria, recalled having

numerous document-filled boxes but could not locate them. Another leader lost his computer when he had to flee Juba in 2016, when violence erupted in the capital. In this computer, he argued, were hundreds of minutes from different meetings between Equatorian leaders. Additionally, I consulted archives from international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), OXFAM, and the International Crisis Group (ICG). Their monthly *situational reports* offered a wealth of factual background information and precise descriptions of events. In instances where researchers and diplomats are unable to access certain areas, humanitarian workers indeed become important sources of information. The United States Institute of Peace's 'South Sudan Peace Project Archive' was also instrumental in accessing important documents related to the 2014 and 2015 IGAD peace negotiations. This project gathers transcripts of drafts, letters, and correspondence of political actors and policymakers involved in the peace negotiations. I also consulted archives of the UK Foreign Office and the US Central Intelligence Agency, mostly for the period 1980-1990. I also consulted personal *memoirs* of South Sudanese politicians, embracing Englund's argument that 'the autobiography as a compilation of experiences and memories resembles that of the archive and offers unique material that not only documents the lives of individuals but of social, cultural, political, and economic histories of all kinds'.[95] To further enrich my research, I also accessed documents and news articles from *Africa Confidential*, from *Sudan Tribune*, from *Eye Radio*, from *Radio Tamazuj*, from *Citizen,* and from *The Dawn.* I assessed archives according to Scott's criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Scott indeed argued that 'even the primary observer

[95] Lena Englund, "Autobiography as Archival Act: Reckoning with Personal and Political Pasts in They Called You Dambudzo and Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness," *Life Writing* 20, no. 3 (2023): 510.

may be influenced by illusions, hallucinations or simple mis-observation into believing that something happened which in fact has not'.[96]

Secondary sources

This research project is significantly enriched by the extensive body of secondary literature and scholarly research that exists on the subject. While the specific literature on Equatoria is limited, the broader literature on politics, conflict, and ethnicity in (South) Sudan has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the topic. Notable scholars such as Robert Collins and Douglas Johnson have made significant contributions to the field by providing comprehensive historical narratives that have deepened my insights into the dynamics of South Sudan. Their works have laid the foundation for understanding the complex socio-political context of the region. Similarly, the writings of Francis Mading Deng and Jok Madut Jok have been invaluable in exploring the intricate relationship between ethnicity, local politics, and national dynamics in South Sudan. Furthermore, the broader and vast literature on Sudan, with its focus on marginalization and exclusion as political instruments, has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of (post)liberation and competing nationalisms in South Sudan. Eventually, reports written by analysts such as Joshua Craze, Ferenc Marko, John Young, and Alan Boswell for NGOs proved crucial because these analysts could have – and continue to have - very close access to south Sudanese leaders.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis adheres to a chronological structure, primarily because the historical context is integral to understanding the genesis, implementation, and ultimate collapse of the nationalist project of the three Equatorian governors. This approach allows for a nuanced

[96] John Scott, *A Matter of Record : Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Cambridge Polity Press, 1990), 24.

examination of the factors influencing key individuals' decision-making processes at critical junctures and their consequences, allowing a better understanding of the role of elites in shaping nationalist projects. For each chapter, introductions present the focus and argument of the chapter and explain how the empirical details matter to understand interaction between elites, power, and nationalism in South Sudan. In the body of each chapter, I sometimes integrate interesting concepts, when necessary, mostly to situate the narrative in the broader literature. The conclusions aim to reiterate the main argument of the chapter and reflect on the role of ideology, elites, and competing nationalisms in South Sudan and beyond.

Chapter 1 – *Elites, Power, and Nationalism*- examines existing approaches to understanding elites and power in Sub-Saharan Africa, revealing the significant limitations of dominant theoretical frameworks. By proposing a novel perspective that centres nationalism, power relations, and elite agency, this chapter aims to give a new perspective on power and political authority. It offers a critique of primordial and modernist approaches to nationalism, demonstrating the need for a more nuanced understanding of nationalism. Nationalism is indeed not a predetermined, structural outcome of modernization, nor is it simply an organic, timeless phenomenon. Instead, this chapter shows, it is a contingent ideology deeply embedded in power relations, shaped by the interactions between elites, their perceptions of domination, and their political projects.

Chapter 2 - *Genesis of an Idea: Elites and the Making of Equatoria* - traces the historical origins of the idea of Equatoria as a category of political practice, an idea that three governors strategically mobilized in the months preceding independence in 2011. By examining this history, the chapter challenges the prevailing nationalist narrative about South Sudan, which presents southern nationalism as following a linear trajectory.

Instead, it offers a new perspective that reveals a more complex political landscape, one where multiple imaginaries and possibilities coexisted and could have emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. The Equatoria nation stands as one of these imaginaries that eventually did not emerge; a historical process that remains both understudied and politically contentious within southern Sudanese historiography. Going beyond a culturalist perspective that emphasizes the natural, primordial difference between farmers and pastoralists and adopting a cautious approach to history, this chapter rather emphasizes the contingent crafting of the idea of Equatoria by Equatorian elites, notably from the *Equatoria Intellectual Committee*, rooted in colonial imaginaries and worlds of possibilities.

Chapter 3 - *(Un)National Revolution: Equatoria and the Rise of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement* - focuses on the emergence of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in southern Sudan and its historical context, exploring the roots of its nationalist and socialist ideology, its organization, and its evolution across time. However, rather than taking the grand nationalist narrative of the SPLM for granted, this chapter focuses on Equatorian elites and their ambiguous relationship with the SPLM in order to 'de-nationalize' the self-proclaimed 'liberation struggle', offering a revisionist account of the second Sudanese civil war that complexifies the simplistic north-south narrative. It shows how the idea of Equatoria never fully dissolved into the SPLM's idea of southern nationalism, remaining a potential imaginary to compete for power as structural inequalities became strikingly apparent in the movement.

Chapter 4 – *The (Re)Making of Equatoria: Power, Agency, and the Gubernatorial Alliance* - examines the socio-political context in which the *modern* competing Equatorian nationalist project emerged and presents in detail the different meetings of Equatorian elites to better understand their ideas and aspirations. It shows how, at the end

of the second Sudanese civil war, the SPLM succeeded in projecting the idea that the movement was the victor of the self-styled liberation struggle, how it used peace negotiations to sideline any other southern groups, and how it sought to impose a single nationalist narrative in South Sudan. In turn, Equatorian elites became marginalized not only in the military, economic, and political spheres, but also in the official nationalist history that emphasized *liberation heroes*. This chapter hence narrates how Equatorian elites responded to this marginalization. Central to this narrative are the leading figures of the new Equatorian nationalist project: Joseph Bakosoro, Clement Wani Konga, and Louis Lobong. The chapter meticulously examines their collective and individual efforts to revamp and embody the idea of *Equatorian-ness*, drawing upon imaginaries and potential alternatives to southern nationalism deployed in the 1980s. Such efforts culminated in the landmark 2011 Equatoria Conference— a pivotal yet largely overlooked event in the region's political history. Seeing Equatorian elites as producers of political ideas and potential futures, this chapter looks at how they attempted to transform their individual agencies into a collective agency, a process that however proved complex and not without dilemmas.

Chapter 5 – *Comrades Go to War: Equatorian Elites, Conflict, and Competing Nationalisms*– examines the efforts of the three governors to foster Equatorian nationalism during a period of intense conflict and violence in South Sudan. In December 2013, the vanguard violently fragmented due to personal rivalries, igniting a five-year civil war. Amid this turmoil, Equatorian elites sought to capitalize on the conflict, seeing it as an opportunity to advance their competing nationalist agenda. This chapter highlights how the governors worked to sustain and strengthen Equatorian unity despite intense centrifugal pressures. Some Equatorian elites indeed saw Riek Machar as a better advocate for recognizing Equatorian nationalism in South Sudan; yet the governors

managed to unify Equatorian elites under one (shaky) roof. Opting to focus on peace negotiations, the governors sought to position Equatorian nationalism within broader East African politics and attract the attention of significant actors. However, unable to thrive in a region ideologically and politically misaligned, the project ultimately failed, exposing the fleeting nature of the geopolitics of Equatorian nationalism.

Chapter 6 – *Downfall and Afterlife: Elite Fragmentation and the Collapse of a Nationalist Project* – traces the collapse and afterlife of the governors' political project in South Sudan. It analyses the growingly antagonistic relationships among Equatorian elites and the governors' failed attempt to launch a more radical, violent initiative after being sidelined at the negotiation table. The chapter examines how this project ultimately failed during a period when Equatorian elites were actively renegotiating their positions within the emerging post-peace agreement order. The civil war and the continuous reshaping of political alliances, it shows, had gradually altered not only how Equatorian elites understood their relationships with each other and with the SPLM, but also their aspirations and their perceptions of, and relations to, *Equatoria-ness*, exposing again the very contingent character of nationalism. In turn, reconciliation efforts of Equatorian elites and attempts to rebuild Equatoria all proved short-lived; power, not corporateness, was in their mind.

The **conclusion** explores the broader implications of the Equatorian project for the literature on nationalism, elites, and power. It reasserts the importance to bring nationalism back into the study of politics in Africa and insists on the importance of elites (understood as social individuals) when it comes to understanding the rise and fall of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic nationalist project. It also analyses what the empirical findings mean for the study of South Sudan, before contextualizing these insights within

the wider Horn of Africa region. Finally, it outlines directions for potential future research that emerge from this thesis.

Chapter 1

NATIONALISM, HEGEMONY, AND THE CENTRALITY OF POWER

Nationalism—be it ethnic, territorial, or religious—has exhibited both remarkable durability as a political idea as well as a persistent capacity to mould societies around the world, despite longstanding predictions of its inevitable decline in the era of capitalist globalisation. History illustrates that nationalism's influence on power has been profoundly paradoxical; from the ashes of empires to the births of new states, and from liberation movements to civil conflicts, nationalism has served as both midwife and destroyer, unifier and divider, liberator and oppressor. Yet, the role of nationalism in shaping elite competition in Africa has been understudied when it comes to understanding processes of domination, legitimacy, hegemony, and counter-hegemony. This thesis argues that the interplay between elites, power, and nationalism has however been pivotal

in modern African history and cannot merely be reduced to a mere cynical instrument in the short-term management of patronage networks. This chapter aims to offer a theoretical framework to account for the complex interplay of elites, power, and nationalism in the modern politics of Africa.

This chapter begins with a review of the main approaches taken by scholars to make sense of the interplay between elites and power in Sub-Saharan Africa, approaches in which the politics of nationalism have been strikingly absent: the long-standing politics of patronage, which emphasises the hidden, neo-patrimonial politics of the 'Big Men', and the politics of state failure, which highlights the decisive role of state collapse in structuring the politics peace and conflict in Africa. These approaches, while certainly offering valuable perspectives, have obscured nationalism, either deeming it irrelevant or relegating it to a position of secondary importance. In this chapter, I thus explore the concept of nationalism to offer a framework that account for the interplay between elites, power, and nationalism. I revisit the dominant theories of nationalism, primordialism and modernism, and then propose a new perspective from which to tackle nationalism and its role in the discourses and practices of power. This chapter theoretically argues that (1) moving away from modernist approaches to the nation-state and (2) placing power and elite politics at the centre of our understanding of nationalism illuminate important—even crucial—aspects of the dynamics structuring contemporary political order in Africa.

'BIG MEN' AND THE POLITICS OF PATRONAGE

In the last three decades, academic research studying politics in Africa has shifted from its early post-colonial ideological and ideational analyses towards a stronger focus on its deeply rational, transactional, and personalised nature in which material resources are all that fundamentally matter—sometimes to the point of caricature. Following the perceived failures and crashes of modernising state- and nation-building projects in early post-

colonial Africa, and driven by the strong personalities of emerging leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko, Idi Amin, and Joseph Bokassa, an idea began to emerge in the literature that African elites were 'unfit' for institutional modernity and that any understanding of continent's politics must focus on the 'hidden' politics—understood as the 'real' politics—of newly independent African regimes. Enduring colonial stereotypes on the incapacity of 'Africans' to insert themselves into peaceful liberal modernity have made these new academic developments particularly resonant for scholars studying the politics of Africa.[1] Institutionalism, they have argued, offered only a partial (if any) understanding of the political dynamics of post-colonial political societies by exclusively focusing on the 'formal rules of the game'.[2] In Africa, these scholars argued, state-society relations should be approached differently.[3] As Reno put it, 'rulers reject the pursuit of a broader project of creating a state that serves a collective good or even of creating institutions that are capable of developing independent perspectives'.[4] Englebert argued that:

> Leaders of historically non-legitimate, incongruent, or mismatched states are indeed faced with a peculiar challenge and are limited in the options available to them to address it […] From colonialism, they inherited the instruments of statehood but not the power that came with it in colonial days.[5]

Chabal and Daloz, in their landmark book *Africa Works*, therefore pushed researchers to explore such informal institutions in order to grasp the personalisation of power in

[1] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Africa Observed: Discourses of the Imperial Imagination' Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation," in *Perspectives on Africa: a reader in culture, history and representation*, ed. R.R. Grinker and C.B. Steiner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
[2] Rebecca Tapscott, *Arbitrary States: Social Control and Modern Authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
[3] See Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1988).
[4] Will Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 1.
[5] Pierre Englebert, "Pre-Colonial Institutions, Post-Colonial States, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa," *Political Research Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2000): 11.

Africa—the supremacy of society over the state.[6] The 'shadow state', Reno noted, is 'a very real, but not formally recognized, patronage system that was rigidly organized and centred on rulers' control over resources'.[7] In this context, neo-patrimonialism emerged as an important theoretical perspective that must be considered—one that left a strong and still vibrant legacy for the academic understanding of elites and power in South Sudan. Médard defined neopatrimonialism as a system in which the 'distinction between public domain and private interest is negated and made to lose any substance'.[8] Van de Walle similarly referred to situations where 'the patrimonial logic coexists with the development of bureaucratic administration and at least the pretence of legal-rational forms of state legitimacy'.[9]

While neo-patrimonialism initially emphasised the historical depth of patron-client relations, their embeddedness within formal institutions, and the mutual accountability between patrons and clients, the literature swiftly shifted focus alongside the rapid collapse of post-colonial dreams of modernisation quickly, beginning to emphasise—sometimes in an extreme form—the pathological character of patronage networks. As Tapscott argued, for a certain set of scholars, 'the "mismatch" between state-like forms of governing institutions and privatized forms of violence is the fundamental pathology of post-colonial African states, making them vulnerable to fragility and failure'.[10] Researchers predominantly focused on examining the corrupt and highly personalised political dynamics prevalent in African contexts—what Bayart dubbed 'elite

[6] Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works : Disorder as Political Instrument* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
[7] Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* 2.
[8]Jean-Francois Médard, "L'Etat Sous-Développé Au Cameroun," in *CEAN: Année Africaine 1977* (Paris Pedone, 1979), 68.
[9] Nicolas van de Walle, "The path from neopatrimonialism: Democracy and clientelism in Africa today," in *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond* ed. Daniel Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 131.
[10] Tapscott, *Arbitrary States: Social Control and Modern Authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda*, 26.

accommodation'[11] or the 'criminalization of the state'[12]—narrowing the theoretical lens of neo-patrimonialism amid the rise of dictators increasingly shaping the 'failure' narrative of the continent.[13] While Max Weber emphasised the 'voluntary compliance of subjects' and the construction of a legitimate authority, neo-patrimonialism was now synonymous with 'Big Men' politics, a framework that overwhelmingly emphasised how greed, corruption, coercion, and violence were preventing the continent from achieving liberal modernity.[14] As Mkandawire argued, 'beneath the veneer of modernity flaunted by local elites lurked a world of irrational beliefs, superstition, and a primordial sense of selective interest'.[15] Moreover, the spectacle of despair provided by Mobutu Sese Seko, Idi Amin, Joseph Bokassa and the like did not give way to a conducive epistemic environment for a positive perception of elites and power on the continent. The focus hence was on the abusive aspects of patronage, not on a nuanced understanding of neo-patrimonialism. 'The interaction between the "Big Men" and their extended retinue', categorically argued Bratton and van de Walle, 'defines African politics, from the highest reaches of the presidential palace to the humblest village assembly'.[16]

The peace and conflict literature has proven itself to be a remarkable receptacle of the 'Big Men' narrative when it comes to understanding South Sudan, as 'scholarly attention has been paid to the economic dimension of contemporary armed conflict'.[17] In this regard, the 'New Wars' paradigm, developed by Kaldor based on her study of Bosnia and

[11] Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: the politics of the belly*, Second Edition ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
[12] Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*.
[13] Thandika Mkandawire, "Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections," *World Politics* 67, no. 3 (2015).
[14] Barry Driscoll, "Big Man or Boogey Man? The concept of the Big Man in political science," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 58, no. 4 (2020).
[15] Mkandawire, "Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections," 566.
[16] Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa " *World Politics* 46, no. 4 (1994): 459.
[17] Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

the conflict in Yugoslavia, has had a lasting influence on the study of African politics and its drivers since the 1990s.[18] 'New Wars', according to Kaldor, occur 'in areas where authoritarian states have been greatly weakened as a consequence of opening up to the rest of the world'.[19] Pointing to the end of the Cold War and the birth of the liberal international order as a pivotal turning point, she contrasted the rise of identity-based politics (within which ethnicity reigns) with earlier idea-centred politics, highlighting the decline of grand ideologies. She contended that today's conflicts are driven by greed and primarily waged by non-state violent actors equipped with light weaponry. Simultaneously, Collier and Hoeffler's 'Greed or Grievance' paradigm gained momentum. Their econometric study, grounded in the increasingly popular rational-choice theory, sought to dismiss the widespread idea that rebels are fighting for a specific cause—what the authors called the 'loud discourse of grievances'.[20] Greed, they insisted, is the most relevant factor to consider when analysing the causes of contemporary conflicts in Africa. Influenced by both Kaldor's 'New Wars' paradigm and the neo-patrimonial approach purged from its Weberian logic, de Waal pushed the notion further, specifically studying South Sudan, arguing that what he referred to as the 'real' politics of the Horn of Africa should be understood as a political marketplace—a 'contemporary system of governance in which politics is conducted as the exchange of political services or loyalty for payment or licence'.[21] He argues:

> A generation ago, Africans saw a contest between modernization and customary, patrimonial forms of governance. Even though perversions of the latter were common, people were confident that these were deviations on the path of progress. Today, they

[18] Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity 2012).
[19] Mary Kaldor, "In Defence of New Wars," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* (2013).
[20] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war " *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004).
[21] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*, 16.

> implicitly understand that political markets are becoming dominant while state-building fades. [22]

This political marketplace model highlights a historical moment in which, within a somewhat Hobbesian anarchy created by a state of institutional dysfunction, the purely monetary aspects of elite politics overshadowed what he called 'principled politics' in the Horn of Africa, resulting in an intense, rent-seeking form of politics in which natural resources, externalisation, and incorporation into the global market seemingly dictate polities' fate.[23] 'The politics of ideas', wrote de Waal, 'will not return'.[24] What is left was an extreme form of the patrimonial management of decay, 'a politics of the belly with remarkably short time horizons, where rents structure social relations, help prevent intra-elite violence and assure buy-ins from other factions'.[25] In other words, what's left is a *Bayardian* 'gluttony'—a 'politics of eating' that imposes a singular 'follow-the-money' approach to understanding elites, power, and politics in Africa. In such an approach, patronage networks are often believed to be structured in terms of ethnic loyalties rather than various nationalisms.

STATE COLLAPSE

Another strand of the literature has focused on 'state collapse' to analyse the politics of elites and power in Africa. The 'failed state' paradigm has been widespread when it comes to examine the politics of Africa, to the extent that the 'Orthodox Failed State Narrative', as it is understood, has come to dominate both academic and policy discussions on the

[22] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*, 18.
[23] See also Alex de Waal's most recent article where he mobilized the concept of 'global war economy', Alex de Waal, "Hunger in global war economies: understanding the decline and return of famines," *Disasters*.
[24] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*, 209.
[25] Verhoeven, *Water, civilization, and power in Sudan : the political economy of military-Islamist state-building*, 27.

continent.[26] 'When the realities of illiberal politics and violent conflict that actually characterise large swathes of Africa are to be accounted for', argued Jones, Soares de Oliveria, and Verhoeven, this is primarily done in terms of the 'failed state' paradigm'.[27] As Hagmann and Hoene also argued, 'African states have occupied a prominent place in the discussion about state failure, collapse and reconstruction'.[28] This is not surprising if one looks at the latest Fragile States Index, in which 14 African countries are filling the top 20 places – South Sudan ranks 3rd.[29] Rotberg's *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* has had an enormous impact in the literature. 'Failed states', argued Rotberg, 'are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions. In most failed states, government troops battle armed revolts led by one or more rivals'.[30] The disappearance of nation-states, proposes Rotberg, is not only a possible reality, but irremediably leads to anarchy and a complete breakdown of society. Out of this breakdown, it is argued, emerge important threats to the international system so that, eventually, a failed state, unable to fulfil its functions, needs to be 'fixed'. Woodward has indeed explained that 'the basic argument underlying the concept of failed states is that weak, fragile, and failing states are the primary cause of threats to international peace and security since the end of the Cold War'.[31] In such an approach, 'the state', deplored Soares de Oliveira, 'is often broached in the guise of obituary rather than as a fertile area of inquiry'.[32] Of course, this focus on state failure did not take place in an epistemological vacuum, as too often assumed in the literature. Woodward demonstrated that the concept

[26] Harry Verhoeven, "The self-fulfilling prophecy of failed states: Somalia, state collapse and the Global War on Terror," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009).
[27] William Jones, Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, and Harry Verhoeven, *Africa's Illiberal State-Builders*, Oxford Department of International Development (Oxford 2013), 4.
[28] Tobias Hagmann and Markus V. Hoehne, "Failures of the state failure debate: Evidence from the Somali territories," *Journal of International Development* 21, no. 1 (2009): 43.
[29] Fragile States Index, 2024. The Fund for Peace, https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/
[30] Robert I. Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 5.
[31] Susan L. Woodward, *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 12.
[32] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea* (London: Hurst & Co, 2007).

of ‘failed state’ emerged after the end of the cold war, a critical juncture that was deemed by some as the ‘end of history’.[33] After the Cold War, the threat of Soviet politics disappeared, forcing the United States to elaborate a new strategy. The Global War on Terror gained traction, more particularly following the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and their alliance with Al-Qaeda, along with the idea that intervention was necessary to prevent states from collapsing. As Verhoeven argued, therefore, ‘the Orthodox Narrative is not an apolitical account, as many authors claim, but a discursive attempt to naturalise the hegemony of a very ideological political-economic project’.[34]

The ‘failed state’ approach is rooted in specific liberal assumptions. It assumes a unilinear, evolutionary and unidirectional causal path to modernity where all societies are converging towards the same state model, ‘a-historically’ and ‘context-independently’ defined following Weber’s rational-legal (institutional) domination. This perspective rests on the idea that the foundational institutions ensuring societal stability must inevitably take the form of the formal governance structures characteristic of Western societies. In such a liberal approach, ‘the problem of war as one of institutional lack'.[35] War, and violence more generally, are indeed perceived as ‘irrational [and] atavistic facets of the primeval era’.[36] In turn, the solution to war is more (liberal) intervention and more liberal state, as institutions are essential to prevent mass atrocities. South Sudan, together with Somalia, has long been a prototypical case of ‘state failure’ in Africa ; South Sudan, and its elites, have thus been understood through an emphasis on failure.

[33] Woodward, *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails*.
[34] Verhoeven, "The self-fulfilling prophecy of failed states: Somalia, state collapse and the Global War on Terror," 406.
[35] Sharath Srinivasan, *When peace kills politics : international intervention and unending wars in the Sudans* (London: Hurst & Company, 2021), 37.
[36] Sinisa Malesevic, "Did War Make Nation-States in the Balkans? Nationalisms, Wars and States in the 19th and Early 20th Century South East Europe," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 25, no. 3 (2012).

In truth, this thesis does not dismiss the importance of 'Big Men' or 'state failure' approaches to the analysis of elites and power in Sub-Saharan Africa. These approaches, when they do not entail caricaturising, have indeed shed light on critical political dynamics. In fact, the personalization of power, overwhelmingly present in the neo-patrimonial perspective, offers a particularly powerful lens to understand the politics of elites and power in Africa. As the introduction emphasized, social networks and personalities are central to the understanding of the rise and fall of the Equatorian nationalist project in South Sudan. However, the 'Big Men' approach, due to its overemphasis on patronage networks, constantly distorts political interactions as inherently corrupt, marginalising the nuanced historical and ideational complexities within which actors operate. The neo-patrimonial literature largely, and simplistically, treats the politics of elites and power as static, failing to examine variations in patronage practices across the continent, with few exceptions.[37] It also simplistically argued that 'political authority is achieved through control over resources and markets and personalized patronage networks'.[38] Such a narrow focus on personalised and transactional political relationships (both horizontal and vertical) negates the ideological driver of political actors, effectively stripping politicians of their ideational and collective agency, but also completely ignores the political and ideational environment within which actors operate. Similarly, the 'state failure' approach offers limited insight into the politics of elites and power, as it fixates on what the African state lacks rather than what it is, using a teleological model of state formation that assumes that states are converging towards the same liberal model. As Hagmann and Hoene argued, moreover, 'the

[37] See for instance Victor Levine, "African Patrimonial Regimes in Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18, no. 4 (1980).
[38] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*, 64.

discursive labels that are used most prominently in the state failure debate gloss over important differences between existing states rather than accounting for these difference'.[39] The framework also interprets violence as evidence of dysfunction rather than recognizing it as an integral component of deliberate political projects. Finally, the state failure approach does not allow for a thorough examination of how local elites 'see' and 'imagine' the political order, seen as mere agents of chaos.

This thesis proposes an alternative approach: focusing on a critical yet poorly understood political force that has fundamentally moulded political orders in Africa—one that has remained invisible, or at best barely visible. By focusing on nationalism as a political ideology, it argues for a novel understanding of how elites, power, and ideas relate to one another and how nationalism persists as a major force in the (un)building of political orders in Africa. The study of nationalism hence represents a *corrective* to the 'politics of the belly' and 'state failure' approaches, focusing on local elites, their agency, and their historically situated ideologies. Such an approach allows to situate elites in the political and ideological environment in which they operate without diminishing the importance of networks and personalized politics.

In making such an argument, this thesis necessarily engages with critical academic debates on the origins and development of nationalism—debates that, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, have profound implications for our understanding of elites, nationalism, and power. Modernist frameworks have dominated scholarly interpretations of nationalism in Africa, often obscuring alternative explanatory models. I begin by presenting the theory of scientific nationalism before examining modernist perspectives, then offer an alternative theoretical framework that centres power relations as constitutive elements of nationalist ideologies. This approach reveals how competing nationalisms

[39] Hagmann and Hoehne, "Failures of the state failure debate: Evidence from the Somali territories," 44.

operate not as a product of modernization processes, but as contingent dynamic forces shaped by complex power relations and driven by agents.

Scientific Nationalism, Primordialism, and Environmental Determinism

A nation was initially perceived as an enduring aspect of human social and political experience, rooted in timeless traditions. National identities were understood as having deep historical roots that preceded modern political formations. Nations, scholars argued, are fixed, organic, biological, innate, and natural; they simply 'exist' and must be 'discovered'. As Mylonas explained, within the framework of scientific nationalism, 'nations are simply a modern veneer upon a form of solidarity that has always or perennially existed'.[40] Indeed, in the first half of the 20th century, 'ethnically and racially defined collectivities were taken for granted and generally assumed to have an unquestionable, objective reality of their own, beyond their constituent members'.[41] Balibar effectively detailed this approach:

> The history of nations […] is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject. The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfilment of a 'project' stretching over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness, which the prejudices of the various historians will portray as more or less decisive—where, for example, are we to situate the origins of France? […]—but which, in any case, all fit into an identical pattern: that of the self-manifestation of the national personality.[42]

[40] Harris Mylonas and Maya Tudor, *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), Cambridge University Press, 19.
[41] Pierre L. van den Berghe, "Race and ethnicity: A sociobiological perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1, no. 4 (1978): 401.
[42] Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 86.

National identities are understood as 'ineffable and coercive, meaning that they are prior to social interactions and practices'.[43] Such a romantic understanding of what nations and nationalism are emerged in an epistemological environment dominated by scientism and evolutionary biology, which drastically influenced the birth of political geography, 'scientific' history, and the broader social sciences.[44] Authors who worked within the scientific nationalism framework included German romantics Johann von Herder and Johann Fichte, Clifford Geertz, and Edward Shils as well as Joshua Fishman and Donald Horowitz.[45] Moreover, environmental determinism occupied a prominent place in the academic literature during the first half of the 20th century. Rooted in a positivist worldview that fantasised about objectivity and scientism, it asserted that societies are solely (i.e., not mediated by any other factor) and causally determined by the objective geographical characteristics of their natural surroundings. Thus, geographical features played a significant role in shaping and supporting nationalist ideologies – southern nationalism is in this regard no exception - as they may be viewed as tangible evidence of an organic historical homogeneity.[46] As Bassin argued:

> The argument for environmental influences offered a very special appeal for nationalists, who appreciated how effectively it could help the popular imagination transform a notional construct into the desired vision of the nation as a natural and eternal or "primordial" entity.[47]

[43] Abdul Maajid Dar, "Revisiting key debates in the study of nationalism," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9, no. 1 (2022): 5.
[44] Richard Peet, "The Social Origins of Environmental Determinism," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75, no. 3 (1985).
[45] Dar, "Revisiting key debates in the study of nationalism."
[46] David H. Kaplan and Guntram H. Herb, "How geography shapes National Identities," *National Identities* 13, no. 4 (2011).
[47] Mark Bassin, "Politics from Nature: Environment, Ideology, and the Determinist Tradition," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, ed. John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal (London: Wiley & Sons, 2007), 18.

In turn:

> The studies of national history that came increasingly to dominate the agenda of academic historiography throughout the nineteenth century would characteristically begin with a chapter or section setting out the environmental context in which the epic tale would unfold, the implication being that this geographical arena itself was implicated in vital ways in the life-story of the nation.[48]

Modernist Visions of Nationalism: Structuralism, Modernisation, and the Nation-State

When exploring the ideology of nationalism, it is impossible to avoid addressing the influential modernist approaches to the origins of nations and nationalism, chief among them the works of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm. In the early 1980s, these authors reshaped how we think about nations and nationalism. Their work sparked a major shift in a field that had long been dominated by primordialist views. Since then, their ideas have become so central to the conversation that alternative perspectives have struggled to gain similar traction. As Mylonas and Tudor argued:

> The rich and interdisciplinary conversations which grew out of these works, as well as important world historical events that followed on during the next decade (the fall of the Berlin Wall, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the Rwandan genocide) sparked renewed interest in the study of nationalism in political science.[49]

The modernist vision of nations and nationalism is rooted in the tenets of the modernisation school, which dominated the social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s. This school asserts, as a basic tenet, that all societies around the world progress along similar stages—that there is one uniform route to development on the path towards Kantian

[48] Bassin, "Politics from Nature: Environment, Ideology, and the Determinist Tradition," 18.
[49] Mylonas and Tudor, *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities*, 52.

'modernity'. Teleology lay at the basis of modernism: 'the (necessary) idea of progress', wrote Vial, 'is woven into the fabric of modernity's social imaginary; we tend, often unthinkingly, to make use of the assumption that we are headed toward some final goal as a principle with which to organize an otherwise chaotic experience'.[50] Nations and nationalism, the modernist approaches argue, are not timeless and organic realities, nor are they contingent interpretations, but are historically the structural products—but not the producers—of such modernity. Modernists argue that nations even constitute 'the primary form of social and political identity in modernity [which] supersedes or subsumes other forms of identity such as gender, class, race, sexuality, etc'.[51] Nationalism would hence be an intrinsically modern phenomenon dating back to the late 18th century. Gellner presented such a perspective in *Nations and Nationalism*, framing nationalism as a necessary function in the transition from pre-industrial/agrarian societies to industrialism in Western Europe.[52] It was impossible, he argued, for nationalism to find its way in agrarian societies simply because the groups that comprised such societies developed distinct structural identities:

> In the agrarian order, to try to impose on all levels of society a universalized clerisy and a homogenised culture with centrally imposed norms, fortified by writing, would be an idle dream. […] It simply cannot be done.[53]

Importantly, industrialisation brought with it new kinds of technology, knowledge, and education, making mobility possible and giving way to an 'identity [that] is based instead on culture'.[54] 'The function of nationalism', explained Hirschi in his study of modernism,

[50] Theodore Vial, "Modernity and Teleology," in *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 224.
[51] Michaelangelo Anastasiou, *Nationalism and Hegemony: The Consolidation of the Nation in Social and Political Life* (London: Routeledge, 2022), 22.
[52] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd Edition ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).
[53] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 17.
[54] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, xxiv.

'was to identify an old or invented high culture with the state and all its citizens and, with this, to grant the egalitarianism needed for social mobility'.[55] In other words, industrialists required a skilled and educated workforce and sought to have the state provide this training in a manner that fostered a sense of shared community among its people. In the same year (i.e., 1983), Benedict Anderson published his acclaimed book *Imagined Communities*. While both Gellner and Anderson approached nationalism as the product of modernity, their historical accounts diverged. Anderson viewed the decline of traditional religion (i.e., secularization), not industrialisation per se, as the primary factor behind the emergence of nationalism.[56] The Enlightenment, Anderson argued, prompted the decline of religion's prevalence in Western European societies. In turn, secular publications became more prominent, the sacred aspect of dynastic rule faded, and time came to be perceived as homogenous and empty, 'creating a sense of the simultaneous activities of different persons within the same imagined community'.[57] Print-as-commodity and the decline of Latin, insisted Anderson, played a significant role in bringing people—even those who did not directly know one another—closer together:

> In pre-print Europe […] the diversity of spoken languages, those languages that for their speakers were the warp and whoof of their lives, was immense; so immense, indeed, that had print-capitalism sought to exploit each potential oral vernacular market, it would have remained a capitalism of petty proportions. But these varied idiolects were capable of being assembled, within definite limits, into print-

[55] Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011), 21.
[56] Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
[57] Astrid Noren-Nilsson, "Imagining Cambodia: Competing Nationalisms in the Second Kingdom (1993-)" (PhD University of Cambridge 2012).

> languages far fewer in number. […] These print-languages laid the bases for national consciousnesses.[58]

In short, 'the nation was created by a reading public'.[59] With print-capitalism, what Anderson dubbed 'administrative pilgrimages' played another major role in effecting national consciousness. Educated officials could physically move across the *national* territory, strengthening the link between individuals who would have hardly interacted directly with one another. Such pilgrimages gave place to a conviction that people were striving toward and attached to one bounded national community. Hobsbawm and Ranger's *Invention of Tradition*, despite not specifically addressing the theory of nations and nationalism, made an important contribution to the modernist literature. Amid the rapid societal changes brought about by modernisation, the authors argued that it had become necessary for societies to adapt their traditions and institutions to the evolving circumstances.[60] Nationalism is hence an instrument that inscribes societies within a much-needed *invented* historical narrative, thereby binding them together. 'Traditions which appear or claim to be old', argued Hobsbawm and Ranger, 'are often quite recent in origins and sometimes invented'.[61] It is therefore *modernity* that forced societies to *invent* traditions, among them the notions of nations and nationalism.[62]

The works of modernist scholars like Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm have proven to be essential to a sound understanding of nationalist projects around the world, not so much for their specific historical narratives but for their assertions that nations are fundamentally *constructed*, *invented*, and *imagined*. Thus, this thesis is in debt (to a

[58] Anderson, *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 43-44.
[59] Mylonas and Tudor, *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities*, 19.
[60] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[61] Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1.
[62] See for instance the detailed argument developed in Ali Al Youha, " Inventing the khalījī state: formation of political sovereignty in the Gulf" (University of Oxford, 2024).

certain extent) to the modernist school. Modernists indeed made use of the constructivist paradigm that had emerged across the social sciences, even though their substantialist perspective—insinuating that nations are *real*—should be cautiously examined, potentially representing what Hirschi dubbed an 'essentialist argument in disguise'.[63] This dealt a partial blow to scientific nationalism and the primordial approach to the 'nation'. As Gellner insisted:

> Nationalism is not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself. It is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures […]. Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality, for better or for worse and in general an inescapable one.[64]

Combatting primordial assertions opened vast new areas of research and analysis on the nature of nations and the dynamics of nationalism, made clearly evident by the expansion of academic journals focused on nations and nationalism in the 1990s.

Neither Primordialism nor Modernism: Nationalism, Power, and the 'Dominant Other'

This thesis takes issue with and confronts both scientific nationalism and modernism, specifically their understandings of nationalism and its interaction with power and elites. It argues for a political understanding of nationalism rooted in the epistemological premise of postmodernism—one in which nationalism is apprehended as a contingent

[63] Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, 27.
[64] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 48-49.

'ideology that promotes the interests of a particular nation',[65] rooted within power structures and social relations, a political force mobilised for specific (generally exclusionary) elite-led political projects. This perspective allows for an in-depth understanding of the (un)making of nationalist projects that goes beyond primordial or modernist narratives projected by elites and their imaginations.

The Problem with Modernism: Africa and the 'Paradigm of Failure'

The dominant modernist approach to nationalism contains fundamental flaws, and the literature on nationalism in Africa serves as a quintessential illustration of these theoretical and empirical shortcomings.[66] The conventional state-centric modernist historiography tends to oversimplify nationalism in Africa as the product of a modernising phenomenon that gave way to nation-states in the wake of decolonial demands: a 'conventional narrative of growing African nationalism triumphing over stolid colonialism'.[67] By adopting the nation-state model in the 1950s and 1960s, Africans simultaneously would have embraced—or discovered—the universal character of modernisation. As Miescher, Bloom, and Manuh argued, 'in the early years of independence, the discourse of modernization played a central role in imagining a postcolonial African future'.[68] Independence, they continued, 'was couched within a preexisting rhetoric of African development proclaiming a new urgency of nation building already set in motion during the 1950s and 1960s'.[69]

---

[65] Definition in Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism : Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 8.
[66] Miles Larmer and Jean Sebastian Lecocq, "Historicising Nationalism in Africa," *Nations and nationalism* 24, no. 4 (2018).
[67] Jost Dülffer and Marc Frey, *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 111.
[68] Peter J. Bloom, Stephan F. Miescher, and Takyiwaa Manuh, *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1.
[69] Bloom, Miescher, and Manuh, *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa*, 1.

The historiography insists on portraying nationalist leaders as modern heroes and the *modern* nation-states that they represented: Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Sylvanus Olympio of Togo, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, etc. Such nationalisms, as they inscribed themselves within the broader ideology of Pan-Africanism (i.e., a collaborative struggle) and merged themselves with state-building and modernisation processes, would become 'official' nationalisms—quintessential examples of structural modernity.[70] Nationalist leaders would go on to form a club, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which decided (by adopting the *uti possidetis* principle) that Africa had embraced *modernity* by creating its nation-states and that borders need not be contested any longer. 'A generation of historians', Larmer and Lecocq argued, 'played a vital legitimising role in providing usable pasts for the dozens of new nations-states under construction'.[71] National consciousness thus emerged (as the modernist approach goes) first as the structural product or function of modernisation processes across the continent before being projected onto nation-states. From an *Andersonian* perspective, historians insisted on the radio (and more broadly the media) as an important new technology in the genesis of national consciousness in Africa.[72] Any internal contestation was to be labelled anti-modern parochialism, ethnic strife, or provincialism, framed within a narrative of 'rebellion' by both nationalist leaders and external observers.[73]

However, 'by the 1970s, the optimism regarding the capacity of African states to build nations from above had dissipated'.[74] In fact, it is the very relationship between modernity

[70] Larmer and Lecocq, "Historicising Nationalism in Africa."
[71] Larmer and Lecocq, "Historicising Nationalism in Africa," 903.
[72] Peter Brooke, "Radio in Africa: Past and Present," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 36, no. 1 (2024); Victoria Ellen Smith, "Radio and the Nation: histories of broadcasting, conflict and race in Southern Africa," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 55, no. 2 (2021).
[73] See for instance the debate on the nation and federalism in Kenya at independence reported in David M. Anderson, "'Yours in Struggle for Majimbo'. Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955-64," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005).
[74] Larmer and Lecocq, "Historicising Nationalism in Africa," 904.

and Africa that garnered critical re-examination. This re-examination engendered a neo-patrimonial shift in African politics, as Africa, some argued, simply 'failed' at modernisation. The diffusionist school argued that nationalism had been understood as too much of a top-down process; thus, it failed to find roots in African societies. The *invented* and *false* character of African nations became overemphasised in the literature. Such a vision supported Vaughan's remark that 'by some accounts Africa seems to have a troubled relationship with the modern world'.[75] This trouble represented a 'paradigm of failure'—inherent to the place of teleology in *modernity*—that would pervade not only the study of nationalism across the continent but also studies of state-building, economic development, and peace-making in Africa.

***

Such a theoretical understanding of nationalism in Africa is fundamentally erroneous, leading to its dismissal in the contemporary literature on African politics. Most notably, critiques of modernist approaches to nationalism have questioned the historical veracity of the modernist paradigm itself. Gorski, in a landmark article, argued that the 'modernist position rests on a distorted—one might even say caricatured—picture of early modern political culture, one which *under*states the degree of nationalism during this period'.[76] It is hence impossible to argue, wrote Gorski, 'that there were no truly nationalist discourses and no fully nationalist politics until the French Revolution'.[77] More recently, Hirschi seriously challenged the 'dominant view among historians and sociologists that nationalism is to be seen as a uniquely modern phenomenon established by

[75] Megan Vaughan, "Africa and the Birth of the Modern World," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (2006): 143.
[76] Philip Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism," *The American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 5 (2000): 1456.
[77] Gorski, "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism," 1456.

industrialisation and mass communication in the nineteenth century'.[78] Second, while the works of Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm, among other modernists, claim to elucidate the historical processes behind the origins of nations, they in truth offer limited insights that contribute to an understanding of *nationalism* as an evolving idea and ideology.[79] The two main questions that modernists deem worth answering are: 'What is the nation?'; and 'How did the nation come to be?'[80] The construction and origin of nations—or, more precisely, of *nationhood*—is presented as a structural passive outcome, the drivers of which are processes of modernisation. *Nationhood* is hence a subconscious construct that would have emerged alongside industrialisation, seriously undermining the agency of elites in the process.[81] *Nationalism* is understood by modernists as a *feeling* of belonging—a definition in fact closer to *national consciousness*. However, such a definition of nationalism is seemingly indistinguishable from that of *nationhood*. Thus, modernists do not 'tackle nationalism as a set of ideas or a sort of philosophy, but rather as a sociocultural mechanism ensuring a degree of cultural uniformity within a state'.[82] The lack of a clear analytical distinction between *nationhood* and *nationalism*, which is overwhelmingly evident in the historiography on African nationalism, represents a significant conceptual flaw in the literature. Nationhood, nation-making, and nationalism are distinct phenomena, each operating through different mechanisms; they are far more than mere interchangeable products of the same forces. In examining the seminal works of Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm, a persistent question remains unanswered: What exactly constitutes nationalism as an idea? This conceptual blind spot becomes

[78] Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, 1.
[79] Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1996).
[80] Anastasiou, *Nationalism and Hegemony: The Consolidation of the Nation in Social and Political Life* 24.
[81] Thomas Jeffrey Miley, "The nation as hegemonic project," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 2 (2018).
[82] Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, 22.

particularly problematic when attempting, as this thesis does, to understand the manifestations of nationalism as an ideology in Africa.

Moreover, the teleological obsession of modernism for the 'nation-state' as the *natural* embodiment of progress and modernity is severely hindering our understanding of nationalism in Africa. While nationalism exists both within and beyond state boundaries, the academic literature, heavily influenced by modernist perspectives, has traditionally classified identities developing within states as merely 'ethnic' or 'regional' rather than recognizing their potential nationalist character. Ethnicity has thus become a symbol of Africa's perceived inability to fully embrace modernity and the nation-state model—an approach rooted in Anthony Smith's teleological assertation that 'nations were gradually or discontinuously formed on the basis of preexisting ethnie and ethnic ties, so that it became a question of "transforming" ethnic into national ties and sentiments through processes of mobilization, territorialization and politicization'.[83] This is not to say that ethnicity and nations never overlap or that all expressions of ethnicity should be automatically dismissed—did Lecocq not argue in his study of Mali that 'the choice between the terms "ethnic group" or "nation" sometimes seems arbitrary'?[84] Both are indeed what Anderson called an 'imagined community'. The nation, Anderson argued, should be understood as 'inherently limited and sovereign', emphasising like Breuilly (who insisted on the notion of sovereignty) the importance of aligning the political with the national.[85] Larmer and Lecocq asserted that, in contrast to ethnicity, 'this Andersonian definition makes the nation a community aspiring to political independence'.[86] It would be more accurate, however, to replace 'political independence' with 'political autonomy';

[83] Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
[84] Jean Sebastian Lecocq, *Disputed desert decolonisation, competing nationalisms and Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 25.
[85] Anderson, *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, 3; John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).p.3.
[86] Larmer and Lecocq, "Historicising Nationalism in Africa," 895.

while all nationalist projects seek to establish their own political institutions, these may take forms other than independent statehood.[87]

Finally, the structuralist assumptions of modernist theory treat the emergence of nations—including those in Africa—as an inevitable, value-neutral 'destiny' of modernisation processes. However, Cooper opened an important door when studying the contested period of decolonisation in French Africa, arguing that:

> Ideas of political emancipation were more diverse than the claim to a singular state for each nation or people: political leaders were trying to imagine for themselves different political forms that would turn the inequalities of colonial empire into something else.[88]

Cooper, effectively looking at African elites as *agents*, demonstrated that nationalism was not a structural inevitability but merely one idea among many competing perspectives.[89] Historians have since deconstructed the organic 'nationalist histories' long perpetuated by academics and political leaders across Africa, pushing the field towards a more nuanced array of 'multiple possibilities' and demonstrating how contested the nationalist

[87] Focusing on ethnicity as an analytical approach does not represent this thesis's main framework for explaining South Sudan's political landscape because it obscures, rather than illuminates, the competing and contested visions of the nation—and their historical processes of formation—that drive political dynamics in the country. Rather than engaging with these substantive nationalist contestations, narrow ethnic approaches typically reduce political dynamics to primordial group loyalties and their instrumental manipulation within neo-patrimonial structures. Such frameworks, which have, as the introduction showed, been extensively employed to understand the Dinka-Nuer divide and the South Sudanese civil war, fundamentally mischaracterize the nature of South Sudanese politics by treating them as competition between bounded ethnic groups, when they are more accurately understood as debates over what kind of nation(s) should emerge and who should belong to them. As Larmer and Lecocq argued, 'the continuing inability or unwillingness of many social scientists to question or interrogate the role of nationalism in social or military conflict led to the characterisation of virtually all such conflicts as 'ethnic'' (p.906). As already established in the introduction, the Equatorian project developed in the following chapters represents an exemplary case for highlighting the enduring relevance of competing nationalisms in structuring the politics of elite competition in South Sudan—a project that ethnic approaches are unable to identify or adequately explore.

[88] Dülffer and Frey, *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, 110.

[89] It is important to note that authors like James Coleman had already, in the 1960s, emphasized such processes of elites and power in the case of Nigeria. See James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958); Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

ideologies projected by some leaders were. For instance, Larmer's study revealed that the opposition to the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia was greater than what is suggested by the historiography.[90] Lecocq scrutinised the relationship between Malian nationalism and the Tamasheq society in northern Mali at the time of independence to showcase how competing nationalisms were debated in both *Soudan Français* and post-colonial Mali, demonstrating the nationalists' 'real lack of power in the North'.[91] Larmer and Kennes' focus on the Katangese Gendarmes beyond the Congolese nation in post-colonial Central Africa is also a worthwhile reminder that the idea of an independent Katanga was real and 'the gendarmes' identification with "Katanga" as a nation-state remained central to their self-identification and activities'.[92] Allman, in her study of Asante Nationalism in Ghana during the independence era, illuminated a little-known debate surrounding Kwame Nkrumah, who was arguably the most influential pan-Africanist of his time, and his politics of unity.[93] Through meticulous archival research, Allman depicted the National Liberation Movement's efforts to advocate for decentralisation and self-determination between 1954 and 1957, offering a new critical perspective on the sources of power behind Ghanaian nationalism. Skinner also highlighted how Togoland as an imagined community persisted in the post-colonial period despite the project to claim self-determination, led by the Ablɔdɛ movement, ultimately failing.[94] Adebanwi, in his study of the media in Nigeria, demonstrated how the idea of the Nigerian nation as a 'grand narrative' has been contested and (re)appropriated by various groups since independence.[95] More recently, Awenengo

[90] Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia*.
[91] Lecocq, *Disputed desert decolonisation, competing nationalisms and Tuareg rebellions in northern Mali*.
[92] Erik Kennes and Miles Larmer, *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa* (Bloomington, UNITED STATES: Indiana University Press, 2016), 2.
[93] Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine : Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana*.
[94] Kate Skinner, *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland: Literacy, Politics and Nationalism, 1914–2014*, African Studies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[95] Wale Adebanwi, *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, (Boydell & Brewer, 2016).

Dalberto's research on the 'Casamance question' in Senegal offered a compelling new perspective on Leopold Senghor's conception of the nation. She demonstrated how, prior to independence, the idea of an autonomous Casamance, a region in southern Senegal, emerged as a potential imaginary not only among Casamance elites but also among French administrators.[96] The autonomy of Casamance was, she argued, a genuine project that ultimately never materialised. The nationalist idea persisted over time, ultimately culminating in a violent conflict in 1983. What all these examples demonstrate is that nationalism is not a structural mechanism but an idea with which some *agents* can attempt to (re)shape political orders in Africa.

Beyond Modernism: A Critical Approach to Nationalism

Both scientific nationalism and modernism struggle to adequately address the question of *power* in their study of nationalism.[97] By portraying nations as natural and organic entities, primordial theories of nationalism leave no room for political projects or collective agency. While modernist theories acknowledge nations and nationalism as constructed phenomena, they attribute this construction—viewed as *real*—to structural forces rather than addressing the identity, agency, and goal of nationalists themselves and their embeddedness in a web of power relations; a technocratic nationalism that limits the study of nationalism and power in South Sudan. It is in fact striking, as Miley suggested,

[96] Awenengo Dalberto, *L'idée de la Casamance autonome*.

[97] Note that Marxist approaches to nationalism, which enjoyed influence in the immediate post-colonial period, soon fell into disuse. Their decline stemmed largely from the rigid universalism embedded within historical materialism, which assumes a unique, linear, and teleological path towards modernization and transformation. Chatterjee, in his landmark book 'The Nation and His Fragments', subsequently emphasized that Marxist theories of nationalism, just like liberal state-building approaches, treat non-Western nationalisms as merely imitative, or 'derivative', of European models. In that view, Africa and other post-colonial societies are reduced to passive recipients of Western ideas, a perspective that readily frames the 'failure' of nationalism in Africa—particularly in its implementation—as previously discussed in this chapter. Moreover, an excessive focus on class-based and material determinism to account for political outcomes risks reducing complex historical processes to economic inevitabilities, thereby neglecting the cultural, symbolic, and ideological forces that often drive political mobilization and shape the trajectory of nationalist projects in Africa.

that both primordial and modernist theories ignore 'the ways in which all appeals to national community and national belonging are embedded within concrete struggles to reproduce or transform existing constellations of power'.[98] Breuilly advanced this same argument in his landmark book *Nationalism and the State*:

> Nationalism is treated as a state of mind, as the expression of national consciousness, as a political doctrine elaborated by intellectuals. Probably the most commonly held assumption [...] is that nationalism arises ultimately from some sort of national identity or that it is the search for such an identity. […] This is a very misleading idea. […] The fundamental point is that nationalism is, above and beyond all else, about politics and that politics is power.[99]

As such, behind narratives of organic or structural nations lurks power struggles that 'often tell us more about the messenger than about the on-the-ground realities'.[100] 'Nationalism', argued Brubaker, 'is not engendered by nations'; it is rather 'produced—or better, it is induced—by *political fields* of particular kind'.[101] A study of nationalism, therefore, cannot be removed from a study of politics. Or, as Spencer argued in his study of elites in Sri Lanka, 'a discussion of nationalism cannot avoid a discussion of power'.[102] Postmodernist approaches, by emphasising the discursively constructed and relational nature of reality, have proven to be extremely valuable when it comes to moving beyond realist and substantialist approaches.[103] Indeed, a sound understanding of nationalism can emerge through a focus on power relations and the ways in which they shape and are shaped by elites and discourses.[104] Nations are not a real phenomenon, as modernists

[98] Miley, "The nation as hegemonic project," 183.
[99] Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 1.
[100] Verhoeven, *Water, civilization, and power in Sudan : the political economy of military-Islamist state-building*, 24.
[101] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 17.
[102] Nugent and Shore, *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, 92.
[103] Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*.
[104] Adebanwi, *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning*.

claimed via their dubious notion of constructivism. Nationalism, therefore, is not the expression of a preexisting entity. Thus, it is imperative to have a distinct understanding of nationalism that separates it from the notions of *nationhood* and *nation-state*. As Brubaker insisted in his study of nationalism in Central Europe, 'nationalism can and should be understood without invoking "nations" as substantial entities'.[105]

Nationalism is a historically situated and inherently relational ideology emerging from relations of power, domination, and marginalisation (or perceptions of such relations); it is not merely the result of a neutral structural process stemming from technological or economic modernisation.[106] 'Whose nationalism?' and 'who gets what, when, how' should be central questions.[107] What this approach implies is that nationalist projects, as they are fundamentally about power, hegemony, and exclusion, create winners and losers; in contrast to the 'origins of nationalism', what matters most is thus the means by which nationalism is articulated and mobilised by specific agents and their interactions with power structures in attempts to mould political orders. In this way, an incisive understanding of nationalism emerges through an examination of power relations with a 'dominant other'. The hegemony of the 'other' represents the primary driver behind the emergence and evolution of nationalist ideologies, representing what Delannoi called the 'oppositional heritage of nationalism'.[108] Therefore, as Jaffrelot cogently argued, nationalism is fundamentally 'an ideology based on a strategy of stigmatization and emulation of a dominant Other'.[109] It is precisely by focusing on 'ressentiment', a term coined by Friedriech Nietzsche, that Greenfeld developed her own understanding of

[105] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 7.
[106] Christophe Jaffrelot, *For a theory of nationalism*, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Sciences Po (June 2003).
[107] Noren-Nilsson, "Imagining Cambodia: Competing Nationalisms in the Second Kingdom (1993-)."
[108] Gil Delannoi, "Le Nationalisme et la Catalyse Ideologique," in *Nations et Nationalismes*, ed. Serge Cordellier and Elizabeth Poisson (Paris: La découverte 1995).
[109] Jaffrelot, *For a theory of nationalism*, 107.

nationalism.[110] Ressentiment refers to a resentful, vengeful, and moralising attitude that arises when an individual or group feels powerless, inferior, or wronged by others. Greenfeld thus views nationalism as an expression, or ideology, of the ressentiment dynamic that Nietzsche diagnosed. Such a dynamic is intrinsically *contingent*; it happens (or it doesn't happen)—it does not develop.[111] While *linearity* and *consolidation* tend to be overwhelmingly present in the nationalist literature,[112] nationalist ideas are rather 'conjuncturally fluctuating',[113] constantly contested, (re)imagined, (re)negotiated, and (re)directed in power settings.

NATIONALISM, HEGEMONY, AND COUNTER-HEGEMONY

The critical approach to nationalism helps to explain how elites, power, and nationalism are interlinked. While the empirical chapters certainly emphasise the 'politics of patronage' and the importance of rent-seeking behaviours among political elites, this research goes beyond reductive frameworks and highlights the role of imagination in producing and reproducing power relations. This thesis foregrounds nationalism as an elite-driven ideology capable of serving as the backbone of radical political projects aimed at reconfiguring both state-society relations and patron-client relations—something that the literature has, most of the time, ignored. Nationalist projects have been central in Africa, often serving as vehicles for sweeping political transformations. At the heart of these processes lies elite coalition-building and fragmentation, as political actors maneuver to consolidate power. Nationalism operates both as a tool of liberation and an instrument of domination, making hegemonic nationalist projects, their backlashes, and

[110] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992).
[111] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*.
[112] See for instance Lynch, *I say to you : ethnic politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya*.
[113] Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*.p .17

the shifting alliances of elites crucial to understanding conflicts, sovereignty, and legitimacy. Nationalist imaginations have also been crucial for elites to (un)build states and project ideas of civilisation. Nationalist discourses are hence not just rhetorical flourishes; they actively shape political realities.

Skewed and deterministic historical narratives, ideas of autochthony, discourses of salvation, and mythical (re)constructions of ancient greatness have all been tools used to (un)build nationalist projects, assert domination, reconfigure political authority, reshape the political economy, and legitimise subjugation or state capture. These discursive tools, most of the time cloaked in deterministic or modernist narratives, serve to assert dominance, reshape political authority, restructure the political landscape, and legitimize both inclusion and exclusion within the 'nation'. Far from strictly teleological processes, nationalist projects wax and wane, embedded in power relations and political alliances. France, for instance, appears to be not the most advanced *nation-state* in the world, as often assumed in the literature. Instead of being the structural, neutral outcome of modernisation, France is rather as an imperial project driven by a specific nationalist project emerging from Paris and expanding into what is now called 'the province'. The history of French nationalism is deeply complex, non-linear, and marred with power struggles, violent marginalization, and profound contestation from the margins, for instance Bretagne, Pays Basque, or Alsace. Nationalist revolutionary ideals have been, as Tilly demonstrated in famous sociological study of Vendée, constantly contested and (re)negotiated; competing nationalist projects have waxed and waned until this day.[114] French nationalism is hence fundamentally *contested*, *unfinished,* and constantly embedded in power relations. Similarly, Narendra Modi's brand of nationalism represents not some inevitable byproduct of India's modernization, but rather a calculated political

[114] Charles Tilly, *The Vendee: A Sociological Analysis of the Counter-Revolution of 1793* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1964).

strategy that weaponizes Hindu identity to capture state institutions and reshape state-society relations in India, a project that, as Jaffrelot has argued, 'equates the majoritarian community with the nation and relegates Muslims and Christians to second-class citizens'.[115] Using the examples of France and India demonstrates that Africa, and more generally post-colonial societies, do not fundamentally differ from Western Europe; something that most modernists have failed to acknowledge.

All nationalist projects – progressive or not - have been met with resistance, creating new political fault lines and sources of power. As postmodernists argued, power is not absolute; it can be challenged by determined agents. The literature, which has overwhelmingly focused on the triumph of some dominant imaginaries, has too often ignored the (sometimes revolutionary) backlash that they inevitably create. As Larmer argued with regard to early post-colonial historical accounts, 'what was judged to be historically important were the acts, dilemmas and ideas of the great men who constructed those nations, judged according to their effectiveness in playing an ascribed role in this unilinear historical trajectory'.[116] While elites craft and coalesce around their own narrative to build counter-hegemony, their creative efforts are restricted by their need to rely on the idea deployed by the very hegemonic project against which they fight; as Foucault argued, 'resistance […] relies upon the situation against which it struggles'.[117] Competing nationalisms thus rely upon and borrow from one another to such an extent that the idea of 'liberation' from a dominant 'other' invariably manifests through a nationalist project.

It is this dialectic, I argue, that has been key driver of political change in post-colonial Africa. Political elites play an immense role within the dialectic; it is indeed the

[115] Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2021), 5.
[116] Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia*, 1.
[117] Cited in Jaffrelot, *For a theory of nationalism*, 32.

coalescing and fragmenting of elites that make and unmake nationalist projects. Elites are indeed particularly 'agentive', given their privileged access to economic, social, and cultural resources.[118] How elites situate themselves in this dialectic over time and how competing nationalisms practically interact with one another is precisely at the heart of this research. Elites are indeed social individuals constructed through social relationships, networks, and interactions. Therefore, competing nationalisms are far from a clear-cut opposition between two homogenous projects; they are instead a complex, contested terrain of negotiation, tension, and strategic repositioning. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic nationalist projects must hence be analyzed both internally — in terms of how boundaries and identities are constructed — and externally, through inter-group dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This chapter critically examined existing approaches to understanding elites and power in Sub-Saharan Africa, revealing the significant limitations of dominant theoretical frameworks. The prevailing narratives of 'Big Men' politics and state failure have obscured the crucial role of nationalism as a dynamic political force. Moreover, these approaches have systematically stripped political actors of their ideological agency, reducing them to either transactional rent-seekers or victims of institutional dysfunction. By proposing a novel perspective that centres nationalism, power relations, and elite agency, this chapter aimed to offer a new perspective. The critique of primordial and modernist approaches to nationalism demonstrated the need for a more nuanced understanding of nationalism. Nationalism is not a predetermined, structural outcome of modernization, nor is it simply an organic, timeless phenomenon. Instead, it is a contingent ideology deeply embedded in power relations, shaped by the interactions

[118] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awọ́lọ́wọ̀ and corporate agency*.

between elites, their perceptions of domination, and their political projects. Nationalism is hence an active political ideology rather than a passive structural outcome, and elites play a critical role in constructing and contesting nationalist narratives. As the following chapters explore, ambiguity, power, material interests, and evolving narratives of solidarity are all at the centre of the politics of competing nationalisms in post-independence South Sudan. However, it is first important to historicise the Equatorian project in order to understand the structural legacies that the three governors inherited.

Chapter 2

GENESIS OF AN IDEA: THE MAKING OF EQUATORIA AND THE POLITICS OF DISTINCTION

At the beginning of the 1980s, elites hailing from the Equatoria region of Southern Sudan created the Equatoria Intellectual Committee (EIC), a group aiming to promote the idea of Equatoria in Southern Sudan. The group and its political ideology – federalism – would drastically impact the politics of South(ern) Sudan for the next five decades, forming a major political idea that would become embedded in important power struggles and 'reworked, commemorated and given new meanings' over time.[1] Where did the idea of Equatorian nationalism come from? What made Equatoria distinct in Southern Sudan? If Equatorian nationalism is a contingent idea, who constructed it and why? This chapter

[1] Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger, *Violence & Memory : One Hundred Years in the "Dark Forests" of Matabeleland.* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 19.

traces the historical context in which Equatorian nationalism, and its associated elites, emerged as a powerful political force in the 1970s and 1980s, exploring the contingent interplay between elite aspirations, political power, and competing nationalisms in post-colonial Southern Sudan. This is a historical chapter whose primary aim is to offer important political and ideological background with which to understand the three governors of post-independence South Sudan and their endeavours, which drew upon existing imaginaries, constructions, and specific aspirations inherited from the past. This chapter is moreover important, as, despite its historical significance, Equatorian nationalism in the 1980s has received minimal attention in the literature, with scholars often dismissing it as 'peripheral' to the linear and teleological history of Southern nationalism.

This chapter shows that although Equatoria is an artificial and highly diverse geographical construct created by colonial authorities, it was in the late 1970s that Equatorian nationalism, an elite-dominated project, emerged as a significant political ideology, challenging the primacy of Southern nationalism in Sudan. Equatoria and its associated nationalist ideology are the product of *ressentiment*, opportunistic encounters, political decisions, and specific productions of knowledge that aimed to create a *distinction* between Equatorian elites and others. Forged against the backdrop of the 1972 Addis Ababa peace agreement, this ideology sought to unite the disparate groups within Equatoria in response to fears of political marginalization by the Dinka elites. Equatorian elites, notably through the EIC, began emphasizing their similarities to infuse a sense of solidarity and develop a pan-Equatorian sensibility to compete for power against other groups in southern Sudan. With this in mind, this chapter reveals how and why Equatoria's enduring image as a fertile agricultural frontier at the crossroads of central Africa – an imagined geography that originated with Ottoman imperial ambitions and continued with

successive political projects – has profoundly influenced Southern Sudanese politics, discourses about nationalism(s), and the position of Equatorian elites in the Southern Sudanese political order. Competing nationalisms, it shows, were at the heart of dynamics that shaped the Sudanese political order. However, such nationalisms were far from ideologically coherent, waxed and waned, and were constantly negotiated over time, depending on context, victories, individual interests, and political alliances. These aspects are crucial to understanding Equatorian elites' approach to power, liberation, memory, and competing nationalisms in post-independence South Sudan.

THE MAKING OF A GEOGRAPHICAL IDEA

Looking for the Nile

The history of pre-colonial Equatoria is intricately intertwined with the frenetic pursuit for the Nile and its sources by imperial authorities, the search for commercial routes to implement the 'imperialism of free trade', scientific discoveries, and the 'scramble for Africa' in the 19th century. The first accounts of the Bahr el Jebel region, situated in the central and southern regions of contemporary South Sudan, came from European travellers and missionaries in the 19th century. The land south of the *Sudd* wetlands, one of the 'most formidable natural obstacles in the world',[2] was deemed 'a harsh, inhospitable environment' by many.[3] However, despite being extremely difficult to reach, villages such as Gondokoro, Lado, and Wadelai developed into trading posts – the *zara'ib* – for merchants traveling from Zanzibar or Khartoum to Darfur or Congo.[4] The Turko-Egyptian authorities quickly demonstrated their interest in securing the *Bahr el Jebel* basin, through which the Nile flows, driven by their desire for territorial expansion in

[2] Robert O. Collins, *A history of modern Sudan* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.
[3] Richard Gray, *A history of the Southern Sudan, 1839-1889* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 11.
[4] Naomi Ruth Pendle, *Spiritual Contestations - the Violence of Peace in South Sudan* (Woodbridge, UNITED KINGDOM: Boydell & Brewer, Limited, 2023).

Africa and the strong belief that Egypt was to undergo a modernist agricultural revolution and become a hydraulic civilization.[5] In 1868, Nubar Pasha, then Foreign Minister of Egypt, insisted, 'I think it a good idea to establish stations between Gondokoro and the lakes; to police out our savage tribes; to find the means of opening up transport'.[6] Samuel Baker, an explorer-turned-politician contracted by Egypt, mentioned the following in his first report to the Khedive Ismail: 'as the prosperity of all Egypt depends on the Nile, it has become indispensable to annex for Egypt the two lakes from which it takes its source'.[7] Baker, after a long but successful expedition, established the Equatoria region in 1871, becoming its first Governor-General. Equatoria became one of the 11 *Mudiriyah* – administrative divisions – of what was known as the Turkiya regime, the first empire to claim sovereignty over these hinterlands. While the Equatoria *Mudiriyah,* which extended, on paper, into contemporary Uganda and Congo, was geographically different from what is now known as the Equatoria region of independent South Sudan, it nonetheless offered an important historical anchor for the construction of contemporary Equatorian nationalism.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that Egypt exerted sovereignty over the area. Not only was the modern concept of sovereignty not legally or philosophically established, but, aside from a few trading posts, the area lacked effective governance. Political projects beyond economic interest were not the objective of the Turkiya at the time, as the region was at the very margins of the empire. In fact, the *Bahr el Jebel* basin was not intended to be governed, either by traders or explorers, but rather served as a reservoir for slaves and ivory, a political geography of plunder that endured for decades. The Turko-Egyptian government was not in control of any territory beyond some thin

[5] Verhoeven, *Water, civilization, and power in Sudan : the political economy of military-Islamist state-building*.
[6] John O. Udal, *The Nile in darkness* (Wilby, Norwich: M. Russell, 1998), 113.
[7] Gray, *A history of the Southern Sudan, 1839-1889*, 88.

administrative islands from whence slave raids were organized.[8] The region also drew the interest of affluent Arab traders, who sought to obtain ivory and slaves. Baker and other European explorers were far from the first outsiders to 'discover' and attempt to 'control' the Bahr el Jebel area, despite the need to project a Stanleyan narrative, one that features a lone hero venturing into 'uncharted territory', to Western audiences. In fact, the traders were more organized, better equipped, and more locally rooted than the Egyptian troops, with the former possessing greater manpower and firearms than the latter.

The Bari and Hegemony

At the time of the Turkiya, the Bari was the largest group living along the *Bahr el Jebel* river, particularly in the localities of Sindiru, Gondokoro, and Bilinyang. They dominated an area also inhabited by the Kuku, the Kakwa, and the Mundari, among others. Identity in this period should be cautiously examined because precolonial African ethnicities, as argued by Lynch, 'were characterized by relatively high levels of fluidity and permeability'.[9] In fact, in Equatoria, as Leonardi suggests, 'ethnicity seems to have been linked to place rather than to descent, with stories of people moving from Lugbara to Nyangwara to Mundari, so that a "tribe" like the Mundari was made up of various groups of immigrants to a particular territory'.[10] While alliances were forged and dissolved, there was no conscious endeavour to cultivate a shared pan-Equatorian identity. George Bureng, a Bari academic, politician, and intellectual, estimates the arrival of the Bari in the Bahr el Jebel basin to be around 1100 or 1200 AD, although precise dating remains uncertain and political.[11] The 'myth of origin' mentions that the Bekat clan of the Bari

[8] Sennesael and Verhoeven, "Breaking from the past? Environmental narratives, logics of power, and the (re)production of food insecurity in South Sudan."
[9] Lynch, *I say to you : ethnic politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya*, 32.
[10] Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan : histories of chiefship, community & state*, Eastern Africa series, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2013), 23.
[11] Bureng G. V. Nyombe, *Some aspects of Bari history : a comparative linguistic and oral tradition reconstruction* (Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press, 2007).

had rainmaking power and that Yo'yok was the common ancestor who received such power from the God of Heaven.[12] The Bari, originally pastoralists like the Dinka and Nuer tribes living north of Equatoria, gradually shifted their focus toward farming. Over time, they came to emphasize their shift to agriculture as a mark of cultural and modern progress, a way to differentiate themselves from the Dinka and Nuer. However, this transition to 'farming culture' was not entirely voluntary nor the result of so-called 'modernity'. Rather, historical records suggest that 'cattle populations […] declined over the last two centuries, making access to farming land, particularly near the fertile Nile banks and islands, more valued and contested'.[13] The Bari both fought against and formed closed alliances with Baker and traders in the area when necessary, leading Baker to assert that the Baris were 'a tribe of intractable savages'[14]; a quote that Bari historiography has since made sure to hide. As Leonardi suggests, 'relations were more complex than the histories of passive victimhood have suggested'.[15]

The Bari never developed into a cohesive and powerful kingdom, unlike the Azande, Buganda, and Bunyoro-Kitara kingdoms in the region, which would facilitate the emergence of a territory-based Equatorian identity decades later. Despite occasional successes in centralizing authority under rain kings, a sustainable dynasty failed to take root.[16] Competition within different Bari groups created rival factions, and political power moved from Sindiru to Gondokoro and Bilinyang. Baker, in his memoir, observed that 'although the people who inhabited this district were all Baris, there was no cohesion among them – they were divided into numerous small chiefdoms'.[17] The cluster of

[12] Nyombe, *Some aspects of Bari history : a comparative linguistic and oral tradition reconstruction*, 73.
[13] Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan : histories of chiefship, community & state*, 23.
[14] Samuel Baker, *Ismailïa: a narrative of the expediton to Central Africa for the suppression of the slave trade.* (New York Harper & Brothers, 1874), 132.
[15] Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan : histories of chiefship, community & state*, 21.
[16] Sara de Simone, *State-Building South Sudan : International Intervention and the Formation of a Fragmented State.* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).
[17] Baker, *Ismailïa: a narrative of the expediton to Central Africa for the suppression of the slave trade.*, 133.

different tribes nevertheless grew to become the dominant political force in the Bahr el Jebel basin. This position was established by inhabiting the banks of the Nile River, which facilitated interactions with external actors and enabled Bari intermediaries to acquire knowledge of Arabic; Bari Chief Allorron was notably remembered for such capacities. This linguistic, diplomatic, and trade advantage empowered the Bari to interact with foreigners, asserting their agency and extending their authority.[18] Domination also came with the conquest of other groups. Across the region, 'destitute or defeated people from other linguistic and ethnic groups are also said to have been incorporated through patrimonial relations, generating political authority and wealth for their patrons'.[19] The central position of the Baris in the historiography of the Equatoria region still resonates in contemporary memory and sometimes casts a shadow on Equatorian leaders' attempts to unite. The Baris frequently invoke the past to emphasize the importance, or even the obligation, of Bari leaders being at the vanguard of Equatorian nationalism.

COLONIAL DISTINCTION, COLONIAL INVENTION

Administration and Distinction

In 1881, Muhammad al-Mahdi, asserting himself as the Mahdi, a direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad, launched a rebellion against the Khedive of Egypt, ultimately founding the Mahdiyya state in Sudan.[20] The Mahdiyya regime did not markedly disrupt the daily rhythms of political life in the Bahr el Jebel basin. Even if the Madhists sent forces to Equatoria, the remote and difficult-to-govern expanse of the Bahr el Jebel basin remained just that: remote and difficult to govern. However, the British imperative to secure access to the Nile and quash the Mahdist authority promised important

[18] Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan : histories of chiefship, community & state*.
[19] Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan : histories of chiefship, community & state*, 25.
[20] See Fergus Nicoll, *The Mahdi Of Sudan And The Death Of General Gordon* (London: Sutton Pub Ltd, 2005).

transformations for the region, its inhabitants, and its cultural and political fabric.[21] Perturbed by the encroaching interests of France and Belgium and compelled by the imperative to control the Nile, the British imposed their domination, at least on paper, over the territory in 1899. The primary objective of the British colonial power was initially to 'pacify' the so-called ‘Southern territories’. However, despite attempted negotiations with local leaders, resorting to force proved to be a swifter means of establishing authority. British troops commenced their campaign by raiding villages in the Bahr el Ghazal basin, a region north of Equatoria, advancing from Jur Ghattas to Tonj, Wau, Rumbek, and Diem Zubeir. However, this endeavour was not without resistance, and the area proved to be challenging to control.[22] Further south, the British had to contend with the Lado Enclave, a territory leased to King Leopold II of Belgium after the signing of the Anglo-Congolese Treaty in 1894, allowing him to link the Congo to the Nile. Roughly the size of England, the Lado Enclave once encompassed areas like Juba, Kajo-Keji, and what is now Uganda’s West Nile region. When King Leopold II died in 1909, control of the enclave passed to the British.[23] After two years of negotiations between the Foreign Office—responsible for Sudan—and the Colonial Office, which managed Uganda, the border with the Ugandan Protectorate was finally settled in 1914. The southern tip of the Lado Enclave was transferred to the Protectorate of Uganda, while the remainder became part of Sudan.[24] What is now known as the Equatoria region was initially part of the larger administrative Upper Nile Province, bordering Ethiopia to the east and situated north of Uganda. In 1906, Mongalla – which would later become the

[21] Pendle, *Spiritual Contestations - the Violence of Peace in South Sudan*.
[22] Robert O. Collins, *Land beyond the Rivers : The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).
[23] While an arbitrarily delineated territory, the Lado Enclave left significant impressions in the collective psyche of the region's inhabitants. To the extent that some now attempt to promote the notion of a glorious 'Lado Kingdom', purportedly covering present-day eastern Congo, the West Nile province of Uganda, and the Equatoria region.
[24] Mark Leopold, "Crossing the line: 100 years of the North-West Uganda/South Sudan border," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009).

Equatoria region, and which consisted of different districts from the southern Upper Nile province, was elevated by the colonial administration to provincial status.

The administration of what became to be called Southern Sudan was initially chaotic, disorganized, and lacking supervision; in fact, colonial personnel was very limited. As de Simone summarizes, 'until the late 1920s, local administration was left to isolated individual initiatives and ad hoc decisions'.[25] It was only in the second half of the condominium period that the administration, following Lugard's theory of indirect rule, began appointing chiefs, a policy known as the Native Administrative Policy.[26] The strategy, as in other colonies, was to increase the colonial power's legitimacy by leaving some aspects of life to traditional authorities.[27] In this regard, Mongalla presented itself as more manageable for administration compared to the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile provinces, which were inhabited mostly by pastoral, decentralized communities. In fact, the Mongalla region, with its geographically favourable terrain, was the first area to come under (relative) British control. As Badiey notes, 'the incorporation of chiefs into the government [had] already [been] a widespread practice in Equatoria' even before the Native Administration system became officially effective.[28] The British developed two distinct patterns of administration in the so-called 'South': one tailored to the pastoralists and another to the sedentary farmers. In the first pattern, mostly developed in the pastoral Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile regions, 'people and their chiefs were accessible only

[25] de Simone, *State-Building South Sudan : International Intervention and the Formation of a Fragmented State.* , 22.

[26] See more on the Native Administrative Policy in Douglas H. Johnson, *Nuer prophets : a history of prophecy from the Upper Nile in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Oxford studies in social and cultural anthropology, (Oxford
New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1994).

[27] Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992); Thomas Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003).

[28] Naseem Badiey, *The state of post-conflict reconstruction : land, urban development and state-building in Juba, Southern Sudan*, Eastern Africa series, (Woodbridge, Suffolk England: James Currey, 2014), 35.

during the dry season'.[29] In the Mongalla province, however, 'the courts and hierarchies […] were accessible to administrators most of the year, met regularly in the same centres, had more powerful executives, and developed on much more bureaucratic lines than those in the pastoralist societies'.[30] In turn, as argued by Johnson, 'when southern Sudanese were recruited into the lower levels of the civil service, in the later years of Anglo-Egyptian administration, they came mainly from those areas with a stronger bureaucratic tradition in Native Administration'.[31] Today, Dinka and Nuer elites accuse Equatorians, particularly the Bari from Central Equatoria, of collaborating with colonial authorities during the colonial period. However, the reality, as in many other colonial polities, is more nuanced. It is true that Equatoria's history of external interactions and negotiations rendered its elites particularly adept at engaging with the British, recognizing the potential advantages of strategic cooperation. With the British instituting the position of 'chief' in the country and recruiting more local civil servants, many saw an opportunity to increase their power. Nonetheless, as noted in many colonial accounts, Equatorians did resist colonial authorities. It should also be noted, as Johnson highlights, that the limited ability of sedentary farmers to avoid government patrols made them 'the first to be co-opted into the colonial security system'.[32]

[29] Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*, African issues, (Suffolk James Currey, 2016), 13.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid, 15.

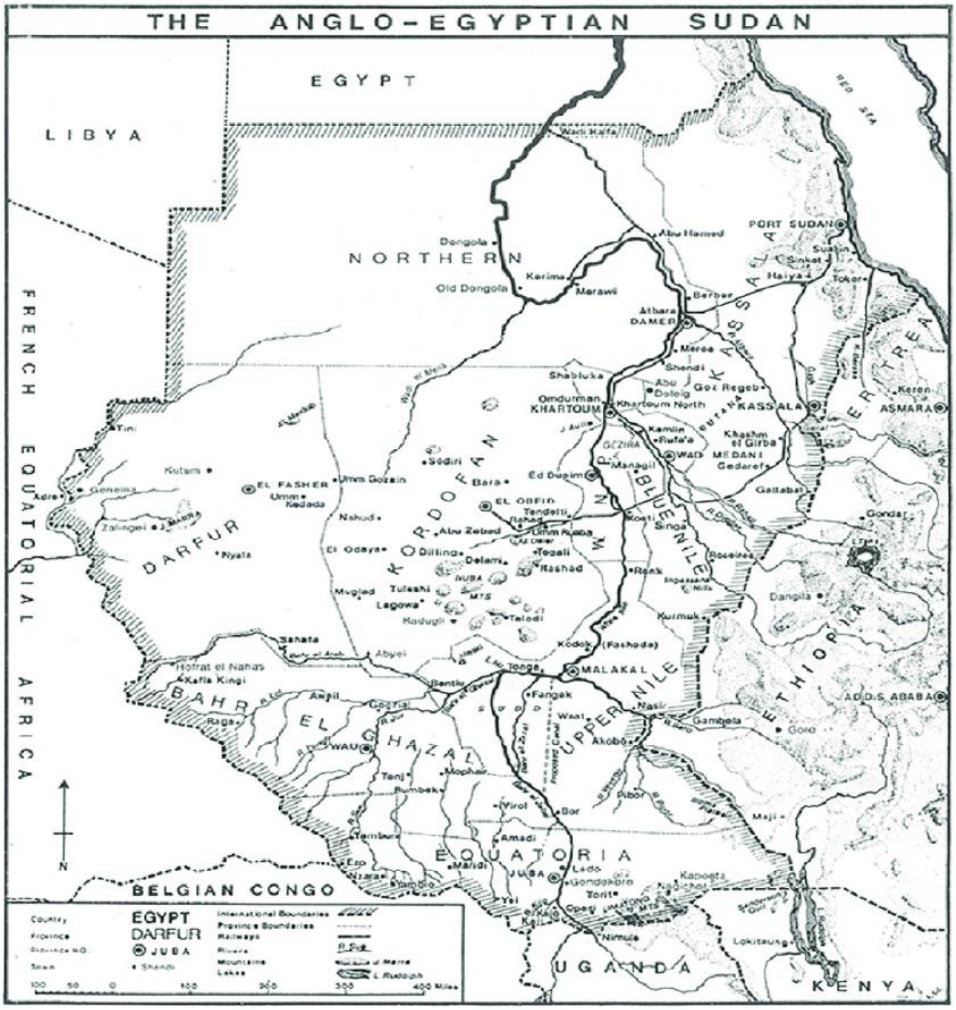

Figure 3 Map of Colonial Sudan

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-map-of-Sudan-during-the-British-colonizatio_fig1_380567408

Invention and Imagination

'Africans' and the 'South' as Categories of Colonial Practice

The South as a category of political practice is the result of an external construction rooted in specific power relations, environmental determinism, and racist oversimplifications. The South has been understood by both colonial authorities and academics through elements such as the Sudd wetlands, the (pseudo)science of race, and a certain political

geography of remoteness – the land beyond the rivers – dating back to the *Turkiyya*.[33] Determinism also emerged as the primary perspective through which the connection between the environment, race, identity, traditions, and underdevelopment has been understood in Sudan. The British colonial administration largely adopted and perpetuated the Turkiya's understanding of the region – an area of plunder and backwardness - rather than attempting to modify this production of knowledge. Consequently, as Willis argues, 'the representation of those southern provinces as distinctive became routine in British accounts'.[34] Britain's view of the wetlands as a frontier created two distinct polities in the condominium.[35] In 1922, following a decision of the colonial authority, the South, like Darfur, Blue Nile, and the Nuba Mountains in Northern Sudan, became a closed district, limiting the movements of non-natives in the area to 'protect' the so-called African tribes, their homelands, and their traditions from Islam. Following the Milner report, the Southern Policy, a dual political and economic project for Sudan that essentialized and materialized the geographical and cultural distinction between the Arabs in the North and the Africans in the South, was officially implemented. The South was to stay traditional (i.e., 'primitive') and untouched by modernity. Economically, the South was still perceived as a vast, underdeveloped area where cheap labour could easily be exploited.[36] However, it would be a mistake to conclude that a Southern identity was in the making, even though the so-called 'Southern problem', understood as the political, cultural, and administrative challenges faced by British colonial authorities in governing the southern regions of Sudan, would be a key leverage to Southern nationalists in post-colonial Sudan.

[33] Collins, *Land beyond the Rivers : The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918*.
[34] Justin Willis, "The Southern Problem: Representing Sudan's Southern Provinces to c.1970," *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 2 (2015): 286.
[35] On the colonial power, rivers, and political authority in Africa, see JoAnn McGregor, *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2009).
[36] Jay O'Brien, " The formation of the agricultural labour force in Sudan," *Review of African Political Economy* 10, no. 26 (1983).

While the objective of the British colonial administration was to govern the South differently, it did not entail homogenizing or unifying the area. This is particularly evident when analyzing the report of the Rejaf Language Conference of 1928. The objective of the conference was for colonial authorities to classify specific categories of languages in the South, which were 'modelled [by the colonial administration] on scientific theories of racism'.[37] The option of a unique language was dismissed, and the preference was for a multilingual approach that would emphasize and preserve the diversity of the South. As Abdelhay, Makoni, and Makoni argue, 'as a result of the objectifying processes of "group languages", a pluralistic image of society was produced' in Southern Sudan.[38] While Reid insists that the 'British […] can be seen to have effectively Balkanised Uganda',[39] a similar observation can be made regarding both Southern Sudan and the Equatoria region.

Environmental Determinism, Landscape, and Identity

As a result of the Southern Policy, the colonial government opened the door for anthropologists to study the 'locals' and their 'traditions' in the South. However, the preoccupation with a science of ethnicity and race among colonial administrators, rooted within a modernist and scientific understanding of progress and humankind, left little room for a nuanced understanding of identities and their histories. The British school of social anthropology brought its ahistorical structural functionalism, influenced by the legacy of Bronislaw Malinowski.[40] As in many other colonies, both researchers and colonial authorities discursively reified the divide between pastoralists and farmers. The portrayal of the Dinka and Nuer as homogenous, primitive, ahistorical, acephalous,

[37] Ashraf Abdelhay, Busi Makoni, and Sinfree Makoni, "The colonial linguistics of governance in Sudan: the Rejaf Language Conference, 1928," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2016): 343.
[38] Abdelhay, Makoni, and Makoni, "The colonial linguistics of governance in Sudan: the Rejaf Language Conference, 1928," 344.
[39] Richard James Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017), 291.
[40] Michael Young, *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist, 1884–1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2004).

aggressive, and backward societies left an indelible mark on South Sudanese politics – what Mamdani called the 'legacy of colonial racism'.[41] This image is grounded in broader stereotypes surrounding the myth of the pastoral 'other' in Africa, understood as nomad-hence-primitive, marginal, and violent.[42] As Kratz and Gordon argue, 'pastoralists have provided means for thinking about and imaging cultural difference and identity, with considerable continuity in representational forms and themes'.[43] To this extent, Evans-Pritchard and Geoffrey Lienhardt's fieldwork in the *Nuerland* and *Dinkaland,* respectively, and the accounts of colonial officers published in the *Sudan Notes and Records* proved instrumental in shaping such constructions.

The colonial administration's struggle to assert authority in the South, particularly in the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile provinces, coupled with the portrayal of the region's inhabitants as 'archaic and primitive pastoralists',[44] contributed to a biased image of what some Equatorian elites continue to refer to, with disdain, as the Nilotes, characterized by segmentary lineage and the central role of cattle in the inhabitants' social, political, and economic lives. For instance, Evans-Pritchard's study of the Nuer in the 1930s, influenced by the colonial gaze characteristic of early anthropological work, concluded that 'Nuer persistently raided the neighbouring Dinka tribes, slowly depriving them of their herds and occupying their grazing lands'.[45] A British administrator also reported to his headquarter that 'the Nuer is very low in the scale of humanity, there is little chance of his ever improving as long as he inhabits the horrible plains of the Sobat and Zaraf'.[46]

---

[41] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject : contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, Princeton studies in culture/power/history, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4.
[42] Katherine Homewood, *The Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies* (Oxford: James Currey 2008).
[43] Corinne Kratz and Robert Gorden, "Persistent Popular Images of Pastoralists," *Visual Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (2010).
[44] Zoe Cormack, " The Making and Remaking of Gogrial: Landscape, History, and Memory in South Sudan" (PhD University of Durham, 2014).
[45] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer a description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 239.
[46] Robert O. Collins, *Shadows in the Grass: Britain in the Southern Sudan 1918-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 17.

The Dinka were not better described. As Cormack states in her research on Gogrial in 1904, the Governor General described the Dinka as 'undoubtedly the most warlike […] tribe' in Sudan.[47] 'The people', adds Cormack, 'were believed to be as wild as the landscape itself'.[48] The primordial perception of fighting Dinka and Nuer is entrenched in the anthropological and political science literature on South Sudan, despite Johnson demonstrating that the Nuer and Dinka were better understood through cooperation and assimilation rather than conflict, primitive-ness, and hatred.[49] Such stereotypes had long-lasting consequences, as the Nuer and Dinka – like many other pastoral communities in Africa – were deemed less suitable for education and the practice of power due to their so-called intrinsic characteristics.

In contrast, the image of the Equatorian sedentary farmer, while not glorified, was constructed as the closest to modernity. This perspective was founded on a teleological and linear view of history and a deterministic epistemological perspective, rooted in the notion that transitioning to a sedentary lifestyle and farming were the initial steps toward civilization and modern political organization. The British colonial administration adhered to a high modernist ideology, advocating for massive agricultural plans, economic planning, and centralization. In contrast, cattle herds, despite their intrinsic value, were considered an unimportant economic asset; they were too culturally connotated, perceived as embodiments of tradition, and too difficult to rationalize and

[47] Cormack, " The Making and Remaking of Gogrial: Landscape, History, and Memory in South Sudan," 63.
[48] Cormack, " The Making and Remaking of Gogrial: Landscape, History, and Memory in South Sudan," 60.
[49] Douglas H. Johnson, "The Fighting Nuer: Primary Sources and the Origins of a Stereotype," *Africa* 51, no. 1 (1981); Douglas H. Johnson, "Political Ecology in the Upper Nile: The Twentieth Century Expansion of the Pastoral 'Common Economy," *The Journal of African History* 30, no. 3 (1989); Douglas H. Johnson, "Tribal Boundaries and Border Wars: Nuer-Dinka Relations in the Sobat and Zaraf Valleys, c.1860-1976," *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 2 (1982).A different opinion was developed by Philip MacDonald, who argued that the stereotype of a fighting Nuer never historically existed, and that Johnson's scholarship was biased due to his personal involvement in the Nuer society. See Philip Macdonald, "Tant de sang coulera en ruisseaux. Sources orales et écrites et le Stéréotype du Nuer belliqueux (Soudan)," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 215 (2014).

capitalize.[50] Due to its distinct, more productive rainfall patterns compared to the rest of the South, the Equatoria region was perceived as conducive to development, with the sedentary farmers deemed more suitable – some would argue, due to their perceived placidity and ease of control – to participating in a rational state-building project.[51] The colonial project was rooted in the deterministic and mechanic belief that different modes of livelihood, depending on the environment, create different kinds of societies.[52] In turn, the boundaries between the Equatoria province and the rest of Southern Sudan would be viewed as naturally delineated, with the end of the bimodal rainfall areas signifying the conclusion of the political, social, and cultural system associated with farming and modernity – a 'politics of landscape' rooted in imperial knowledge.[53] However, such an approach reifies and essentializes differences between pastoralists and agriculturalists, between tradition and modernity. It overlooks the reality that many in the Equatoria region – particularly in Eastern Equatoria – engage in cattle herding activities, that the Dinka and Nuer also practice farming, that urbanization ushered in new modes of livelihoods, and that intermarriage was common in this region. As Verhoeven argues, 'generalizations […] frequently occlude as much as they clarify; cause-and-effect relations are often poorly evidenced and seldom put in context; and assumptions that are as ethically troubling as they are empirically faulty are rarely made explicit'.[54]

The colonial administration nonetheless opted to create a clear-cut distinction between different groups, causing the pastoralist-farmer fault line to endure to this day. Such decisions were based on a primordial understanding of identity and a desire for social

[50] Alden Young, *Transforming Sudan : decolonization, economic development, and state formation*, African studies, (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[51] I thank Cherry Leonarid for her comment
[52] Roland Pourtier, "Middle Africa, Equatorial Africa: Environment and history," *Herodote* 179, no. 4 (2020).
[53] McGregor, *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier*.
[54] Harry Verhoeven, "Climate and Water in a Changing Africa: Uncertainty, Adaptation and the Social Construction of Fragile Environments," *Daedalus* 150, no. 4 (2021): 261.

stratification within society to implement a regime of differentiation.[55] In the need to see like a state, narratives 'serve to demarcate into ordered parcels the highly varied landscape of knowledge and practice'.[56] However, moral values were not inherently attached to the pastoralist-farmer distinction. While sedentary farmers were perceived as more conducive to development and state-building, colonial authorities did not consider Equatorians morally superior; on the contrary, some officers viewed the Dinka and Nuer – a 'warrior race' – with greater admiration for their prowess as fierce fighters. Nonetheless, 'these categories', as Sebabatso recalls, 'gained political currency and salience [despite having] a tenuous footing in Sudan's various social organisations that existed prior to the Condominium era'.[57] As a former Equatorian Minister stated in an interview, 'Equatorians are simply more peaceful than the Nilotes and able to adjust to the modern world. This is not the case of the Dinka'.[58]

DECOLONIZATION AND SOUTHERN NATIONALISM(S)

After Sudan gained independence in 1956, it became evident that the country would be dominated by elites from the Ja'alin, Shaigiya, and Danagla groups, who focused almost exclusively on developing the central region, from Omdurman to Kosti and Sennar, and who considered themselves 'emblems of Sudani-ness, a creole identity to which it was possible for them to assimilate the other peoples over whom they ruled'.[59] However, Sudanese nationalists, despite their promises to integrate the so-called 'South', never truly envisioned their nation as including Southerners, the latter being considered antithetical

[55] Mamdani, *Citizen and subject : contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, 7.
[56] John Galaty, "How Visual Figures Speak: Narrative Inventions of ``The Pastoralist" in East Africa," *Visual Anthropology* 15 (2022): 358.
[57] Sebabatso Manoeli, *Sudan's "Southern Problem" : Race, Rhetoric and International Relations, 1961-1991* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 19.
[58] Interview with Former Senior Minister from Equatoria, Juba, March 2022
[59] Young, *Transforming Sudan : decolonization, economic development, and state formation*; Willow Berridge, "Colonial Education and the Shaping of Islamism in Sudan, 1946-1956," *British journal of Middle Eastern studies* 46, no. 4 (2019).

to the northern Sudanese cultural and political identity.[60] The South Sudanese nationalist historiography cites the 1955 mutiny in Torit, Western Equatoria as the start of the long liberation war against Khartoum domination in the South, another example of a post-colonial crisis in Africa.[61] However, as Johnson argues, 'while the mutiny was an expression of an anxiety which was general throughout the South, the mutineers themselves were unable to mobilize that discontent behind their leadership'.[62] Unrest occurred almost exclusively in the Equatoria region, and Dinka and Nuer political elites, showing little sympathy for Equatorians, did not demonstrate an eagerness to join or collectively fight as Southerners. In fact, the post-colonial historiography of Southern Sudan not only ignores the important internal conflicts inside the South following Sudan's independence but also ignores that Southern nationalism results from a mixing of distinctive identities. The scholarly literature has become somewhat saturated with this viewpoint.

In the early 1960s, the colonially constructed 'Southern problem' – the idea that the geographical region south of the Sudd wetlands was different - was leveraged by – or imposed on by external actors – Southerners as the foundation for Southern nationalism, acting as a crucial foundation for political mobilization and power struggles against the North.[63] As the Sudanese government intensified its repression in the South, aiming to Islamize the region, large numbers of Southern Sudanese were compelled to flee the country, seeking refuge primarily in Uganda, Kenya, and the Congo. These countries had only recently gained independence. In Uganda and Kenya, Southern Sudanese elites,

[60] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*; Douglas H. Johnson, *South Sudan : A New History for a New Nation* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016); Manoeli, *Sudan's "Southern Problem" : Race, Rhetoric and International Relations, 1961-1991* ; Arnold Matthew and Matthew(Leriche, *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence* (London: Hurst & Co Publishers 2012).
[61] Matthew and Leriche, *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence*.
[62] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*, 28.
[63] Manoeli, *Sudan's "Southern Problem" : Race, Rhetoric and International Relations, 1961-1991*

predominantly from Equatoria, became engaged in debates on liberation, anti-colonialism, and 'modern' nationalism spurred by Jomo Kenyatta, Milton Obote, and Julius Nyerere as well as their political parties, the Kenyan African National Union (KANU), the Uganda People's Congress (OPC), and the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), respectively. Embracing the nationalist ideology, calling for self-determination, and determined to inscribe themselves in a wider movement spearheaded by KANU and TANU, important political figures such as Saturnino Lohure, a Lotuko from Equatoria; Aggrey Jaden, a Bari from Equatoria; Joseph Oduho, a Lotuko from Equatoria; and William Deng, a Dinka from Bahr el Ghazal, created the Sudan African National Union (SANU) in Kampala. The military branch of the movement, called the Anyanya, was led by Joseph Lagu, a Madi from Equatoria. Because of power relations within Southern Sudan, SANU was heavily dominated by Equatorian elites. Unlike KANU and TANU, however, the Equatoria-dominated SANU had not been able to catch the wave of 'nationalist' fervour that swept across Africa in the late 1950s. By the early 1960s, the newly established Organisation of African Unity (OAU) – which Sudan was part of - considered the issue of self-determination largely settled in Africa. Consequently, the OAU adopted a conservative policy of maintaining existing colonial borders, showing little sympathy for Southern Sudanese aspirations for independence. This encounter marked the beginning of Equatorian elites' complex and often contentious relationships with regional powers.

Despite, or because of, the adoption of a collective identity as 'Southerners', Southern elites struggled to maintain a cohesive and corporate identity. 'Racial nationalism' alone proved insufficient to unite the varied factions and move beyond the artificiality of the externally constructed 'Southern problem'. In 1965, SANU splintered into two groups, the SANU-Inside led by William Deng and the SANU-Outside led by Aggrey Jaden,

unable to find a common policy on secession and self-determination. In the meantime, another group, the Southern Front, led in majority by Dinka such as Abel Alier, emerged with its own agenda, one which favoured working with the Sudanese government and which promoted federalism rather than secession. All these groups failed to unite, sometimes even supporting rival militias in the South. As Willis argues,

> through the 1950s and 1960s, politicians – or rather, men who found themselves becoming politicians – in Sudan's southern provinces were repeatedly drawn into the task of representing a generic community of southerners. […] Representing the south gave these men space to talk about the increasingly desperate circumstances of those who lived in Sudan's southern provinces; but it gave them almost no space at all to negotiate a civic culture of southern politics.

Willis also states that 'southern politics was heavily extraverted, pulled by the interests and prejudices of northern Sudanese, Egyptians, Britons, and others'.[64] This external influence limited the diversity of political options available to Southerners, effectively silencing existing competing nationalisms – a constraint that would continue to haunt South Sudan's political landscape.

EQUATORIANS AND THE ETHNIC QUESTION

'Othering' the Dinka and the Politics of 'Distinction'

The 1972 peace agreement signed between Southerners and the government of Sudan after a decade of violence represented a critical juncture, a period 'when institutional reform promised a renegotiation of the rules and terms of ethnic inclusion and exclusion'.[65] Indeed, after the establishment of a South Sudanese Autonomous Region, 'there was now something to fight over'.[66] Among Equatorian elites, concerns regarding

[64] Willis, "The Southern Problem: Representing Sudan's Southern Provinces to c.1970," 281.
[65] Lynch, *I say to you : ethnic politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya*, 51.
[66] Interview with Dr. Leben Nelson Moro, University of Juba, March 2022

marginalization and exclusion escalated. It was indeed the case that 'none of the competing ethnic nationalities and groups was aiming at a postcolonial situation in which "external colonialism" would be replaced with "internal colonialism"'.[67] President Nimeiri's appointment of Dinka Abel Alier as the President of the High Executive Council (HEC) for the newly established Southern region was met with profound resentment in Equatoria. Many Equatorians emphasized their leading role in the resistance against Khartoum during the first Sudanese civil war. Therefore, the elevation of a nilote figure to power in the South was perceived with profound apprehension and disfavour, and certain Equatorian elites regarded Alier's nomination as a collusion between the Dinka and the Northerners.[68] Some Equatorians recounted that, despite being outraged, '[they] caved in only because there was too great an international pressure from the World Council of Churches and the British for us to accept it'.[69] Alier, aware of the need to be inclusive, enlisted numerous Equatorian political figures, such as Hilary Logali and Joseph Oduho, into his regional government.[70] However, Equatorian elites still harboured growing concerns about potential economic and political marginalization, fearing they might be sidelined in the very political system they helped create.

Moreover, amidst the rising economic opportunities in the Equatoria region, juxtaposed with the less favourable conditions in the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile provinces, an increasing number of Dinka, constituting over 30% of the Southern region's population, began migrating to Equatoria in search of employment and prospects. From 1972 onward, 'the number of Dinka in government service increased'.[71] While the actual count never reached the exaggerated figures often proposed by some Equatorians, many Equatorian

[67] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólówọ̀ and corporate agency*, 32.
[68] *Africa Confidential*, vol. 14 n°4, February 1974
[69] Interview with an Equatorian MP, who was a member of the Anya-nya, October 2023
[70] *Africa Confidential*, vol. 14 n°4, February 1974
[71] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*, 52.

civil servants, who had until then occupied the vast majority of government positions, openly expressed their dissatisfaction, stating that 'Equatorians were marginalized in getting jobs'.[72] One former Equatorian civil servant of the Ministry of Agriculture recalled 'working really hard and being much more educated than the Dinka, but never promoted despite an university degree in agronomy'.[73] The image of the uneducated Dinka holding esteemed intellectual roles was, for many Equatorians, intolerable.

Equatorians emphasized their education and focus on agriculture as a marker of *distinction*, often connoted as superior because, as Fumanti argues in his study of Namibian elites, 'attached to distinction are a set of moral values, such as respect, exemplary and good behaviour'.[74] In his study of the Creoles of Sierra Leona, Cohen argued that 'no matter how highly educated a provincial may be, "die-hard" Creoles maintain, he will never attain the same kind of "mentality" or "culture" as the Creoles'.[75] Such a logic perfectly applies to Equatorians and their vision of the Nilotes. As Daloz argued, distinction 'refers literally to the objective idea of separation and, in derived meanings, to noticeable eminence as well as to refined manners'.[76]

However, it was not just positions of intellectual authority that were at stake. Due to recurring floods and a changing hydrology, Dinka cattle keepers from the Bor and Aliab sub-sections north of Central Equatoria began migrating southward to the central plains near the Mundari group. The rise in Dinka cattle-keepers in Central Equatoria, attributed by Equatorians to the influence of the Dinka-dominated government, heightened tensions between the Mundari and Dinka sub-groups. Territorial narratives of indigeneity and

[72] Interview with a Equatorian community leader, Juba, October 2023
[73] Interview with former Equatorian civil servant from the Ministry of Agriculture, Juba, March 2022
[74] Mattia Fumanti, *The politics of distinction : African elites from colonialism to liberation in a Namibian frontier town* (Canon Pyon, [Herefordshire]: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2016), 4.
[75] Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture*, 27.
[76] Jean-Pascal Daloz, *The Sociology of Elite Distinction: From Theoretical to Comparative Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

exclusive claims to land, stemming from the legacy of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, gained prominence in Equatorian rhetoric and became a weapon of mobilization, intensifying the perceived necessity to shield the region from what Equatorians call Dinka nationalism, even though a cohesive and homogeneous Dinka nationalism had yet to materialize.

In 1978, Equatorian Joseph Lagu re-entered the political scene in and took part in the regional election. Two years prior, significant opposition figures, including Equatorian Joseph Oduho, had been detained by the Alier government on allegations of planning to overthrow the administration. After winning the election and stepping into the presidency of the HEC, Lagu moved quickly to bring back several key political figures and began reshaping Alier's administration.[77] While he publicly called for unity and warned against efforts to divide the South, tensions soon surfaced. Lagu and prominent Equatorian leaders started leaning into ethnic rhetoric aimed at the Dinka and other Nilotic groups; in effect, Lagu 'put together a coalition of all other Southern tribes against the Dinka'.[78]

An incident that received significant attention in the local press epitomizes the vindictive discourses towards the Dinka and the cattle-herders. In October 1978, the *Nile Mirror* reported that 'a Boeing plane was unable to take off when it crashed into cattle on the runway' at Juba airport. The *Nile Mirror* further reported that 'certain factions of the population in Southern Sudan [tried] to capitalize on this incident'.[79] Equatorian elites – whom the journalist was referring to – argued that this was a clear sign of the Dinka presence in Equatoria. Following the incident, Lagu issued a presidential decree to evict cattle-owners from the area; the move was largely perceived as anti-Dinka.[80]

[77] *Africa Confidential* vol.19 n°6, March 1978
[78] *Africa Confidential* vol 21 n°9, April 1980
[79] 'No one tribe can make a country', *Nile Mirror*, 24 November 1978
[80] According to the local press, it was revealed that the cattle actually belonged to non-Dinka elites.

At the same time, after the fall of Idi Amin in Uganda, Lagu welcomed pro-Amin Ugandans in Southern Sudan, 'arousing suspicions that he would seek to incorporate Amin's former supporters in his own constituency in the South'.[81] Lagu's increasingly overt anti-nilotic discourses, as argued by Johnson, bore resemblance to Amin's 'anti-Nilotic' propaganda, which, in the 1970s, contributed to the demonization of the Nilotes in Uganda. It would however be an exaggeration to suggest that Lagu was ideologically driven by Amin's ideas about power, politics, and ethnicity. However, the two men, coming from the former Lado area, respected each other. It is also noteworthy that Amin, who was from the West Nile region of Uganda, supported the Anyanya rebellion led by Lagu and permitted Israeli operations on Ugandan territory to assist the Anyanya forces. Moreover, Lagu, in his political rallies, tended to adopt Amin's theatrical style when addressing crowds. While they might not have shared the same ideologies, the two shared the conviction that the Nilotes were not to be in power in East Africa.

Redivision and the *Equatoria Intellectual Committee*

Alier Back to Power

In 1980, two years after Lagu assumed the presidency of the HEC, Abel Alier reclaimed the presidency following early elections prompted by scandals of embezzlement, underdevelopment, and internal political turmoil. Lagu's allies became incensed, arguing that the 'dissolution of the regional assembly from Khartoum was unconstitutional and contrary to the Addis Ababa agreement'.[82] Alier's appointment of a predominantly Dinka government further fuelled the fury. In 1981, after months of growing debates about the need for the redivision of the South, Lagu published a political pamphlet entitled

[81] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*, 52.
[82] Africa Confidential vol. 21 n°9, April 1980

Decentralization: a necessity for the Southern Provinces of the South,[83] in which he emphasized the challenges of a multi-ethnic society and the imperative for each group in Southern Sudan to pursue their own development. Lagu did not believe in the existence of a strong Southern nationalism because it would lead to a 'tyranny of the majority' in which Equatorians would not emerge victorious. In March 1981, a session was convened in the Southern Regional Assembly to deliberate on the proposal put forth by certain Equatorian elites, in majority from Western and Eastern Equatoria, to partition the Southern Region and establish two separate regions: Equatoria and the remainder of the country.[84] The proposal aimed to further solidify the notion of 'two nations' in Southern Sudan, with one characterized by enlightenment and prosperity and the other by pastoralism and backwardness. While the motion was rejected six days later, the idea did not fade away.

The Equatoria Intellectual Committee

Following the March assembly, disappointed Equatorian elites – including Joseph Lagu, Joseph Tambura, Luka Manoja, and Eliaba Surur – secretly founded the Equatoria Intellectual Committee (EIC), 'whose aim was to organize the Equatorian public to exert more pressure on the President of the Republic to accept their demand for a separate region'.[85] As in many other nationalisms, intellectual elites played a major role in defining and performing Equatorian-ness. The EIC, which aimed to be a pan-Equatorian association, emerged as a rallying point and pivotal forum for socialization and reflection. The committee is also regarded as having played a crucial role in inventing, shaping, and homogenizing a political and cultural pan-Equatorian identity and having fostered the

[83] The pamphlet was an answer to *The redivision of the Southern Region: Why it must be rejected* commissioned in 1980 by the Solidarity Group for the United of Southern Sudan
[84] 'Political, Legistlative, and Executive Leadership Reject Division of South', Nile Mirror, 14 March 1981
[85] 'Sharing out the Cake', *Nile Mirror*, July 1983

idea of a modern and progressive Equatorian nation that continues to hold relevance among elites today. Equatorian elites of the EIC began openly asserting that attaining state power would necessitate greater homogeneity among politicians from the Equatoria region, as they could not, unlike the Dinka or Nuer, depend on ethnic imagination. The idea, therefore, was to unite to become a third political force, alongside the Dinka and the Nuer, and a powerful entity in the South. The nationalist ideology, which was based on a primordial view of identity, that emerged from the efforts of this group became a valuable resource for political engineering in Southern Sudan. The EIC was also significant because Nimeiri's socialist revolution, which began with a coup in 1969, did not allow for a free market democracy. The Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) was the only party to which one could pledge allegiance, therefore preventing the potential transformations of the EIC into a pan-Equatorian political party.

Situated in Juba, the EIC was primarily composed of elites from Central Equatoria, although it also included significant figures from Eastern and Western Equatoria. Despite its small-town character, Juba served as the epicentre of Southern Sudanese politics, was home to most ministries, and symbolized Bari dominance in the region. Other Equatorian elites, particularly Eastern Equatorians, felt marginalized by the Juba establishment, and their relationship with the Bari remained fraught. While the EIC kept Juba at the centre of the Equatorian historiography, the group insisted on recruiting intellectuals from many Equatorian ethnic groups, defending a broad Equatorian unity. The EIC mostly consisted of intellectuals who had studied abroad for master's or doctorates. For instance, Taban Lo Liyong had attended the prestigious Howard University in the United States and had published several acclaimed books, such as *Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs* and *Another Nigger Dead*. Intellectualism was highly valued by the Equatorian elites – hence its presence in the name of the group. The EIC, which had a marginal presence in Equatoria

at its inception, would meet regularly for political or scholarly discussions as well as for sharing drinks and listening to music. Nevertheless, politics remained closely intertwined with the group's activities, as it is said that the band performing the music regularly sang songs urging MPs to stay resolute in their assigned missions within the National Assembly.[86]

An essential aim of the EIC was to advocate for redivision in the South along the 1948 boundaries, contending, following the distribution of Lagu's pamphlet, that Southern nationalism disproportionately benefitted a single group: the Dinka. The EIC unveiled a significant document, entitled the *Kokora* policy,[87] which outlined a proposal for a new institutional framework for the South, aiming for Equatoria's autonomy, regionalism, and federation. The EIC also presented demands for the Dinka senior personnel to vacate Equatoria, a demand that the Dinka community still recalls with anger. The demand for regionalism, which directly undermined the grand idea of a South Sudanese nation, echoed post-colonial nationalist delusions across Africa, such as the Majimbo debate, the ongoing political debate around decentralization and federalism in Kenya in the early 1960s.[88] Like majimboism, what came to be known as Equatorianism has since been constantly discounted by South Sudanese nationalists as tribalism, the outcome of manipulation by outside powers, or the result of greedy and self-serving leaders.

Under the intellectual Eliaba Surur, the EIC supported its candidates in several elections to gather enough legislative authority and solidify the dominance of the group in Equatoria. The group also actively reached out to elites from other regions, with a particular focus on engaging officials from Bahr el Ghazal to garner support for their cause. The Dinka sub-groups from Bahr el Ghazal had expressed significant discontent

[86] 'Equatoria Intellectuals organise Get-Sitting together', *Nile Mirror*, 30 January 1982
[87] *Kokora* means 'to divide' in Bari language
[88] Anderson, "'Yours in Struggle for Majimbo'. Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955-64."

with Alier's political leadership, which favoured Dinka from Bor (Upper Nile), and were thus more inclined to support a regionalist agenda. Protests were also organized in Juba, where bold posters reading 'Equatoria Region Now!' were prominently displayed outside the Southern assembly. While Equatorians may have gradually developed a shared political identity over time, it was the Equatoria Intellectual Committee (EIC) that truly gave shape and voice to Equatorian nationalism—especially among the region's elites. The EIC's influence left a lasting mark, shaping the thinking of future generations of Equatorian intellectuals. The EIC's actions show that Equatorian-ness and the fight for self-determination did not arise spontaneously from a natural order of events. It emerged because of specific elites interpreting particular historical events and asserting their agency, the latter relying on specific productions of knowledge and the mobilization of discourses and history.

Redivision

In October 1981, President Nimeiri dissolved the Regional Assembly and the HEC amidst rising defiance against Abel Alier. Major General Rassas, a military figure hailing from Wau, Bahr el Ghazal with limited experience in Southern politics, was then appointed as the (allegedly) neutral transitional President of the Southern Region. Rassas' government included staunch advocates of redivision, such as Darius Bashir and Philip Oyway, causing apprehension and discontent among partisans of Alier. Despite Nimeiri's initial promise of a referendum to resolve the redivision issue in the South, he reversed course and instead called for new elections in 1982. Joseph Tambura, a key figure in the Equatoria Interest Group and a vocal advocate for the redivision of the South, won the election and assumed the presidency of the Southern Region. Originally from Western Equatoria, Tambura held the title of Wiri Gbia, being the son of an Azande chief. Around that same period, Joseph Lagu also gained national prominence, stepping in as Sudan's

Vice President, succeeding Abel Alier. In June 1983, Nimeiri officially and unilaterally declared the redivision of the South into three regions, Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal, and Upper Nile, essentially rendering many provisions of the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement obsolete.

Equatorian Nationalism and Its Fragilities

Following the redivision of the South, Joseph Tombura assumed the role of governor in the newly established Equatoria region. The 1983 poster 'Equatoria Region – the Governors, Ministers, and Commissioners', dated June 12, 1983, showed three hands, symbolizing Western, Central, and Eastern Equatoria, clasped to signify the unity of the Equatorian nation.[89] Juba, the former Southern Sudanese regional capital, became the centre of this new Equatoria region. A local newspaper reported that 'The call for a separate region for Equatoria was a dream; today, it has become a reality, and a great achievement'.[90] Tombura, alongside Joseph Lagu, was then seen as a prominent political figure of Equatorian nationalism – something contemporary Equatorian elites still recognize today. However, Tombura, possibly due to his non-Bari background and inability to maintain Equatorian unity in the 1980s, never personified Equatorian-ness to the extent that he became the uncontested progenitor.

Despite pledges of unity, times of discord soon followed, impeding efforts to organize and promote the notion of an Equatorian nation. Internal disputes among Equatorian elites, including within the EIC, further hindered progress. The redivisionist group, who had worked to instil a sense of pan-Equatorian sensibility, failed to remain united amidst political struggle with anti-redivisionists in Equatoria. This became publicly visible in September 1983, when Equatorian leaders attempted to elect leadership of the inaugural

[89] Rift Valley Institute, South Sudan National Archives Collection, RVI-0000055
[90] Speaking Out', Sudan Now, September 1983

Equatoria Regional Assembly. Taban Lo-Liyong contended that because the governor, Joseph Tambura, hailed from Western Equatoria, the Speaker of the Regional Assembly should originate from Eastern Equatoria.[91] Eastern Equatorians thus convened a meeting to determine their preferred candidate for advancement. Candidates included Eliaba Surur, Funda Zebedayo, Pacifico Lado, Amato Gore, and Lo-Liyong himself.

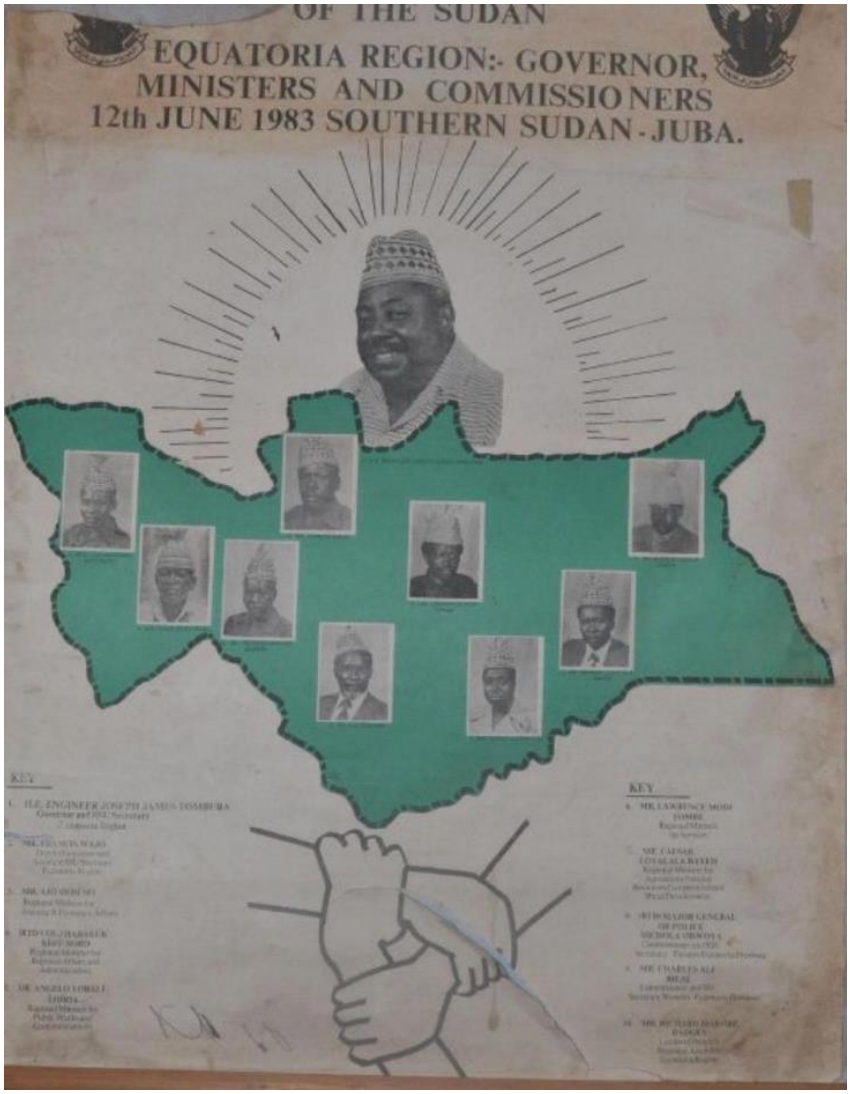

Figure 4. The Democratic Republic of the Sudan. Equatoria Region

Source: https://www.sudanmemory.org/image/RVI-0000055/1/

[91] 'Speaking Out', Sudan Now, September 1983

Given Surur's significant role in shaping Equatorian nationalism through the EIC, both the Eastern Equatorian MPs and the Equatoria Youth organization threw their support behind him. However, Tombura and the Western Equatorian elites did not greet the proposal from Eastern Equatoria with enthusiasm. Tombura argued that many Eastern Equatorian elites were opposed to the redivision and were not fully committed to the idea of an Equatorian nation. As a result, he was hesitant to endorse their candidate and began to portray Surur as a puppet of the sceptical Eastern Equatorian faction. This came as a surprise to many – a political aide to Surur, irritated, declared, '[Surur] sacrificed his personal life for the redivision […] but now that the region is achieved, he's been told to go to hell'.[92] When Tombura announced that Pacifico Lado, a Lokoya and longtime defender of an Equatoria region, would rather be the Speaker, Samuel Renzi, a Western Equatorian chief and politician, joined Surur's coalition. 'If Renzi had not crossed over', a civil servant recalls, 'the whole thing would have appeared as a clear-cut division between the East and the West', solidly undermining the idea of a pan-Equatorian nation.[93] Tombura, Surur, and Lado never came to an agreement on the matter. Lado won the election with 26 votes, as Surur could only gather 16 votes, and became the new speaker of the regional assembly.

At the same time, a more significant challenge emerged for the Bari elites, who were discontented with the perceived shift in leadership within the Equatorian identity, which favoured Western Equatoria, a position they believed they were entitled to due to historical reasons. The Bari began to demand their own province, possibly in partnership with the Moro tribe. 'All in all', states Moyiga Korokoto, journalist for *Sudan Now* in 1983, 'the new Equatorian region is already showing symptoms of power rivalry; an

[92] Speaking Out', *Sudan Now*, September 1983
[93] Ibid.

opposition has been born'.[94] Despite the outward portrayal of Equatorian nationalism as cohesive, the sense of collective solidarity projected by Equatorian elites publicly disintegrated as soon as it came time to organize the group for power.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the idea of Equatorian nationalism in Southern Sudan – a process that the literature has long ignored – against the backdrop of wider political transformation and competing nationalist projects in postcolonial Sudan. It demonstrated how specific environmental narratives and a primordial sense of identity, moulded by colonial authorities, constituted important ideational and cultural resources leveraged by elites to promote Equatorian nationalism, the idea of distinction, and pursue distinct political objectives in postcolonial Sudan. This chapter revealed that nationalism as a political ideology proved instrumental for Equatorian agents in their competition for power within Southern Sudan, showcasing its enduring relevance in the quest of collective agency, two decades after the waves of national independences swept through the colonial world. Equatorian nationalism, this chapter posited, did not emerge organically through a linear, structural, and teleological progression but rather arose as a contingent consequence of deliberate actions and imaginations by certain elites, notably those affiliated with the EIC. In this construction process, *Equatoria-ness* became synonymous with agriculture, education, and peace, cultural elements that proved crucial for elites to claim political leadership over Equatoria. It's reasonable to say that if the redivisionists hadn't come out on top in Equatoria's political battles during the complex twists of Southern Sudanese politics, Equatoria might not have become such a prominent force in South Sudan's political landscape today. Seen in this way, the Equatorian nationalist project—despite its contradictions—offers valuable insight into the ongoing

[94] Ibid.

struggles to define what independence and nationhood truly meant in the postcolonial period. These are complexities that nationalist histories have often struggled to account for.[95] However, nationalist projects are never set in stone; they must constantly re-invent themselves. In Southern Sudan, a powerful new political force would soon emerge, launching an ambitious and daring nationalist project, one that would both transform Southern Sudanese political and economic order for decades and directly challenge the legitimacy of Equatorian nationalism: the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), led by Dinka leader John Garang. The next chapter explores how Equatorian elites interacted with the SPLM, war, and violence in Southern Sudan between 1983 and 2005.

[95] Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia*; Larmer and Lecocq, "Historicising Nationalism in Africa."

Chapter 3

(UN)NATIONAL REVOLUTION: THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

The story about the creation of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) goes as follows. In April 1983, Southern Sudanese soldiers of the army's 105th, stationed in Bor, Pibor, and Pochalla (Upper Nile) initiated a mutiny due to unpaid wages amidst allegations of corruption by the First Division Headquarters in Juba.[1] A new commander, Major Kerbino Kwanjin Bol, a Dinka from Bahr el Ghazal, threw his support behind his soldiers, leading the group to assume de facto control of the town.[2] Displeased with the disorder, the Khartoum government, led by Gaafar Nimeiri, launched an assault to restore order, aiming to impart a lesson and instil discipline among the Southerners.[3] 'That the decision', writes Abel Alier in his memoirs, 'would spark off a wide-ranging rebellion

[1] Øystein H Rolandsen and M. W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan : From Slavery to Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016).
[2] Rolandsen and Daly, *A History of South Sudan : From Slavery to Independence*.
[3] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*.

was not properly considered'.[4] John Garang, a Dinka from Bor, a senior military officer within the Sudanese army, and an ideologue steeped in pan-Africanist and socialist thought, found himself on leave in Bor — some would argue, not by mere chance.[5] Garang and the mutineers successfully escaped Bor and fled to the Gambela region of Ethiopia, managing to evade pursuit. By July 1983, 'about 2,500 soldiers had defected to the new guerrilla base'.[6] Among them were Kerubino Kwanjin Bol, William Nyong Bany, Joseph Oduho, Salva Kiir, and Nyachigak Ng'achiluk, soon to become the founding fathers of a new revolutionary movement united under the military command of John Garang de Mabior. Together, they would mobilize a nationalist and vanguard ideology aimed to drastically reshape the Sudanese political order: the SPLM.

***

The above narrative overlooks a crucial detail: not all soldiers from battalion 105 stationed in Bor retreated to Ethiopia's Gambela region. Some, hailing from the Greater Equatoria region, decided not to rebel and stayed in Southern Sudan, refusing to join the self-styled nationalist vanguard movement that they labelled the 'Dinka Army'.[7] This discrepancy challenges the SPLM's grand narrative of a 'national liberation', a framework that has been uncritically accepted in most accounts of the Second Sudanese Civil War. [8] The literature on self-styled 'national liberation movements' in Africa has, in fact, overwhelmingly focused on the movements themselves, their creation, their organization,

[4] Abel Aleir, *Too Many Agreements Dishonoured* (Reading: Ithac Press, 1990), 287.
[5] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*; Danielle Del Vicario, "The lives, deaths, and afterlives of John Garang: History-making and politics in Sudan and South Sudan" (University of Oxford 2023).
[6] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*, 62.
[7] Interview with Equatorian community leader, Juba, October 2023
[8] Such accounts have been undertaken numerous times by both historians and political scientists, often with a strong teleological approach, and typically marginalized Equatoria's experience. See for instance Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*; John Young, "The SPLM/SPLA and governance in south Sudan," *Politique africaine* 88 (2002); Peter Biar Ajak, "Building on Sand: The Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army (SPLM/A) and State Formation in South Sudan" (PhD University of Cambridge, 2017); Matthew and Leriche, *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence*; Johnson, *South Sudan : A New History for a New Nation*.

their relationship with civilians, and their experience of the so-called 'liberation struggle'.[9] Much has been said about their diplomatic skills, politics of extraversion, and Marxist-Leninist liberation ideology.[10] However, the national dimension of 'national liberation' seems to have escaped rigorous scholarly scrutiny. This is either because scholars have failed to treat nationalism as a serious ideological force or because of the entrenched assumption that these liberation movements were inherently national. Because nationalism creates both winners and losers, this chapter aims to de-nationalize the liberation narrative, bringing the dialectic of nationalism back to the centre of inquiry. As Alexander, Israel, Larmer, and Soares de Oliveira argue, in the literature on so-called 'liberation movements', 'the fragile hegemony of a victor's history has begun to give way to a more considered engagement with the experience of "losers" and not easily "usable" stories – the liberation movements that did not come to power, the dissidents who were silenced, the practices and cultural productions that spoke of "un-national" agendas, and those who fought on the "wrong" side of history […]'.[11]

---

[9] See for instance John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia : The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Justin Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975–2002*, African Studies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*; Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*; Redie Bereketeab, *National Liberation Movements as Government in Africa* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018); Benjamin Chemouni and Assumpta Mugiraneza, "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda.," *African affairs* 119, no. 474 (2020); Dan Connell, *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997); Ruth Iyob, *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Paula Cristina Roque, *Insurgent Nations: Rebel Rule in Angola and South Sudan* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2024); David Pool, "Revolutionary Crisis and Revolutionary Vanguard: The Emergence of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front," *Review of African political economy* 7, no. 19 (1980); Filip Reyntjens, *The great African war : Congo and regional geopolitics, 1996-2006* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Michael Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa: Rebellion and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Edward Katumba-Wamala, "The National Resistance Army (NRA) as a Guerilla Force," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 11, no. 3 (2000).

[10] Dereje Feyissa, "Aid negotiation: the uneasy "partnership" between EPRDF and the donors," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011); Christopher Clapham, "The international politics of African guerrilla movements," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (1995); Harry Verhoeven, "The Party and the Gun: African Liberation, Asian Comrades and Socialist Political Technologies," *Third world quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2020); de Simone, *State-Building South Sudan : International Intervention and the Formation of a Fragmented State.* ; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2013).

[11] Alexander et al., " Liberation Beyond the Nation: An Introduction," 823.

This chapter focuses on Equatorians and seeks to understand how they, and their recently imagined Equatorian nationalist project, interacted with the SPLM and its militarized ideology. It is also this chapter's objective to understand the inherent processes of marginalisation and subalternity in the making of nationalist project. The objective is not to provide a comprehensive historical or political account of the SPLM, even if a thorough understanding of what the SPLM is and how its leaders think remains crucial to understand Equatorian elites' aspirations. Rather, it scrutinizes the complex, uneasy, and often ambiguous relationship Equatorian elites developed with the idea of Equatoria and the SPLM senior leaders during the second Sudanese civil war, demonstrating both the contingent character of nationalism over such a long period and the need to move beyond groupism to understand the rise and fall of nationalist projects. As such, this analysis extends beyond addressing an empirical gap in the existing scholarship. Understanding how Equatorian elites experienced and negotiated the liberation struggle is essential for two reasons: it illuminates both the nationalist project of the three governors in post-independence South Sudan and explains the fundamental challenges they encountered in its implementation. This is because the struggle, which lasted more than 20 years, marked the socialisation of elites, generating 'intense feelings of loyalty and friendships, as well as of resentment, mistrust and betrayal'.[12] This feeling would be at the heart of post-independence politics in South Sudan.

THE SUDAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

This section analyses the SPLM as an 'ideological and social entity'.[13] It is important because, as McAdams states, the idea of the vanguard is more important than its

[12] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 4.
[13] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.

organization.[14] It redresses an imbalance in the existing literature on the SPLM, which has predominantly employed materialist, institutionalist, and utilitarian perspectives to analyse the movement – a narrow and reductionist treatment that other liberation movements have not received.[15] This section also explores the SPLM's ideological underpinnings and their contradictions, internal organizational structure, relationships with regional and international actors, and evolution throughout the self-styled national liberation struggle. This is crucial because the SPLM elites' interpretation, framing, and experience of the struggle – including its origins and ramifications – have profoundly moulded conceptions of power, nationalism, and their entanglement with state-building in post-independence South Sudan.

Ideas and Ideologies

Historical Materialism

John Garang de Mabior, the leader of the SPLM, received his education in East Africa and attended the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam was, in the immediate post-colonial period, what Roberts describes as 'the heartbeat of revolutionary Africa' and what Prunier has nicknamed the 'Mecca of young African left-wingers'.[16] Indeed, Southern African movements such as the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), the Frente de

[14] James McAdams, *Vanguard of the revolution : the global idea of the Communist Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020).
[15] Christopher Clapham, for instance, attributes significantly more ideational and reformative credibility to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) of Uganda. In contrast, he does not classify the SPLM as a 'liberation movement' in his typology, instead categorizing it as a 'separatist insurgency'. See Christopher Clapham, *African Guerrillas* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998).The literature on Rwanda, Uganda, or Ethiopia has also emphasized the importance of ideas and ideologies to understand liberation politics and its aftermath. See for instance Chemouni and Mugiraneza, "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda.." Elleni Centime Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964-2016* (Brill, 2019).
[16] George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).p.1 Gérard Prunier, "Rebel movements and proxy warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986–99)," *African Affairs* 103, no. 412 (2004).

Libertação de Moçambique, (FRELIMO) or the African National Congress (ANC) all had representation in the city, being hosted by pan-Africanist Julius Nyerere. During his years of study and wide-ranging travels across East Africa, Garang, like many who saw themselves as part of a liberation vanguard, gravitated toward the ideas of post-colonial thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, Jean-Paul Sartre, and other voices from the radical left. He actively took part in lively debates with young East African intellectuals, where they explored and challenged ideas around decolonization, neo-colonialism, nationalism, Third World solidarity, and the role of armed struggle—all within the charged atmosphere of the Cold War. Like any other leader, Garang was a child of his time; the SPLM project can therefore not be understood in isolation from the intellectual context in which it was created. A pervasive myth suggests that during his time in Dar es Salaam, Garang associated with Yoweri Museveni, the future head of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda, and other prominent liberation fighters. Historical evidence does not support this claim.[17] However, the persistence of this narrative remains significant, as it serves to illustrate the perceived ideological and strategic alignment – Pan-Africanism, solidarity, and nationalism – between Garang and other East African liberation movements. This perception has fostered the notion of the SPLM as part of a cohesive, pan-regional vanguard family from its inception, one that sought to completely restructure the politics of Africa, even though such a family never truly existed.[18]

[17] Del Vicario, "The lives, deaths, and afterlives of John Garang: History-making and politics in Sudan and South Sudan."
[18] This idea of a common liberation front was debunked by Fisher in his research on the foreign policy of post-liberation regimes in East Africa, Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.

Initially, the SPLM, in alignment with other liberation movements, adopted a Marxist-Leninist ideology, supported by Ethiopia's Mengistu regime.[19] However, the movement quickly shifted its ideological stance to embrace socialism as its official doctrine to unify the country and promote nationalism over sectarianism. This transition was prompted, in part, by President Nimeiri and other opponents' efforts to discredit the SPLM by labelling it as 'communist'.[20] Ideological purity was, however, not something SPLM founders insisted on. Garang, for instance, argued in a 1984 speech that 'the conceptualization and particularization of socialism in Sudan shall unfold as the armed struggle proceeds',[21] leaving its meaning open to interpretation and recalibration over time. While some might dismiss it as unserious or merely instrumental, one could argue that Garang and his associates, rather than simply mimicking externally constructed dogmas, attempted to contextualize their own beliefs.[22] Socialism, like nationalism, must be understood as a fundamentally contingent ideology.

The most important, beyond ideological purity, was how certain philosophical tools helped frame the 'lived ' of Southerners and the SPLM's objectives – or, as Fisher insisted, its aspirations.[23] In this regard, historical materialism, dialectical analysis, and anti-conservatism resonated with SPLM leaders' worldviews, further shaped during trips to China and Cuba, and their analysis of Sudan's socio-political challenges. Such a vision of the world aligned with other liberation movements; as Markakis and Cliffe state in

[19] Clare Metelits, "Reformed Rebels? Democratization, Global Norms, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army," *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004).
[20] Del Vicario, "The lives, deaths, and afterlives of John Garang: History-making and politics in Sudan and South Sudan."
[21] Speech by John Garang on the First Anniversary of the Founding of the SPLA/SPLM, in PaanLuel Wël, *The Genius of Dr. John Garang - Speeches on the War of Liberation* (Independent, 2013).
[22] Harry Verhoeven, "'What is to be done?' Rethinking socialism(s) and socialist legacies in a postcolonial world," *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2020).Moreover, McAdams argued that even the Russian Communist Party never had ideological purity and that party leaders were 'not bound to the doctrinal conception of the communist party [but] were motivated by an evolving body of beliefs about what needed to be done', see McAdams, *Vanguard of the revolution : the global idea of the Communist Party*.p.4
[23] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.

their 1984 editorial of the *Review of African Political Economy*, 'what unites these movements is a common perception of material deprivation and social discrimination, sustained and compounded by political oppression'.[24] Adapted to a Sudanese context, it provided a compelling interpretative lens through which to understand the historical dynamics of underdevelopment and core-periphery relations in Sudan. As Lado Gore, a close friend of Garang, firmly argued, 'historical materialism was the only perspective that illuminated all our problems'.[25] Another SPLM leader understood power only as 'ownership, access to, and control to resources'.[26] Garang himself constantly mobilized historical materialism in his speeches:

> We firmly stand for putting to an end the circumstances and policies that have led to the present uneven development of the Sudan, a state of affairs in which vast regions of the East, South, West, and the far North find themselves as undeveloped peripheries to the relatively developed central regions of our country.[27]

Garang's 'New Sudan' vision was twofold: it aimed to foster development in Sudan's peripheral regions while simultaneously dismantling the hegemony of a single dominant ethnic group within the country, undermining the prominence of the post-colonial Sudanese state, referred to as 'Old Sudan'. 'The central problem of the Sudan', stated the SPLM manifesto, 'is that the post-1956 Sudanese state is essentially an artificial state, based on a political system and an institutional framework of ethnic and religious chauvinism'.[28] Unlike liberation movements in Zimbabwe or Mozambique, which

[24] Lionel Cliffe and John Markakis, "Editorial," *Review of African political economy* 11, no. 30 (1984): 2.
[25] Interview with Alfred Lado Gore, close friend of John Garang, Juba, March 2022
[26] Interview with a member of the SPLM who joined the movement in the 1990s, Juba, October 2023
[27] Speech by Dr. John Garang on 22 March 1985, in Wël, *The Genius of Dr. John Garang - Speeches on the War of Liberation*.
[28] SPLM Manifesto, 1983

confronted colonial regimes and White minority rule, the SPLM's primary adversary was post-colonial Black conservatism and its sectarian politics inherited from the colonial era.

Nationalism

Nationalism was seen by the SPLM as an important political ideology to, as Fanon argues, 'introduce into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny'.[29] Nationalism was seen as a profoundly modern political imagination, in contrast to the so-called 'politics of identity' and sectarianism; SPLM leaders fully adopted the idea of nationalism as a necessary function of modernization, depoliticizing the question of nationalism. The problem of Sudan, argued the SPLM Manifesto, was that previous governments 'have failed to evolve a Sudanese identity, a Sudanese commonality, a Sudanese commonwealth, that embraces all Sudanese, and to which all Sudanese pledge undivided loyalty irrespective of their religion, race, or tribe'.[30] This emphasis on nationalism as a necessary tool for liberation was not novel, as it had been developed by both Asian and African elites decades earlier. Nationalism and discourses on unity were thus a way to overcome ethnic fragmentation, the legacy of the colonial indirect rule, and to foster a new society wherein Sudanese-ness would prevail over any other identity. 'Culture' was tolerated by the movement, but, again rooted in the ideology of modernization, it was strongly perceived as antithetical to progress and modernity. The SPLM specifically mentioned the need to 'pull together the common strands that unite while eschewing factors that divide'.[31] Garang also insisted the following:

[29] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 51.
[30] SPLM Manifesto, 1983
[31] SPLM Manifesto, 1983

> We are dedicated to the eradication of 'tribalism', sectionalism and provincialism, which have of late been fanned by the regime and other self-seeking politicians to divide and weaken the Sudanese struggle.[32]

However, while the movement agreed that nationalism was an important political technology, debates on what the nation is, what it should be, and which solidarity should be leveraged in priority would create an important rift within the SPLM. The New Sudan ideology did not initially have any separatist aspirations – even though some SPLM cadres had secession in mind from the beginning; such aspirations would develop later throughout the self-styled liberation struggle. As Fisher argues, 'ideological frameworks [are] not static, and they evolve and mutate over time'.[33] Garang, unlike Anyanya leaders, deliberately refrained from mobilizing along the North-South divide – something that Salva Kiir would later do – recognizing that, as Manoeli argues, 'a separatist goal would isolate [the SPLM] from potential national and regional allies'.[34] Some SPLM leaders were proud to say that 'the first bullet in the SPLA was shot against the separatist'.[35] The objective, for Garang, was to capture Khartoum, not to break away from it. Indeed, Pan-Africanism advocates for cohesion in pursuit of liberation, rather than promoting secession or ethnic differentiation. Sudanese nationalism, called Sudanism by Garang, played a pivotal role in mobilizing support from diverse Sudanese regions such as Kordofan, Darfur, and Blue Nile and brought together a critical mass of revolutionaries. Even if the SPLM was overwhelmingly made of Southern figures, Garang's idea was to transform Sudan as a whole and dislodge the so-called 'Arab clique', understood by

[32] Speech by Dr. John Garang on 22 March 1985, in Wël, *The Genius of Dr. John Garang - Speeches on the War of Liberation*.
[33] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 50.
[34] Manoeli, *Sudan's "Southern Problem" : Race, Rhetoric and International Relations, 1961-1991* 183.
[35] Peter Adwok Nyaba, *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan : An Insider's View. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 1997.* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1997), 34.

Garang as the group of political and military elites from the northern part of Sudan, who, in his view, dominated the country's government and state apparatus.

Of course, not everyone joined for the SPLM ideological reason. In his memoirs, Peter Nyaba, a SPLM captain, explains that 'the Bor and the people of Kongor joined the SPLM/A in tens of thousands, hoping to acquire weapons they needed' and that 'the people of northern Bahr el Ghazal […] joined in order to acquire the gun to defend their homes against the Murahàlieen'.[36] The SPLM, however, faced the imperative of broadening its appeal beyond the movement's core ideologues and incorporating diverse groups interested in the self-proclaimed struggle for liberation, whatever their reason.

Militarism

Garang and the SPLM leaders' core vision, influenced by Fanon's idea of structural (post)colonial violence,[37] Leninism, and Maoism, was that the SPLM had to be revolutionary, including in its organisation. The Manifesto insisted on the SPLM being a 'progressive movement led by revolutionaries and dedicated to the socialist transformation of the whole country'.[38] This approach inevitably entailed armed struggle and the use of force rather than relying on electoral processes to fundamentally alter the Sudanese government – a strategy deemed unlikely to succeed. The SPLM thus embraced Nyerere's argument that 'when the door of peaceful progress to freedom is slammed shut, and bolted, then the struggle must take other forms'.[39] Many SPLM founding leaders had previously participated in the Anyanya rebellion, where they witnessed firsthand the

[36] Nyaba, *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan : An Insider's View. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 1997.*, 26.
[37] Fanon, in the *Wretched of the Earth*, wrote that 'whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon', in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.
[38] SPLM Manifesto, 1983
[39] Cited in Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974*, 28.

challenges posed by loose organization and lack of cohesion when confronting a government.[40] It was therefore imperative to find a solution to these shortcomings; as Mao had previously said, 'the guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swim in the sea'.[41] Such a solution, deeply immersed in radical and socialist literature and historical precedents, entailed the adoption of Lenin's vanguard party, understood as a highly organized, disciplined, and ideological party that guides the proletariat in overthrowing the existing political system, as a tool to lead the revolution. The decision to adopt a vanguard party structure, rooted in the ideology of militarism, echoed the path taken by earlier African revolutionary leaders like Julius Nyerere and was also shaped by the influence of comrades from Asia.[42] With its strong focus on revolutionary struggle and armed resistance, the SPLM/A became more than just a military force—it saw itself as a political movement driving a broader vision for change. Most of its leaders, including Salva Kiir Mayardit, Kerubino Bol, William Nyuon Bany, and John Garang himself, had completed their education within the Sudanese army, where they learned the basics of military organization and command structure. Militarism, as in other vanguard parties across the world, was thus deeply entrenched in their political culture, serving as a lens through which they analyzed most events. As Daly argued, 'in Africa, the conservative realism of the military mind met the liberatory spirit of the decolonizing mind, and some strange ideas were born'.[43] The militarization of nationalism was not incidental but fundamental to understanding the SPLM, ultimately having far-reaching consequences for Equatorian elites and their alternative nationalist project in post-independence South

[40] Nyaba, *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan : An Insider's View. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 1997.*
[41] Cited in Verhoeven, "The Party and the Gun: African Liberation, Asian Comrades and Socialist Political Technologies," 566.
[42] Verhoeven, "The Party and the Gun: African Liberation, Asian Comrades and Socialist Political Technologies."
[43] Samuel Fury Childs Daly, *Soldier's Paradise: Militarism in Africa after Empire* (Duke University Press, 2024), 7.

Sudan. Military prowess and other self-styled 'masculine characteristics', such as courage and pain, therefore acted as currency for climbing the ranks. The SPLM – and its nationalism – was to this extent inevitably patriarchal, and masochism ran deep; women were subordinated to men, even though the Manifesto promised to fight 'patriarchal oppression' and empower women, who were named by the Manifesto the 'marginalized of the marginalized'.[44] The SPLM/A was also an organisation 'with political and military leadership fused, *de jure* or *de facto*, in the same person'[45] because Garang quickly deposed Equatorian Joseph Oduho, chairman of the SPLM, and ran both the SPLM and the SPLA.

The SPLM/A, its leaders insisted, needed to be centralized, hierarchical, and, of utmost importance, disciplined. However, two decades of civil war would demonstrate that the SPLM/A lacked this fundamental discipline. If one accepts Woldemariam's argument that factionalism and fragmentation are intractable problems of organized rebellion, the SPLM emerged as the prototypical case.[46] Unlike its East African counterparts, the SPLM failed to implement an effective internal system for managing disagreements or personal rivalries among elites and never managed to control all its battalions at the central level. Garang's authoritarian leadership style, far from the promises of democracy, was swiftly condemned by other SPLM leaders, who chose to determine their own strategies at the local level. Given that violence had been established as the primary means of resolving tensions within the movement, such discords led to devastating armed clashes. The most notorious example was the decision by Riek Machar, Gordon Kong Cuol, and Lam Akol to break away from the SPLM in 1991 after their failed attempt to remove Garang from

[44] SPLM Manifesto, 1983
[45] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*, 68.p.68
[46] Woldemariam, *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa: Rebellion and its Discontents*.

leadership.[47] The split led to the Bor Massacre in November 1991, wherein Machar and his allies attempted to take over Garang's hometown, resulting in the killing of many Dinka civilians.[48] Discipline was poor also among the ranks, and despite some training received from Ethiopian troops and the establishment of training camps in Ethiopia's Gambela region, most of the soldiers, who were largely illiterate, lacked proper combat knowledge, leading to large-scale violence against civilians as troops resorted to more brutal, unrestrained tactics to achieve their objectives, something the Equatorian population would never forget. The SPLM was also unable to provide adequate food, clothing, or shelter to its soldiers; consequently, the troops had to rely on the local population, who helped either willingly or under coercion.

Rebel Governance

At the beginning of the struggle in 1983, the main objective of the SPLM was to quickly win territory – which it did – rather than to develop sustainable institutions to govern the Southern population or to start any state- or nation-building project. As Cristina Roque argues in her study of rebel governance in Southern Sudan, 'it took the SPLM/A 11 years before it understood that the tangibles of legitimacy had to be accompanied by a state-like entity that would challenge Khartoum'.[49] This left a profound impact and lasting scars on the population. All-out mass attacks were considered a good strategy, despite heavy casualties for both the SPLM and civilians. Similarly, the use of starvation was employed to conquer towns and cities.[50] The brutal and highly militarized Civil-Military Administrator (CMA) of the SPLM aimed to control the population, not to deliver any

[47] Danielle Del Vicario, "John Garang On Air: Radio Battles in Sudan's Second Civil War," *Journal of African history* 63, no. 3 (2022); Øystein H Rolandsen, " Democratisation in the Sudan and SPLM's Second National Convention" (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008).
[48] *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by All Parties in the War in Southern Sudan* Human Rights Watch (June 1994).
[49] Cristina Roque, *Insurgent Nations: Rebel Rule in Angola and South Sudan*.
[50] Malual Ayom Dor, "Conflict Resolution As a Learning Process: The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army 1983-2005" (PhD King's College London, unknown).

services. It wasn't until the early 1990s that the movement acknowledged the need for change, largely due to a series of challenges faced by the SPLM. These included a failed coup attempt by Riek Machar against John Garang and increasing opposition from the people, which weakened the movement's ability to effectively fight against Khartoum. Moreover, Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), launched in 1989 by various United Nations agencies and numerous Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to increase humanitarian assistance in the South, highlighted the SPLM's need to better care for the population, as millions were displaced and in need of assistance.[51] The Civil Authority for a New Sudan (CANS), which aimed to advance state-building efforts by finally 'acting like a state' and to mobilize more recruits, was established in 1992, and decentralization became operational in 1994, soon after the SPLM's first national convention. The CANS was made up of three branches, with the objective 'to secure the hearts and minds of the people so that they too imagined the "state" with the SPLM at its helm':[52] the National Executive Council; the National Liberation Council, which acted as the legislative organ; and a judiciary branch. Although one objective of the CANS was to reduce the military's role in the state-like structure and democratize the decision-making process within the vanguard party, soldiers nonetheless maintained their influence. The promised decentralization of power, while outlined in official documents, remained largely theoretical.

External Support

The SPLM originally relied on Ethiopia's logistical support, which helped the SPLM develop its structure. The communist regime of Mengistu was keen on provoking turmoil in Sudan; Khartoum was assisting Meles Zenawi's Tigray People's Liberation

[51] Millar Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan : War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[52] Cristina Roque, *Insurgent Nations: Rebel Rule in Angola and South Sudan*.

Front/Ethiopian People's Revolutionary and Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF) and Isais Afwerki's Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) against the *Derg*.[53] However, the fall of Mengistu in 1991 radically transformed Ethiopian politics. The SPLM was first kicked out of Ethiopia by self-styled 'liberation' forces from Tigray and Eritrea but eventually succeeded in securing an alliance with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, after which the SPLM was invited to have an office in Eritrea's capital, Asmara.[54] Uganda's involvement began earlier, in 1988–1989, just two years after Museveni's NRM took control of Kampala. Composed of leaders who had been part of Dar es Salaam's liberation movement, the NRM was the first East African liberation group to seize power and make a bold attempt to transform the national, regional, and even continental political landscape.[55] In his first years in power, however, rather than attempting to export his ideological revolution, Museveni was more cautious not to antagonize other conservative East African regimes, including Sudan. 'When [Museveni] finally resorted to helping the SPLA', argues Prunier, 'it was only because his earlier policy of non-interference had ultimately failed to produce results'.[56]

In fact, without denying its agency, the SPLM and its nationalist project benefited from a 'good alignment of planets', making it the main channel through which other regional – and later international – actors wanted to protect their interests rather than an idealistic and uninterested 'vanguard solidarity' in the region. First, the rise to power of Hassan al-Turabi in Khartoum, an Islamist ideologue willing to export a conservative revolution throughout East Africa,[57] scared the NRM, EPLF, and TPLF to the point that they decided

[53] Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia : The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991*.
[54] See more in Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.
[55] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*.
[56] Prunier, "Rebel movements and proxy warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986–99)," 364.
[57] Willow Berridge, *Hasan Al-Turabi : Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

to act against it, using the SPLM as a proxy. As such, from the early 1990s onwards, the SPLM benefited from strong regional allies in its fight to transform the Sudanese political order. Second, the end of the Cold War reshaped international relations in a way brought the US and the new liberation leaders closer. While the US withdrew from Africa at first, seeing no further threat to fight against, Madeleine Albright, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, and Susan Rice, member of the National Security Council and later Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, re-emphasized the need to engage with Africa and identified the rise of liberation leaders in the region.[58] Willing to curb Sudanese Islamist aspirations, viewing Khartoum as a safe haven for terrorism, and determined to find strong allies on which to rely in the region after the failure of Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, the US began to support Museveni and his liberation allies – including the SPLM – in their projects from the Congo to Sudan.[59] Similarly, individuals such as Roger Winter, John Prendergast, and Eric Reeves, all policymakers and academics of the 'Council' – an informal group of friends of the SPLM, strongly believed in John Garang and promoted him in Washington circles, opening doors to SPLM leaders that no other rebel movement had previously enjoyed.[60] The SPLM, unlike other East African liberation movements, was thus not isolated and benefited from – but was also played with by – strong networks of support. These networks would prove decisive in the post-independence period, enabling the SPLM to advance its nationalist narrative while simultaneously constraining Equatorian elites' ability to pursue their alternative vision of power.

[58] Gérard Prunier, *Africa's world war : Congo, the Rwandan genocide, and the making of a continental catastrophe* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[59] Jonathan Fisher, "Managing donor perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 intervention in Somalia," *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012).
[60] Rebecca Hamilton, "Special Report: The wonks who sold Washington on South Sudan," *Reuters* 11 July 2012.

'A Dinka-Nuer movement, nothing more'

As the SPLM began its rebellion from Ethiopia in 1983, Equatorian elites were pushing for a regionalization policy and for the establishment of Equatorian institutions. 'Equatoria for Equatorians' was still the dominant idea among Equatorian elites. Equatorian nationalism was high, whereas the 'South' and 'Sudan' were not yet the political imaginaries that Equatorian elites were ready to fight for. Joseph Tombura had just begun his presidency of the Southern Sudan Region a few months earlier, taking over from Abel Alier and his so-called 'Dinka government'. He was also about to lead the newly formed Equatoria region. Joseph Lagu was in Khartoum, made Vice-President by Gaafar Nimeiri. In short, in the first few months, or even years, of the SPLM, Equatorian elites did not feel any incentive to join the movement, and the rumour even goes that Tombura and Lagu supported the government's attack on Bor in April 1983, as it was a good way to 'cut the Dinka down to size'.[61] In fact, the SPLM's historical materialism and its socialist ideology failed to gain significant traction in Equatoria. Equatorians – apart from those in Eastern Equatoria – were in a better economic situation than those in other regions of the country. Many international organizations were developing projects in Equatoria, providing employment opportunities and health services. Moreover, at the time, it was far from certain that Garang's movement would become hegemonic, as many other rebel groups had mushroomed in the region. This knowledge would only be the result of a post-ante interpretation, bolstered by the benefit of historical unfolding. A June 1983 CIA report, for instance, doubted the SPLM's capacity to survive, with American analysts writing that 'we do not believe that the renewal of the north-south civil war is

[61] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*, 67.

imminent'.[62] Only at the end of 1983 did the first attacks of the SPLM occur, with a modest victory in Malual Gahoth. The movement then received minimal media coverage, appearing, at best, only in the final pages of some national newspapers.

Above all, the issue was simply that Equatorian elites perceived the SPLM as anti-Equatorian. As some Equatorians recall,

> The SPLM was first and foremost an anti-Equatorian movement rather than a true liberation movement fighting for democracy and rights for Southerners; just like we had been scared of Alier's government, Dinka and Nuer were not in favour of Equatorians ruling their own region and decided to rebel against us…for us it was a nilote movement, nothing more.[63]

> The rebellion took place in Bor…John Garang is from Bor…however Equatorians have a problem with Dinka Bor…Bor is where Abel Alier was from…the Dinka Bor tried to be hegemonic in the past, there was no way Equatorians would ally with any rebellion starting from Bor.[64]

Indeed, contrary to discourses about true national representation, the movement and its military structure were primarily Dinka and Nuer. The first main battalions – 104/105, Jamus, Tiger, and Timsah – were in vast majority, if not entirely, composed of Dinka and Nuer soldiers, a perfect reflection of the senior leadership:

> When the war started, it started in Bor…from Bor, it went to Bentiu, Malakal…all the activities were in Eastern Southern Sudan. Naturally, those who started the business…who started the war… were more popular in it than any other ethnic groups. So, the Dinka and the Nuer became dominant in the SPLA…it is only as time began to go by, that some others began to join.[65]

---

[62] *Sudan's Nimeiri: Surviving in a Tumultuous Period - An intelligence assessment*, Central Intelligence Agency, United States of America (June 1983).
[63] Interview with a member of the SPLM who joined the movement in the 1990s, Juba, October 2023
[64] Interview with David Otim, Acholi Equatorian community Leader and former MP
[65] Interview with an Equatorian minister in the national government who joined the SPLM in the 1980s, Juba, March 2022

Equatorian representation within the movement was at first minimal. A 1986 CIA report confirms the following:

> Nilotic tribesmen are dominant among the insurgents. The Equatorian tribes play a smaller role in the current insurgency than they did in the original Anyanya. The US Embassy reports several Equatorian groups have attempted to create their own insurgent movements and may even seek a separate settlement with the central government to avoid being subordinate to the Dinkas.[66]

The few Equatorians who joined the SPLM had typically been educated abroad and had been drawn to Third-Worldist ideologies, embracing Garang's nationalist and socialist ideology. Consequently, their connection to Equatoria as an idea was often tenuous, as they were generally disconnected from notions of Equatorian nationalism. Moreover, these individuals did not bring any human or material resources to support the SPLM, making it almost impossible for them to claim power positions within the organization. Nonetheless, among the few Equatorian recruits, Garang raised two Equatorians within the ranks: his friend Alfred Lado Gore, a Marxist who travelled to and learned from many socialist countries, and James Wani Igga, who had undergone training in Cuba, where he met, among others, prominent SPLM leader Lam Akol. A high-ranked SPLM leader remembers the following:

> Dr John [Garang] raised Lado Gore and Igga so that Equatorians, who were far away from the frontline…it could influence them to think that the SPLM was liberal, that the SPLM was looking for diversity…and Garang put them on SPLA radio to talk, so that Equatorians think 'oh Equatorians are also there!'[67]

[66] *Sudan: Roots and Future of the Southern Insurgency*, Central Intelligence Agency (February 1986).
[67] Interview with an Equatorian minister in the national government who joined the SPLM in the 1980s, Juba, March 2022

The SPLM, however, inspired mostly fear among Equatorians. Stories of massacres, hunger, and despair circulated widely, often propagated by Khartoum through radio broadcasts and newspapers. These narratives reinforced colonial stereotypes about the supposed inherent violence of the Dinka and Nuer peoples. The tactic of kidnapping foreigners, developed in the early days of the rebellion, was also strongly disapproved of by Equatorians:

> I was in Juba…and then we could hear these stories of SPLA kidnapping British workers, then French! We were scared… the Sudanese government was telling us the SPLM could come kidnap our children…for us it was a violent group, ready to come and burn everything.[68]

To counter this image, Radio SPLA, founded in 1985 and presenting itself as the 'voice of the revolutionary armed struggle', proved an immensely crucial tool for the SPLM/A, as radio broadcasts were for other liberation movements in Africa.[69] It also became a place where 'Garang's near mythical stature was cultivated'.[70] In this regard, radio eventually proved much more successful than printed materials such as *Newsudan* or the *SPLM Newsletter*.[71] From the mid-1960s, radio became what Brooke describes as a 'household commonplace' in Africa.[72] Radio SPLA allowed the movement to reach a wider audience, counter the propaganda of the Sudanese government, construct a more professional image, and share its nationalist and anti-colonial ideology, therefore making itself more appealing to various groups. This strategy also served to establish hegemony in the South, leveraging communication tools that other groups, such as some Equatorian

[68] Interview with an Equatorian soldier of the SPLM in the 1990s, Juba, August 2023
[69] On the role of radio in Africa, see Brooke, "Radio in Africa: Past and Present."
[70] Del Vicario, "John Garang On Air: Radio Battles in Sudan's Second Civil War," 310.
[71] As Del Vicario argued, 'whereas Radio SPLA is ubiquitous in memories of the civil war, the earlier SPLA/SPLM Newsletter and aborted Newsudan magazine do not figure in South Sudanese or expatriate Account', in Del Vicario, "John Garang On Air: Radio Battles in Sudan's Second Civil War," 310.
[72] Peter Brooke, "Looking at Listening: Gender and Race in Commercial Advertising for Radio Sets in Southern Africa from the 1950s to the 1970s," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 36, no. 1 (2024).

rebel movements, lacked. An Equatorian in his early teenage years in the mid-1980s remembers the following:

> We did not know about any other movement. We did not have more information besides the radio. There was no news, as we were with the Arabs; Radio SPLA was the only way to have information…and the SPLA the only movement we knew of.[73]

Del Vicario demonstrated how 'radio battles directly shaped the struggle for political authority between Garang and the Sudanese government'.[74] While programmes were mainly broadcast in English and Khartoum Arabic, Garang quickly insisted on developing programmes in different Southern languages – including in Bari, Zande, and Latuka – to cement a sense of nationalism and to involve languages that had never before been heard on air. An anecdote shared by Daniel Akech Thiong, a South Sudanese researcher, about Radio SPLA highlights the marginality of Equatorian soldiers – *in casu* from the Azande tribe of Western Equatoria – within the SPLM in the early years of the struggle:

> The leader of the SPLM/A, Dr John Garang, was impressed with the impact of both the Dinka and Nuer language programmes and motioned for the Azande language to be added to the list. On failing to find an Azande within their ranks to be a presenter, Atem [the director of Radio SPLA] asked Garang to find one, who then sent a 'to all units' message asking the field commanders to find an Azande among their soldiers. None of the commanders but William Nyuon reported any Azande. Nyuon claimed that he had one Azande soldier who had fought in Ayod with him, but he had gone to Ethiopia with his soldiers and was later killed while fighting under Kerubino Kuanyin Bor.[75]

[73] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, former Governer of Western Equatoria, Juba, October 2023
[74] Del Vicario, "John Garang On Air: Radio Battles in Sudan's Second Civil War," 310.
[75] Daniel Akech Thiong, *Politics of Fear in South Sudan : Generating Chaos, Creating Conflict* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2021), 5.

Radio SPLA strategically used vanguard Equatorians to communicate with other Equatorians. In January 1985, an important message was aired and read by Joseph Oduho, a Latuka from Eastern Equatoria and one of the founders of the SPLM. Forty years later, many interviewees still remember Oduho's intervention.[76] The messaging aimed to specifically counter rumours that the SPLM would come and kill Equatorians, appease Equatorians, and attract them to the nationalist movement:

> These people (our colleagues) must therefore now tell those people who are going around Equatoria saying that Equatoria must rise in order to protect themselves from the SPLA. My dear brothers and sisters, the SPLA is not your enemy. The SPLA will not disarm you. The SPLA will only train you, educate you politically so that you can understand your rights... fight for your rights. My dear Equatorians, you are the most advanced people of the Southern region. You have the most highly educated people. These educated people could be the ones to guide you and guide you correctly. Some of them guided you to division, in order that they could get big jobs, which they would never have dreamt of getting in a united country. Today these people we understand are scheming, deceiving you in the countryside, throughout all the districts trying to tell you that we must fight for our home, Equatoria. I can assure you of one thing, that the problems of division have gone, as I have said . . . And this is happening before you, and you can see that this is the real enemy. It is not the Dinka who is your enemy. It is not the Nuer who is your enemy. It is not the Nilotic who is your enemy. It is the system that has been exploiting you for centuries which is your enemy, not your brother, the Dinkas or the Nuers. Rise up therefore and join the SPLA... And remember, united we stand, divided we fall.[77]

[76] Ironically, just a few months after this event, Oduho was arrested on charges of inciting Equatorians against the SPLM; he was killed in 1993 by the SPLM. See Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*.
[77] Summary of World Broadcasts, 5 January 1985

Radio SPLA's strategy proved, to a certain extent, effective in Equatoria, particularly among younger populations seeking modernity and hope. While older Equatorians insisted on maintaining Equatorian identity as their primary frame of reference, younger Equatorians began to envision Southern Sudan – but not Sudan as a whole – as a nation and thus an idea worth fighting for. Today, senior Equatorian leaders continue to blame the Equatorian youth for 'falling into SPLM nationalist propaganda' in the 1980s. One Equatorian leader, who was a student at the time, recalls being enthusiastic about the SPLM because of Radio SPLA:

> I was in the seminary in Wau [Bahr el Ghazal]. I heard the SPLM on the radio. I was hearing about the victories of the SPLA. I took a marker pen and wrote behind my shirt: 'Who will fight for Sudan? SPLM!' My shirt was of course restricted by the school, but I was wearing it as soon I could, when the principal was not looking. When I graduated, I left and felt the need to join the SPLM. I ran with some friends through the Central African Republic, and then we entered Southern Sudan and met the SPLA.[78]

This generational divide within Equatoria is important to highlight. Younger Equatorians, who would become some of the most prominent Equatorian leaders 15 or 20 years later, became socialized within the so-called liberation networks at a young age, developing a stronger link with the idea of national liberation than older Equatorians. This early exposure to the liberation ideology through these networks shaped their political consciousness differently from previous generations, something that would have important consequences on the competing nationalist project of post-independence Equatorians, demonstrating the necessity to approach elites as social individuals.

[78] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, former Governor of Western Equatoria, Juba, October 2023

Entering Equatoria

Despite Radio SPLA attracting some Equatorians, the majority of the Equatoria region remained hostile to the SPLM/A in the 1980s, perceiving it as a threat to Equatorian nationalism and its ambitions. After the fall of Nimeiri in 1985, tensions rose even further as the Transitional Military Council (TMC), formed in Khartoum by a group of military officers to rule Sudan, cancelled Decree Number One, the decree redividing the South, thus recreating a Southern High Executive Council (HEC) and putting an end to the autonomy of the newly created Equatoria region. Equatorians, in turn, would once again be governed by a larger Southern administration, much to the fury of their leaders. The presidency of the Southern region was first offered to Fabian Agamlong Guem Bol, a Dinka and a Southern Sudanese General, but he declined, suggesting that an Equatorian should take the position to avoid more unrest.[79] James Loro Cirisio, a Bari from Central Equatoria and a member of the TMC, accepted the mission. In Juba, however, Peter Cirilo Swaka, who had succeeded Joseph Tombura as Governor of Greater Equatoria, rejected the authority of a Southern government, even one led by James Loro Cirisio. 'Peter Cirilo', wrote Agamlong Guem Bol in his memoirs, 'encouraged the people of Equatoria to meet [James Loro's arrival in Juba] with demonstrations against his government'.[80] The situation was so tense that Loro's government never relocated to Juba, instead remaining in Khartoum, which severely limited its authority in the South.

Peter Cirilo also became paranoid about the SPLM/A's capacity to infiltrate Juba and therefore arrested many Dinka traders accused of being so-called 'fifth columnists' of John Garang, people secretly supporting or assisting the SPLM.[81] Fighting between the government of Sudan and the SPLM/A had in the early years of the SPLM concentrated

[79] Fabian Agamlong Guem Bol, *Memoirs of a Village-Born General* (Bourchier Books, 2016).
[80] Agamlong Guem Bol, *Memoirs of a Village-Born General*, 172.
[81] Agamlong Guem Bol, *Memoirs of a Village-Born General*.

on the Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal regions, where the SPLA targeted oil blocks discovered a few years prior by the U.S. oil company Chevron.[82] 'If John Garang set foot in Equatoria', bragged Cirilo in the early 1980s, 'the people of Equatoria would fight him'.[83] The SPLM/A, however, needed the Equatoria region, as it represented a strategic location. First, it was an important entry point to East Africa, allowing trade with and support from Uganda and Kenya. Lokichokkio, located in Kenya, later became a crucial logistical hub for the SPLM's supply operations. Second, with its mountainous terrain and dense vegetation, it offered an ideal landscape for guerrilla tactics, which the Anyanya had extensively utilized during the First Sudanese Civil War. Third, its fertile soil made it an ideal area for food production to sustain the troops; the SPLM/A would later appoint food security specialists to maximize production in controlled areas. Fourth, Equatoria represented an important pool of potential recruits for the SPLM/A, which needed to expand its ranks due to fighting on multiple fronts.[84] Fifth, having a presence in Equatoria was crucial for the SPLM to be a national movement rather than a bush rebellion, underscoring the importance of Equatoria in legitimizing the SPLM's broader aspirations beyond a mere Upper Nile uprising.

Throughout 1984 and 1985, however, Acholi and Mundari fighters from Equatoria successfully repelled the SPLM on multiple occasions. It was only in 1987 that the *Shakkush* battalion of the SPLA, led by James Wani Igga, succeeded in capturing Kapoeta, its first victory in Equatoria. The 'Bright Star Campaign', as it was dubbed, then set its sights on capturing Juba; however, this objective was never realized as the SPLM proved unable to militarily capture Juba. It was not until three years later that the SPLM

[82] *Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's Bleeding Finances*, International Crisis Group (Nairobi, 6 October 2021).
[83] Agamlong Guem Bol, *Memoirs of a Village-Born General*, 174.
[84] Interview with Lt Gen Malual Ayom Dor, Director of the Institute for Peace and Development Studies of the University of Juba and former SPLM Chief of Staff, Juba, March 2022

gained control of its first major Equatorian city, Yambio, in Western Equatoria; Yei fell to the SPLM in 1997, while Torit, like Juba, remained uncaptured.[85] Upon the SPLM's entry into Yambio, however, they found the city nearly deserted. The majority of its inhabitants had fled, seeking refuge in the surrounding bush or across borders into the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.[86] The SPLA soldiers' abuses in Equatoria were indeed severe. According to Human Rights Watch, acts such as 'village burning, looting, and summary executions' were widespread throughout the region.[87] Although to a lesser extent than in other parts of the country, some Equatorian children – some of whom would later be the SPLM/A's fiercest opponents – were also coerced into joining the 'Red Army', the SPLM/A's youth organization.[88]

'You Do Not Liberate Us by Subjugating Us'

Upon entering Equatoria, the SPLM immediately dispatched its senior Equatorian leaders to mobilize support in the region. Initially apprehensive, some Equatorians began to join the SPLA, drawn primarily by its anti-Khartoum stance, as Equatorians favoured a secessionist agenda and were not particularly attracted to Garang's socialist 'New Sudan' ideology. They were also motivated by material factors and the better opportunities the SPLA offered:

> SPLA soldiers gave us food, and they said you can take anything you want, and we stayed with them. I did not want to be a refugee. I stayed one night with the soldiers, and the next morning, I joined the SPLA training centre in Western Equatoria to fight.[89]

[85] Cherry Leonardi, "Violence, Sacrifice and Chiefship in Central Equatoria, Southern Sudan," *Africa* 77, no. 4 (2007).
[86] Cristina Roque, *Insurgent Nations: Rebel Rule in Angola and South Sudan*.
[87] *Civilian Devastation: Abuses by All Parties in the War in Southern Sudan*
[88] *South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*, International Crisis Group (Nairobi, 25 May 2016).
[89] Interview with Western Equatorian politician who joined the SPLM in the 1990s, Juba, March 2022

An important senior recruit was Samuel Abujohn Kabbashi, an influential politician from the Azande Kingdom in Western Equatoria and former Anyanya fighter. Abujohn joining the SPLA would prove a major victory for Garang, as more Equatorians – especially from Western Equatoria – began enrolling in training centres due to his involvement. Of similar influence was the defection of Father George Longoko Kinga, an Eastern Equatorian minister in Khartoum who, like Garang, had obtained a PhD in the US. Eliaba Surur, a prominent member of the EIC who had defended *kokora*, also joined Garang after long discussions in Nairobi. Some Equatorian leaders began to envision Southern Sudan as a political idea worth fighting for, viewing the SPLM as a vehicle to achieve what the Anyanya movement had failed to secure: secession. As time progressed, an increasing number of senior Equatorian officers also defected from the Sudanese Armed Forces and joined the movement; in retaliation, Khartoum killed hundreds of civilians in Juba. These high-ranking officers from the Sudanese army retained their ranks upon joining the SPLA, thereby increasing Equatorian representation within the SPLA's leadership structure. These Equatorian figures helped the SPLM recruit, or kidnap, thousands of Equatorians in the refugee camps in Uganda, insisting on the need to fight to defend their motherland. An informant told Human Rights Watch the following:

> The SPLA influence is very strong in the camps. There are informers in the camps, and there is a problem with forced recruitment. Uganda turns a deaf ear to refugees with this problem.... [The] SPLA stays in the camps with their guns and uses the camps for rest and recovery and to plan.[90]

However, the integration of Equatorian recruits with Dinka and Nuer soldiers proved to be challenging and would long shape Equatorians' demands and aspirations. Equatorians

[90] *Hidden in Plain View: Refugees Living Without Protection in Nairobi and Kampala*, Human Rights Watch (New York, November 2002).

found themselves in the unprecedented position of having to accept leadership from Nilotic groups, a situation they had historically resisted. Equatorian recruits remember being immediately frustrated with what they called the 'illiterate Nilotes', insisting on Equatorians' higher capacities to understand and integrate new lessons:

> Some of the Dinka soldiers did not know what OMO powder was [a popular laundry detergent]…they thought it was food…They started to chew the soap…and they did not even know Arabic! […] It was the longest training! In the training, one lesson, and we could master it within one hour. These people, I mean the Dinka, they began to be scared we would take over from them. So they made us to remain in the training centre for two years![91]

> When they took over the area, it took the Dinka only one day to be frustrated from us…because all the recruits came, and when they said 'attention!' everyone could do it; 'turn right!'…and everyone turned right…in not even 10 minutes, we were done.[92]

> They gave us forms to fill, where you had to say who you are, what is your level of education…all of us, we had a good school level! The Dinka started to think it was a problem…most of the Dinka and Nuer generals did not even have a primary school certificate…the nilotes started to think they needed to do something if they were not to be replaced by Equatorians.[93]

Equatorian recruits were initially dispersed among various battalions and training camps. This distribution made it extremely difficult for a soldier from Western Equatoria, for instance, to be aware of the situation for Eastern Equatorians. Radio SPLA was, after all, constantly broadcasting nationalist messages of unity and equality.[94] As one Equatorian intellectual insists, 'at the beginning, to be honest, we did not see the Dinka hegemony'.[95]

[91] Interview with Western Equatorian politician who joined the SPLM in the 1990s, Juba, March 2022
[92] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, former Governor of Western Equatoria, Juba, October 2023
[93] Interview with Western Equatorian politician who joined the SPLM in the 1990s, Juba, March 2022
[94] Ibid
[95] Interview with Taban Lo Liyong Equatorian intellectual and politician, Juba, August 2023

Equatorian recruits were also fed revolutionary songs emphasizing unity and inclusivity. Such songs, argue Chemouni and Mugiranzea in the case of Rwanda, occupy 'a central place in the strong apparatus of political education'.[96] The most famous songs were in Arabic, but many songs were in local languages – including Equatorian languages, tailored to each specific battalion. As one Equatorian soldier remembers, 'we kind of believed in these songs when singing…it gave us courage'.[97]

However, two dynamics quickly fostered awareness among Equatorians about their marginal position within the SPLM. First, as Equatorians gradually ascended the ranks, they gained a more comprehensive understanding of the movement's inner workings and its imbalanced representation. Second, the SPLM/A's efforts to develop a state-like apparatus in the early 1990s highlighted organizational structures and representation, further illuminating the Equatorians' marginal status:

> At the beginning, we never knew about dominancy or segregation; we were just recruits staying in Equatoria. The idea began to come when I left the armed forces to do the political work. I started to work for the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association [The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SSRA) was the humanitarian branch of the SPLM/A]. I began to realize there is something wrong in our system: wherever I went, there was only one tribe![98]

> Upon graduation, we were 800 Equatorian recruits…only three were promoted! And…only second-lieutenant…they actually brought some officers from other ethnic groups to command us. Normally, you graduate forces, and the battalion has its own structure…they should have let us command it![99]

[96] Chemouni and Mugiraneza, "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda.," 120.
[97] Interview with Central Equatorian who joined the SPLM as agricultural advisor in the 1990s, Juba, March 2022
[98] Interview with Central Equatorian SPLM soldier, who joined in the 1990s in Western Equatoria, Whatsapp, December 2023
[99] Interview with Equatorian Diaspora community leader who joined the SPLM, Oxford, November 2024

Equatorians also began to be convinced that the SPLM/A was sending them to fight without proper equipment, seeing them as second-class soldiers:

> When attacking…we were not armed…no proper arms were given to us. They only gave us old guns which could not fire, which got stuck every time…they did not even give us uniforms… they just did not equip us to fight![100]

In turn, Equatorians became increasingly more vocal within the SPLM/A, partly because Equatorian liberated zones were mainly administered by Dinka officers:

> I was in an administrative meeting with all the SPLM/A commissioners, and I said, 'There is no equality in our movement…this is *Animal Farm*…you know Orwell? Some are more equals than others… If I knew, I would not have joined the movement…I've seen segregation… there is only one tribe dominating'. …I asked the chairman, 'Have you ever seen President Bashir sending intelligence officers to Lotuka land? No, he does not do that; he uses Lotuka people to have information! However, in my county, all leadership is from the Dinka tribe – what kind of information can you get from the population? Why don't you recruit Equatorians to rule Equatoria and get relevant information? I see an "*Animal Farm* principle" in this movement!'[101]

Another interviewee remembers that daily life in liberated zones with Dinka officers was not always easy, and tensions began to arise. When a Dinka commander told an Equatorian community leader that Equatorians were segregating Southerners by criticizing the Nilotes, noting that the Nilotes had been fighting for the Southern nation, the community leader answered as follows:

[100] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, former Governor of Western Equatoria
[101] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, former Governor of Western Equatoria

> To the Dinka commander, I said, 'Do you fight to conquer Equatoria or to conquer Sudan? You fought to liberate us…you don't liberate us by subjugating us'.[102]

Equatorian senior leaders attempted to warn Garang of these issues, writing numerous letters to the senior leadership of the SPLM/A between 1990 and 2004. These letters consistently requested that Equatorians be allowed to lead Equatorian battalions, 'so that Equatorians can feel that they really trusted as equals in the movement'[103]; a proposal that was never truly implemented. As time passed, the tone of these letters grew more intense, mirroring the increasingly strained relationship between the Dinka and Equatorian senior leadership. Exemplifying such tensions, an Equatorian leader wrote the following in a memo sent to the SPLM/A leadership in September 2003:

> We condemn in the strongest terms the false accusations and intimidation of Equatorian commanders, officers, and politicians…which amount to character assassination by some security organs of the movement.[104]

EQUATORIA AS TOOL OF AGENCY

The First Equatoria Regional Congress

For frustrated Equatorians within the SPLM/A, the signing of the Machakos Protocol between the SPLM/A and Khartoum in July 2002, which established the broad principles for a constructive peace, indicated that the end of the struggle was potentially near. Consequently, Equatorians began to consider the post-conflict transition, focusing on how to secure representation and protection for Equatorians. The idea of Equatoria developed 20 years earlier by the EIC was remobilized, perceived as an important tool to develop agency in a political order dominated by SPLM senior leaders. There was also another

[102] Interview with Central Equatorian community leader, Juba, March 2022
[103] Memo of Senior Equatoria SPLA commanders, September 2003 (copy with author)
[104] Memo of Senior Equatoria SPLA commanders, September 2003 (copy with author)

pressing issue, one that appears in a confidential note dated December 2002: an increasing number of Equatorian SPLA soldiers had been deserting the movement since September 2002, creating chaos and mobilizing fighters on a tribal basis, potentially putting Equatorian unity and security at risk.[105] Therefore, Samuel AbuJohn took the initiative to organize a conference that, for the first time, gathered Equatorian members of the SPLM from the 13 counties controlled by the liberation movement.[106] Members of the Equatorian diaspora as well as all Equatorians 'not antagonistic to the SPLM' were also invited.[107] In other words, Equatorians fighting with other militias were excluded from the invitation. The so-called 'First Equatoria Regional Congress' took place in Yei, Central Equatoria from November 27 to December 2, 2002. Only Equatorian delegates were authorized to participate in the congress; no outsiders were allowed to observe – or listen to – the debates. The communique of the conference began as follows:

> We, the people of Equatoria region, […] assembled in a congress […] and went through elaborate deliberations and scrutiny of problems facing our people and the region and established ways and means as to how best we could tackle these issues […] realizing that the unity of our people is paramount if we are to jointly achieve the goals of development, security, education, civil administration, and social development in our region.[108]

During the congress, Equatorian members of the SPLM presented a political model based on federalism, insisting that Equatoria should remain a coherent territorial and political unit and not be dismembered:

[105] 'Confidential Report on the Emergency Consultative Meeting for Equatoria Region on the Impact Created by Particular Groups of Army Deserters'
[106] Interview with the floor manager of the regional congress, Whatsapp, July 2024
[107] ibid
[108] 'First Equatoria Regional Congress', Communique

> The Equatoria region is that part of New Sudan, which is bordering the Bahr el Ghazal region in the west and northwest; Upper Nile region in the northeast and bordering the Republics of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. […] The area of Equatoria region shall not be apportioned to any other region and no other region's areas shall be added to Equatoria region except with the approval of Equatoria regional congress.[109]

Fearing the political hegemony of the Dinka and Nuer, Equatorians insisted on the protection of their cultural institutions in their demands:

> Culture and property of the civil society of Equatoria should be respected and protected. […] All over brothers and sisters from outside Equatoria should respect the culture, customs, and traditions of Equatorians. [110]

Equatorians sought autonomy in decision-making for their region, which would allow them to maintain their identity within the post-liberation power structure. To this end, they advocated for their own 'governor', who would essentially be a 'president of Equatoria':

> The Regional Secretary should be given the privilege to nominate his ministers, whom he shall present to the chairman of the SPLM.[111]

Equatorians also sought a crucial sovereign power: the authority to levy taxes. This demand stemmed primarily from their perception that the SPLM/A was allocating fewer resources to Equatoria:

> The finance of Equatoria region should be in the hands of the Regional Secretary. He should be the one to collect taxes on items appropriated to the region.[112]

---

[109] Ibid
[110] Ibid
[111] Ibid
[112] Ibid

The final main proposition echoed the feeling of marginalization within the centralized leadership of the movement:

> The Equatoria region must be adequately represented in decision-making at all levels.
>
> There should be promotion of capable Equatorian officers into other ranks effectively and equal representation of the command.[113]

Although the SPLA deemed Equatorians' demands excessive, the conference yielded a significant result: acknowledging their underrepresentation in army leadership, the SPLA appointed 30 Equatorians as commanders. This concession wasn't easily won; reportedly, Samuel AbuJohn fought with Garang for hours to secure the commander rank, as a lower position was initially proposed.[114] Despite this concession, the disparity remained significant; the appointment of 30 Equatorians did little to approach parity in representation as the SPLM attempted to take power in the South. However, the conference represented a major milestone: after a decade of promoting Southern nationalism, Equatorian elites within the SPLM continued to wield the idea of Equatoria and nationalism as a key instrument of political practice. While they saw no contradiction between an Equatorian identity and Southern nationalism, the SPLM leadership viewed this emphasis with a critical eye.

The Equatorian Defence Forces

While some Equatorians tried to reform the movement from within, others chose to split off and organize opposition against the SPLM/A. After Riek Machar's 1991 attempt to overthrow John Garang, which resulted in the formation of the SPLM-Nasir, a breakaway faction, some Equatorians began to view Machar, a Nuer, as a leader they could rally

[113] Ibid
[114] Interview with Michael Kenyi, Central Equatorian member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023

behind. His promise of a federal system with an autonomous Equatoria appealed to them, contrasting with the SPLM vanguard's nationalist ideology. However, after initially aligning with Machar, these Equatorians ultimately decided to form their own movement, the Equatorian Defence Forces (EDF), in 1995. This decision was a result of feeling marginalized by the Nuer dominance in Machar's faction and the feeling that 'Machar was eventually using [them] with no intention to promote Equatorians'.[115] The EDF consisted of local militias that had been protecting their villages against SPLM/A incursions since the mid-1980s as well as a significant number of disillusioned SPLA soldiers from Equatoria.[116] Access to weapons was readily available, as the Sudanese army had left large caches of armaments behind after being defeated by SPLA troops in Equatoria.[117] The EDF was led by two prominent figures: Martin Terensio Kenyi, a Madi, and Theophilus Ochang Lotti, a Lotuko. Both hailed from Eastern Equatoria and received higher education abroad.[118]

In South Sudanese historiography, the EDF has often been portrayed simplistically as 'Khartoum's proxy militia'.[119] While it is true that the movement signed the Khartoum Agreement in 1997, consequently receiving support from the Sudanese government to combat the SPLM/A, this narrative overlooks its broader significance and diminishes the movement's agency and independent decision-making. The EDF deserves more nuanced attention, as it represented the first attempt during the so-called 'liberation' struggle to unite Equatorians and establish an 'extra-tribal, regionally based organization that was

[115] Interview with South Sudanese political analyst, Juba, March 2022
[116] Mareike Schomerus, *Violent Legacies: Insecurity in Sudan's Central and Eastern Equatoria*, Small Arms Survey (Geneva 2008).
[117] *Annex 4 - Report on the Research on the Proliferation and Trafficking in Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in Yambio, Maridi, Kajo-Keji, and Yei River Counties, Equatoria, South Sudan*, Larjour Consultancy (2002).
[118] *South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*.
[119] Matthew and Leriche, *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence*; John Young, *South Sudan's Civil War : Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking. London: Zed Books Ltd, 2019* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2019); Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars*.

both defensive and proactive' to push back against the vanguards.[120] While the movement, comprising over 12,000 men and four brigades, attracted a majority of Eastern Equatorians, Bari and Zande also joined the EDF in significant numbers, making the movement pan-Equatorian and distinguishing it from other smaller, local militias such as the Mundari militia. Theophilus Ochang eventually signed an agreement with the SPLM in 2004 with the objective of integrating forces before the signature of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the SPLM/A and Khartoum. However, the EDF maintained a strong Equatorian identity, one that was perceived as negative by some SPLM/A leaders who were unwilling to give too much space in the movement to Equatorians. In a letter addressed to John Garang, Charles Barnaba Kisanga, the then Secretary General of the EDF, insisted the following:

> Some members of the SPLA seemed to have been alarmed at the unity of Equatorians with their brothers in EDF, and they started to wage war to undermine the integration [of the EDF into the SPLA] … Those opposed to integration of EDF into the SPLA have tried to discredit [us].[121]

CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to understand how Equatorian elites interacted with the SPLM and its nationalist project during the so-called 'liberation struggle', an aspect that the literature, which focuses almost exclusively on the SPLM and its senior leaders, has failed to account for. Such an endeavour is more than empirically interesting in its own right; it is crucial for understanding the nationalist project of the three governors in the post-

[120] *The South Sudan Defence Force: a Challenge to the Sudan Peace Proces*, Institute for Security Studies (8 April 2004).In Sudan Open Archive, https://sudanarchive.net/?a=d&d=SLPD20040408-01
[121] Letter with author, personal archives

independence period and its implementation, as the social and political networks developed during more than 20 years of struggle proved to be heavily consequential.

This chapter highlighted the primacy of nationalism both as tool within struggles for power and an object of tension in the politics of Sudan at the end of the 20th century. What is remarkable about the SPLM is its ability to sustain a nationalist project throughout the 1990s and early 2000s – an era defined by post-national globalization and an inhospitable ideational context. In this light, the SPLM's 'revolutionary nationalism' appears, at first glance, to have run entirely counter to the prevailing currents of African politics at the time. However, the Equatorian perspective of the struggle reveals a gap between the constructed narrative of national and ideological unity and the complex, often fractious, reality on the ground. While Equatorians gradually embraced the idea of a national – understood as Southern Sudanese – revolution, the SPLM's rigidly centralized and militarized structure precluded any meaningful representation of Southern Sudan's diverse societal components. This reality further emphasized the idea that some within the movement were, as one Equatorian insisted, 'more equals than others'. As overlapping solidarities continuously collided during the struggle, the structural inequality within the SPLM increasingly reinforced the feeling among Equatorian elites that Equatorian-ness should not be entirely dissolved into Southern nationalism but should rather remain an important alternative imaginary. Equatorian elites experienced the conflict in vastly different ways that shaped their networks, loyalties, and worldviews. Some fled Sudan entirely, others relocated to Khartoum, while still others joined the SPLM, fought against it, or attempted neutrality. These divergent paths during the war created lasting divisions in their relationships, linkages, memories, aspirations, and understanding of what liberation, Equatoria, South Sudan mean and what it ought to mean. The only aspect they had in common was the shared idea of Equatoria as an object

of political practice, although they failed to gather their individual agencies into one collective agency by the end of the struggle. Despite this, as the next chapter shows, Equatorian elites eventually succeeded in gathering to launch a competing nationalist project in the post-independence period, aiming to fundamentally reshape the South Sudanese political order.

Chapter 4

THE (RE)MAKING OF EQUATORIA: POWER, AGENCY, AND THE GUBERNATORIAL ALLIANCE

On 9 January 2005, after more than 20 years of civil war, three years of negotiations, and numerous political obstacles, the much-awaited signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) finally occurred between the SPLM and the Sudanese Government. The CPA sparked a notable surge of optimism across the continent, particularly among other nationalist vanguards, as the Sudanese government was considered the enemy *par excellence*, having sought to export its conservative revolution throughout the region.[1] The case of southern Sudan reaffirmed that the ideals of a nationalist and socialist liberation remained very much alive two decades after the Rwandan Patriotic Front took over Kigali in Rwanda, and only a few years after the conflict among former members of the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL) had dashed

[1] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*.

hopes of a new peaceful and progressive regional order in Africa.[2] During this momentous occasion, Dr. John Garang de Mabior made a solemn pledge:

> This peace agreement will change the Sudan forever. Sudan cannot and will never be the same again, as this peace agreement will engulf the country in democratic and fundamental transformations, instead of being engulfed in wars as it has always been for the last 184 years. […] The signing of this peace agreement thus marks the end of what I will correctly call the First Republic of the whole Sudan that has lasted 49 years. […] This peace agreement, therefore, signals the beginning of Sudan's second republic of the New Sudan.

Focusing more particularly on southern Sudan, he stated:

> The SPLM will also spearhead the South-South dialogue. This dialogue, above all, is to heal wounds and restore fraternity and mutual respect so as to create a healthier political environment that is accommodating all southern Sudanese political forces, both at the level of southern Sudan and at the national level.[3]

***

In the first years of the post-CPA period, questions of *who* belonged to *what* nation started to emerge, alongside contentious debates about who deserved the mantle of *national liberation hero* and, equally important, who did not. Equatorian elites from across the political landscape soon found themselves marginalised from both the triumphant – but exclusive – modernist, nationalist, and militarised narrative of the SPLM and the material distribution of power in southern Sudan. In response to this marginalisation, Equatorian elites began to view southern nationalism, as developed by the SPLM, as a form of

[2] See Reyntjens, *The great African war : Congo and regional geopolitics, 1996-2006*; Prunier, *Africa's world war : Congo, the Rwandan genocide, and the making of a continental catastrophe*.
[3] Dr. John Garang, *Speech on the Conclusion of the CPA*, 9 January 2005

oppression – a mere instrument of a new hegemonic project in which they would have little, if any, influence.

The literature on *national* liberation movements in Africa has so far heavily emphasised their transition from rebel groups to governments, particularly focusing on their *state-building* efforts and on the use of *liberation* discourses and symbols to build legitimacy.[4] Because the new revolutionary nationalist regimes were 'born powerful',[5] as Dorman has argued, the fate of *losers* and their agency has, however, not been sufficiently addressed, and too often, they have been relegated to the status of passive actors.[6] This chapter explores the role of Equatorian elites in the remaking of Equatorian nationalism in the post-independence order, a project rooted in discontent with both the militarism of the SPLM and the growing Dinka-Nuer hegemony in the political, economic, and security sectors, and also a project that attempted to transform and restructure the southern Sudanese political order based on one important pillar: federalism. In doing so, this chapter shifts the focus away from the SPLM and their nation- and state-building project, highlighting instead the political agency of Equatorian elites in Southern Sudan and their attempt to transcend marginality by forming a form of civic nationalism. Based on interviews with the key protagonists, the chapter particularly traces the process behind the emergence of an Equatorian counter-hegemonic project and its main architects, the

[4] Roger Southall, *Liberation movements in power: Power and state in Southern Africa* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013); Filip Reyntjens, "Post-1994 Politics in Rwanda: problematising 'liberation' and 'democratisation'," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 6 (2006); Sara Rich Dorman, "Post-liberation Politics in Africa: examining the political legacy of struggle," *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 6 (2006); Stephanie Cawood and Jonathan Fisher, ""It should be a constant reminder": Space, meaning and power in post-liberation Africa," *Political Geography* 99 (2022); Sara Rich Dorman, *Understanding Zimbabwe: From Liberation to Authoritarianism* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2016); *Revolutionary Movements in Africa: An Untold Story*, ed. Pascal Bianchini, Ndongo Samba Sylla, and Leo Zeilig, 1 ed. (Pluto Press, 2024); *From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa*, ed. Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close, and Gary Prevost (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007).

[5] Sara Rich Dorman, "Born Powerful? Authoritarian Politics in Postliberation Eritrea and Zimbabwe," in *From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa*, ed. Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close, and Gary Prevost (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007).

[6] One notable exception is Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger, *Violence & Memory : One Hundred Years in the "Dark Forests" of Matabeleland.* .

three elected governors of the Greater Equatoria region: Joseph Bakosoro from Western Equatoria, Clement Wani Konga from Central Equatoria, and Louis Lobong Lojore from Eastern Equatoria. It examines in detail how the three governors attempted not only to revamp the idea of Equatorian nationalism, but also to embody the idea of *Equatoria-ness* to act *on behalf* of Equatorian elites. To do so, they had to be able to gather individual agencies into a collective project despite deep personal rivalries among Equatorian elites, divergent aspirations, and different experiences of the liberation struggle. The detailed accounts of early meetings, discussions, and governors' personalities presented in this chapter are hence crucial to understanding the *contingency* of nationalism, the *practice* of nationalism by elites, and the *ambiguity* of competing nationalisms. Equatorian nationalism, this chapter shows, indeed became an underpinning idea for the project of Equatorian elites, who understood the need to build a cohesive force to compete with other groups in southern Sudan. Such an ambition, however, had to occur within specific structural constraints: a post-independence order that not only championed the 'end of history', but also a complete overhaul of the old political system and the cult of John Garang, the *primus* vanguard *inter pares*.

EQUATORIAN ELITES, VANGUARD NATIONALISM, AND THE SPLM

National Hegemony and the Politics of *As If*

Unlike other East African national liberation movements, the SPLM did not seize power through outright military triumph; indeed, Juba never capitulated to the SPLM forces. Instead, the vanguard's ascent into power in southern Sudan was due to negotiations with the Khartoum government, aided by international partners who celebrated and praised the 'freedom fighters'.[7] Despite the mediated settlement with Khartoum, and counter to what

[7] Srinivasan, *When peace kills politics : international intervention and unending wars in the Sudans*.

the word ‘power-sharing’ might suggest, the SPLM could solidify its hegemonic dominance in the southern region, wielding considerable, if not exclusive, influence in shaping the post-conflict polity. This consolidation stemmed from the SPLM's successful positioning of itself as the *de facto* national representative of the ‘South’ during peace negotiations with Bashir’s National Congress Party, a strategic imperative that leader John Garang articulated as ‘a matter of necessity and practicality in order to end the war’.[8] The SPLM’s strategic approach to negotiations, designed to marginalize lingering rival insurgencies throughout southern Sudan, was executed with the backing of the international community. Indeed, during that period, not only did Western chancelleries – particularly Washington – hold a favorable view of the SPLM as a bulwark against Islamism and terrorism, but they also strongly believed, somewhat naively in retrospect, that the SPLM was a truly *national* movement representing all segments of southern Sudanese society.[9] On the other hand, the SPLM held 70% of the seats in the newly formed regional legislative assembly. While the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) lacked cohesion and professionalism, it was recognized as the legitimate regional military force, solidifying its control over the security sector. Moreover, as the main recipient of foreign development aid and oil export revenues, the liberation movement was able to secure a steady flow of funds, reinforcing its dominance.

The SPLM’s hegemony also derived from its success in portraying the 2005 CPA as a southern military triumph and in acting as such in the post-CPA period. A politics of *as if*, which Wedeen has called a ‘meaningful fiction’, proved enduring, demonstrating the importance of narratives in projecting political power.[10] As one senior civil servant from

[8] John Garang, *Speech on the Conclusion of the CPA*, 9 January 2005
[9] Hilde F. Johnson, *South Sudan the untold story : from independence to civil war* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).
[10] Lisa Wedeen, "Acting "As If": Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 3 (1998).

the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs asserted, '[I]t is striking how the SPLM truly believes they defeated the north, and even more striking is the fact that everyone, including foreign diplomats, seems to believe it'.[11] However, not only was this factually not the case, but many southern rebel groups were still active at the time of the CPA, and, like the EPRDF in Ethiopia or the NRM in Uganda, the SPLM struggled to fight them and consolidate national hegemony. Such 'details' did not to make it into southern history books. The SPLM's newfound status empowered its senior leadership in two ways: it enabled strategic alliance-building, primarily through the co-optation of dissenters, and legitimised their use of force against other southern factions, as any competing rebel movement was deemed a threat to the emerging nation-state's survival. Given the difficulty of militarily defeating some groups, the most powerful being Paulino Matip's South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) in Upper Nile,[12] a so-called 'South-South dialogue' also occurred in Nairobi under the auspices of former Kenyan President Daniel Moi and its Moi Institute foundation, where 'more than 60 senior military commanders from both SPLM/A and other armed groups gathered under the chairmanship of Mr. Garang'.[13] These negotiations proved crucial to continue the politics of *as if*: indeed, they proved a convenient way to bring other rebel groups into the nationalist narrative of the SPLM.

Politically, the SPLM's ambition was, much like that of the NRM in Uganda two decades earlier, to form a 'big-tent national government' to broaden its base and legitimacy, including in Equatoria.[14] Practically, this ambition paved the way for establishing a tradition of patronage networks, primarily directed towards the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper

[11] Interview with civil servant, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Juba, 2023

[12] The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, was supported by Khartoum to, notably, destabilize northern Uganda as part of what Prunier called an 'undeclared war between Sudan and Uganda'. See Prunier, "Rebel movements and proxy warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986–99)."

[13] United Nations Security Council, 'Report of the Secretary General on the Sudan', S/2005/579, 12 September 2005

[14] Anna Reuss and Kristof Titeca, "When revolutionaries grow old: the Museveni babies and the slow death of the liberation," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 10 (2017).

Nile regions, the SPLM leaders' constituencies. Despite pretensions of opening the political landscape, the SPLM operated as the *de facto* Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS), while the GoSS itself was inherently intertwined with the identity of the SPLM. Such an understanding of state-building derives from the vanguard structure of the SPLM, a close-knit hierarchical military movement that did not leave room for a free political market. Therefore, similar to what Soares de Oliveira has said of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), 'conventional boundaries between party, state, and public administration [were] virtually meaningless'.[15] Moreover, with Salva Kiir, a Dinka from Gogrial, assuming Garang's position after his tragic death in a helicopter crash, a new network of elites assumed power in South Sudan, and it had extensive military experience but scant political acumen. Kiir and his inner circle, hailing mostly from the Bahr el Ghazal Dinka ethnic group and having barely been involved in the CPA negotiations, were far less ideologically driven; instead, they were significantly more inclined to establish a brutal nationalist military regime in the South and pursue secession from Sudan, showing little regard for Garang's *New Sudan* reformative ideology. While not overstating Garang's ability to successfully democratise the southern political order would be an exaggeration, given his often-criticised authoritarian style, Kiir's accession to the presidency extinguished any hope for such a radical transformation.

[15] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and beggar land : Angola since the Civil War* (Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 91.

Vanguard Nationalism

Militarism as Ideology

Militarism – the ideology of rule by soldiers - was deeply embedded in the SPLM, much like in other self-proclaimed vanguard liberation movements across Africa. As emphasised in the previous chapter, the SPLM is first and foremost a military organisation run by soldiers. As Daly remarkably emphasised:

> Soldiers run countries like they fight wars. Combat is their metaphor for politics. They approach political problems like battles to be won or lost, even when it isn't clear what winning or losing would mean. They treat their rivals like enemies—not people who see things differently but adversaries who have to be defeated. They divvy up the population into friends and foes and treat them accordingly. They enforce conformity, and they try to make everyone think like they do. [16]

SPLM senior leaders sought to present an appealing vision for the future—one that would break away from a history of marginalization and promise a new era of freedom for South Sudan. In that vision, 'they valued discipline as an end in itself, and they saw no reason why this principle, which structured their lives, might not serve as a philosophy for everyone'.[17] To that extent, militarism lay at the very core of the SPLM's project—shaping its 'ethos, institutional culture, a political economy'.[18] It was not, as foreign diplomats often assumed, simply an instrument for seizing power.

In that vein, nationalism proved integral to this idea of society. It functioned both as a unifying force to consolidate loyalty around the movement and as a moral framework through which the new state could – and should - be imagined. By fusing militarism with nationalist ideals, the SPLM promoted a collective identity that prioritized obedience,

[16] Daly, *Soldier's Paradise: Militarism in Africa after Empire*, 2.
[17] Daly, *Soldier's Paradise: Militarism in Africa after Empire*, 7.
[18] Daly, *Soldier's Paradise: Militarism in Africa after Empire*, 72.

sacrifice, and the pursuit of 'national' liberation over individual interests. For the SPLM, the military movement was the only institution able to unify South Sudanese, restore order, and spread the gospel of nationalism across the country. Therefore, after the CPA was signed, Salva Kiir and the SPLM – which, like many regimes, was centred on the idea of 'national liberation' – insisted in imposing a *single* nationalist and modernist narrative to consolidate power. The narrative was, as Doll has summarised, one of 'a singular, linear liberation teleology of the movement-cum-state'.[19] Southern nationalism was, it was argued, a function of modernisation that could not be deconstructed. This narrative, rooted in a mix of primordial and modernist assumptions, oversimplified the complex historical process of competing nationalisms in (southern) Sudan and glossed over setbacks and nuances in identity formation. However, narratives 'play a very important role in the struggle for control and full participation in whatever is constituted as a totality'.[20]

The *praxis* of nation-building certainly proved superficial, but the liberation war and its nationalist narrative were made highly visible; as Cohen argued, power is 'articulated in terms of different patterns of symbols and of symbolic activities'.[21] In this regard, large banners praising SPLM leaders for their sacrifice and presenting them as the saviours of the nation were continuously displayed - as Daly argued, 'militarism offered Africans a heroic view of themselves'[22] - and played a significant role in consolidating SPLM hegemony. So did the commemorations of the 'liberation heroes' – although the politics of choosing them proved controversial – through 'Martyrs' Day' and 'SPLA Day'. Such national days, Elgenius has argued, 'provide by their design a framework for the

[19] Christian Doll, "Sovereignty from 'ground zero': Power through performance in independent South Sudan," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (2023): 637.
[20] Adebanwi, *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning*, 281.
[21] Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture*, 17.
[22] Daly, *Soldier's Paradise: Militarism in Africa after Empire*, 3.

imagination and expression of nationality in terms of commonality and oneness' and 'express the ideals of surviving historical narratives'.[23] Moreover, the decision to place John Garang's face on banknotes carried profound significance in a country where digital payments has remained scarce, and it ensured that Garang, the SPLM, and the liberation struggle permeated the daily lives of southern Sudanese people.

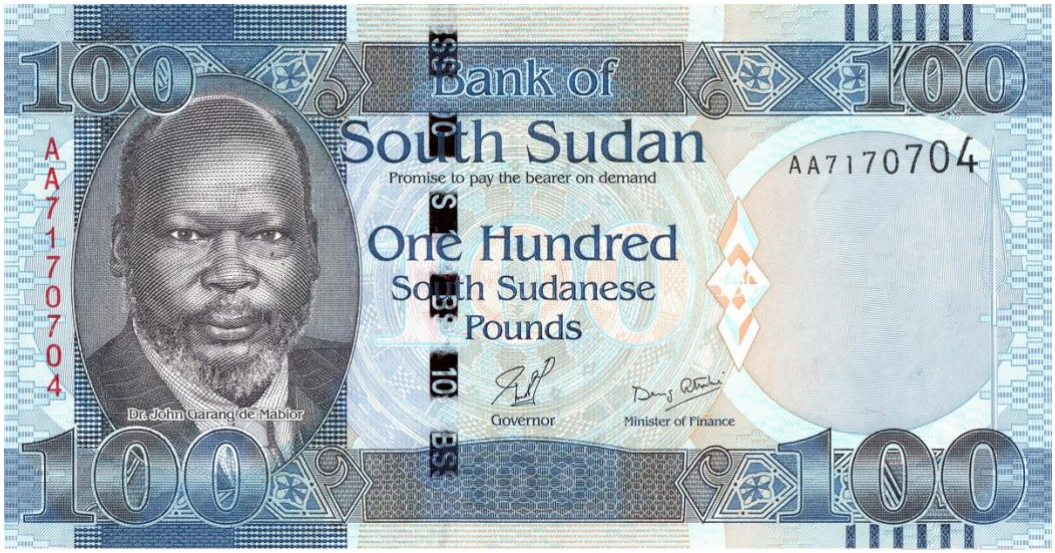

Figure 5 Banknote with the face of John Garang

Source: https://en.numista.com/catalogue/note202488.html

Similarly, the SPLM carefully drafted the national anthem, titled 'South Sudan Oyee', invoking the rallying cry 'SPLM Oyee!' from the liberation struggle. The lyrics were crafted to position the SPLM as the definitive liberator:

Oh black warriors!

Let's stand up in silence and respect,

Saluting millions of martyrs whose

Blood cemented our national foundation.

[23] Gabrielle Elgenius, *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism: Celebrating Nationhood* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132.

We vow to protect our nation.

Additionally, similar to what Tendi has argued about Zimbabwe and the ZANU-PF, the SPLM began to 'repackage and propagate the country's liberation history in a narrow and authoritarian narrative'.[24] Biographies and memoirs flourished, all inscribing the SPLM within a grand narrative of southern nationhood – one that some traced to the very 'creation of the universe' itself.[25] In such books, the SPLM emerged as the primary vehicle of liberation, portrayed as the logical, and only possible, continuation of the struggle for freedom, to such an extent that its leader was thought to have been chosen by God himself; indeed, John Garang was often presented as Moses, the leader who led his people to the promised land.[26] As Reim argued, 'few domains are as central to the construction of a national community and its Others as the epistemic, symbolic politics of history-making'.[27] In history textbooks used in southern Sudanese secondary schools, liberation is presented, again rooted within a modernist understanding of progress, as a 'national destiny whose "tide could not be stopped"'.[28] The same textbooks insist that '[m]ost Southern Sudanese were united in their pursuit of total freedom from Northern domination',[29] completely overlooking the fraught relationships not only among Garang, Kiir, and Machar, but also between the SPLM and other groups in southern Sudan. In the books, when certain facts proved impossible to erase, any dissenting act during the

[24] Blessing-Miles Tendi, "Patriotic History and Public Intellectuals Critical of Power," *Journal of southern African studies* 34, no. 2 (2008): 380.
[25] James Wani Igga, *South Sudan: Rediscovering Our Roots* (Kampala, Uganda: Roberts & Brothers General Printers, 2010).
[26] Christopher Tounsel, *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press 2021).
[27] Lena Reim, "History-Making as Othering: Perspectives on Zimbabwe's Patriotic History from Matabeleland," in *States and the Making of Others: Perspectives on Social State Institutions and Othering in Southern Africa and Western Europe*, ed. Jeanne Bouyat, Amandine Le Bellec, and Lucas Puygrenier (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 44.
[28] Denise Bentrovato and Merethe Skårås, "Ruptured imaginings amid emerging nationhood: The unsettled narrative of "unity in resistance" in South Sudanese history textbooks," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (2023): 1049.
[29] Bentrovato and Skårås, "Ruptured imaginings amid emerging nationhood: The unsettled narrative of "unity in resistance" in South Sudanese history textbooks," 1049.

liberation war was instead presented as the result of Khartoum's nefarious schemes, thereby refocusing attention on the 'true enemy'. Unsurprisingly, SPLM leaders occupy a prominent place in those books and are portrayed as the bringers of 'total liberation' and as 'charming leaders […] who enlightened the Southerners'.[30] Such narratives left no room for a nuanced history of nationalism, much less an alternative or dissenting one that could highlight painful memories of the self-proclaimed 'liberation struggle' or bring a more diverse approach to the past.

Dissenting historical events – such as *kokora*, the Bor Massacre, intra-SPLM feuds, or the emergence of competing rebel movements – were suppressed in the name of national unity, and the SPLM's deep-rooted militarism stifled any intellectual challenge to this narrative. As Ranger has described in the case of Zimbabwe, such *patriotic history* 'resents the "disloyal" questions raised by historians of nationalism. It regards as irrelevant any history that is not political. And it is explicitly antagonistic to academic historiography'.[31] Employing a Manichaean vision of politics, the nationalist narrative cast any leader who was not 'a true revolutionary' as either a traitor or collaborator. Consequently, as an Equatorian scholar of the University of Juba confided, 'Equatoria and its leaders do not appear much in the official nationalist narrative'.[32] Equatorians and their (violent) experiences during the liberation struggle are indeed marginalised in the SPLM's *patriotic history*, creating frustrations, feelings of othering, and a sentiment of invisibility among Equatorian elites. Worse, the official nationalist narrative notably dismissed Equatorians' significant contributions – intellectual, material, and military – to the liberation struggle. Despite the sacrifices of their population, Equatorians were

[30] Bentrovato and Skårås, "Ruptured imaginings amid emerging nationhood: The unsettled narrative of "unity in resistance" in South Sudanese history textbooks," 1049.
[31] Terence Ranger, "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe.," *Journal of southern African studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 218.
[32] Interview with one Professor of the University of Juba, March 2022

branded as anti-SPLM elements who had failed to fight for the nation. Resonant to the masculinist ethos of the SPLM, some even reported that Kiir once called Equatorians 'women' and 'cowards'.[33] These claims not only stripped Equatorians of their status as 'liberation heroes', but also challenged their very legitimacy as members of the southern nation, casting them as second-class citizens; this discourse would intensify in the following decade.

Juba as the Symbol of Competing Nationalisms

After the signing of the CPA, the SPLM quickly attempted to move the capital city from Juba, simply because it was in Equatoria and hence, according to a senior SPLM Minister, 'not representative of the nation'.[34] The fact that the city never surrendered to the SPLM and that the SPLM was never able to capture it certainly played a major role in that decision. Space, Adebanwi has argued, 'is very central to hegemony'.[35] The SPLM therefore seriously considered the project, worth a billion dollars, to have Ramciel, a small town of 1,500 people in the Lakes State with a majority of Dinka, as the new capital. Self-styled national liberation leaders were indeed reluctant to start a new state- and nation-building project in Juba, which had symbolized the domination of Equatorian elites over the politics of southern Sudan. However, while USAID agreed to fund Ramciel as the interim headquarters for the SPLM for six months between January and June 2005, international donors advocated for Juba to be the capital city of southern Sudan, citing its greater capacity, although Juba was, at the time, nothing more than a conglomerate of *tukuls*.[36] Nevertheless, if relocating the capital was not possible, revolutionary leaders started to shape it according to their nationalist vision and ideals. 'The city', wrote Doll,

[33] Interview with an Equatorian who joined the SPLM in the 1990s, Juba, October 2023
[34] Interview with SPLM senior leader and former Minister, Juba, October 2023
[35] Wale Adebanwi, "The City, Hegemony and Ethno-Spatial Politics: The Press and the Struggle for Lagos in Colonial Nigeria," *Nationalism & ethnic politics* 9, no. 4 (2003): 26.
[36] Naseem Badiey, "Les Dynamiques Locales de la Construction Étatique à Juba, 2005-2008," *Politique Africaine* 122 (2011).

‘is both an arena of conflict and a space from which novel post-conflict trajectories, topographies and modes of governance arise and are forged’.[37]

Figure 6. John Garang Mausoleum, next to the National Parliament in Juba

Source: https://jubainthemaking.com/garang-mausoleum/

For example, *Juba Na Bari*, one of Juba's most significant neighbourhoods and home to most of the foreign embassies, UN institutions, and ministries, was renamed *Thöŋ Piny*, a Dinka name. Similarly, the death and remembrance of John Garang through the erection of the Garang Mausoleum, next to the national assembly, played an important role in asserting the primacy of the SPLM and its nationalist hegemony in Juba and South Sudan. As Del Vicario argues in her biography of John Garang, ‘Dr. Garang de Mabior’s burial […] marked his long-anticipated return to Juba and asserted the SPLM/A’s claim to the city’.[38] This spatial act, as Cawood and Fisher have argued about other post-liberation

[37] Christian Doll, "HOW THÖŊ PINY BECAME JUBA NA BARI: Naming and Place-Making in Urban South Sudan," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 48, no. 2 (2024): 248.
[38] Del Vicario, "The lives, deaths, and afterlives of John Garang: History-making and politics in Sudan and South Sudan," 215.

regimes, ‘constitute[s] [a] symbolic attempt by post-liberation governments to reproduce and reinforce the founding ideas, values, and struggles which brought them to power’.[39]

Whispers of Discontent

Discursive practices wield power not only through their creation of potent symbols and narratives, but also through their material consequences. While Equatorians might have dismissed the SPLM's nationalist rhetoric, they could not escape its tangible impact on their political reality. Beyond mere perceptions of marginalisation, Equatorian elites found themselves systematically sidelined within the political landscape, effectively stripped of their ability to shape, or even influence, the politics of southern Sudan.

Marginalization in the Security Sector

Despite the SPLM's rhetoric of national unity and equal opportunity, Equatorian elites rapidly felt politically sidelined in the post-2005 political landscape, which was dominated by the legacy of the struggle, patriotic history, and a cohort of liberation veterans. Akin to other post-liberation regimes, ‘because the fighters of the liberation army midwifed the new political dispensation, the military claim[ed] an inherent authority on the country’s political fate’.[40] As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Equatorian elites did not occupy senior positions within the SPLA, or did so rarely, significantly reducing their influence in the post-struggle political order. Dinka and Nuer elites hence justified Equatorians' marginalisation by claiming they joined the liberation struggle belatedly, affording them insufficient time to rise through the ranks – an argument rooted

[39] Cawood and Fisher, "“It should be a constant reminder”: Space, meaning and power in post-liberation Africa," 2.
[40] Anna Reuss, "Politicization, professionalization, and personalisation of the Uganda People’s Defence Forces" (PhD Ghent University, 2018), 19.

in a perceived birthright that rendered upward mobility in the security sector virtually unattainable for Equatorians.[41]

Equatorian elites countered that they were systematically denied promotions, arguing that senior army leadership roles should have been bestowed upon them after the 2005 CPA to restore equilibrium among southern factions. Moreover, a senior Equatorian leader asserted that the Dinka leaders viewed arming Equatorians as an unacceptable risk, fearing they could capture Juba and seize power – a deep-rooted apprehension dating to the *Kokora* era.[42] Politically, the 'big tent approach' offered little opportunity for Equatorian inclusion in the southern government's decision-making process. In fact, since SPLM leaders prized military prowess above all else, the only Equatorians who secured relatively influential positions in the post-liberation military regime were Clement Wani Konga, head of the Mundari Militia; Theophilis Ochang, chairman of the Equatorian Defence Force; and James Wani Igga, a senior SPLA general. Hailing from Central Equatoria, a key state for the SPLM as it established itself in Juba, these three individuals were appointed caretaker governors during the transition period. For other Equatorian elites, however, the situation was politically precarious, as most lacked a strong foothold in the security sector and found themselves relegated to being mere spectators of the power-sharing accords between military elites. Despite some Equatorian participation in the transitional government, their junior SPLM ranks – again a consequence of their belated involvement in the liberation struggle – or their previous affiliations with Khartoum undermined their ability to advocate for regional interests. Preoccupied with securing their own political standing, personal status, and financial security in the new order, these individuals also simply lacked the inclination or leverage to champion Equatoria's cause effectively.

[41] Interview with Senior Military Leader of the SPLA, Juba, February 2022
[42] Interview with Equatorian leader and Former Member of the SPLM/A, Juba, October 2023

Patronage, Corruption, and Exclusion

In the 1980s and 1990s, the SPLM garnered support – including from Equatoria – by vowing to diverge from the economic policies of the Khartoum government, condemning their centralised nature and the systematic marginalisation of the peripheries in the distribution of revenues. However, once in power and compelled to satisfy liberation fighters and consolidate its authority, the SPLM paradoxically replicated the very same patterns of centralisation, extraversion, and predatory politics it had previously denounced – the same insidious practices that had led to the concentration of developmental gains in the hands of a few elites in Khartoum. This *politics of accommodation* left little room for an ideological change.[43] In the aftermath of liberation, SPLM cadres rapidly engaged in a scramble to access resources and position themselves within lucrative global economic networks. As Sennesael and Verhoeven have argued, 'not only did this routinely involve liberation movement heavyweights partnering with self-declared "cowboy capitalists", but these deals represented an extension of intra-SPLM competition over influence, money, and ethnic fiefdoms'.[44] SPLM leaders dispensed vast swaths of land – including in the fertile Equatoria region – to foreign investors, while also establishing questionable joint ventures with dubious entities. Corruption scandals began to surface, the most egregious of which was the infamous 'Dura Saga' scandal, where a staggering $3 billion was squandered on grain purchases that never materialised in a region where 50% of food needs were not met.[45] Moreover, the burgeoning oil industry, which had touted the resource-rich fields in Unity and Upper

[43] Verhoeven, *Water, civilization, and power in Sudan : the political economy of military-Islamist state-building*.
[44] Sennesael and Verhoeven, "Breaking from the past? Environmental narratives, logics of power, and the (re)production of food insecurity in South Sudan," 11.
[45] "South Sudan to Probe 'Dura Saga' Grain Swindle ", *Voice of America* 16 May 2013; *South Sudan Food Security Update, July 2005*, FEWS NET (24 July 2005), https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/south-sudan-food-security-update-july-2005.

Nile, swiftly minted a new class of oligarchs, whose petrodollars further fuelled the frenetic scramble for wealth and power, coinciding with a period of peak international oil prices. As the International Crisis Group argued, ‘some officials justified their scramble for oil money as recompense for decades of wartime suffering’.[46] To be clear, the Equatoria region as a whole did not descend into outright economic marginalisation after the CPA. The capital city, Juba, remained situated in Central Equatoria; furthermore, the region continued to benefit from trade networks with Uganda, relatively well-developed road infrastructure, and fertile agricultural lands, which prevented Equatorians from falling into food insecurity, in contrast to communities in Bahr el Ghazal.[47] However, Equatorian elites lacked access to crucial patronage networks and felt that the economic benefits of independence were becoming centralised in the hands of the Dinka-Nuer elites. As an Equatorian MP lamented, 'there were simply no opportunities for us to attain revenue-generating positions in the post-CPA period’.[48] Although the SPLM had major agricultural and hydropower projects in the Equatoria region, it remained uncertain how, or if, these would benefit local elites. In reality, there was a significant shift in the political economy, moving away from Equatoria’s traditional agricultural core to the more profitable oil fields in Unity and Upper Nile states.Furthermore, wealth remained concentrated within the Juba government rather than being distributed to the sub-national states, including the three Equatorian states, causing apprehension among Equatorian elites about the future.[49] Corroborating these concerns, in its 2012 Public Finance Assessment, the World Bank noted that 'large over-spenders in all three years under review were the SPLA, the Ministry of Finance, and the President’s Office'.[50]

[46] *Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan’s Bleeding Finances*.
[47] *South Sudan Food Security Update, July 2005*.
[48] Interview with Central Equatorian MP, Member of the SPLM, Juba, March 2022
[49] Edward Thomas, *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
[50] World Bank, *Public Finance Management Assessment: South Sudan* (31 May 2012).

Land, Returnees, and Indigeneity

In 2005, Branch and Mampilly warned that 'the most serious stumbling block on the way towards a successful political and social integration of returning Equatorians [will be] the settlement of hundreds of thousands of Dinka on land claimed by returning refugees'.[51] Their assessment could not be more accurate. By 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had already recorded approximately 300,000 returnees.[52] Two years later, in 2011, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated that the number of returnees to South Sudan had reached 2.5 million.[53] Equatorians, many of whom had massively fled to northern Uganda during the civil war, harboured a strong conviction regarding their right to reclaim land that was illegally occupied or sold.[54] However, Dinka settlers' unwillingness to depart stoked recurrent tensions, prompting Equatorian community leaders to challenge SPLM heavyweights over their inaction on this matter.[55] Soon, the rhetoric of 'internal colonialism' gained traction, with some Equatorian elites fuelling the idea that the SPLM's long-term plan was to take over Equatoria by maintaining the presence of a Dinka population, together with their cattle, in the area. Moreover, as Badiey has demonstrated, 'more non-Equatorians came to Juba than in any previous time in the town's history, upsetting a delicate balance of power within the formerly isolated garrison town'.[56] This new reality fuelled discourses of *indigeneity* among Equatorians, who embraced colonial notions of

[51] Adam Branch and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, "Winning the war, but losing the peace? The dilemma of SPLM/A civil administration and the tasks ahead," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2005): 2.
[52] "Number of returnees to South Sudan passes the 300,000 mark," news release, 10 February 2009.
[53] *IOM South Sudan, Vol.1 Issue 3*, The International Organisation for Migration (November 2011).
[54] Sara Pantuliano and Irina Mosel, *The long road home: Opportunities and obstacles to the reintegration of IDPs and refugees returning to Southern Sudan and the Three Areas*, Overseas Development Institute (London, 2008).
[55] Naseem Badiey, "The Strategic Instrumentalization of Land Tenure in State-Building: The Case of Juba, South Sudan," *Africa* 83, no. 1 (2016).
[56] Badiey, *The state of post-conflict reconstruction : land, urban development and state-building in Juba, Southern Sudan*, 155-56.

territoriality and authority to protect themselves. The presence of cattle-herders in Equatoria became a weapon of mobilisation for Equatorian elites seeking to mobilise popular support. At the same time, the relationship between the SPLM and the Equatorian communities residing in Juba was strained. With Juba designated as the capital, the SPLM considered itself to have full authority over the city, including its land, much to the dismay of Bari elders. As Badiey has described in her detailed study of post-conflict reconstruction in Juba, 'stories spread among local residents that SPLM members were intimidating Equatorian civil service personnel, sparking negative memories of perceived "Dinka domination" during the Addis Ababa period, and raising concerns about the marginalisation of Bari-speaking groups and other Equatorians under the SPLM-government'.[57] On the other hand, the SPLM perceived the Bari group as 'collaborators' who did not contribute to the liberation struggle, part and parcel of the former political system that needed to be drastically transformed to allow southern Sudan to thrive.

GENESIS OF A NATIONALIST PROJECT

The Youngster and the Veteran

Not long before the 2010 gubernatorial elections, which were set to coincide with the presidential and parliamentary elections in Sudan, two individuals, seemingly at odds in every respect except for their Equatorian identity, crossed paths in Juba. The first individual's name was Joseph Bangasi Bakosoro, an ethnic Zande from Western Equatoria, born almost exactly on the border between the Central African Republic and Southern Sudan. Bakosoro, of modest height, was not born into the esteemed Avongara clan, regarded as the royal lineage among the Azande ethnic group.[58] Instead, he belonged to the less prestigious Kowe clan, an essential factor for comprehending subsequent

[57] Badiey, *The state of post-conflict reconstruction : land, urban development and state-building in Juba, Southern Sudan*, 91.
[58] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Origin of the Ruling Clan of the Azande," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 4 (1957).

political manoeuvres. Perhaps stemming from this background, he has steadfastly championed a somewhat populist discourse, a narrative that appears to have struck a profound chord among Western Equatorians. Like many of his peers, Bakosoro was sent by his family to a Catholic-run boarding school in Wau, one of the few available in the South. Post-independence education in the region had seen little change from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium period; as Tounsel observed in his account of post–World War II education in the Nugent School in Southern Sudan, 'there were sports and house/interhouse competitions, and activities like the Table Games Club and Debating Club. On one occasion the school was divided into "tribal groups" and a game organized with the goal of making an illustrated primer in every vernacular language'.[59] Disenchanted with the Catholic education and restless for change, Bakosoro joined the SPLM as a teenager, captivated by the anti-Khartoum narrative and inspired by the charisma of John Garang de Mabior. He actively participated as one of the numerous SPLM soldiers in the movement's unsuccessful offensive against Juba on 7 July 1992, which aimed to capture the city and end the war. Like many Equatorians, he had nonetheless become frustrated with the status of Equatorians within the SPLM.

It is fair to assert that Bakosoro is a skilled orator – arguably one of the best in South(ern) Sudan – endowed with immense charisma. In his own words, he claimed to be able to 'sell any political idea to anyone'.[60] He relishes sharing an anecdote to highlight his talent, yet its veracity remains unverifiable, as none of the interviewees recollected such a moment:

> All the SPLM commissioners, by that time 79 commissioners, were gathered in New Kush, in Eastern Equatoria, in 2002. Dr John [Garang] came to chair the meeting of the commissioners, to listen to them. […] Each commissioner was

[59] Tounsel, *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan*, 36.
[60] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023

> given three minutes … strictly three minutes! The first commissioner, he talked, three minutes, they stopped him! […] When I began talking, the chairman forgot about the time… I talked for thirty minutes![61]

This proficiency, combined with a natural ability to connect with people, earned him widespread recognition in the Western Equatorian microcosm. Beyond his oratory prowess, Bakosoro was unmistakably an ambitious man, the kind who always felt compelled to lead a group and express his thoughts openly. After spending several years working with UNICEF following the 2005 CPA, Bakosoro joined the SPLM national secretariat in 2008; yet, he appeared to aspire to more than bureaucratic roles. Hailing from a non-elite background and lacking financial resources, Bakosoro was what Adebanwi would call a *subaltern* or a *radical lumpen.*[62] He harboured aspirations of transforming himself into a member of the elite of Western Equatoria.

Figure 7 Joseph Bakosoro in 2009
Source : https://www.flickr.com/photos/41597758

[61] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[62] Wale Adebanwi, *How to Become a Big Man in Africa: Subalternity, Elites, and Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2024).

The second individual, Clement Wani Konga, belonged to the ethnic Mundari group of Central Equatoria.[63] In many ways, Clement Konga differed from Joseph Bakosoro. While Bakosoro was young and still navigating the intricacies of politics, Konga was already a so-called *Big Man*, a seasoned political veteran approaching his sixties. Moreover, he derived his charisma not from oratory finesse or intellectual capabilities, but from his towering stature and his military prowess, which left a lasting impression on his interlocutors.[64]

Born in 1950 into a cattle-herding family as the third of eight children in Terekeka County, Konga grew up amid the displacement and violence that followed the outbreak of the First Sudanese Civil War. Raised by his stepbrother, he studied at Okaru Seminary, a Comboni institution in Torit County. When the Sudanese government expelled missionaries from the South and took over the school, Konga fled to northern Uganda, where he continued his studies at Lacor Seminary in Gulu. In 1967, in the final years of the war, however, he abandoned his priestly training to join the Anyanya rebellion, persuaded by Joseph Lagu, who used to visit schools in northern Uganda to recruit soldiers, to fight for the South.[65] After training at Owinyi Ki-Bull military camp, he was sent to Israel in 1969 for a stronger military training, at a time when Israel was actively backing the Anyanya rebellion as part of its broader strategy of supporting non-Arab groups in the region.

After the signature of the Addis Ababa agreement in 1972, effectively ending the civil war, Wani Konga was selected among 200 Equatorian officers for reintegration in the Sudanese army. He became an intelligence officer in the Republican Guard of President

[63] Central Equatoria State was known as Bahr al Jebel State before the CPA.
[64] Interview with a 'National Expert' from the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Juba, March 2022
[65] Lujang John Jangaling, *Major General Clement Wani Konga : a hero or a villain* (Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers 2023).

Jaafar Nimeiri in Khartoum, before being redeployed in Torit.[66] During the second Sudanese civil war, he fought alongside Khartoum's forces, with his strong Mundari militia proving an indispensable force against the SPLM. Konga was thus, as the South Sudanese say, *from arab*. It is not to say that Konga was pro-Khartoum, but the SPLM violent attack against Equatorian civilians in Terekeka in 1986 convinced him that he had to protect Central Equatorians from John Garang's SPLM. In 2005, Konga nonetheless managed to reach an agreement with the SPLM as part of the 'south-south dialogue', allowing him to continue serving as the governor of Central Equatoria. Shortly after the CPA, in 2006, he became a member of the SPLM. Konga's capacity to lock eyes with SPLM military leaders, a testament to his formidable military background, became a source of admiration among Equatorians. Likewise, the SPLM's apprehension regarding Konga and his Mundari militia instilled a sense of pride within the Equatorian community. Adding to his mystique, there are rumours that Konga, despite outwardly aligning with the NCP during the civil war, operated clandestinely for the SPLM under the code name 'Black Fox'.[67] In such a narrative, the ostensibly malevolent protagonist underwent a metamorphosis, emerging as a hero worthy of inclusion among the pantheon of revolutionary leaders. In an Equatorian political community in search of heroes with whom they could identify, Konga was, hence, highly esteemed.

Rock City

How and why did the two men come together? Although Wani Konga did not remember in detail how the encounter happened, it is recounted that Bakosoro seized the initiative, propelled by a profound interest in meeting Clement Konga:

[66] Jangaling, *Major General Clement Wani Konga : a hero or a villain* 57.
[67] While I could not verify this element, different sources in Juba have mentioned this story. Lujang John Jangaling, a Mundari researcher, also mentioned this fact in his book *Major General Wani Konga: Hero or Villain?,* independently published, 2023.

> One day I thought, 'Governor Konga is here [in Juba] and I should know other politicians in Equatoria'. I managed to call him to fix an appointment, and he told me to come to the house'. I asked Konga if he was also going to compete or not [in the gubernatorial elections]. He was happy to talk about politics, and said we should meet the next day.[68]

The Western Equatorian politician was clearly seeking allies and recognition, especially after making the bold and risky choice to run as an independent in the gubernatorial race. He was up against Jemma Nunu Kumba, a candidate backed by the SPLM and a Zande from the prestigious Avongara clan. Two years earlier, after the death of Western Equatoria's governor, Abu John, who had succeeded the influential Avongara elite Patrick Zamoi, President Kiir had appointed Nunu Kumba to the role. Some sources suggest that Western Equatorian elders had given Kiir three names to consider as Zamoi's replacement, but Nunu Kumba wasn't one of them—yet he still managed to secure the position.[69] Bakosoro's narrative of his decision to run against Nunu Kumba underscores his populist stance:

> I was living in Gudele.[70] In the morning, at around 6 o'clock, three elders arrived at my door. They said, '[W]e are sent by the people of Western Equatoria; elections are coming, and you are our choice to compete'. In our Zande culture, it is customary for crucial messages to be conveyed early in the morning before we wash. I said I had no intention to run, but they emphasized it was the decision of the people. They said they had already chosen me in 2005 and 2008, but I had declined. I thought my political career would be damaged if I didn't listen to them. I was among 24 candidates competing for the endorsement of the SPLM. When the

[68] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[69] Joshua Craze, *Jemma's War: Political Strife in Western Equatoria*, Small Arms Survey (October 2023).
[70] Gudele is a neighbourhood situated to the west of the city centre in Juba

> SPLM announced Nunu Kumba had been appointed as flagbearer, I decided to run as an independent candidate.[71]

Although they belonged to distinct generations – Bakosoro did not witness the politics of the *kokora* period – Konga and Bakosoro nonetheless shared a common dedication to Equatoria and significant personal political ambition, along with their mutual distrust of the Dinka. During their first meeting, Konga and Bakosoro delved into discussions about the upcoming elections and the impending campaign, and they touched upon the marginalisation of Equatorians within the new political order. Several weeks before, Josephine Lagu, a graduate of the University of London, undersecretary in the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, and the daughter of Joseph Lagu, had been accused of embezzlement and dismissed by President Kiir.[72] Equatorian elites felt her dismissal as a shock, perceiving as an anti-Equatoria move that again highlighted their marginalization within the state apparatus.

The two men also discussed the factionalisms within the Equatoria region – what they called the 'disintegration of the Equatoria nation' – which hindered the unity of Equatoria as a cohesive group. Indeed, in 2010, Equatoria was very far from being a cohesive socio-political unit, and the era of Joseph Tombura, Joseph Lagu, Eliaba Surur, and the Equatoria Intellectual Committee, seemed distant. While Wani Konga had previously met with other Equatorian governors – Samuel Abujohn and Aloisio Ojetuk, in Torit, Eastern Equatoria, in February 2007 – the so-called 'Greater Equatoria Conference' did not result in any concrete outcomes.[73] To be clear, Bakosoro and Konga did not *invent* the need to revamp Equatorian nationalism. In fact, conversations were ongoing in Equatorian political circles about marginalisation and the need for action. As southern Sudan was

[71] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[72] "Lagu's family celebrates acquittal of corruption charges," *Sudan Tribune* 6 May 2010.
[73] "Sudan's Greater Equatoria conference discusses security, LRA," *Sudan Tribune* 28 February 2007.

preparing for independence, Equatorian elites met regularly; in one of those meeting, Joseph Lagu was reportedly already exhorting Equatorians to plan for secession in case their political situation did not improve in the SPLM nation.[74]

A day after their first encounter, as agreed, Bakosoro and Konga reconvened in Rock City, a location not far from the Jebel Kujur Mountain in Juba. On this occasion, Konga was accompanied by his deputy governor, Manase Lomule Waya.[75] Lomule Waya, concurrently serving as the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for Central Equatoria State at that time, had supported the SPLM from Nairobi during the liberation struggle.[76] Lomule was a principled man always ready to serve, and he faithfully acted as Konga's aide – having first met him in 2005 – and diligently worked to implement his ideas. Lomule's presence can be interpreted as a sign of Konga's careful consideration of Joseph Bakosoro. It underscores Konga's belief in Bakosoro's value as an individual with whom it was worth forming an alliance, or at the very least, engaging in serious discussions. While young Bakosoro actively sought potential allies, Konga was in fact equally interested. Konga sought recognition as the main protector of Equatoria, positioning himself as a father figure for the region—someone who could stand up to both the SPLM and the Dinka if needed. As an elder, forming a political alliance with other Equatorian leaders would help him gain this role, and with the support of his Mundari militia, he could rise to a prominent position in the region. The Mundari elite, once embodying a form of pan-Equatorian authority, might then have the chance to claim the status of a national 'Big Man', putting Konga in a position to challenge figures like Salva Kiir, Paul Malong from Bahr el Ghazal, and Riek Machar. During this second encounter, which

[74] This discussion was reported by John Young in John Young, *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking* (London: Zed Books, 2019).
[75] Interview with Manase Lomule Juba, October 2023
[76] Ibid

lasted several hours, the trio revisited the imperative of reforging the unity of the Equatoria nation to counterbalance the influence of the Dinka.

Fearing that they would be left behind in the post-liberation order, they sought to present an alternative model to President Kiir's militarism and centralized vision of power. They rather opposed a form of civic nationalism that would emphasize constitutionality and liberal values. Militarism, they concluded, would become a source of marginalisation should they fail to unite. *Equatoria-ness* hence became a potential 'locus for the articulation of legitimate interest'.[77] Of course, they were not the only ones thinking that way. At the end of the meeting, Konga also emphasised the necessity of establishing connections with politicians from Eastern Equatoria – it was necessary, in his own words, to 'tighten the belt' – stressing the importance of solidarity and unity among Equatorians.[78] A nationalist project without Eastern Equatoria would indeed lack coherence, as it is an integral part of the historical Equatoria nation. In line with the localised nature of Equatorian politics at that time, it is striking that, according to Bakosoro, Konga did not possess a clear understanding of potential candidates running in Eastern Equatoria.[79] Bakosoro subsequently expressed contentment when revealing that he was acquainted with the SPLM's favoured candidate in Eastern Equatoria, someone he had actually attended school with in Wau: Louis Lobong Lojore.

Following the meeting in Rock City, Bakosoro departed for Yambio in Western Equatoria to prepare for the campaign against Jemma Nunu Kumba. Meanwhile, Konga, the SPLM's candidate for Central Equatoria, was gearing up for the election in his state. Should we see the debates unfolding around him as driven by personal ambitions, or could they represent a real attempt to launch a nationalist movement that transcended individual

[77] Elisha Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo, "Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalities of Survival: Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya," *African Studies Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 226.
[78] Interview with Manase Lomule, Juba, October 2023
[79] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023

goals? Both seem to be correct answers. Certainly, Konga and Bakosoro viewed Equatorian nationalism as being in service of their searing ambitions, capitalising on widespread dissatisfaction within the Equatoria region towards the SPLM. Equatorian nationalism should, in that vein, be viewed as a process through which agents, in this case Bakosoro and Konga, aim to appropriate both a heritage – *Equatoria-ness* – and an ideology – *federalism* – to bolster their political careers. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to posit that both perceived the project not only as beneficial for themselves, but also for the broader Equatorian nation and for South Sudan as a whole. Spencer, in his study of elites and nationalism in Sri Lanka, insisted that 'a discussion of nationalism cannot avoid a discussion of power, but the power involved is not necessarily (or usually) the property of a particular individual or segment of society […] We need to look to arguments which enable us to discuss power in non-instrumental terms'.[80] Beneath discussions on Equatorian unity, a broader political project indeed unfolded, demanding the creation of a modern, multi-ethnic state founded on a federal structure. Their initiative reopened longstanding debates about the *nation* and *liberation* within Sudanese society, debates that the liberation struggle could only conceal for a limited period, despite repeated claims of an 'end of history'.

The Gubernatorial Elections

Undeniably critical junctures emerge in analyses of the intricacies of political projects, the building of a collective agency, and the fate of political elites. For Equatorian elites, the 2010 gubernatorial elections and their immediate aftermath were unquestionably such moments. Had Bakosoro and Konga not emerged victorious, the Equatorian nationalist project might never have seen the light of day. This is not to suggest that Konga or

[80] Nugent and Shore, *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, 92.

Bakosoro would have forsaken their political ideals, nor that other actors would not have eventually mobilised Equatorian nationalism. Would Wani Konga have negotiated such a project with Jemma Nunu Kumba? Their relationship made this collaboration virtually impossible. Could Equatorian unity have been forged through a different path? We may never know, as Bakosoro emerged victorious in Western Equatoria, Wani Konga in Central Equatoria, and Lobong in Eastern Equatoria. Nonetheless, it is possible to suggest that the nationalist project of reunifying the various groups comprising Equatoria to reach a sense of collective agency certainly might not have emerged as we know it, as it relied on the governor's capacity to 'institutionalize their own interests'.[81] Elections in the three Equatoria states barely made an impact, overshadowed by Omar al-Bashir's presidential race in Sudan and Salva Kiir's victory in the Southern Region. At that time, the CPA was hanging by a thread, with deep animosity between the SPLM and the NCP threatening its stability. Most diplomatic efforts were centered on keeping the CPA intact, no matter the cost.[82] Equatorian politics at that time was clearly dismissed as *unworthy*, as everyone was focused on SPLM senior leaders.[83]

Western Equatoria

The most remarkable triumph was that of Joseph Bakosoro in Western Equatoria. As an independent candidate facing the SPLM's Nunu Kumba, all the odds were undeniably stacked against him. Nunu Kumba was indeed anticipated to secure victory, mirroring the expectations for other SPLM candidates in the remaining nine states of Southern Sudan. Nunu's overseas assignment for the SPLM during the liberation war had, however, created distance between her and Western Equatoria, a sentiment that the people of Western Equatoria openly expressed. Bakosoro hence purposefully emphasised his profound

[81] Suzanne Francis, *Institutionalizing Elite: Political Elite, Formation and Change in KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Legislature* (Leiden: Brill 2011).
[82] Johnson, *South Sudan the untold story : from independence to civil war*.
[83] Interview with a European Ambassador posted in Juba from 2010 to 2015, Paris, June 2023

understanding of Western Equatoria and pledged to bring security and unity to Western Equatorians – a promise that Nunu, as governor, had been unable to fulfil, as the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ambororo nomads had been active in the area. Bakosoro surprisingly emerged victorious in the election, garnering over 5,000 votes more than Nunu Kumba, who, quickly and democratically, conceded her defeat.[84] A community leader encapsulated the prevailing positive sentiment towards Bakosoro:

> Before the Azande were becoming very weak. But when Bakosoro came, he started giving them some freedom to become men! … Before he came to the chair, we were treated badly. And we were all keeping quiet. … But when he came, there was already this issue of Arrow Boys … because we were running from the LRA. But when he came, he said, 'We cannot leave ourselves to run. Where do we want to run to from our land? We must stand and fight back!' So this gave courage to the people.[85]

Adorned in the traditional Azande cloth known as *bagadi* and clutching a *mambere*, a traditional Azande knife, during his inauguration as governor of Western Equatoria a month after the gubernatorial elections, Bakosoro ascended to the status of *Big Man* under the nose of the Avongara clan. However, this *revolution*, which took political power from the hereditary Avongara aristocracy, would not be without consequences for the nationalist project of the governors, as the Avongara elites would seize any opportunity to break it. As Bakosoro surveyed the crowd assembled before him, in a bid to inscribe himself into the national liberation project despite running as an independent, he concluded: 'I am SPLM, and the SPLM is me'.[86] Indeed, the legitimacy of power continued to be rooted in the national liberation struggle.

[84] 'Col. Bakosoro wins the W.Equatoria Gubernatorial Elections', *Sudan Tribune*, 26 April 2010
[85] Bruno Braak and John Justin Kenyi, *Customary Authorities Displaced: the Experience of Western Equatorians in Ugandan Refugee Settlements*, Rift Valley Institute (Nairobi, Kenya, 2018).
[86] "'I am SPLM and SPLM is Me' – says New Governor of W. Equatoria," *Sudan Tribune* 26 May 2010.

Central Equatoria

In Central Equatoria, Clement Konga emerged victorious, as expected, though not without facing several hurdles. The SPLM Bureau had not chosen Lt. Gen. Alfred Ladu Gore, an ethnic Bari and a longstanding friend of John Garang, as the official SPLM candidate, and he thus opted to run as an independent candidate. Although purportedly leading in the polls, except within Wani Konga's stronghold of Terekeka County, Ladu Gore was announced as the loser by the National Elections Commission (NEC).[87] Despite many petitions and reports indicating that security officers had threatened and arrested Ladu Gore's electoral observers, the NEC confirmed Wani Konga's victory.[88] The Bari community, residing in the vicinity of Juba, where the SPLM had established a strong presence, missed the opportunity to have a governor representing their local interests, much to the satisfaction of Salva Kiir.[89]

Eastern Equatoria

In Eastern Equatoria, Louis Lobong, endorsed by President Salva Kiir, emerged victorious, as well. During the campaign, the NCP candidate, Abdalla Albert Alfoda, had attempted to mobilise the extensive Dinka community that had established roots in Eastern Equatoria during the liberation struggle. Originating predominantly from Jonglei in the Greater Upper Nile region, this community became increasingly dissatisfied with the SPLM, feeling unrepresented by Salva Kiir, who hailed from Bahr el Ghazal. Alfoda also endeavoured to exploit the Dinka community's concerns about potential expulsion by the Toposa community, as the number of Eastern Equatorian returnees was

[87] "Central Equatoria Residents Reject Governor-Elect, Petition NEC," *Sudan Tribune* 11 May 2010.
[88] *Democracy on Hold: Rights Violations in the April 2010 Sudan Elections*, Human Rights Watch (New York, 30 June 2010).
[89] On the land issue in Juba, see Badiey, "Les Dynamiques Locales de la Construction Étatique à Juba, 2005-2008."; Badiey, "The Strategic Instrumentalization of Land Tenure in State-Building: The Case of Juba, South Sudan."

staggering.[90] Moreover, driven by potential mining revenues, Louis Lobong had been vocal about addressing the influence of Dinka Bor elites over most business activities in Eastern Equatoria.[91] However, despite Alfoda's strong pro-Dinka agenda, Lobong could still secure a victory, achieving what was arguably the easiest win among the three Equatoria states.

Table 1. Gubernatorial Election Results in Greater Equatoria, April 2010

Western Equatoria State	*Central Equatoria State*	*Eastern Equatoria State*
Joseph Bakosoro - Independent	**Clement Wani Konga - SPLM**	**Louis Lobong - SPLM**
Jemma Nunu Kumba - SPLM	Alfred Ladu Gore – Independent	Abdalla Albert Alfoga – NCP
Abbas Ajalla Bambey- UDSF	Aloisio Ojetuk - Independent	Aloisio Ojetuk - Independent
Natale Kimbo - Independent		
Awad Said Ahmed – NCP		

Source: Compiled from various sources, including interviews and newspapers (Sudan Tribune; Catholic Radio Network)

PERFORMING NATIONALISM

Leaving for Yambio

Following the inauguration of the newly elected governors in their respective states, and in the aftermath of the self-determination referendum, where just under 99% of the 3.8 million southern Sudanese voters had opted for secession from Sudan 'in a calm, peaceful, and orderly environment',[92] Clement Wani Konga orchestrated a meeting with Joseph Bakosoro and Louis Lobong in Juba in February 2011. The conversation, held in Rock City before the elections, was rejuvenated, this time with the participation of Louis

[90] According to a World Bank report, 'the EES Government Strategic Plan claims that the population tripled from around 500,000 in 2003 to 1,500,000 in 2006' - 'Sudan: Towards Sustainable and Broad-Based Growth', World Bank, Report 52514-SD, 2009

[91] Anne Walraet, "Le Sud-Soudan dans l'attente du référendum. Un regard sur la formation de l'Etat par le bas," *Politique Africaine* 119 (2010).

[92] *'Final report on the Southern Sudan Referendum 2011'*, European Union Election Observation Mission, 2011

Lobong. Lobong belonged to the same generation as Bakosoro; the two studied at the seminary in Wau together. Lobong also became a member of the SPLM during adolescence and took up arms in Eastern Equatoria. Interestingly, both assumed the role of SSRRC county secretaries in the same year, subsequently served as commissioners together, and were elected as governors in 2010.[93] In stark contrast to Bakosoro, Lobong is highly secretive. While Bakosoro greets visitors with a warm smile and a desire to be liked, Lobong, who hails from the Toposa community in Greater Kapoeta, endeavours to assert his strength and power directly. With a penchant for intelligence work and navigating the intricacies of the security sector, Lobong had been appointed chief of the National Intelligence and Security Service for the Southern Sector of South Sudan.[94] Lobong largely sees himself more as a security sector officer than a politician. Moreover, in line with SPLM senior leaders, he firmly believes that employing brutal force is necessary when dealing with local affairs.

During the meeting, the trio of governors reached a consensus on the imperative of uniting Equatorians and reconstructing a sense of *Equatoria-ness* to better compete in the vanguard nation. This, as Lynch has argued about the Kalenjin ethnic group in Kenya, required 'emphasi[sing] similarities and elements of shared "tradition" and "memory", and play[ing] down dialectic differences, divergent histories, and cultural variation'.[95] Such an endeavour was not easy because, as one Equatorian leader insisted, 'Equatoria is a collection of tribes, we don't talk one language'.[96] To project unity, the governors hence agreed to extend their meeting in another location; indeed, it was politically important for the three governors to 'make history and choose a location where to start our project'.[97]

[93] Discussion with Joseph Bakosoro and Louis Lobong
[94] 'Louis Lobong Lojore', Mapping Actors and Alliances Project – South Sudan, Small Arms Survey, accessed 8 January 2023
[95] Lynch, *I say to you : ethnic politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya*, 32.
[96] Interview with Easter Equatorian MP, Juba, March 2022
[97] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023

Yambio, a town nestled in the ancestral lands of the Azande people and bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo, emerged as an agreed-upon location. It is telling that Equatorian leaders 'fled' Juba, the historical centre of Equatorian hegemony in southern Sudan, to meet. Various factors could have influenced such a choice. First, Bakosoro likes to emphasise that the other two governors chose Yambio because, as he puts it, 'you [Joseph Bakosoro] came up with the idea of reviving an Equatorian nation'.[98] However, no other interviewee would confirm this account. On the contrary, many see Clement Konga as the instigator of Equatorian unity. However, it is almost certain that Bakosoro pushed for Yambio, as this choice would undoubtedly garner him political credit within his constituency, further solidifying his recently attained status in Western Equatoria. Secondly, as Manase Lomule has suggested, Yambio was chosen as a locale for discussions in a serene environment.[99] Convening in Juba, the headquarters of the SPLM and the location of the State House – but more importantly, the new locus of the SPLM state-building strategy – indeed appeared inappropriate for the celebration of a revitalised Equatorian nation. However, Yambio was remote and far from scrutiny. Cristina Roque, in her study of rebel governance in South Sudan, has also underscored that 'Yambio was one of the most politically independent areas during the transition of 2005–2011'.[100] The election of Bakosoro appears to validate this characteristic, and the chosen site was hence highly symbolic.

Thirdly, I suggest that the three leaders understood that it was tactically wise to meet outside of Central Equatoria for the project of re-inventing an Equatorian nation. The idea of *Equatoria-ness* – as exemplified by the *Equatorian Intellectual Committee* – has historically revolved around Central Equatoria, with Bari leaders playing a particularly

[98] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[99] Interview with Manase Lomule, Juba, October 2023
[100] Cristina Roque, *Insurgent Nations: Rebel Rule in Angola and South Sudan*, 29.

prominent role in political endeavours. As described in Chapter 2, the Bari hegemony stems from the colonial authorities' decision to designate Juba as a political hub in southern Sudan, incorporating Bari speakers into the government structure. Consequently, the Bari – and, to a broader extent, Central Equatorians – have consistently regarded themselves as intellectuals and individuals with a strong association with governance, positioning themselves in a higher social position compared to other groups in southern Sudan, including within the broader Equatoria region. For instance, the Toposa of Eastern Equatoria, highlighting the central role of cattle in their daily cultural, social, and political practices, have been considered not entirely fitting the mould of traditional Equatorians.[101] According to the criteria that Central Equatorians established – notably through the Equatoria Intellectual Committee in the early 1980s – a *proper* Equatorian elite is thus characterised by intellectual pursuits, involvement in agriculture on their own land, and a display of political 'enlightenment'.[102] These qualities are considered fundamental prerequisites for embracing modernity and being recognised as part of the Equatoria *intelligentsia*. The purpose of relocating to Yambio was hence to envision the creation of a new nation, one where Central Equatoria would not have a hegemonic position, fostering consensus and raising awareness about a redefined political destiny among various communities.

Following several hours of discussions, the three governors subsequently selected Yambio to obtain further details and organise the first public appearance of the three governors together. More surprising was their unanimous decision to unite there promptly, emphasising the urgency of celebrating the newfound unity among Equatorians. Louis Lobong did not even return to Torit in Eastern Equatoria to collect

[101] Interview with Eastern Equatorian community chief, Juba, March 2022

[102] What it means to be a 'proper' Equatorian is based on various interviews with Equatorian intellectuals, community chiefs, and Equatorian politicians during fieldwork in South Sudan. Such investigation is based on Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awọ́lówọ̀ and corporate agency*.

any belongings. The next day, the three governors, accompanied by their respective deputies, organised a convoy and journeyed to Yambio, roughly 12 hours by road, in their vehicles.[103]

The Remaking of Equatoria

Yambio is a typical small provincial African town, featuring a dusty main road running through its centre, several government offices, and lively markets that add vibrancy to its atmosphere. The lush greenery that envelops the area, characterised by extensive stretches of forest that surround it, confirms that visitors have entered the renowned 'green belt', the gateway to Central Africa. However, Yambio had remained underdeveloped since the CPA, serving as a symbol of the neglect and marginalisation that Equatorians had sought to emphasise. Moreover, the criminal activities of the LRA in the area not only provoked significant displacement, but also highlighted the SPLM's incapacity – some would say unwillingness – to tackle important security issues in the peripheries. The three governors named the two-day meeting in Yambio on 24 and 25 February 2011 'the future of Equatoria region in the development and stability of the New Republic of South Sudan'.[104] The governors, accompanied by delegations from the three Equatoria states, did not, in fact, discuss much:

> We only discussed two or three hours during these two days. … [T]he most important was to see the land, to see the place, to enjoy Yambio, and to go around. The questions were 'who are we?'...'Can we have one language, one objective?'…'How do we promote the interests of Equatoria in South Sudan?'… [W]e agreed that yes, we need unity of Equatorians. … [Y]ou know, the fact is that we don't talk one language. … [W]e have 34 languages

[103] Interview with Sapana Abui, former Deputy Governor of Western Equatoria, Juba, October 2023
[104] "Two Days Greater Equatoria Ends in Yambio," *Sudan Tribune* 25 February 2011

> in Equatoria! We are not a tribe. Equatoria is … I can say in a bigger tone … a nation, which comprises different ethnic groups. What binds us together is the land called Equatoria. What binds us together is the nation. … I don't know how it happened…[105]

The two-day meeting had, first and foremost, a symbolic value. The realm of rhetoric and performative politics has, to a certain degree, been undervalued in political science, undoubtedly due to the scant consideration accorded to interpretivism in the political literature. As Wedeen recalls, however, 'through public words and deeds, actors "make their appearance" in the world'.[106] The Yambio meeting hence served as a potent tool for creating meaning, reinventing a common identity, and inaugurating the restored unity among the Equatorians; Cohen indeed insisted that 'the cultivation of mystique, dramatic performance, rhetorical strategies, or a combination of all three' are essential for elites to 'covince the masses that its sectional interests represent the wider public or national interest'.[107] In Yambio, Equatorian nationalism made its appearance. However, other politicians, foreign diplomats, or analysts scarcely acknowledged this symbol. Even other South Sudanese politicians undermined it. When questioned about his recollection of the Yambio conference, a senior Dinka member of the SPLM and Minister in the transitional government of national unity not only affirmed that he had never heard of it, but also added, laughing, that 'only Equatorians care about what is happening in Equatoria'.[108] The meeting, however, held significance, as it mirrored a potentially potent, albeit fragile, unity that the three governors forged, a unity with the potential to drastically reshape the political landscape of South Sudan.

[105] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[106] Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 16.
[107] Cited in Nugent and Shore, *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives*, 2.
[108] Informal discussion with a senior member of the government in his office in Juba, March 2022

‘The meeting’, the local press reported, ‘culminated in a massive rally in which the three governors gave details of their discussions’.[109] Around 1,000 people reportedly gathered at Yambio’s freedom square on 25 February 2011 – a bit more than a month after the referendum for the independence of South Sudan – where the governors, in a long ceremony which involved local chiefs from Western Equatoria, small delegations from the three Equatoria states, including youth movements, and local authorities, addressed the crowd. With the South Sudanese flag proudly draped over the lectern, Clement Wani Konga declared emphatically: ‘Equatorians have started a new chapter. ... [T]his is the beginning of fighting the marginalisation of Equatorians’. Joseph Bakosoro echoed his sentiment, stating, ‘[T]his is the beginning of unity of the people of Equatoria region’. Louis Lobong, adopting a more measured tone, also contributed: ‘[T]he people of Eastern Equatoria State will stand with whatever outcome of the conference to be held in Juba in the interest of Greater Equatoria’. Lobong’s speech underscored a pivotal decision made during the meeting: the organisation of a grand Equatoria conference in Juba in the following months, which intended to ‘send the message of unity, as determined by the leaders, to the broader Equatoria nation’.[110] The Equatoria conference would aim not to assemble a mere handful of political advisors, as was the case in Yambio, but rather to unite hundreds of representatives from all corners of the Equatorian nation. The objective was clear: to materialise and take action on the new nationalist project and foster a comprehensive and inclusive engagement across all sections of the revived Equatorian nation to build a collective agency in the new political order.

[109] "Two Days Greater Equatoria Ends in Yambio."
[110] Interview with Manase Lomule, Juba, October 2023

Gathering the *New* Equatoria Nation

Meeting at Nyakuron

On 14 April 2011, three months before independence, and as agreed upon in Yambio, approximately 300 delegates from Western Equatoria, Central Equatoria, and Eastern Equatoria – along with representatives from the diaspora – gathered in the expansive auditorium of the Nyakuron Cultural Centre in Juba at the invitation of the three governors. The conference marked a crucial victory for them, and they sought to embody the *new* Equatorian nation. Wani Konga managed to mobilise some money – 1.5 million Sudanese pounds – to organise the event at Nyakuron.[111] Located a short distance from John Garang's Memorial Park in Hai Nyakama, the Nyakuron Cultural Centre was built in 1976, in the aftermath of the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement. The centre stands as a testament to the preservation of South Sudanese cultural heritage and serves as a celebration of the country's remarkable diversity. Many Equatorians perceived the timing of the conference, which occurred just before independence, as crucial. Their concerns echoed Joseph Bakosoro's opening statement at the conference, which warned that 'if [Equatorians] don't get [political representation/autonomy] right now, then we will not get it in future, so we have to prepare ourselves'.[112] Bringing together Equatorian elites was crucial for promoting the idea of nationalism among Equatorians, as the governors' project was a top-down initiative that required widespread support. As the historical context shows, however, Equatoria largely remained an elite-driven concept, with little to no connection to the broader population. Similar to the Yambio meeting, the conference failed to make headlines, despite its crucial significance in delineating the boundaries and limitations of the CPA. It also failed to garner the attention of the diplomatic community; none of the interviewees who were in office at the time recalled this conference. A

[111] Interview with Manase Lomule, Juba, October 2023
[112] "Equatorians hold pre-independence conference."

diplomat recalled that ‘everyone was solely focused on independence, building the state, the SPLM, the Dinka, or the Nuer, but the notion of Equatorian nationalism, and any political problem it could represent, was never part of any discussions among us’.[113]

The theme of the three-day conference was 'Justice, Unity, and Prosperity,' which intriguingly mirrored the slogan of the SPLM. This alone underscores the challenge the governors faced in navigating the post-independence order and asserting their competing project in the vanguard nation. Despite the facade of unity in Yambio, the governors found themselves at odds on how to engage with the SPLM. Konga and Lobong, opting for a cautious approach, sought to be accommodating towards the SPLM and wanted to take time to explain their project to secure acceptance of the idea of Equatorian nationalism; indeed, the SPLM remained highly reluctant to entertain any notion reminiscent of *kokor*a and remained suspicious of Equatorian unity. The decision to exercise caution was not without reason: after all, Equatorians had virtually no military capability and were not in a position to assert autonomy through undiplomatic methods. In contrast, and somewhat unsurprisingly, Joseph Bakosoro wanted to move fast and was not particularly interested in ‘sell[ing] the project to the SPLM’,[114] arguing that ‘Equatoria shall never be cowards nor be followers of others’.[115] It was nonetheless decided that invitations would be extended to renowned *liberation* comrades from the SPLM. Among the notable attendees at the conference were thus Telar Deng Ring, an Atout Dinka hailing from Yirol in Lakes State who had sided with the Nasir splinter faction in 1991; accompanying him was Vice-President Riek Machar Teny, also the deputy chairman in the SPLM/A at that time. The presence of Vice-President Machar,

[113] Interview with former Swedish diplomat, Rome, January 2023
[114] Interview with Central Equatorian MP, Juba, October 2023
[115] "Equatorians advocate for justice and equality in S. Sudan," *Sudan Tribune* 15 April 2011

and to a lesser extent Telar Deng, proved to be of great significance for subsequent political developments. According to a former Equatorian state minister:

> President Kiir's mistake was not attaching great importance to these Equatorian conferences. … Machar was present and could establish valuable connections with Equatorian elites, which would later prove immensely beneficial to the SPLM-IO during the civil war.[116]

In fact, with Salva Kiir also being the Vice-President of Sudan, he had to spend most of his time in Khartoum, to some extent leaving Riek Machar to construct an important power network in the south. Alongside invitations to *liberation* comrades, Governor Bakosoro also made it clear during the conference that 'most of the time Equatorians are being suspected, jailed, and accused, but these tactics are all total lies; [Equatoria] shall continue to support and be in [Kiir's] government'.[117] To further reaffirm to the SPLM that Equatorian leaders harboured no intentions of seceding or seizing power, the final communiqué of the conference reiterated the commitment that 'Equatoria pledges full support to the current [Government of Southern Sudan] president having driven the people of southern Sudan to the Promised Land'.[118]

The 2011 Equatoria Conference

During the intensive three-day conference, appeals for unity laid bare the collective concern of Equatorian elites. Bakosoro insisted, '[W]e Equatorians must organise ourselves politically and know what our rights are and be ready to lead our new nation in the right direction, as it will be painful if a new nation is born in a disorganised house'.[119]

---

[116] Interview with Equatorian former state minister from Central Equatoria, Juba, February 2022
[117] ‘"Equatorians hold pre-independence conference."
[118] 2011 Equatoria Conference Resolutions (copy with author)
[119] "Equatorians hold pre-independence conference."

The delegates recognised that internal divisions could result in increased marginalisation. Bakosoro emphasised that the Equatoria conference should not 'be used as a platform for insecurity and hatred; but we need to trust each other'.[120] Equatorian elites also understood that their participation in the post-CPA state- and nation-building process hinged on their capacity to function as a cohesive group rooted in *Equatorian-ness*. Bakosoro, again, insisted that the 'administrative boundaries of [the] Equatoria region into three states [Western, Central, and Eastern Equatoria] should not result to divide of rule' and urged 'the greater Equatorian population to ensure that they are united and not divided on tribal, political, or religious aspects'.[121] To unite Equatorians, the governors once again mobilised the politics of distinction. Wani Konga insisted that 'people should recall the cultural ways of living, in which a cow cannot be reared in agricultural areas', in a sense reactivating the farmers-herders divide. Bakosoro, mirroring Equatorian elites in the 1980s, also insisted:

> Equatorians are known for some qualities that many people may not have. In history Equatorians do not fight among themselves and have never lived a life of hostility; we always lead by example. […] Equatorians [are] born in a good environment of governance and can be witnessed through the activities. […] I urge all to spread such [a] good example to others.[122]

At the end of the conference, specific recommendations were laid out to strengthen both political and cultural identification with Equatoria:

> 1.2. Cultural identity and names of National features of cultural groups in Equatoria shall be respected and the villages or places or mountains or rivers and streams that were arbitrarily renamed their original names shall be restored.

[120] "Equatorians advocate for justice and equality in S. Sudan."
[121] "Equatorians advocate for justice and equality in S. Sudan."
[122] Equatoria Conference 2011 Resolutions

> 1.3. Equatoria parliamentary and senate caucuses at the Federal level should be formed to advocate, lobby, and protect interests of the people in Equatoria.
>
> […]
>
> 1.5. Equatoria cultural expressions shall be promoted, cultural days observed and practiced to enhance and advance social integration.
>
> […]
>
> 4.3. An Equatoria Consultative Council (ECC) be established as a think-tank and forum to address governance, development, security, and other issues of public interest and concerns to Equatoria.[123]

Bakosoro also insisted, '[I]t is clear that the three states of Equatoria are not receiving same level of foreign assistance as the rest of seven states of South Sudan'.[124] In a separate document addressing national politics, Equatorian elites called for the SPLM to implement a federal constitution in the newly independent South Sudan to share political and economic power among the different groups:

> 1.1 A democratic federal system of governance where fundamental rights and freedom are protected, including freedom of expression and access to information. Therefore, the establishment of the new country should be referred to as the Federal Republic of South Sudan

While various groups or leaders have advocated for the implementation of federalism in the history of (southern) Sudan, Equatorians have consistently – in part due to the *kokora* episode – been perceived as the *ur*-federalists in southern Sudan, to the extent that so-called *Equatorianism* is closely associated with federalism and regionalism, regardless of

[123] Equatoria Conference 2011 Resolutions
[124] "Equatorians advocate for justice and equality in S. Sudan."

the practical implications. This ideology regarding the state's institutional structure is founded on the fundamental belief that multi-ethnic societies cannot thrive under a unitary concept of the nation. Senior leaders of the SPLM reject such ideas, viewing the Equatorian pursuit of federalism as a means to undermine the national liberation project and reintroduce sectarian and tribal politics to the vanguard nation. *Equatorianism* nonetheless persists as a loosely defined ideology lacking a formal and coherent framework, leaving it open to various interpretations and with many key questions unanswered.

To promote a more equitable distribution of power at the national level, Equatorians advanced the following recommendations:

> 1.2 Rotational power sharing in the posts of President, the Vice-President, and the Speaker in the Republic of South Sudan shall be equitably shared in the executive, particularly in sovereign ministries and representations in the foreign missions.
>
> […]
>
> 1.20 Juba shall retain its present status as both the state capital of Central Equatoria as well as the national capital of South Sudan.
>
> […]
>
> 3.3. The National Army and the National Security Organs or law enforcement agents shall reflect national character, their mandates and functions shall be regulated by law within a decentralised system of governance.
>
> […]
>
> 3.9. Senior officers and national figures from Equatoria who were politically dismissed without due legal processes by the Khartoum government or Government of Southern Sudan should be reinstated.[125]

[125] Equatoria Conference 2011 Resolutions

Bringing the April 2011 'Justice, Prosperity, and Unity' conference to a close, Riek Machar rose from his seat, recognised that the 'topics discussed are important', and made a solemn declaration: 'The SPLM is fully dedicated to the principles of federalism and decentralisation. Consequently, the new Republic of South Sudan shall be founded upon democratic governance'.[126]

NATIONALISM, LEADERSHIP, AND LEGITIMACY

As South Sudan approached independence, the three governors demonstrated unity and achieved a significant level of cohesion by mobilising nationalism as an idea, in contrast to other Equatorian governors prior to the 2010 gubernatorial elections. Furthermore, they effectively conveyed their ambitions to other Equatorian elites, resulting in the success of the 2011 Equatoria conference. The recommendations of the conference also signified more than a mere political alliance between three senior politicians; they reflected a strong determination to promote Equatorian nationalism as a cultural and political cornerstone in South Sudan. Of course, there were dissenting voices, with some Equatorian interviewees characterising the conference as a 'masquerade'[127] or a 'political instrument for the individual interests of the governors only'.[128] As one participant remembered, however, 'the logo of the conference was a drum because when the drum is beaten, everyone should gather, and that is exactly what happened – we were all present and united'.[129] Even though the conference was considered a success, the question of the group's leadership remained ambiguous. De Pina Cabral and Pedroso de Lima highlighted the importance of groups 'invest[ing] persons with specific authority in order

[126] "Equatorians hold pre-independence conference."
[127] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, October 2023
[128] Interview with Eastern Equatorian community leader and former member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, March 2022
[129] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023

to survive'.[130] 'The successful heir', they argued, 'has to demonstrate that he is a successful leader in out-group terms'.[131] For instance, Adebanwi, in his study of Yoruba elites in Nigeria, has focused on the 'the ways in which [Ọbáfémi] Awólówò is constructed as the *ur*-Yorùbá as well as the Yorùbá *ur*-elite [in Nigeria]' and on 'how a singular life 'can be mapped onto a collective political life'.[132] '*Yorubaness',* argues Adebanwi*,* 'was reconstituted through the political actions, rules, and resources that attempt to conform to the ideal, ideas, representations, and practices of Chief Obafemi Awolowo'.[133] However, in the case of Equatoria, determining a successful heir and singular leadership to reconstitute *Equatorian-ness* through the mobilisation of a *national hero* from the past would prove challenging, even though the three governors succeeded in becoming the rallying point of Equatorian nationalism. However, this would not last. Although the underlying rationale of Equatorian agency – the establishment of a shared identity to endeavour to reshape the status of Equatorian elites within the recently independent state – appeared unchanged compared to the 1970s, there was indeed a shift in the context in which this agency unfolded.

The Long Shadow of John Garang

As Adebanwi has argued, 'events in general, and particular kinds of events, contain the potentials of producing, reproducing, confirming, contesting, or transforming power relations in society, directly or indirectly'.[134] Garang's 2005 death in a helicopter crash after visiting President Museveni of Uganda made him an eternal symbol. Garang attained a central place in the south Sudanese nation, becoming a national hero and the (only) *progenitor* of *south Sudanese-ness* – even though his New Sudan ideology opposed

[130] de Pina-Cabral and Pedroso de Lima, *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession*, 3.
[131] de Pina-Cabral and Pedroso de Lima, *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession*, 3.
[132] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfémi Awólówọ̀ and corporate agency*, 21.
[133] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfémi Awólówọ̀ and corporate agency*, 245.
[134] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfémi Awólówọ̀ and corporate agency*.

secession. In the post-liberation order, as demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, John Garang de Mabior indeed became what Del Vicario has called an 'inescapable founding figure',[135] an embodiment of nationalism and liberation, effectively preventing any other *progenitor* from coexisting within the organic southern nation. Garang and his memorialisation have been instrumental for the SPLM in redefining history, one in which Equatorians play only a very marginal role.[136] This example confirms that, as Adebanwi has asserted, 'death, burial, and statue are resources for creating meanings and legitimacy in moments of contention'.[137] In such a context, reviving the memory of a past Equatorian leader to give him a new political (after)life and achieve collective agency proved to be a difficult – if not impossible – task. Because, as Horswell and Skottki have argued, 'making heroes' is indeed a political act,[138] this endeavour would be perceived as an attempt by Equatorian elites to rewrite, and therefore contest, both the centrality of Garang and the *national* liberation in the making of South Sudan.

Whose Successor?

Adding further complexity, it was unclear whom the potential heir should succeed, as Equatorian leadership had never been properly consolidated under one individual in the 1980s; it had even been fiercely contested. As Carrier and Nyamweru have argued, 'there is much danger in turning to history, as it can just as easily be a source of division'.[139] Moreover, unlike unilineal descent groups, the idea of Equatoria lacks a clear 'founding

[135] Del Vicario, "The lives, deaths, and afterlives of John Garang: History-making and politics in Sudan and South Sudan."
[136] Del Vicario, "The lives, deaths, and afterlives of John Garang: History-making and politics in Sudan and South Sudan."; Shepherd Mpofu, "Making Heroes, (Un)Making the Nation?: ZANU-PF's Imaginations of the Heroes' Acre, Heroes and Construction of Identity in Zimbabwe from 2000 to 2015," *African identities* 15, no. 1 (2017).
[137] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awọ́lówọ̀ and corporate agency*.
[138] Mike Horswell and Kristin Skottki, *The Making of Crusading Heroes and Villains* (London: Routledge, 2020), 2.
[139] Neil Carrier and Celia Nyamweru, "Reinventing Africa's national heroes: The case of Mekatilili, a Kenyan popular heroine," *African Affairs* 115, no. 461 (2016): 600.

father/mother' figure to serve as a unifying reference point. In fact, the myth of a mystic origin is absent because the genesis of the group primarily lies in an administrative or territorial construct. The lack of historical figures to mobilise was challenging because the 'need and passion [for great personages] are central to the construction of politics'[140]. Joseph Tombura and Joseph Lagu could have represented such progenitors to personify when it comes to producing and reproducing a political and cultural collective in Equatoria. However, Joseph Tombura was not considered a *great* national political leader, as he was memorialised as the 'politician that divided the south' in 1983. Reviving his memory would not have sent a positive signal to the SPLM, as it would have been too defiant. Indeed, *Kokora* was not something to be lauded in a post-liberation order dominated by the SPLM. Similarly, portraying Lagu as a moral character proved challenging due to the numerous accusations of corruption he faced, making him an unsuitable figure for Equatoria, even though some Equatorian elites have been tempted to idealise Lagu's leadership – somewhat confirming the notion that 'memories […] often have only a tenuous link with a "real" past'.[141] Both Tombura and Lagu sided with the Khartoum government when the SPLM started its insurgency, effectively becoming anti-SPLM. Even though Lagu, who had worked as a Sudanese diplomat for Bashir in the early 1990s, was appointed special adviser to President Kiir in 2010 as part of the 'big-tent approach', he did not wield significant influence or harbour particular affinity with the SPLM.[142]

[140] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awọ́lówọ̀ and corporate agency*, 85.
[141] Carrier and Nyamweru, "Reinventing Africa's national heroes: The case of Mekatilili, a Kenyan popular heroine," 600.
[142] "Lagu's appointment as Presidential Advisor welcomed by SPLM-NS," *Sudan Tribune* 19 August 2010.

The (Not So) Perfect Candidate

Choosing the right person to lead Equatoria, with all the caveats described above, presented – and continues to present – a Gordian knot for Equatorian elites, and that knot could be summarised with a name: James Wani Igga. Wani Igga occupied one of the highest ranks within the SPLM-A, was a close friend of John Garang, and represented the SPLM in various diplomatic negotiations. Since the CPA, he had assumed the role of the Speaker of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly, making him the most influential and visible Equatorian politician in South Sudan. Moreover, Professor Wani Igga, as he likes to be called, epitomised the quintessential Equatorian, as his qualities were many: educated,[143] Roman Catholic, and hailing from both Zande and Bari origins. His elevated position within the SPLM and his military abilities – honed through training in Cuba and Ethiopia – granted him the status of a liberation hero, an indispensable attribute for any political ambition in post-independence South Sudan. In other words, he was the perfect leader in *out-group terms*. Wani Igga was the ideal candidate to drive Equatorian nationalism within the SPLM government. However, Igga lacked one dimension – indeed, the most important one: as one interviewee insisted, he 'does not care about Equatoria and has no intention of speaking on behalf of Equatoria'.[144] A pro-Dinka news outlet, for instance, praised Igga for not being 'influenced by such negative [Equatorian] politics'.[145] An opinion piece, calling Wani Igga the 'Prodigal Son of Equatoria', perfectly echoed sentiments of numerous Equatorian elites I interviewed:

[143] Wani Igga graduated in economics from Cairo University and authored various books on subjects ranging from Souther Sudan politics and John Garang to taxation
[144] Interview with Central Equatorian, Member of the University of Juba and Former member of the SPLM duringthe liberation struggle, Juba, October 2023
[145] "South Sudan VIPs Series (Part III): Dr. James Wani Igga, a Loyal and Humble Cadre of the SPLM/SPLA," *PaanLuel Wël* 28 April 2020.

> James Wani Igga remained unpopular among his people the Baris and Equatorians at large, though highly respected within the SPLA movement. This unpopularity at the home front is due to his inability to relate and the utter disengagement with his people the Equatorians. … Many south Sudanese see James Wani as part and parcel of the failed government of Kiir. … The Majority of Equatorians view Wani Igga as an incompetent and clueless politician who lacks ability and wisdom to unify the sophisticated and complex and diverse people of Equatoria.[146]

Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/41597758@N02/4639186030/in/dateposted/

Figure 8 James Wani Igga in 2010, in the center

Clement Wani Konga, the political veteran of the group, showed a clear readiness to take on a leadership role. Equatorian elites valued his strength and, unlike Wani Igga, his ability to maneuver through the political scene without yielding to the SPLM. Konga was, in the words of some elites, 'not ready to easily compromise with the SPLM'.[147]

[146] Elijah Samuel. (date unknown). '*James Wani Igga: The Prodigual Son of Equatoria*.' South Sudan Liberty News, accessed 15 January 2024.
[147] Interview with 'National Expert' of the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Juba, March 2022

Additionally, he was the sole Equatorian leader commanding a military force – the Mundari militia, comprising over 1,000 men – capable of asserting its strength if required. Equatorian elites hence saw him as capable of balancing the assumed domination of the Dinka and Nuer elites in independent South Sudan. Both Bakosoro and Lobong recognised Konga as their elder, understanding that internal factionalism and inter-ethnic rivalries within Equatoria should not detract from the overarching project. However, neither was willing to entirely cede their authority to him. As the newly inaugurated leaders of their respective states, the timing was indeed not conducive to surrendering power to another individual, even symbolically. In turn, while Konga was symbolically praised as the leader of Equatoria, in reality, a triumvirate emerged to collaborate and collectively address challenges. Sometimes referred to as the *Equatoria Council of Elders*, in an attempt to *ethnicise* the Equatorian identity and give it a cultural and political dimension, the three leaders faced the immense task of maintaining cohesion among Equatorians and defending their interests in the post-independence order.

CONCLUSION

Emerging from two decades of civil war, southern Sudan faced a difficult transition period, as John Garang died soon after the signing of the peace agreement. The SPLM could nonetheless leverage the legacy of the liberation struggle, its extensive international networks, and the support of its regional allies to solidify its hegemonic position in the south. In the immediate aftermath of the 2005 peace agreement, the SPLM also embarked on constructing a powerful nationalist narrative. This narrative effectively conflated southern nationalism with the SPLM, positioning the movement within a teleological framework that cast it as the ultimate agent of southern *liberation*. Southern nationalism – which ultimately catalysed South Sudan's secession – should therefore not be

interpreted as historically predetermined. Rather, it must be understood as a contingent process, shaped by the agency of specific actors and, more significantly, by the complex interplay of individual interests and power dynamics. These dynamics, however, created entrenched patterns of privilege and exclusion that would profoundly influence the political trajectory of independent South Sudan.

This chapter revealed that the post-conflict period posed unprecedented challenges to Equatorian elites, who quickly felt marginalised in the economic, political, and security sectors. Emphasising the agency of Equatorian elites, this chapter examined the emergence of a competing nationalist project in the Equatoria region, one that aimed to propose an *alternative* future. It explored in detail how the three Equatorian governors initiated a coordinated response to their marginalisation at a critical juncture in the political trajectory of southern Sudan, reconstituting *Equatorian-ness* in the 21st century. In doing so, this chapter analysed how 'the processes by which personal and supra-personal entities formed and reformed each other through an interplay of power relations'.[148] Nationalism, the very same political technology that the SPLM wielded, proved crucial for Equatorian elites to build momentum, revealing not only the endurance of the nationalist idea in elite political imagination, but also the importance of 'ideological entrepreneurs' in shaping the Equatorian movement. However, this chapter illustrated the ambiguity of Equatorian nationalism, shaped both by internal power dynamics among Equatorian elites and by their attempt to build a competing nationalist project while still positioning themselves within the liberation narrative. The debate over whether to invite SPLM leaders to the 2011 Equatoria conference exemplifies this fundamental ambiguity. As one governor mentioned, 'we were clearly walking on eggs'.[149]

[148] de Pina-Cabral and Pedroso de Lima, *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession*, 2.
[149] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023

Because Equatorian elites belonged to different networks of solidarity, and because multiparty politics was not a reality, a clear-cut project against the SPLM did not emerge. This alone challenges traditional approaches that portray competing nationalist movements as ideologically unified forces representing distinct, homogeneous groups. The tension between *Equatoria-ness,* individual interests, and liberation networks would indeed prove difficult for Equatorian elites to escape. These tensions would become even more intense, as the disagreement within the vanguard themselves would soon provoke a deadly civil war, a conflict that could have been an opportunity for Equatorian elites to reshape the political order in South Sudan, but that eventually proved fatal for the political project of the three governors.

Chapter 5

COMRADES GO TO WAR: EQUATORIAN ELITES, CONFLICT, AND COMPETING NATIONALISMS

In his memoirs, Nicholas Coghlan, then the ambassador of Canada to South Sudan, described the first hours of what would become a long and deadly civil war in the world's newest country:

> Shortly after 6:00 a.m. it started to get light and I could hear a staccato crackling outside. I got up, rubbed my eyes, and pushed aside the net curtain. There was no sign of rain. I pulled on a pair of trousers, walked to the front door, and peered out. … By now it wasn't just small-arms fire. There was the occasional heavier thump and you could feel the ground shake a little. … I switched on my laptop, which was sitting on the dining-room table, rummaged around for the plug-in fob that allowed us access to the SIGNET communications system of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa, and sent off a very short e-mail to the late-night watch office, timed at 7:02 a.m.: 'Heavy gunfire at military GHQ

during the night in Juba; all Canadian staff ordered to remain at home pending clarification of the situation'.[1]

Unlike other African national liberation movements, which could, at least in the early years following their victories, entertain dreams of an effective 'end of history', the SPLM did not have the luxury of contemplating such thoughts. Merely two years after achieving independence in 2011, following a referendum, enduring wartime rivalries resurfaced, triggering a violent schism within the nationalist movement that ultimately resulted in a devastating civil war that killed more than 400,000 people in five years.[2] In this regard, intra-elite rivalries among the vanguards and the struggle for power and legitimacy seriously undermined the nationalist project of the SPLM. Indeed, the vanguard forgot to follow Mao's advice that 'while the party commands the gun, the gun must never be allowed to command the party'.[3]

***

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Equatorian elites responded to the power struggle between the vanguard merely two years after the 2011 Equatoria conference. This chapter particularly examines the governors' endeavour to sustain their competing nationalist project amid escalating tensions and shifting political allegiances. It analyses their strategic manoeuvring to preserve both stability and political cohesion to maintain the glue which bound Equatorian elites together, while navigating the complex dynamics of conflict in post-independence South Sudan. This chapter hence narrates how Equatorian elites attempted to become a 'group' to advance their competing nationalist

[1] Nicholas Coghlan, *Collapse of a Country : Memoirs of a Diplomat in South Sudan* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), xvii.
[2] Francesco Checchi et al., *Estimates of crisis-attributable mortality in South Sudan, December 2013-April 2018*, The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (London, 2018).
[3] Mao Tse-Tung, 7 August 1927

idea, a project – or rather an aspiration - that proved immensely challenging. In fact, the fragmentation of the vanguards was certainly a timely moment for the governors' nationalist project and their followers. With the SPLM disintegrating, the central government on the verge of collapse, and re-negotiations about the post-liberation order underway, the nationalist vision of Equatorian governors gained momentum in a country where 'national unity' seemed to be an impossibility. Equatorian elites, attempting to project the image of a fixed identity, pushed for their federal agenda, even traveling abroad to gather some support and insert their project into the broader politics of East Africa. However, maintaining elite cohesion proved difficult for the governors to advance their aspirations within a political landscape that was still dominated by the SPLM, its Dinka and Nuer leadership, and entrenched narratives of conflict and legitimacy. Indeed, Equatorian elites faced military leaders who viewed power as a zero-sum game, assuming that Equatorians were ultimately aiming for regime change. In reality, the civil war didn't unify them as expected; instead, it deepened divisions within Equatoria. Various groups began to vie for leadership over Equatorian nationalism, each presenting its own vision of how it should relate to the broader liberation movement. The friendships and rivalries formed during the struggle for liberation continued to have a powerful impact on the elites and their ambitions.

INSTITUTIONALIZING EQUATORIAN NATIONALISM

Ideas and Aspirations

Following the 2011 Equatoria Conference, which reinvigorated the idea of Equatorian nationalism, Equatorian elites, under the leadership of Bakosoro, Wani Konga, and Lobong, reached a consensus to establish various institutions to enhance the visibility and efficacy of their new project. 'Like any other idea', wrote Miley, 'the "nation" can only exist as a material force in history, embodied in institutions and apparatuses. …

Nationalists aspire for their beliefs to be institutionalised, so that such beliefs can be diffused, adhered to by an ever-broader public, and reproduced'.[4] One Equatorian leader recalled the following:

> The primary objective was to promote Equatorian integration through the development of economic, social, political, and cultural institutions. We needed to invest in Equatoria as a block to be reckoned with in South Sudanese politics.[5]

The fundamental challenge laid in a political climate that precluded the emergence of competing political parties. In the absence of democratic opportunities, any attempt to establish alternative, meaningful political formations risked immediate denouncement as anti-national, with dissenting voices swiftly branded as enemies of the vanguard nation. In this context, the Equatorian case offers a compelling example of a nationalist project seeking political influence without the scaffold of formal institutional structures. Another difficulty was that Equatorian elites lacked military and economic capacities, forcing them to rely mainly on political advocacy to advance their agenda of self-determination. Numerous proposals were put forth during the 2011 conference, and subsequently, efforts were made to implement them. As a community leader from Central Equatoria recalls, 'everyone was motivated, united, and following the governors';[6] most Equatorian community leaders had indeed endorsed them. A comprehensive table was drafted that delineated the proposed initiatives, their respective timelines for completion, and the individuals or entities responsible for their execution.[7] The establishment of the Equatoria Commercial Bank, for instance, was intended to centralise foreign investments, thereby catalysing economic growth and financing agricultural projects throughout the Equatoria

[4] Miley, "The nation as hegemonic project," 184.
[5] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023
[6] Interview with Community Leader from Central Equatorian who attended the 2011 Conference, Juba, March 2022
[7] Interview with Equatorian leader who was tasked with drafting a progress table, Juba, October 2023

region.[8] This institution's long-term objectives were twofold: first, to eliminate food insecurity within Equatoria, and second, to generate agricultural surpluses for export to the broader East African market. Another initiative involved the establishment of an Equatorian cultural centre aimed at fostering Equatorian nationalism. The objectives were to organise cultural events and to produce scholarly research on Equatorian culture and history with the goal of uncovering and promoting a deeply rooted, shared identity grounded in the region's historical past. A so-called Equatorian University, distinct from the University of Juba and that would be controlled by the SPLM government, was also among the many ideas.

However, the most consequential initiatives were political in nature and focused on establishing two key institutions. The underlying rationale was to create a political architecture that would transcend the tenure of individual governors, thereby ensuring institutional continuity beyond Joseph Bakosoro, Clement Wani Konga, and Louis Lobong; *reproduction* is indeed a key aspect of nationalism. These institutions were the Equatoria Cooperation Council (ECC) with its accompanying secretariat, and the Equatoria caucus within the national parliament. The ECC, imagined as the *de facto* governing body of Equatoria, was structured to include nine senior members nominated by the governors, with equal representation from the three Equatorian states.[9] The secretariat, composed of three representatives from each state, was tasked with convening meetings of the council and setting the agenda.[10] Concurrently, the formation of the Equatoria caucus in the national parliament aimed to amplify the collective voice of Equatorian MPs at the national level and to enhance Equatorian political agency in the

[8] This idea had already been in the files of Peter Cirillo, the former governor of Equatoria at the start of the liberation struggle in the mid-1980s.

[9] Its formation actually sparked debate, reflecting the persistent influence of vanguardism in South Sudanese politics. Some argued for including the SPLM-affiliated governors to better promote Equatorian interests, while others advocated for 'neutral' Equatorians to leverage influence with the government.

[10] Interview with Equatorian leader who was tasked with drafting a progress table, Juba, October 2023

post-liberation order. In addition, the governors proposed rotating some state ministers among the three Equatorian states to foster political unity.[11]

Figure 9. Joseph Bakosoro (left), Clement Wani Konga (second from left), and Louis Lobon (far right) at the second Equatoria Conference, February 2013

Source: https://www.facebook.com/people/Equatoria-Conference/100064342853294/

Implementation

The implementation of these initiatives ultimately fell short of initial expectations. A common criticism that Equatorian elites levelled was that the three governors failed to take the necessary steps to genuinely build and empower these regional institutions. Despite the convening of two additional Equatoria Conferences in 2013, both also held at the Nyakuron Cultural Centre in Juba, a sense of frustration persisted among Equatorian leaders. Many complained that 'our leaders are simply not implementing' the intended institutional frameworks and cooperative mechanisms.[12] The reality, however, is more complicated than simply ascribing blame to a lack of willingness from the group of governors. One key issue was a recurrent lack of funding to sustain the proposed

[11] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[12] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023

institutions and coordination mechanisms. While Governor Wani Konga succeeded in mobilising resources to organise the Equatoria Conferences, funding all these ambitious ideas was simply too great a task, as it became quickly evident that the SPLM government would not provide the necessary financial support for these initiatives – specifically regarding the Equatoria Commercial Bank. Moreover, ideas of empowered regional institutions and financial autonomy were politically very sensitive in the post-liberation order. The three state governors, especially Konga and Lobong, appeared reluctant – one leader even said 'terrified'[13] – to be seen as challenging the authority or interests of President Salva Kiir and his vanguard government. As the president holds the power to nominate and dismiss governors, any perceived provocative 'bad move' by the governors could prove fatal for Equatoria and the fragile political alliances they had forged. Finally, the external political context played a crucial role in impeding the progress of the Equatorian project. In March 2012, tensions between South Sudan and Sudan over the sovereignty of oil-rich regions in Unity and South Kordofan provinces escalated into overt hostilities between the two countries, directly threatening South Sudan's territorial integrity.[14] Manase Lomule, Clement Wani Konga's deputy, recalls:

> It was time to defend South Sudan and our independence. It was bigger than Equatoria. I remember trying to enrol Equatorian soldiers to go fight in the north, and then to mobilise food to send to people starving because of the conflict in Upper Nile and Unity. All of this somewhat disorganised and slowed down our efforts in Equatoria.[15]

[13] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023
[14] On the conflict, see Douglas H. Johnson, "The Heglig oil dispute between Sudan and South Sudan," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, no. 3 (2012).
[15] Interview with Manase Lomule, Juba, October 2023

In fact, among the proposed institutions, only the Equatoria caucus within the national parliament became a functional entity for Equatorian MPs, likely because it was easier to establish within the existing legislative structure and required fewer additional resources. Thomas Wani Kondo came to lead the caucus which, until 2014, and in the absence of an Equatorian political party, became an important platform for Equatorian elites to not only meet, debate, and share ideas, but also where careers were sculpted or crumbled, all under the watchful eyes of Equatoria's power brokers. The caucus succeeded in raising crucial political debates on federalism, land, security, and local grievances to the point that it, together with the Equatoria Conferences, became the centre of gravity of Equatorian politics and its internal tumult.

TENSIONS AMONG THE VANGUARD

Succession and Contestation

While the three Equatorian governors attempted to institutionalise their nationalist project, for the vanguard, it became clear that the ideological and organisational manifesto of the SPLM/A required a thorough review, seven years after the passing of John Garang. The last SPLM national convention had been held in 2008, three years prior to independence. It had highlighted significant disagreements among the vanguard regarding the way forward, and different leaders had made firm their intention to challenge President Kiir and run for the position of chairmanship of the SPLM.[16] After the death of John Garang, it quickly became apparent that Salva Kiir had failed to conclusively seize the political and ideological heritage of the SPLM's founder. Salva Kiir notably failed to emulate the charismatic leadership style and commanding rhetoric that had defined John Garang's political persona. Introverted and lacking Garang's oratory

[16] Rolandsen, "Short Democratisation in the Sudan and SPLM's Second National Convention."

prowess, Kiir struggled to embody the larger-than-life image of the SPLM's revered founder, despite numerous attempts to present himself as Garang's natural heir. This inability to position himself as Garang's uncontested successor eroded Kiir's claims to legitimacy, opening space for internal contestation within the nationalist movement. 'Entities', argued Pina-Cabral, indeed 'remain always dependent on the constant interplay of hegemonic and counterhegemonic forces'.[17]

'Many within the SPLM', Johnson argued in a briefing to *African Affairs*, 'agreed … that the party had lost direction since the independence referendum and had no real vision or programme for national development and national unity'.[18] However, President Salva Kiir was not in a hurry to dive into an in-depth analysis of the SPLM's key documents or to call for a much-needed convention with senior SPLM leaders. Having faced no less than three military coup attempts since 2011, Kiir was deeply aware of the fragility of his position.[19] For Kiir, it was simply not the appropriate time for the SPLM to address skeletons in the closet. Indeed, the vanguard government had endeavoured to continue to consolidate its newfound sovereignty on the regional stage, to assert control over South Sudan's peripheries to lay the foundation of a modern state, and to push for their nationalist project. It had also embarked on ambitious infrastructure projects, aiming to capitalise on the moment and leverage the goodwill of international donors. Displaying disunity at such a critical moment would reflect poorly on the vanguard. Kiir believed that, should any reform occur, it would be to further centralise the group and tighten its structure rather than open the door for internal disagreements. Nonetheless, after intense pressure from the SPLM leadership, the third SPLM national convention was scheduled to occur at the end of February 2013 but was repeatedly postponed – officially for the

[17] de Pina-Cabral and Pedroso de Lima, *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession*, 2.
[18] Douglas H. Johnson, "Briefing: The crisis in South Sudan," *African Affairs* 113, no. 451 (2014): 303.
[19] Kiir even told his troops that 'the international community would not recognise a government that had taken power by force', in "Juba jitters ", *Africa Confidential* 2 November 2012.

politburo to take time to review the founding documents of the party. It was never held. Vice-President Riek Machar, a Nuer, began openly calling for President Kiir to step down, arguing that Kiir was incapable of implementing the necessary political reforms for the country. Machar's ambition indeed confirms Roessler and Verhoeven's argument that 'in the post-liberation period personal ties often come under pressure as elites jockey for the most privileged positions and seek to maximise their share of spoils'.[20] Machar aimed to challenge Kiir for the leadership of the SPLM during the national convention. However, since the vanguard party *is* the state, it was clear that Machar's ultimate goal was to run for president in the 2015 elections, with the plan of taking Kiir's place. The politics of *as if* – effective in projecting a facade of unity during the CPA – ultimately revealed its inherent limitations.

The Equatoria Consultative Conference

As it became apparent that tension was growing among the vanguard, the group of Equatorian governors convened in Juba. They decided to organise the 'Equatoria Consultative Conference' at Nyakuron Cultural Centre, where the 2011 Equatoria Conference had occurred, on 8 May and 9 May 2013. The theme was 'Fostering Equatoria Leadership in Building Cohesive Nation'. This gathering marked the third Equatoria conference in a mere two-year span. Together with the three governors, James Wani Igga also attended the meeting; Jemma Nunu Kumba, Bakosoro's political enemy from Western Equatoria, was also present. Despite internal tensions, the Equatorian family convened at Nyakuron to collectively deliberate on how to respond to the mounting political instability. The idea of nationalism, it appeared, had successfully strengthened internal cohesion. The gathering reflected a concerted effort to demonstrate cohesion and

[20] Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, "Hobbes Revisited: The Commitment Problem, Trust and Preemption" (APSA Annual Meeting, 2011).

assert Equatorian influence amidst the broader power struggles unfolding in South Sudan. Crucially, the Nyakuron meeting provided a platform to, again, publicly reassert their demand for a federal system of governance, expressing doubts that the SPLM nationalist project would create enough space for the *Equatorian* project. Louis Lobong took the floor and, before reiterating the objectives of the Equatoria project, commented on the rivalries inside the SPLM:

> What is going on in our country is not based on our democratic values; rather, is power struggle that will victimise the people of South Sudan and in particular Equatorians, as was the case during the history of the previous years of the movements. We cannot allow this happen again under our watch. […]
>
> May I take you back to the Resolutions of Equatoria Conference, 2011. In that Conference, we Equatorians did vow that Equatoria Land will never be used for any bloodshed against the people of South Sudan by the enemies of peace. The Resolutions were an attempt to contribute toward greater freedom, peace and security, democratic governance, social justice, economic growth and development, stability, and friendship. … They were the milestones set for Equatoria to move on the path of peace for nation-building in the post-independence period.[21]

Joseph Bakosoro, understanding the issue of elites' rivalries, called on 'the ruling party to imitate the recent internal discipline that was witnessed from the South African's ANC party', while Wani Konga reminded the audience that 'when two bulls fight, it is the grass that suffers' – insinuating that Equatoria could once again witness violence because of the SPLM.[22] However, the governors' project of fostering corporateness was not to

[21] Speech of H. E. Louis Lobong Lojore at the Equatoria Consultative Conference, 9-10 May 2013
[22] "South Sudan's Equatoria region calls for peaceful leadership contest," *Sudan Tribune* 9 May 2013.

everyone's liking within Equatoria. Jemma Nunu Kumba clearly marked her discontent when urging Equatorian governors to 'sensitise Equatoria people on the right things to do instead of misleading them to destroy and destabilise the region and the country'.[23]

While the vanguard had paid little attention to the first two conferences, seeing the Equatoria conference as a cultural – that is, unpolitical, project – Kiir, Machar, and other senior leaders of the SPLM were reportedly furious that Equatorian elites would meet again and display their nationalist project while the vanguard had strong disagreements. Indeed, the self-styled national liberation leaders now viewed any display of Equatorian cohesion and collective assertiveness with scepticism; the time when SPLM leaders would happily attend the 2011 Equatoria Conference was gone. Debates soon emerged questioning the constitutionality of the Equatorian governors organising a regional conference. Concurrently, narratives challenging the premise of the 'would-be marginalisation' of Equatorians gained traction, reframing Equatorian elites' demands as self-serving parochialism. Some South Sudanese elites also heavily criticised the governors for commenting on internal SPLM politics, with some suggesting that Equatorians did not have to comment on what was happening at the national level. For instance, Lam Akol, a prominent Shilluk politician from Upper Nile and a former member of the SPLM, wrote the following in an opinion:

> [T]he right forums to discuss SPLM issues are within SPLM organs whether at the national or the State levels. Therefore, the Equatoria Conference should not be concerned with this matter except in as much as it impinges on the state of affairs in Equatoria, something the Governors have failed to show. … As to the current Equatoria Conference, one hopes to hear about their evaluation of the

[23] "Equatorions need to talk leadership, economic issues," *Catholic Radio Network* 10 May 2013.

> implementation of their previous resolutions, especially those made last February. Anything else must be considered diversionary.[24]

Vice-President Machar, giving a speech at the occasion of the death of Andrew Wiu, a *liberation* fighter, also strongly condemned the nationalist project of the three governors:

> [R]egional forums that act as political blocs would kill the role of the political parties, promote tribalism and diminish the chances of ascending to power by leaders from smaller tribes. … [I]t is the … SPLM that can unite the country by providing a national direction and vision and not by groupings into separate regional political blocs which firstly serve regional interests.[25]

Fragmentation

After weeks of tensions and multiple visits by Machar to Khartoum, increasing suspicions that he sought political support, President Kiir decided to dismiss his entire cabinet as a strategy to oust Riek Machar; the same day, SPLA soldiers were deployed all across Juba.[26] The tension had grown so severe that regional *liberation* leaders intervened, fearing the collapse of a fellow vanguard regime. President Paul Kagame, during the second anniversary of South Sudan's independence, insisted on the obligation of the SPLM to stay united for the sake of the region's stability, re-emphasising *vanguard nationalism* as the right ideology to invest in against conservative sectarianisms in the region:

> We recall with you the long and protracted struggle for freedom, sovereignty, self-determination, and dignity over your people that culminated in your independence two years ago. Since then, you have worked tirelessly to build your nation and to

[24] "The Equatoria Consultative Conference, Nyakuron Cultural Center, Juba, South Sudan.," *PaanLuel Wël* 11 May 2013.
[25] "Machar warns against sliding into regional politics in the country," *Sudan Tribune* 2 June 2013.
[26] " A power struggle, not a coup 1st August 2013 ", *Africa Confidential* 1 August 2013

> realise the aspirations of the people of South Sudan. … We salute your efforts and assure you that the Rwanda people stand with you in this process of nation-building. Mister President, we all recognise that independence brings enormous benefits that we are very happy to enjoy. In this respect, the independence of South Sudan is bound to contribute to peace, security, and development in the region and Africa as a whole. … Independence also comes with opportunities which we must seize to propel our countries forward. We all understand that our destiny as Africans is tied together, and the future of the continent will be assured by the way we closely work and live and think together to advance and protect our common interests.[27]

Officially, Kiir's objective was to prevent leadership divisions from destabilising the new political system. However, it was not only Machar who was in Kiir's crosshairs, as SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum was also dismissed upon allegations of corruption – a tactic that seems common to many vanguard parties across the world.[28] Similarly, Cirino Hiteng, an Equatorian and Minister of Culture, was relieved. In fact, it was a true political purge that Kiir attempted, dismissing any SPLM/A senior leaders who did not embrace his leadership.[29] Historical leaders of the SPLM who had been close to John Garang, nicknamed the *Awlad Garang* (the 'Garang Boys') or the *New Sudanists*, were hence also sidelined; Kiir not only doubted their loyalty, but he also feared their strong legitimacy to claim power given their involvement in the revolutionary struggle. Salva Kiir's strategy was to force dissenting leaders out of the SPLM, compelling them to form a new

[27] 'President Kagame delivers his address during 2nd Independence Anniversary of South Sudan', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fl7EiCJANus

[28] The most notable example being communist China, see for instance Tony Saich, *From Rebel to Ruler : One Hundred Years of the Chinese Communist Party* (Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press, 2021).

[29] We can name Deng Alor Kuol (cabinet affairs), John Luk Jok (justice), Gier Chuang Along (internal affairs), Oyay Deng Ajak (office of the president for national security), Madut Biar (telecommunications), Majak D'Agoot (deputy defence), Cirino Hiteng (culture), Kosti Manibe (finance), Eziekel Lol Gatkuoth (former representative of the southern transitional government to the US and, after independence, head of bilateral relations
in Juba), and Chol Tong Mayay

opposition movement that lacked the SPLM's status as 'the vanguard party that liberated the South'. This tactic would allow Kiir to monopolise the liberation legacy while marginalising rivals, leaving them with little political capital. At best, these ousted rivals could serve as political window-dressing: toothless opponents whose mere existence would lend a veneer of pluralism to South Sudan's façade of democracy. This manoeuvre echoes the tactics of Ugandan President Museveni – a vanguard with whom Kiir is politically close – who orchestrated the exit of Kizza Besigye from the NRM in 1999. Besigye, a liberation fighter and Museveni's former personal physician, had, like Machar, penned a critique of his party's authoritarian drift in a document called 'An Insider's View of How the NRM Lost the Broad Base'. By founding the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Besigye challenged Museveni for over 20 years, ultimately serving as little more than a sparring partner for the Ugandan President.

Machar, an astute politician with ample experience, refused to become the South Sudanese Besigye, knowing that only the national convention could strip him of his SPLM membership. Still the deputy chairman of the SPLM, he consistently framed the tensions as disagreements among revolutionary leaders – in his words, a 'war of vision and personality'[30] – with the struggle centred on the meaning of *liberation* in post-independence South Sudan. Machar was not alone in asking for reforms within the revolutionary movement. Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, the widow of John Garang, urged Kiir to step down, questioning the ideology of the SPLM. These leaders, despite their sometimes-stark divergences, formed a coalition after Kiir had appointed his new government of figures such as Riak Gai Kok, Telar Deng, Tut Gow, or Abdallah Deng Nhial, all of whom were closer to Khartoum than to the revolutionary circles.[31] In early

[30] "Senior SPLM colleagues give Kiir ultimatum over party crisis," *Sudan Tribune* 6 December 2013.
[31] As Boswell explained, 'The Garang-ist wing gave Machar much-needed leverage within an often hostile SPLM and military elite, and Machar and his Nuer followers gave the Garang-ists credible leverage due to

December 2013, they decided to hold a press conference in the modest compound of the newly built SPLM house in Juba, strategically located next to the ministries. Among them were the Equatorians Kosti Manibe and Cirino Hiteng. Gathered under a tent, they presented their grievances, demonstrating their commitment to the 'true' SPLM nationalist project:

> Revolutionary comrades, members of the SPLM, [...]
>
> We, the members of the SPLM Political Bureau, National Liberation Council, and SPLM leaders have called this press conference to enlighten our people on the internal crisis that has engulfed the SPLM leadership.
>
> [We blame] the shift in the decision-making process from SPLM national organs to regional and ethnic lobbies around the SPLM chairman when it came to appointments to positions in government. [...]
>
> The efforts to transform the SPLM from a liberation movement into a mass-based political party have totally been frustrated by the Chairman. General Salva ignored the grassroots views and demands garnered between July and August 2012 for the SPLM re-organisation. [...]
>
> We want to bring to the attention of the masses of our people that General Salva Kiir has surrendered the SPLM power to opportunists and foreign agents. [...]
>
> The SPLM should hold steering wheel of the two historical processes of nation-building and state-building.[32]

The Aron Hotel Meeting

With Machar dismissed in July 2013, the position of Vice-President of South Sudan needed to be filled. Equatorians saw an opportunity to expand their influence within the

the Nuer strength in the SPLA', in Alan Boswell, *Insecure Power and Violence: The Rise and Fall of Paul Malong and the Mathiang Anyoor*, Small Arms Survey (October 2019).

[32] "Senior SPLM colleagues give Kiir ultimatum over party crisis."

government, taking advantage of the tumult within the vanguard party to attempt to reshape, or at least benefit more from, the post-independence order. The idea was that obtaining the vice-presidency would consolidate the institutional architecture that Equatorians had been trying to establish in South Sudan, possibly making self-determination a political reality. Moreover, the new government that Kiir formed was clearly biased towards the Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal regions, which provoked resentment among Equatorian elites. In fact, Equatorians publicly asserted that one of their own ought to be vice-president. President Kiir, on the other hand, saw an equal opportunity to find regional allies, as some comrades were now threatening his leadership. As an analyst wrote, 'Salva Kiir had discovered that the SPLM party structures were far stronger than the National Assembly, [which had been] doing little more than rubber stamping Salva's decrees'.[33] The need for Kiir to promote other groups in South Sudan to counter the Machar faction and historic SPLM leaders was indeed vital for him: it was certainly not the moment to quarrel about the Equatorial nationalist project.

In an interview with *Sudan Catholic Radio Network*, the Equatorian Journalist Alfred Taban revealed in August 2013 that 'the SPLM caucus was still discussing whether they should consider the SPLM hierarchy or regional representation in choosing the vice-president'.[34] The SPLM vanguard – mostly hailing from Dinka and Nuer groups – wanted to have a say in the nomination, with the risk of sidelining already marginalised groups. Kiir, however, was intent on promoting a vice-president based on geography, undermining the prominence of the vanguard faction that Kiir did not want around him in South Sudanese politics. To that extent, Salva Kiir met with the Equatoria caucus of the national parliament to request support and hear Equatorians' grievances. When asked

[33] "From power struggle to uprising ", *Africa Confidential* 19 December 2013.
[34] Catholic Radio Network, 'Senior Journalist Predict Vice-President from Equatoria', 3 August 2013, https://catholicradionetwork.org/2013/08/03/senior-journalist-predicts-vice-president-from-equatoria/

by Equatorian leaders whether President Kiir could confirm that they would be equal citizens in the new country, Kiir stated that his government was also working for Equatorians and reminded Equatorian lawmakers that hosting the government of South Sudan in Juba was to their economic advantage – concealing, intentionally or not, the fact that he still sought to move the capital out of Equatoria.[35] Kiir, a skilled strategist despite what many diplomats may have repeatedly said, then secured the support of Equatorians without having to move away from vanguardism, by *pretending* to let Equatorians choose a vice-president:

> When Machar got dismissed by the president, automatically James Wani Igga became number 2 of the SPLM. … [D]espite that it is automatic, the president decided to throw the ball into our courtyard … saying, 'You seek and endorse the man who is to be Vice President'! He did it purposely so that Equatorians don't blame him that he is the one who picked someone to represent us. He wanted to make Equatorians accountable for their decision.[36]

Following Kiir's skilful decision to let Equatorians choose a vice-president, Clement Wani Konga, Louis Lobong, and Joseph Bakosoro held an emergency meeting of the group the same day at the Aron International Hotel in August in Juba, an ageing building showing its years. The purpose was for Equatorian leaders to discuss and officially endorse a single candidate, one who could embody *Equatoria-ness* and strongly speak *on behalf of* Equatorian elites. The governors' decision to take the lead immediately demonstrated their leadership over Equatorian affairs at the time. Given the last-minute nature of the meeting, there was insufficient time to convene all Equatorian leaders.

[35] Interview with former Government official, 7 March 2023 (phone call)
[36] Interview with Sapana Abui, former Deputy Governor of Western Equatoria, Juba, October 2023

Instead, only those Equatorians available in Juba were gathered, and the governors were tasked with quickly consulting the leaders in their respective constituencies. Joseph Bakosoro, who was then in Yambio, took the first flight to Juba, arriving late to the meeting. He nonetheless remembers the events of that night:

> We were trying to choose seniority, not necessarily someone who was fit or capable to represent us. The SPLM is driving its policy towards the east [understood as authoritarianism], not towards Western democracies. … Let's not forget the vanguard still think that hierarchy within the party is important. Machar was gone, the next in line was an Equatorian, James Wani Igga. … [I]t did not matter that Wani Igga was an ineffective Equatorian. The party mattered the most.[37]

James Wani Igga, a senior SPLM vanguard and then Speaker of the National Parliament, was the candidate the Equatorian leaders ultimately endorsed to be their representative. There was in fact little debate, as Wani Igga was clearly Kiir's preferred choice for the position, even though the two men were not particularly close allies:

> The president had first reservations about Wani Igga … because of the betrayal of Wani Igga in 2004, when Dr. John Garang had reconciled with Riek Machar. When Machar rebelled in 1991, Salva became number 2 of the SPLM. When Machar came back to the SPLM, the question was: where are we going to place him? Salva said he must come to be detained, because he is a rebel! Wani Igga then willingly surrendered his political position to Machar, who became number 3. Salva got angry and screamed to Igga: 'You have betrayed us!'[38]

[37] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[38] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023

Nonetheless, Wani Igga was so entrenched in the SPLM hierarchy that no other Equatorian challenger, especially Wani Konga, could realistically compete. Equatorians recognized an opportunity to capitalize on Igga's vanguard position, as he was the most prominent Equatorian figure in South Sudan, despite his (at best) ambiguous stance on Equatorian nationalism and his lack of empathy towards the three governors and their advocacy for self-determination. For Kiir, Igga's endorsement allowed him to claim Equatorian representation in his government. Moreover, as a senior vanguard, Igga was the kind of candidate Kiir preferred for the vice-presidency, and he was reassured about his commitment to southern nationalism. At the end of the Aron Hotel meeting, after the usual debates, Wani Konga, who usually spoke last and sought consensus, chose to speak first and assert his preference. The selection process for the vice-president lacked a formal structure; instead, it relied on a sense of agreement among the elders. Bakosoro, accustomed to speaking first in previous discussions, found himself unexpectedly placed last in the speaking order. This left him with limited options, he argued, ultimately leading him to endorse Igga:

> Clement Konga mentioned Wani Igga was the only man we can choose. Nobody was clapping at all in the assembly. Lobong then said we really had to choose Wani Igga. What could I do? I said ok, I have no objection to endorse Wani Igga. In any case, it [the position] was for Wani Igga. Because of seniority, the liberation issue, the most senior Equatorian in government. … [W]e decided to give in the chance. It is a kind of … natural law if you want.[39]

Wani Igga was, in a sense, the lesser of two evils for Equatorians, although the choice disappointed many. One Equatorian remembers that ‘after endorsing him, the room was

[39] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023

quiet. Usually everyone is clapping and dancing! At the end of the meeting, we told the governors they had let us down'.[40] At the time, however, others resolutely decided to give Wani Igga a chance:

> We said it might be a chance for Wani Igga to represent us. … [T]o be fair, he had not had the opportunity to do so. He had been speaker of the parliament … but what can a speaker really do? Becoming vice-president, it was his chance to prove himself.[41]

On 23 August 2013, the national parliament officially approved Wani Igga's nomination as vice-president. Wani Igga hence became a dominant figure among Equatorians, but he was unpopular with many in the region and did not share the objective of self-determination. Vanguardism and its politics had clearly constrained Equatorian leaders' choice. However, this outcome was not the preferred choice of the SPLM, either. Accounts suggest that Kiir strong-armed the decision, threatening to dissolve the assembly if MPs refused to confirm Wani Igga and strip them of their benefits. Security forces allegedly even contacted some legislators and pressured to fall in line with Kiir's decision.[42] The SPLM politburo, the party's highest executive body, had not been involved at all in the decision to appoint Wani Igga as vice-president. One SPLM member thus lamented that, by forcing the appointment of Wani Igga, 'Kiir has shown total disregard for the existing structures of the ruling party in decision-making'.[43]

[40] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, March 2022
[41] Interview with Eastern Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023
[42] "S. Sudan lawmakers unanimously endorse Wani Igga as new VP," *Sudan Tribune* 24 August 2013.
[43] "South Sudan parliament intimidated as power wrangles continue," *Sudan Tribune* 27 August 2013.

‘This prophet of doom continues to pursue his actions of the past’

It is said that on 15 December 2013, Dinka and Nuer soldiers within the Tiger Battalion engaged in armed conflict in Juba, purportedly in response to rumours that Riek Machar was plotting a coup with other senior leaders. However, numerous accounts contest this version of events, which Kiir’s loyalists and some biased Western analysts spread.[44] In its report, the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan in fact argued that there was no evidence of such a coup attempt.[45] A more likely reality is that President Kiir had premeditated a violent purge of his vanguard rivals, following the press conference that Machar and Rebecca Garang led at the SPLM House.[46] The outbreak of violence is therefore to be understood as what Roessler and Verhoeven have called a ‘co-conspirator rupture’, in which ‘comrades manoeuvre to eliminate their brothers-in-arms out of fear they themselves face imminent elimination’.[47] Regardless of the initial catalyst, violence rapidly proliferated throughout Juba as Riek Machar fled the city on foot. In the capital, the *Mathiang Anyoor*, a violent militia from Northern Bahr el Ghazal led by SPLA General Paul Malong, was swiftly deployed. Thousands of civilians, mostly Nuer, ran towards the United Nations military base seeking protection as military tanks were mobilised. Human Rights Watch reported:

> Government soldiers of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and police questioned residents about their ethnicity and deliberately shot ethnic Nuer.

[44] Young, *South Sudan’s Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking*.
[45] *FINAL REPORT OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON SOUTH SUDAN*, AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (Addis Ababa, 15 october 2014).
[46] See for instance accounts reported in Philip Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
[47] Roessler and Verhoeven, "Short Hobbes Revisited: The Commitment Problem, Trust and Preemption."

> Thousands of people have fled areas of Juba, including more than 16,000 people who sought shelter at the compound of the United Nations Mission.[48]

At 11 a.m. the following day, President Salva Kiir made a televised national address, donning the military fatigues of the Tiger Battalion. To his right, amidst the crowd, the newly appointed Vice President, Wani Igga, stood motionless. Kiir strongly condemned the supposed coup attempt by Riek Machar and his allies.. Kiir acknowledged 'an attack by a group of soldiers' but sought to reassure the population, stating that the 'government maintains full control of the security situation in Juba'. He further emphasised that his administration would exclusively 'permit a peaceful transition of power'. At the end of his intervention, he declared:

> My fellow citizens, let me reiterate my statement [from] a few days ago in which I said that my government is not and will not allow the incidents of 1991 to repeat themselves again. This prophet of doom [*Riek Machar*] continues to persistently pursue his actions of the past, and I have to tell you that I will not allow or tolerate such incidents once again in our new nation.[49]

Salva Kiir expeditiously chose to leverage the pre-existing, colonially constructed Dinka-Nuer ethnic divide as a framework for the conflict, employing this strategy to obscure the internal political dynamics within the vanguard movement and the wider national problem of representation. By emphasising the 1991 schism within the SPLM, which had precipitated the massacre of Dinka civilians by Nuer militias in Bor during the self-proclaimed *liberation* struggle, Kiir deliberately resurfaced a fraught ethnic history. This strategic manoeuvre served to reframe contemporary political dynamics within a historical narrative of Dinka-Nuer inter-ethnic conflict, despite the fact that the tensions

[48] *South Sudan: Soldiers Target Ethnic Group in Juba Fighting* Human Rights Watch (19 December 2013).
[49] Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap*, 1.

among the vanguard clearly transcended these ethnic boundaries.[50] Similarly, Kiir's characterisation of Machar as a 'prophet of doom' strategically invoked a cultural imaginary associated with the significant role of prophets in Nuer society, thereby leveraging ethnic symbolism for political ends.[51] It was the 19th-century Nuer prophet Ngundeng Bong who predicted that 'a ruler with a big beard would be toppled by a left-handed Nuer from the west of the Nile', and that this Nuer would be 'unmarked by the scars of manhood and who would be married to a white woman'.[52] Salva Kiir happened to have a beard, and Riek Machar is a left-handed, unmarked Nuer from the west of the Nile. Furthermore, Machar's personal history included a marriage to Emma McCune, a white British humanitarian worker.[53] Although Kiir's invocation of prophecy might seem tenuous in a contemporary political context, its deployment served a strategic purpose: to galvanise the Dinka constituency, which had previously shown reluctance to rally strongly behind the President.[54]

The Power of Narratives

The events in South Sudan appeared to appeal to the catastrophist narratives frequently imposed upon African politics: a paradigm wherein ethnicity serves as a *deus ex machina*, and where, to borrow Mkandawire's critique, 'primordial ties [are] mesmerised by the big man'.[55] As violence exploded, the diplomatic corps had in fact only recently established

[50] Sharon E. Hutchinson, *Nuer dilemmas : coping with money, war, and the state* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Hutchinson, "A Curse from God? Religious and Political Dimensions of the Post-1991 Rise of Ethnic Violence in South Sudan."
[51] On Nuer prophets, see Johnson, *Nuer prophets : a history of prophecy from the Upper Nile in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*; Hutchinson and Pendle, "Violence, Legitimacy, and Prophecy: Nuer Struggles with Uncertainty in South Sudan."
[52] Hannah Wild, Jok Madut Jok, and Ronak Patel, "The militarization of cattle raiding in South Sudan: how a traditional practice became a tool for political violence," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3, no. 1 (2018): 5.
[53] Deborah Scroggins, *Emma's War: Love, Betrayal and Death in the Sudan* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).
[54] Interview with Prof. Jacob Dut Chol, University of Juba, March 2022
[55] Mkandawire, "Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections," 558.

their presence in Juba, having arrived sometimes mere months prior to the outbreak of conflict. Their focus had been predominantly on developmental initiatives, chief among them the 'New Deal Compact' – a framework, somewhat ironically, designed to address South Sudan's purported 'state fragility'.[56] The internal dynamics of the vanguard party – and, more broadly, the issue of competing nationalisms – had been insufficiently monitored and, consequently, inadequately understood. The diplomatic community quickly adopted a reductionist narrative, interpreting the conflict solely through a mix of Dinka-Nuer antagonism and elite power struggle, an approach that had the potential to isolate Equatorian elites. 'When grand narratives are shared', argued Adebanwi, 'they provide "cognitive lenses" through which people can view the world'.[57] The United Nations Security Council President Gérard Araud, for instance, quickly insisted that the 'conflict had the potential of a civil war between the two main ethnic bodies'.[58] According to numerous diplomatic sources, the perceived Dinka-Nuer reality of the conflict was ostensibly corroborated by the relative quiescence of the Equatorian region. This observation led many to conclude, erroneously, that 'the problem of South Sudan was circumscribed to only two tribes'.[59] Indeed, the initial propagation of violence to Bor and subsequently to Bentiu could at first lend credence to this interpretation. This geographical spread was precipitated by the defection of Nuer-dominated SPLM factions, who mobilised in an attempt to reach Juba, ostensibly to retaliate against the targeted violence that Nuer populations had endured in the capital during the preceding days. The advancement of Nuer militias, notably the so-called Nuer *Dec in boor*, or White Army,

[56] Interview with XXXX, former Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Whatsapp call, September 2024
[57] Adebanwi, *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning*, 281.
[58] Cited in "South Sudan opposition head Riek Machar denies coup bid," *BBC* 18 December 2013.
[59] Interview with XXXX, former Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Whatsapp call, September 2024

towards Juba was ultimately thwarted by the intervention of the Ugandan army in support of Salva Kiir, an action that American authorities tacitly endorsed. Concurrently, in his quest for political allies, Riek Machar had no choice but to embrace the notion of embodying Nuer ethnic nationalism to attempt to be perceived as the representatives of the violent armed Nuer militias operating across the country, something that in fact never materialised. Machar nonetheless endeavoured to construct a Nuer-centric cult of personality around himself, exemplifying the use of culture as a 'resource for political engineering'.[60] Indeed, just like the Dinka, the Nuer, who had spent decades fighting each other, were not particularly keen to organise to fight for political power in Juba.

Cohesiveness Under Strain

As violence erupted in Juba, Equatorians initially adopted a cautious stance, choosing to hide and wait for the conflict to shift northward. Very few decided to take sides or join the fighting, perceiving the conflict as external – or *nefast* – to their interests. An Equatorian leader argued, '[A]t the beginning, this was simply not our war'.[61] Equatorians, perceiving themselves as collateral victims rather than direct stakeholders in the conflict, prioritised shielding their region from the rippling effects of intra-SPLM violence. Their marginalisation within the army had rendered them spectators to the unfolding drama of military factionalism. However, several Equatorian elites cast their lot with the newly formed Sudan People's Liberation Movement – In Opposition (SPLM-IO) led by Riek Machar, which was already widely perceived as a Nuer movement. Strikingly, the SPLM-IO emerged as a carbon copy of its progenitor, precisely replicating the SPLM's structure. This mimicry illuminated the enduring grip of the vanguard party as a political tool to defend South Sudanese nationalism. Among those few Equatorians

[60] Adebanwi, *Yorùbá elites and ethnic politics in Nigeria : Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólówọ̀ and corporate agency*.
[61] Interview with David Otim, former MP and Member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, March 2022

who joined the SPLM-IO were Alfred Lado Gore, who, after (unsuccessfully) attempting to mobilise his Bari community to fight Salva Kiir, fled to Upper Nile. One could also mention Richard Mula from Western Equatoria; Ramadan Laku, a Mundari; Frank Matata, a Kuku from Kajo-Keji; and Henry Dilang Odwar, who, like Lado Gore, initially sought to form, without success, an Equatorian force in the conflict.[62] As an Equatorian community leader put it, '[T]he war opened the possibility for some Equatorians to fight for recognition through a new channel and to contest the leadership of the three governors'; inevitably, Equatoria's internal dynamics became inextricably entangled in the web of national conflict.[63] These Equatorians – most of whom the three governors had sidelined – attempted to form a rival group claiming leadership over Equatorian affairs. Indeed, Machar employed a dual strategy in his bid for leadership. On the one hand, he sought to position himself as the leader of the Nuer, aiming to exert control over various militias operating in Upper Nile and Unity. Simultaneously, however, he attempted to gather elites from across the country, presenting himself as a true *national* liberation leader with broad appeal. A key move in this strategy was hence naming Lado Gore as his deputy, a calculated attempt to attract Equatorians and build a sympathetic relationship with them.[64] Similarly, Riek Machar's promise to implement federalism in South Sudan was a strategy to appeal to marginalised groups, promising them more power should he prevail as the winner of the post-liberation war. However, Young has rightly argued the following in his analysis of the civil war:

> The IO leadership thinks the Equatorians are more sympathetic to them than to the Dinka-dominated government and support their appeal for federalism but

[62] Young, *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking*; "MAAPSS – Mapping Actors and Alliances Project – South Sudan," Small Arms Survey, https://maapss.org.
[63] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member for the SPLM-IO, Juba, October 2023
[64] Some suggest that Machar attempted to attract Bakosoro to his movement, without success. Bakosoro is not particularly close to Machar, whom he accuses of having supported the LRA massacres in Western Equatoria. See *Conflict in Western Equatoria*, Small Arms Survey (Geneva, 2016).

assume they will not commit to the opposition until it looks like the government can be overthrown.[65]

NEGOTIATING GROUPNESS IN THE SHADOW OF CONFLICT

The 2014 Emergency Equatoria Conference

The Equatorian governors sought to leverage the political conflict to assert their agency and advocate for systemic reforms. They recognised that Equatorian elites needed to maintain organisational cohesion, establish and publicly articulate clear objectives, and speak with a unified voice – achieving what Archer has termed 'corporate agency'[66] – to effectively advance their agenda while avoiding subsumption into the dominant Dinka-Nuer narrative. The framing of the civil war and the narratives that external actors deployed posed a significant risk: Equatorian elites could be absorbed into the very vanguard nationalist structure they had been trying to reform. Indeed, after numerous efforts to mobilise nationalism in service of creating a unified political bloc, the civil war threatened to dangerously reshape alliances and social networks, potentially undermining the governors' nationalist project. The outbreak of violence hence catalysed swift action from Equatorian governors in early January 2014, three weeks after the outbreak of violence. As the war raged in Unity and Upper Nile, on 10 January 2014, Bakosoro, Wani Konga, and Lobong quickly organised an emergency Equatoria conference, aiming to reaffirm Equatorian nationalism, end any attempts by some Equatorian leaders to create their own military force or to take sides in the conflict, maintain the political leadership of the three governors over Equatoria, and propose resolutions to end the burgeoning crisis. As Clement Loku Chichim, an Eastern Equatorian state minister, stated on the

[65] John Young, *A Fractious Rebellion: Inside the SPLM-IO*, Small Arms Survey (Geneva, September 2015), 30.
[66] Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

radio, a key objective was also to prevent 'the region from becoming a war field' for SPLM leaders.[67] Despite the urgency, the Nyakuron Cultural Centre in Juba had still been decorated for the occasion, and traditional dances had opened the ceremony and maintained a sense of *Equatoria-ness*. However, the gravity of the situation was evident in the conference's condensed format: a one-day event, rather than the usual multi-day conference, reflecting the difficulty of gathering leaders in this volatile climate. In fact, ultimately, many Equatorians were left uninformed about this conference, as the conflict had already severely disrupted communications among them. Many interviewees remembered the morose ambiance in the room. The Equatorians who had left with the IO were widely discussed, which called into question the possible unity of Equatorians in this conflict. At the centre of the conversations were the names of Kosti Manibe and Cirino Hiteng Ofuho, two prominent Equatorians among the 11 senior politicians whom the government had detained and who had been accused of backing Riek Machar in his attempted coup.[68] The conference's concluding communiqué unsurprisingly mirrored the event itself; it was brief. In fact, as one attendee observed, the event was more of a 'gathering to say that we were united rather than a real conference'.[69] Equatorian governors nonetheless saw the conflict as an opportunity to advocate federalism in South Sudan and continued to believe in their capacity to hold the group of Equatorian elites together. The communiqué started as follows:

> We the political leaders, intellectuals, elders, and community leaders from Equatoria States, do hereby wish to present our position on the conflict as follows:
>
> - Strongly express unquestionable, unwavering, undivided, and unconditional support to democracy and democratic values, democratically elected government,

[67] "Equatoria postpones extraordinary conference," *Catholic Radio Network* 8 January 2014.
[68] They were released two weeks later and transferred to Kenya
[69] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023

the Transitional Constitution, and all National Institutions of Governance of the Republic of South Sudan.

- Condemn, in the strongest possible terms, any move by anyone to usurp power by unconstitutional means, causing destruction, displacement, and death in our nation.[70]

Taking the opportunity to reassert their agenda and ideas for political reforms, the document then presented proposals to address the crisis, including the following:

- Working out a formula for equitable sharing of state power by the different regions, states, and ethnic groups […]
- Adopting a federal system of governance as the best way of sharing political power […]
- Mobilisation of Equatorians for the protection of the territory, its people, and their property […]
- Ensuring the equitable and transparent sharing of state resources between the centre and states and between states and counties […]
- Formation of Equatoria High Committee to be involved in the peace process in Addis Ababa.[71]

Promoting Unity and a Fixed Identity

Two months later, on 29 March 2014, the three governors convened in Juba to deliberate on the evolving political landscape in South Sudan. Their primary topic of discussion was to swiftly establish the independent Equatoria Cooperation Council (ECC), ensuring that the region presented a unified stance in the on-going conflict. This pivotal step sought to ease tensions among Equatorian elites and foster a sense of solidarity and cohesion, as

[70] Emergency Equatoria Conference 2014
[71] Emergency Equatoria Conference 2014

the council had the task of speaking on behalf of Equatoria. Indeed, several days prior, Prof. Wani Tombe Lako had founded the Greater Equatoria Council of Rights (GRECOR) with the objective of rallying Equatorian elites behind Riek Machar. Although the movement was small and primarily centered around the Equatorian diaspora, it compelled the governors to recognize the necessity of strengthening their control in Equatoria. Additionally, the meeting was timely, coming at a critical moment when the Equatoria caucus had essentially fallen apart amid the chaos of the ongoing conflict.

Several days later, the governors attended a two-day conference, titled 'Supporting Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity', organised by the Equatoria Students Union in Uganda (ESUU) in Kampala.[72] The ESUU, founded following the 2011 Equatoria conference, had the primary objective of mobilising students from the Equatoria region to promote Equatorian cultures and traditions. The student union had close ties with the three governors. Indeed, the governors viewed the union as a valuable instrument for multiple purposes: nurturing young Equatorian leaders (such as Bush Buse, who would later become an important youth activist in South Sudan), mobilizing the significant Equatorian community in Uganda, and asserting their leadership on Equatorian affairs. At the conference, the governors reiterated the importance of Equatorians remaining united and neutral, aiming to prevent any individual from bypassing the governors to promote Equatoria's interests. Louis Lobong, wearing a tie adorned with the colours of South Sudan and attempting to discourage Equatorians from joining either Kiir or Machar, declared:

[72] The union was originally named the 'Greater Equatoria Union in Uganda'; note that Joseph Bakosoro was however unable to attend, and was represented by Phillip Pai, the Western Equatoria Education Minister.

> You should be remembered that we the Equatorians ha[ve] suffered from the brutal civil war and destruction of properties since 1955. … We cannot again go for meaningless war after gaining the independence we fought for.[73]

In the crowded assembly, a student reinforced that message:

> This unity starts with the family, and the families here refer to the Equatorians. Once the Equatorians are united, we shall be able to move out and preach the same gospel of unity to our fellow brothers and sisters in South Sudan.[74]

Federalism for Self-Determination

Wani Igga: The 'Not-So-Ideal' Equatorian

While the three governors worked towards maintaining internal unity, they took the opportunity to advance their federalist agenda as a solution to the political crisis, as federalism was a core element in the defining ethos of true *Equatoria-ness*. Machar's strategic adoption of federalism to garner allies had propelled the issue to the forefront of South Sudanese politics in early 2014. Equatorian governors sought to capitalise on this momentum, becoming increasingly active and vocal in promoting federalism against the unitarian nationalism of the SPLM. On 25 May 2014, Equatorian elites, at the invitation of the three governors, held a meeting in Juba to discuss federalism, its implications, and whether it should be adopted as the official policy for Equatorians. Several weeks before, Wani Konga had declared that 'the people of Equatoria have come openly that [federalism] is what should be included in the constitution'.[75] In contrast to the 2011 and 2013 Equatoria conferences, which had broad audiences, this one-day event gathered only politicians and intellectuals from the three Equatorian states. Clement Wani Konga was

[73] "Equatoria students urge unity for prosperous S. Sudan," *Sudan Tribune* 7 Paril 2014.
[74] "Equatoria students urge unity for prosperous S. Sudan."
[75] "G. Equatoria politicians discuss federalism as Igga lashes out at rebel leader Machar," *Sudan Tribune* 25 May 2014.

present, whereas Bakosoro and Lobong sent representatives, as they were unable to attend. During the meeting, although most Equatorian leaders (unsurprisingly) agreed that federalism should be implemented in South Sudan, Vice-President Wani Igga, who had been invited because of his political status and visibility, refused to endorse such a proposal. As a journalist reported, Wani Igga argued the following:

> [M]any Equatorians saw that this idea of Riek on federation will rescue them. Equatorians, no, Riek is a liar. So, please, the few of us who think they must join Riek in order to get federation, please, you are on the wrong road. … This federation here is not the creation of Riek; we all know that Riek actually stole this renewed call for federalism in this hall here – Nyakuron – during an Equatorian consultative conference like this, because he knew the resolutions of it; then he said, yes, I am also for federation.[76]

Igga's resistance to federalism, expressed to the Equatorian elites, stemmed from his ideological roots in vanguardism. Igga, reflecting the views of President Kiir, but also those of President Museveni of Uganda and other vanguard leaders, perceived federalism as sectarianism and tribalism, a relic of the colonial era that divided people instead of bringing them together.[77] For instance, in his book *Rediscovering Our Roots*, a dubious historical endeavour aimed at explaining the historical genesis of South Sudan, Igga wrote that 'tribalism in pristine societies like the South Sudan can be not only intractable for any government to handle but quite destructive to the socio-economic fabric of the nation'.[78] Igga's position must also be understood as an attempt to prevent Equatorian

[76] "G. Equatoria politicians discuss federalism as Igga lashes out at rebel leader Machar."
[77] President Museveni, in a speech in Juba, for instance warned the South Sudanese against embracing tribalism or sectarianism in politics, describing them 'wrong, false, pseudo or bogus ideology in nationhood. See '"SOUTH SUDAN: "Tribalism, Sectarianism -Wrong ideology"- President Museveni," *AMECEA* 2015.
[78] Wani Igga, *South Sudan: Rediscovering Our Roots*, 176.

leaders from aligning with Riek Machar. Indeed, massive support from Equatorians for the SPLM-IO would have dealt a major blow to Salva Kiir and his allies.

Shortly after the meeting of Equatorian leaders publicly endorsing federalism, Riek Machar's spokesperson, attempting to attract Equatorians, told journalists the following:

> Our leadership welcomes this courageous step taken by the Equatorian leaders and intellectuals in discussing the importance of constituting and implementing a federal system of governance in South Sudan. … The question would be, who is ready to champion this overdue popular demand of the people and implement it? I think it is important to say that those leaders who embrace the idea of federalism should instead lead their people towards achieving it despite who initiated the idea.[79]

Igga's reluctance to champion federalism in that meeting was met with strong disapproval among Equatorian elites. In less than a year, the (tepid) support that Igga had once received from his peers at Aron Hotel had withered, and he was no longer in their good graces. Equatorian leaders had already determined that Wani Igga was not a good Equatorian – one who neither followed in the footsteps of nor upheld the core principles, including the federalism, of the Equatorian Intellectual Committee. The most striking response to Wani's position came from an open letter from the Greater Equatoria Youth Leadership (GEYL). Although the three governors did not sign the letter and denied any involvement in orchestrating it, their role in its creation remains open to question. The letter, released in June 2014, stated as follows:

> Mr. VP, the GEYL would like to outline critically to you that, never again interfere with demands and interest of people of Greater Equatoria public, as well as their public opinion concerning anything that affects their daily living conditions, when you are playing your political cards. … We have observed your nerve characters of

[79] "G. Equatoria politicians discuss federalism as Igga lashes out at rebel leader Machar."

> indecisiveness, and always act for your selfish purpose leaving the mass population of people of South Sudan at disposal of destructors. … We therefore advise you that you have a choice to make, resign or be silent to do with anything that concerns popular demands of people of Greater Equatoria Region, particularly the element of federalism all the people of the region are embarking on.[80]

One day later, the same group endorsed Clement Wani Konga as the Equatorian leader, reflecting the long-held hope of other Equatorian elites. Clement Wani Konga was now the *primus* Equatorian *inter pares*:

> We the Greater Equatoria Youth Leadership today resolved to take this opportunity to underscore its common position to stand firmly behind the Central Equatoria State Governor Clement Wani Konga for his visionary leadership skills, and leadership's directives for the people of CES, and Greater Equatoria at large in regards to the federal system in South Sudan.[81]

Several days later, on 4 June 2014, Wani Konga orchestrated a demonstration of force at Nyakuron, reportedly drawing more than 3,000 Central Equatorians. Addressing the assembled crowd, Konga articulated his unwavering stance: 'We can engage in dialogue, but we stand firmly for a federal system, and our demand will not waver – we have pursued this through discourse, not through violence'.[82]

Debating Federalism at Juba University

Less than two months later, on Saturday, 5 July 2014, a debate on federalism at Juba University became the defining moment in the rising call for federalist reforms. Hosted by the university's Centre for Peace and Development (CPDS) – and not by the three

[80] "An Open Letter to VP James Wani from the Equatorian Youths," *PaanLuel Wël* 5 June 2014.
[81] "Greater Equatoria Youth Leadership: We Stand Firmly Behind Governor Clement Wani Konga," *South Sudan News Agency* 7 June 2014.
[82] "C. Equatoria governor: 'We stand for federalism'," *Radio Tamazuj* 5 June 2014.

governors – the event was titled 'Federalism in the History of South Sudanese Political Thought'. Luka Biong Deng Kuol, a former Minister of Cabinet Affairs and a fellow of the Rift Valley Institute, organised the debate. The guest speaker was the historian Douglas Johnson, who was once close to the SPLM but had distanced himself after Garang's death. The room was packed to capacity, with a notable presence of foreign diplomats. One attendee recalled that 'hundreds of people – mostly Equatorians – gathered outside, straining to catch a glimpse through the windows', a testament to the overwhelming interest in the debate.[83]

During the debate, which gathered academics, politicians, and civil society leaders, the Dean of the College of Social and Economic Studies presented a poll showing that the vast majority of students from Equatoria favoured a federal system. Federalism was viewed by many South Sudanese—not just Equatorians—as a system that could prevent the hyper-centralization of power, safeguard minority rights, and promote cultural recognition across the country, ultimately bringing peace and stability in South Sudan. For many, federalism was indeed the only system that enables, through accommodative mechanisms, self-determination without resorting to secession, because, rooted in territorial politics, it attempts 'to manage ethnic conflict by allowing territorial groups to exercise some degree of self-rule'.[84]

Federalism as an idea has been highly debated not just in South Sudan but across the continent since independence. 'During the 1960s and 1970', wrote Yimenu, 'several federal orders were made in Africa, but all were shortlived, making the continent home of failed federal arrangements'.[85] Still viewing federalism as a legacy of colonial divide-

[83] Interview with Irene Panozzo, former Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Whatsapp call, September 2024

[84] Bizuneh Yimenu, "Federalism and State Restructuring in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Origins, Rationales, and Challenges," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 54, no. 1 (2023): 7.

[85] Yimenu, "Federalism and State Restructuring in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Origins, Rationales, and Challenges," 10.

and-rule policies, many leaders have regarded it as merely a stepping stone toward further secession.[86] It was only in the 1990s, during the third wave of democratization, that federalism began to regain traction: accommodation of diversity and conflict management, not economic prosperity, being the main rationales.[87] Nowadays, however, only Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Somalia have proclaimed themselves federal states by adopting federal constitutions, raising questions about the ability of federalism to prevent conflict and promote stability. This is because, argued Yimenu, 'federalism's effectiveness as a conflict management tool depends on robust democracy, strong institutions, and a party system conducive to flourishing federalism', which many African states simply lack.[88]

For Salva Kiir, the event at Juba University was the straw that broke the camel's back. As early as June, newsrooms had received directives from the government to stop publishing on federalism, considering the topic a threat to national security. Alfred Taban, an Equatorian personality and founder of the Juba Monitor, vehemently criticised this policy in an editorial. Subsequently, security forces seized all copies of the newspaper.[89] Following the debate at the University of Juba, government forces once again attempted to suppress media coverage of the event. Security forces raided the independent newspaper *The Citizen*, and all copies were confiscated.[90] Several politicians advised Luka Biong to leave the country.

---

[86] Nico Steytler, "Non-centralism in Africa: In search of the federal idea. ," in *A research agenda for federalism studies*, ed. John Kincaid (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019).
[87] Yimenu, "Federalism and State Restructuring in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Origins, Rationales, and Challenges," 12.
[88] Yimenu, "Federalism and State Restructuring in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Origins, Rationales, and Challenges," 29.
[89] *Truth and debate fall victim to 'national security' rhetoric amid South Sudan's crisis*, Amnesty International (7 July 2014); "Is South Sudan Government Trying to Mute Federalism Debate? ," *Voice of America* 1 July 2014.
[90] "A debate on federalism at Juba University," news release, 2014.

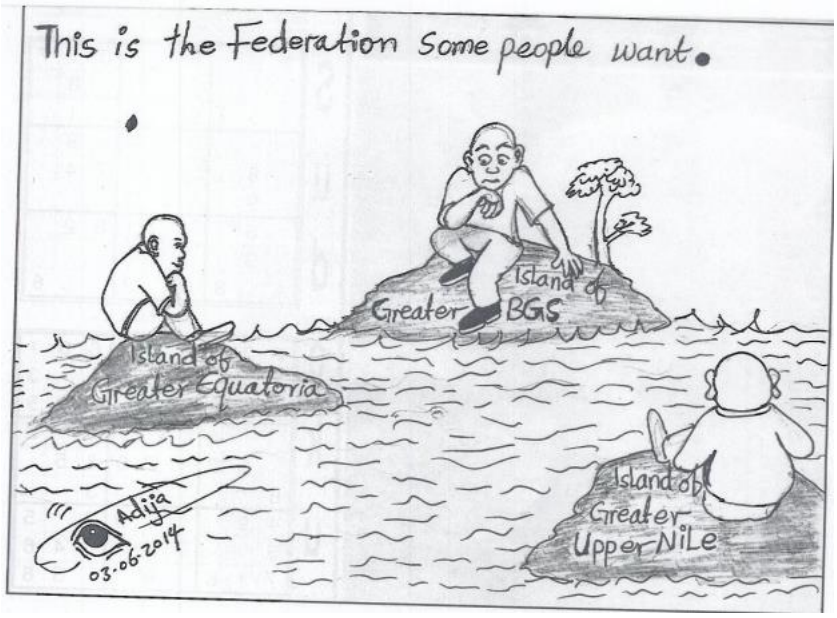

Figure 10. Cartoon of the day in The Citizen *newspaper, South Sudan, 3 June 2014*

Source: https://tinyurl.com/45t77adk

Salva Kiir, who, until then, had been relatively vague on his stance on federalism, stepped up his rhetoric and denounced attempts by Equatorians to break the country apart. Invoking the past, Kiir equated federalism with *kokora* (see *Chapter 2*), spreading fear that Equatorians would again demand their own region and expel others – despite several attempts by the three governors to distinguish between *kokora* and federalism:

> The issue that people are raising now, that is the same issue that came in 1983. Kokora. And Kokora should not again derail us from what we are doing … because when it happened, yes, it started in Equatoria. The Equatorians wanted their own state. Equatoria Region. It was called 'region'. The people of Bahr al Ghazal left, the people of Upper Nile left, the people of Equatoria stayed here.[91]

[91] "Kiir raises fears of 'Kokora' under federal system," *Radio Tamazuj* 10 July 2014.

The Equatorian project was certainly territorially bound, and it was mostly a South Sudanese affair. However, the limits of methodological nationalism force us to move *beyond the nation*, exploring the regional, transnational, and international politics of competing nationalisms in South Sudan, in a time where all South Sudanese actors vied for external support. This is crucial because nationalist projects have, in a way, always been linked to their regional and international environments. The three governors did attempt to integrate their nationalist project within the wider geopolitics of Eastern Africa, however unsuccessfully. This section explores such an attempt, presenting both its *enablements* and *constraints*. What it shows is the limits of the governor's agency when it comes to reshaping – even in a limited way – regional and international alliances, as actors and networks are embedded in wider historical and political structures and broader worldviews on sovereignty, state-building, and security. The three governors' failure to project corporateness certainly did not help, demonstrating the link between the internal politics of Equatoria and its external dimension.

Peace Inc. in Action

Shortly after violence erupted in Juba in December 2013, a peace process quickly materialised in an attempt to stop the conflict. In late December, the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa appointed three mediators to spearhead the peace efforts: General Lazaro Sumbeiywo of Kenya, who had previously played a role in the CPA negotiations; Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, the influential former Foreign Minister of Ethiopia; and Mohamed Ahmed al-Dabi, a Sudanese general.[92] No Ugandan diplomat was included in

[92] COMMUNIQUE OF THE 23 rd EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION OF THE IGAD ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTH SUDAN, (Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa 27 December 2013).

the mediation team, as Uganda's intervention to prevent Riek Machar from seizing Juba had rendered it a direct party to the South Sudanese civil war. The United Nations, the United States, the African Union, China, and the European Union quickly supported the IGAD, welcoming a regional institution taking the lead in a new era of waning interventionism. Regarding the rushed peace process, Aly Verjee, a senior advisor to the chief mediator of the IGAD during the negotiations, wrote the following in 2020:

> [T]he extreme rapidity with which the process was constituted allowed little time for thoughtful consideration of what the mediators should, or could, seek to achieve nor what their priorities and sequence of activities should be, nor how they would go about achieving those aims, nor what they would do if they encountered resistance or suffered setbacks.[93]

The mediators had a narrow understanding of peace, perceiving it only as the absence of violence, and they focused primarily on warring factions, leaving non-belligerent parties aside.[94] In their January 2014 Progress report, the special envoys hence started by stating, '[T]he parties to the conflict, namely, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and the SPLM/A (in Opposition), arrived in Addis Ababa on 1st and 2nd January to begin dialogue'.[95] 'The objective', recalls a diplomat, 'was just to stop violence, hence we only focused on violent actors. … [I]n fact, having non-warring parties at the table was too difficult'.[96] In such a 'belligerents' bargain', wrote Srinivasan in his study of peace-making in Sudan, 'the ideal problem [for peacemakers] is the abstract neatness of …

[93] Aly Verjee, "How Mediators Conceive of Peace: The Case of IGAD in South Sudan, 2013–15," in *Making and Breaking Peace in Sudan and South Sudan*, ed. Sarah Nouwen, Laura James, and Sharath Srinivasan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 278.
[94] Interview with Irene Panozzo, former Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Whatsapp call, September 2024
[95] *Ending the Crisis in South Sudan through Mediatio: A Progress Report of the Special Envoys to the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government*, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (31 January 2014).,4.
[96] Interview with Irene Panozzo, former Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Whatsapp call, September 2024

mutually exclusive unitary political actors … deploying armed forces'.[97] However, the negotiators' attempt to simplify the conflict by overlapping the Dinka-Nuer dichotomy with the two warring parties obscured both the complex loyalties of belligerents and South Sudan's broader political landscape. This need for 'abstract neatness' overlooked, among other groups, Equatorian elites and their grievances based on the misguided assumption that, as a European Ambassador mentioned, 'Equatorians were not part of the problem because they were not fighting'.[98] This framing of the conflict demonstrates South Sudanese elites' agency in shaping both the negotiation table and how peace will ultimately be understood and endorsed, something that the *liberal peace* paradigm, with its top-down approach and ready-to-use toolkit, has long ignored, refusing to take elites' ideas seriously when it comes to 'make peace'. Recognizing the importance of broadening the negotiation table if South Sudan was to see a real reduction in violence, the IGAD Assembly of Heads of State and Government met again at the end of January 2014. In attendance were Sudanese President Bashir, Kenyan President Kenyatta, and James Wani Igga, representing the South Sudanese government. Among other decisions, the Heads of State decided on the following:

> [To] instruct IGAD Special Envoys to develop a framework for the next phase of negotiations in South Sudan, including specific modalities on structure, representation, and timeframe, so as to ensure dialogue is truly inclusive; and further [to] instruct them to ensure that such a framework is developed with a view to involve a broad range of South Sudanese government, political, and civil society actors in a reinvigorated constitutional process.[99]

[97] Srinivasan, *When peace kills politics : international intervention and unending wars in the Sudans*, 36.
[98] Interview with French Ambassador to the Republic of South Sudan, Juba, October 2023
[99] "COMMUNIQUE OF THE 24th EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION OF THE IGAD ASSEMBLY OF HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT ON THE SITUATION IN SOUTH SUDAN," news release, 31 January 2014.

For Equatorian leaders, the IGAD's decision to open negotiations represented a crucial opportunity to become actors at the negotiation table and to attempt to reshape the South Sudanese political order.

Pushing for Equatorian Nationalism

Equatoria, the SPLM, and its Regional Networks

As negotiations unfolded between Machar and Kiir in Addis, the three governors requested a meeting with President Kiir in Juba:

> [T]he negotiations were only Dinka versus Nuer. … [S]o we went to the President and said, '[I]f we leave the two major ethnic groups to negotiate, they may not reach the right conclusion. … [T]hey may end up again fighting. … [W]hat you are saying during negotiations is also affecting us. … [W]hatever the Dinka and Nuer are discussing, we are part of South Sudan … so we need to be part of the discussions. If you decide to sell South Sudan, are you going to sell us, as well?'. And the president allowed us to travel across the region.[100]

The governors Joseph Bakosoro, Clement Wani Konga, and Louis Lobong formed a committee of politicians from Western, Central, and Eastern Equatoria to collaboratively draft a position paper, the 'Equatoria Community Second Extra-Ordinary Conference and the Fifth Conference Resolution'. The document contained the following demand:

> [A f]ederal option for the republic of South Sudan shall be democratically negotiated in the constitution-making process but not through party interest agreement. Neither the SPLM nor the other political parties and organisations have the mandate to determine and impose federalism on South Sudanese people. Equatoria's constant call for federal system is a peaceful, open, and civic demand driven by our socio-economic and political situation in our country. It is therefore a constitutional right in a democratic society to propose the best governance system to serve the people.[101]

[100] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[101] Quoted in "Where do the governors of Equatoria stand on federalism?," *Sudan Tribune* 2015.

They then embarked on a diplomatic tour across East Africa with the firm intention of being recognised as one bloc with vested interests in the peace negotiations and finding allies – one could even say patrons – to support their political project. Indeed, the competing Equatorian nationalist project had to export itself and insert itself in the regional politics of East Africa. As the IGAD in January 2014 shows, regional leaders had indeed started pushing for the inclusion of other parties – including non-warring groups – in the negotiations, leaving hope for the inclusion of the three governors. As Srinivasan argues in his study of peace-making, 'the politics of peace negotiations go far beyond the parties' bargaining at the negotiating table [and] include the actions of, and effects upon, a wide range of actors seeking to shape or reshape the "negotiating table" itself'.[102] The governors hence aimed to raise awareness about the demands of Equatorian elites among influential regional leaders, focusing on Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda – countries they believed had significant sway in the peace negotiations. However, the ambiguous relationship that Equatorian elites had developed with the SPLM and the meaning of *liberation* continued to haunt their project. The three governors, aware that there were discussions on Riek Machar becoming vice-president once the peace agreement was signed, strongly advocated for James Wani Igga to remain vice-president; this demand was surprising, as Wani Igga had been deemed an *improper* Equatorian several months before. One aide to the governors explained the following, however:

> [T]he idea was the same as in 2013. … [W]e were pushing for an Equatorian to be vice-president, because there were discussions that Riek [Machar] would come and take Wani Igga's position, again marginalising Equatorians. … [I]t was not so much

[102] Srinivasan, "War by other means: the politics of peace negotiations in Sudan ".

> for Wani Igga, but he was the highest Equatorian within the SPLM, and we knew Kiir could only accept him. … [W]e were just pragmatic! [103]

This decision, however, angered many Equatorian elites, who questioned why the governors would back James Wani Igga, given his staunch loyalty to Salva Kiir. Alfred Lado Gore, in a press release, quickly used the occasion to dismiss the governors' leadership:

> Equatorians in South Sudan and outside the country, reject the document of the three governors of Equatoria presented to the IGAD that James Wani Igga should remain as vice president because it only advances the personal interests of the ruling elites at the expense of the broad masses of Equatorians and South Sudanese at large.[104]

This disorder in the Equatorian house was not in the Equatorian elites' favour. Equatoria was indeed not high on the agenda of regional leaders. While the SPLM, through John Garang and his vanguard connections, had established strong regional diplomatic networks, Equatorians, occupying lower ranks within the SPLM, lacked such opportunities and connections. However, as Khan has written, 'ties to others serve as resources'.[105] In other words, Bakosoro, Lobong, and Wani Konga lacked close ties with regional leaders such as Uhuru Kenyatta, Meles Zenawi, and Yoweri Museveni. Such social networks, however, seemed to have been a prerequisite for politically ambitious groups in East African politics over the past two decades.[106] The SPLM's foreign policy has received little attention in the literature, and many have deemed the SPLM too weak and ideologically incoherent to develop a regional thinking. However, the SPLM had

[103] Interview with Sapana Abui, former Deputy Governor of Western Equatoria, Juba, October 2023
[104] "Top Equatorian rebel leader slams governors' stance on federalism," *Sudan Tribune* 22 February 2015.
[105] Shamus Rahman Khan, "The Sociology of Elites " *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012): 368.
[106] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*; Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*; Fisher, "Managing donor perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 intervention in Somalia."

smartly balanced regional interests since assuming power in 2005 with the objective of defending the sovereignty of the new nation; because the nation *was* the SPLM, and vice-versa, SPLM leaders eventually asserted their own sovereignty in East Africa. Midwifed by the United States, South Sudan was at a strategic location, between Central and Eastern Africa and on the Nile. Despite strong NRM backing, the SPLM never exported its national liberation agenda, partly because Salva Kiir rejected Garang's vanguard ideology, but mainly because the SPLM's nationalist project materialised two decades after other liberation regimes had consolidated. By then, the Congo war and feuds among eastern African comrades had extinguished any continental vanguard ambitions, with liberation leaders prioritising mere survival and internal affairs.[107] The SPLM foreign policy was hence largely driven by Realpolitik. The SPLM had been able to skilfully manoeuvre, deploying 'shrewd imaginaries of [South Sudan] as a potential breadbasket and energy powerhouse for the region' and playing on 'the geopolitical anxieties of Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda, not least with regard to any one of these regional protagonists stealing a march on the others'.[108] In turn, no East African government sought regime change in South Sudan.

Governors on Tour

The governors began their tour in Addis Ababa, where peace negotiations were underway and were attended by numerous diplomats and South Sudanese leaders. The Ethiopian government – and more precisely the Marxist-Leninist EPRDF – had played a pivotal

[107] Fisher, *East Africa after liberation : conflict, security and the state since the 1980s*.
[108] Francois Sennesael and Harry Verhoeven, *Energy and Water for Sovereignty: South Sudan's Regional Diplomacy and the Geopolitics of the Nile Basin*, Columbia University in the City of New York (New York, December 2022).

role within the IGAD, actively contributing to its revival to counterbalance the influence of the so-called 'conservative' African Union in the region.[109] Meles Zenawi and his government had also served as a key mediator between Sudan and South Sudan, forging close relationships with many of SPLM political elites. Additionally, Ethiopia had been a significant contributor of blue helmets to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, positioning itself as a 'regional policeman'.[110] For the governors, the aim was to meet with Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, the lead negotiator for the IGAD, but also with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who, together with Kenyan President Kenyatta, took a leadership role in resolving the South Sudanese conflict, to present their case and advocate for inclusion of Equatorians in the peace talks as a unified group.

The governors recalled the surprise that many felt when the Equatorian leaders arrived in Addis Ababa. Seyoum Mesfin's office was genuinely intrigued by the unexpected arrival of these politicians, questioning who they were, why they had come to Addis, and what their stakes were in the conflict.[111] This fact, initially surprising, reveals the deeply biased and rigid perspective that mediators held regarding South Sudanese politics.

In Addis, the governors undoubtedly grasped a sobering truth: Equatorian nationalism was a phantom in the broader Eastern African region, eclipsed by both the SPLM and the dominating Dinka-Nuer paradigm. In a brief meeting, the Equatorian governors outlined their grievances and urged the mediation team to consider their recommendations – chief among them, the need for federalism – as essential for achieving sustainable peace in South Sudan. In response, the governors received only a brief 'thank you' and a reminder

[109] Harry Verhoeven and Tefera Negash Gebregziabher, "From imperial power to regional policeman: Ethiopian peacekeeping and the developmental state," *International Affairs* 100, no. 3 (2024).
[110] Verhoeven and Gebregziabher, "From imperial power to regional policeman: Ethiopian peacekeeping and the developmental state."
[111] Interview with various member of the IGAD negotiation teams

that the SPLM-IO, included in the negotiations, also supported a federalist ideology – insinuating that their demands were already represented.[112]

Figure 11. Louis Lobong, Clement Wani Konga, and Joseph Bakosoro (from left to right) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Source: https://tinyurl.com/44yhby8r

After Addis Ababa, the three governors continued their tour to Nairobi. There, they first reached out to Cirino Hireng and Kosti Manibe, the Equatorians whom the government had detained with other SPLM leaders. The governors had become aware of an unpleasant diplomatic music: there were some Equatorians present on the different negotiating teams, rendering one bloc seemingly unnecessary. Their objective was then to ask all

[112] Interview with Manase Lomule, Juba, October 2023

Equatorians to rally behind them, starting with Hireng and Manibe, with little success, however. Next, they met briefly with the recently elected President Uhuru Kenyatta – a meeting that lasted no more than 20 minutes. Given the significant influence of heads of state on the IGAD's decision-making process, the governors believed that meeting Kenyatta could help leverage their claims. Moreover, Kenyatta was chairman of the East Africa Community (EAC) and Rapporteur of the IGAD at the time, giving him diplomatic importance in the region. Bakosoro described the message delivered to Kenyatta:

> If two regions are fighting, and one region is not fighting … and you distribute the cake between the fighting regions … then the region not fighting will rise up so that also that region will receive interests. …[W]we don't want this scenario to take place in South Sudan.[113]

From Nairobi, they travelled to Kampala for what was perhaps the most important leg of their journey. Indeed, President Museveni was seen as a kingmaker in South Sudan, the only leader able to impose his views on South Sudanese affairs, given Uganda's long-standing support for the SPLM. Museveni's influence stretched across the entire East African region and beyond.[114] If the governors were able to persuade him that they deserved a seat at the table, it was likely they would get one. However, Museveni wasn't particularly focused on Equatorian politics, seeing them as local issues that occasionally impacted northern Uganda but not something he considered a priority. To Museveni, a legacy of his liberation ethos, there was nothing worse than local groups attempting to play a role at the national level based on their identity, especially when the vanguard was ruling the country. In short, federalism had consistently been absent from Museveni's vocabulary for the past three decades. This politics, Museveni argued, would reinforce

[113] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, October 2023
[114] Fisher, "Managing donor perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 intervention in Somalia."

tribalism and sub-national identities, weakening the vanguard nationalism necessary for liberating the country from colonial influence. Moreover, Museveni himself made clear to all South Sudanese actors many times that he would 'always support a government that liberated itself', in this case, Salva Kiir and the SPLM.[115] In turn, since the beginning of the conflict, he had consistently advised Equatorians to stay out of the dispute between Kiir and Machar, stating that it was not their affair, but rather a problem among the vanguard. He attempted to persuade even the Equatorians who had joined the SPLM-IO to leave the conflict by creating their own politically inoffensive group called 'SPLM-IO-In-Equatoria'.[116] Museveni did not even ultimately receive the governors; rather, his brother, Salim Saleh, a political figure not known for his diplomatic finesse and who had led the so-called *peace team* of the Ugandan government, did so. Nothing concrete came out of the meeting.

Not Invited to the Table

During the peace negotiations in Addis Ababa, both Kiir and Machar initially resisted broadening the dialogue. They preferred to maintain a duopolistic political system in South Sudan based on the constructed Dinka-Nuer fault line that preserved their dominance, despite pressure from regional leaders and international partners. As a negotiator recalls, '[T]hose parties were resistant to the idea that there should be third, fourth, fifth, etc., groups participating in the process'.[117] From May 2014 onward, the negotiations nonetheless expanded to include a broader range of actors with the idea of 'open[ing] the possibility for people to think about participation in less binary terms'.[118]

[115] Interview with David Otim, Juba, March 2022
[116] Ibid
[117] Interview with XXXX, senior advisor to the chief mediator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace process for South Sudan, email
[118] Interview with XXXX , senior advisor to the chief mediator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace process for South Sudan, email

However, this had required the intervention of the IGAD's Heads of State, after the special envoys had asked the Summit, the IGAD's highest organ, 'to stress the need for the Parties to accept the principle of inclusivity'.[119] Among those eventually brought into the process were the SPLM Former Detainees, the so-called Other Political Parties, civil society representatives, Christian and Muslim leaders, and later, a Women's Bloc. However, the mediators did not see the three governors as representatives of Equatoria as a whole, as some Equatorians were fighting with the SPLM-IO, and two Equatorians, Kosti Manibe and Cirino Hiteng, were with the 'Former Detainees' bloc. In fact, the mediators believed that Equatorians were in all the groups represented at the table, and so there was no reason to include Equatoria as a block.[120] While the governors succeeded in cultivating a sense corporateness among Equatorian elites, this identity remained invisible to the mediators' eyes. Either through oversight or deliberate disregard, the negotiators failed to perceive – or chose not to acknowledge – the Equatorians' attempt to build a corporate agency to compete in the South Sudanese political system. Moreover, no rapprochement with other Eastern African countries had been possible; the governors had failed to influence regional relations and establish working connections with Addis, Nairobi, or Kampala. Indeed, they had little to offer, and their relationship with the SPLM was at best ambiguous. Moreover, while Kiir, Machar, and others had certainly disappointed Eastern African capitals, the latter were not ready to turn against the SPLM, and they had even interest in supporting it, as South Sudan represented a buffer zone against Bashir's Sudan and its conservative, hegemonic agenda in the region.

This was also compounded by a paradox within the Equatorian camp itself: while the governors championed a corporate identity, Equatorian leaders embedded in various

[119] *Letter of the Three Special Envoys to the Heads of State and Government*, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (13 March 2014).

[120] Interview with XXXX, senior advisor to the chief mediator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace process for South Sudan, email

factions found themselves unable, or perhaps unwilling, to openly rally behind this unified front, tethered as they were to their respective political allegiances – a situation that, as the next chapter demonstrates, the governors attempted to change. An adviser to the negotiation team also insisted the following:

> No area of the country was represented geographically in the peace process, which made it difficult for the mediation to say, oh, we want governors to be officially part of the process: ostensibly, governors, as subnational officers, were subordinate to the central government. Keep in mind that the IGAD mediation was deferential to the idea of the way federal/federal-like states theoretically function.[121]

The exclusion of so-called 'identity groups' reflected a broader belief among negotiators that politics in South Sudan revolved entirely around personal gain. As a result, during power-sharing talks, they tended to see the conflict mainly as a contest between self-serving political elites, paying little attention to the influence of ideas and ideologies, like nationalism, that also shape the country's peace and conflict dynamics. 'Whether elites were trying to co-opt or instrumentalise ethnic identity', confirmed one adviser to the mediation team, 'was another matter that was not our interest'.[122] Eventually, Kiir explicitly rejected the inclusion of an 'Equatorian bloc' in the negotiations, viewing it as a threat to his political ambitions. Kiir was particularly adamant about preventing any nationalist project from Equatorian elites. 'For Kiir', argued an Equatorian leader, 'it is quite simple: as soon as Equatorian sit together, there is danger to his Dinka nationalist political project'.[123] His goal was to prevent any competing nationalist movements from

[121] Interview with XXXX senior advisor to the chief mediator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace process for South Sudan, email
[122] Interview with XXXX, senior advisor to the chief mediator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace process for South Sudan, email
[123] Interview with Central Equatorian MP and Member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023

emerging during peace talks. This strategy forced political elites to align with one of the two warring parties.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined how Equatorian elites responded to the structural factors inherent in the implementation of their project and in the war between the vanguards. Specifically, it explored how the three Equatorian governors attempted to build corporateness to view themselves as a coherent bloc to better assert their competing nationalist ambitions within the South Sudanese political order. Their aspiration proved difficult: while the conflagration that the conflict triggered initially reinforced solidarity among Equatorian elites, as the conflict evolved, differences in loyalties and political networks dating to the long *liberation* struggle began to strain an Equatorian project that was far less coherent than initially imagined. At the heart of the matter was the struggle for Equatorian leadership and whether to mobilise *Equatoria-ness* as a political tool in the civil war, reinforcing the necessity of going beyond *groupism* to understand power dynamics *within* and *between* nationalist projects. What this chapter revealed is that the outbreak of violence in Juba in December 2013 seriously reshaped the nexus between elites, power, and nationalism in South Sudan. The three governors nonetheless succeeded in maintaining relative unity and in preventing Equatoria from falling into violence. The ambiguous relationship with the SPLM, however, did not change; Equatorian elites nonetheless adopted a more frontal position against the perceived hegemony of the Dinka elites in South Sudan and attempted to advocate for their competing nationalist aspirations outside of South Sudan. However, the regional geopolitical context and the relationships that the SPLM could develop with Addis, Khartoum, Nairobi, and Kampala did not favour an Equatorian project. Similarly, the format of peace negotiations did not leave room for the Equatorian project to grow. How did Equatorian elites react to their marginalisation?

Did the three governors succeed in maintaining unity in Equatoria? The next chapter analyses the downfall and afterlife of the competing nationalist project that the three governors had spearheaded since 2011.

Chapter 6

DOWNFALL AND AFTERLIFE: ELITE FRAGMENTATION AND THE COLLAPSE OF A NATIONALIST PROJECT

On the evening of August 16, 2015, Joseph Bakosoro sat with his wife, Angelina, and their children in their home in Gudele, a neighborhood in Juba. The family had gathered in front of the television for their evening routine of watching the news. As the broadcast unfolded, Bakosoro witnessed a moment that would send shockwaves through the Equatoria region and reshape South Sudan's political landscape for years to come: there, on the screen, stood President Salva Kiir, announcing that both he and Clement Wani Konga were being relieved of their positions as governors, as his presidential power allowed. Mere hours later, as Angelina would recount, the relative peace of their evening was shattered when armed soldiers and intelligence officers burst into their home. They seized Joseph Bakosoro and conducted a thorough search of the premises, ostensibly looking for weapons. For days, Bakosoro's location was unknown. The Equatoria Caucus

of the national parliament, led by Thomas Wani Kondo, organized an emergency meeting and shared a communiqué requesting his release. Kondo told the press:

> We are concerned about the arrest of honorable Joseph Bangasi Bakosoro and the way he was arrested and his whereabouts is not known. […] If he is suspected of any crime by the people who arrested him, then he should be taken to the court and the court should prove it, because a person is not supposed to be detained more than 24 hours. So we are more concerned that we need him to be released.[1]

The news of the governor's withdrawal came as a shock across Equatoria, and many Equatorian leaders in Juba were unhappy about the decision. Following the governors' dismissal, the Equatorian Community in the UK, led by Federico Awi Vuni, published an open letter to President Kiir that captured the prevailing sentiments among Equatorians:

> The humiliation of the former Governors also reflects on the whole of Equatoria, who elected them, in light of no apparent reason for their dismissal. The duty of candour, demands that your [President Kiir] subordinates are treated fairly and in a transparent manner but regretfully this noble procedure was not followed.[2]

After four days, Bakosoro was eventually released without any charges. A few months later, in December 2015, he was however arrested again by the National Security Services and held in the so-called 'Blue House' – a place known for abuses and torture - for months. After a campaign from Amnesty International and as his health had been worsening, Bakosoro was eventually released in April 2016. He then managed to flee to Uganda and was given a visa by the United States, where he became a political refugee.

[1] "Equatorian Caucus demands Kiir release Governor Bakosoro," *Radio Tamazuj* 19 August 2015.
[2] Federico Awi Vuni, "Deploring recent Equatorian Governors' Dismissal by Kiir," *Pachodo.org*, 2015.

***

By 2015, the nationalist project of the three governors had shattered. In only a few months, violence spread across Equatoria, forcing millions to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, weakening the cohesiveness of Equatorian elites, and completely reshaping networks of solidarities among South Sudanese elites. Equatorian elites descended into leadership rivalries and internal power struggles, skilfully ignited, or at least encouraged, by Salva Kiir and his allies. Wani Konga and Bakosoro out of the picture, the politics of succession proved immensely difficult, if not impossible, as it led to the creation of rival groups. Moreover, Salva Kiir's project to marginalize opposition forces and reinvigorate the vanguard nationalist project based on his person seriously raised the costs for alternative or dissident political projects, costs that many Equatorian elites appeared unwilling to pay. The ideas of the *Equatoria Intellectual Committee* proved indeed a risky heritage to seize. Five years after the 2011 Equatoria conference, which aimed to foster security and prosperity in the region, the so-called 'peaceful farmers' had become both victims and perpetrators of violence. The ideology of nationalism, it became evident, had profound consequences for the lives of millions.

This chapter traces the collapse and afterlife of the governors' political project in South Sudan. It analyses the growingly antagonistic relationships among Equatorian elites and the governors' failed attempt to launch a more radical, violent initiative after being sidelined at the negotiation table. The chapter examines how this project ultimately failed during a period when Equatorian elites were actively renegotiating their positions within the emerging post-peace agreement order. The civil war and the continuous reshaping of political alliances, it shows, had gradually altered not only how Equatorian elites understood their relationships with each other and with the SPLM, but also their aspirations and their perceptions of, and relations with, *Equatoria-ness*, exposing again

the very contingent character of nationalism. In turn, reconciliation efforts of Equatorian elites and attempts to rebuild Equatoria all proved short-lived; power, not corporateness, was in their mind. However, it is not to say that the idea of Equatorian nationalism disappeared; while President Kiir has temporary bought peace in Equatoria, the so-called 'voluntary servitude' might not endure.

THE KAMPALA MEETING

The period between Equatoria's exclusion as a negotiating bloc and the signing of the peace agreement in August 2015 remains somewhat obscure, as conflicting narratives persist, each shaped by the interests of the parties involved. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, subjectivity is inherent in elite interviews; partiality is hence an inevitable aspect of such an endeavour. What is clear is that after the three governors were left out of the negotiations - blocked both by the reluctance of the warring sides and the mediators' narrow view of the peace deal as simply a way to manage rival power interests -frustration and resentment began to build among them. With James Wani Igga now stripped of his status as Equatorian leader by his Equatorian peers, the governors were left with few options to advance their competing nationalist agenda. Joseph Bakosoro felt particularly humiliated as he observed Jemma Nunu Kumba, his archenemy, increasingly gaining privileged access to President Kiir's inner circle. Moreover, his own constituency, Western Equatoria, grew progressively resentful at the government. Some interviewees even reported – until now unverified - rumours that, end of 2014, Bakosoro was even ready to join Riek Machar and consequently facilitated the arrival of two young Equatorians from the SPLM-IO, Frank Matata and Losuba Lodura, in Bilpam, Western Equatoria.[3] The objective was for the two rebels to make contact with a powerful Western

[3] This event also appears in *Conflict in Western Equatoria*.

Equatorian militia named the *Arrow Boys,* group with which Bakosoro reportedly maintained close ties.[4] A strong group, their allegiance to Machar could have altered the course of the conflict. However, without any interviewee fully understanding the precise reasons, the alliance ultimately failed to materialise.

In May 2015, the three governors ultimately convened with the senior Equatorian leadership from the SPLM-IO in Kampala, Uganda; Salim Saleh, President Museveni's brother, was in the room. However, depending on the interviewees, accounts differ on what was discussed in that room and what the reason for this gathering was. The first account is the narrative delivered by Joseph Bakosoro. In his account, the governors never asked to meet with the Equatorian leadership of the SPLM-IO, and refused to even discuss with them because of their 'rebel status':

> We met with Salim Saleh in Kampala. We went as a team again for the cause of Equatoria. We were in Kampala, then we were told 'Salim Saleh needs to see you now'. Ugandans sent us vehicles, and we went to Salim…to find that also the Equatorian SPLM-IO were called ! Present were Lado Gore, Ramadan, and Odwar. Since they are Equatorians as well, we said no problem, they are our brothers, we are all Equatorians. Then Salim Saleh came and said 'ok let's talk, what is our problem?'. Within one minute, Lobong and Konga began to quarrel with Lado Gore and Odwar…they said 'you are rebels, who invited you ?'…I did not even know where to begin myself ! I asked Salim 'How did we agree to meet with the opposition? Why have you brought us here?'. We said 'ok the meeting is cancelled because we are not supposed to discuss with these people'. So we left.[5]

[4] The militia had been created by local leaders and equipped by Uganda to fight Kony's Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in the early 2000s. See Klaas Castelein, *Zo scherp als een pijl: het verhaal van de Arrow Boys uit Oost-Oeganda* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, Leiden University, 2014); Mareike Schomerus, *The Lord's Resistance Army: Violence and Peacemaking in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[5] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, Juba, March 2023

However, this narrative is not fully supported by accounts obtained from other interviews, even though one should not assume that Bakosoro purposefully lied. Contrary to what Bakosoro asserts, for instance, Henry Odwar was, according to sources, not in the room. Moreover, it is simply untrue to say that the governors had never discussed with the Equatorian rebels and had always refused to do so. Another version indeed surrounds this meeting, one where extensive discussion took not only place between the Equatorian leaders in May 2015 in Kampala, but before that meeting as well. To better understand this context, one needs to rewind to mid-2014, when the Equatorian governors reportedly did not receive satisfactory outcomes from the negotiations. During the months following the governors' marginalisation in the negotiations, Wani Konga was said to fume.[6] In March 2015, Konga even publicly expressed his anger as violent incidents were on the rise across Equatoria, allegedly provoked by Kiir's soldiers and cattle herders:

> What is taking place in Western Equatoria now and in Central Equatoria, soon in Eastern Equatoria, is going to compel the people of Equatoria to take up arms… and I don't want this. […] This is a question we are questioning, what has happened that the national army is accompanying tribal cattle raiders to raid a cattle camp? Is there preference by the national army for a specific group?[7]

The idea of forming an Equatorian front, one that would fight against both the SPLM and the SPLM-IO, had gradually taken shape in Wani Konga's mind, eventually feeling the urge to strike a deal with the Equatorian representatives within the SPLM-IO leadership. Given that the Equatorian voice had not been adequately heard in the peace negotiations, it indeed appeared crucial to intensify – meaning using violence – the competing Equatorian nationalist project, even if that risked disrupting the image of the 'peaceful

[6] Various interviews with Equatorian leaders in Juba, 2022 and 2023
[7] "Sacked governor accepts decision, promises to support new one," *Radio Tamazuj* 17 August 2015.

Equatorians' that lies indeed at the center of *Equatoria-ness*. In turn, in April 2015, the three governors reportedly met in Nairobi with the Equatorian leadership of the SPLM-IO. The meeting was mediated by Equatorian Bishop Paul Yugusuk.[8] At the end of the meeting, all the Equatorian leaders agreed to sign a document – commonly called an 'agreement of ideas'- calling for federalism and for limiting the movement of Dinka cattle herders into Equatoria.[9] Although an alliance was officially not on the table, Equatorian leaders from both sides resolved to advocate for the recognition of Equatorian nationalism in post-independence South Sudan, each within their respective political camps. The idea was, as an anonymous source mentioned, 'to harmonise the Equatorian position in South Sudan'.[10] During the meeting, a proposal was even discussed to organise a new Equatoria Conference in Kenya, one year and a half after the Equatorian Emergency Conference. While the meeting of Lado Gore and associates with the three governors in Nairobi was officially 'approved by the leadership' of the SPLM-IO, the latter's subsequent need to publicly affirm this awareness appears more like an attempt to create an a posteriori impression of united ranks.[11] In fact, at the time, rumours circulated among Equatorian elites that Clement Wani Konga was secretly negotiating with Alfred Lado Gore, Ramadan Hassan, and Adel Senderi to make them defect from the SPLM-IO and form a new Equatorian alliance against both the Dinka and the Nuer.

The secret meeting in Kampala in May 2015 would thus have aimed to continue the negotiations which had been complicated as the leaders were constantly at odds. Concurrently, Clement Wani Konga had reportedly been seeking financial support from President Museveni of Uganda to organize an Equatorian bloc. As the region had had a

[8] *Conflict in Western Equatoria*.
[9] "South Sudanese rebels say no differences among Equatorian opposition leaders," *Sudan Tribune* 30 June 2015.
[10] Interview with anonymous Equatorian leader from the SPLM-IO, Juba, October 2023
[11] "South Sudanese rebels say no differences among Equatorian opposition leaders."

long history of transnational violence, proxy wars, and interventions from neighbouring countries to reconfigure political fault lines, Konga's request seemed indeed relevant. Many questions however arise from this narrative. Was Konga attempting to persuade Museveni that an Equatorian leadership in Juba could serve Uganda's interests, especially as Museveni grew increasingly frustrated with SPLM leaders' behavior? Was Museveni genuinely interested in hearing the Equatorians' perspective? By delegating Salim Saleh to engage with the Equatorians, Museveni seemed to have sent a clear message that they were not a priority for his personal attention. Manase Lomule, Wani Konga's deputy, seemed to confirm this analysis as he mentioned that 'Museveni did not bother coming because it was none of his business'.[12] Salim Saleh reportedly opening the Kampala meeting with the question, 'Okay, let's talk, what is our problem?', as Bakosoro reported, also suggests that neither he nor his brother were particularly aware of the intricacies of Equatorian politics. Another crucial question is whether Bakosoro and Lobong were aware of Konga's plan, and if so, to what extent they had endorsed it. Perhaps Bakosoro was indeed unaware, which would (partially) explain his recollection of events where he observed quarrelling without fully comprehending the underlying reasons. In any case, no alliance was formed in Kampala, and the meeting sounded the bell marking the end of discussions. Soon after the meeting, the three Equatorians from the SPLM-IO were summoned to explain themselves before the IO leadership, which had heard rumours of secret discussions in Kampala. They all denied any attempt to leave the SPLM-IO. In a rare, filmed interview, Alfred Lado Gore explained:

> A lot of reports and rumours have been going on about my defection, a meeting with Museveni. These are claims that I categorically reject. They are completely baseless. A person like myself can never be bought! […] It is

[12] Interview with Manase Lomule, former Deputy Governor of Central Equatoria, Juba, October 2023

> a lie fabricated by people who have their own imagination. They have no proof. I ask people not to confuse issues. […] I have sacrificed for this struggle, I put my life on the firing line….and none of the rumourmongers have made any contribution for this struggle. Some even claim they are doctors or professors, and they are not! We don't want this kind of people […] I have made clear that claims by Governor Clement Wani are totally nonsense. That I have received money from the President of Uganda is also non-sense.

He then told his own version of the Kampala meeting, which eventually seemed to confirm the attempt to form a cautious, although not quite united, Equatorian front. Equatorian nationalism as an idea, it seemed, had remained well alive:

> I went to Kampala in order to propagate the position paper of Equatorians. If you are a national leader, you cannot ignore the realities of our society. Our society is full of communities. And no community should be left behind…we are trying to mobilise the people of Equatoria ! There is nothing wrong about this! This is not to say that you forgot your national responsibilities.[13]

DOWNFALL

Bakosoro and Wani Konga Dismissed

Following the *Kampala affair*, as one might call it, both Kiir and Machar grew increasingly uneasy with the Equatorians' attempts to create a unified front, as well as with the rumours circulating about them in Juba, Addis Ababa, and Nairobi. Though fighting each other, it seems, both vanguard leaders seemed to agree on the necessity to curb Equatorian nationalist aspirations in South Sudan. The SPLM-IO leadership

[13] 'Lado Gore on Rumours of Defection', filmed by Mabior Garang, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPS_rK-Y4-E

established an investigative committee to determine the roles of Lado Gore, Ramadan, and Senderi. Surprisingly, it was other Equatorians within the SPLM-IO who advocated for a thorough investigation, with the Equatorian caucus of the SPLM-IO initiating the inquiry. The investigating committee concluded that the three leaders did indeed meet with the Equatorian governors in Kampala, but that no evidence of corruption or defection could be held against them.[14] 'While the three Equatorians were officially absolved of the accusations against them', reported John Young, 'considerable distrust remained'.[15] President Kiir took a more radical decision. Willing to further strengthen and centralize his power and ready to sign the peace agreement, the latter *de facto* giving him almost absolute power in South Sudan, he decided to relieve, by Presidential Decree, Joseph Bakosoro and Clement Wani Konga from their positions on 17 August 2015. Contrary to Joseph Bakosoro, Wani Konga was not arrested by the government, which was mindful of the potential violence the Mundari militia could unleash. Konga, cognizant of the highly volatile situation and seeking to defuse tensions in Central Equatoria, quickly delivered a conciliatory speech:

> Today, I have come to tell the people of Central Equatoria State that yesterday I have been relieved as the governor of this state after a long service. […] I have learnt that today many shops have not opened, there is no war, what has taken place is a rotating change, so everybody has to go ahead with his business. If you don't go to the field today, you will have nothing to eat. So it is better for any trader to open their shop.[16]

To replace Wani Konga, Salva Kiir appointed Juma Ali Malou, the former commissioner of Terekeka County, as the new governor of Central Equatoria. Juma Ali Malou was, like

[14] Young, *A Fractious Rebellion: Inside the SPLM-IO*.
[15] Young, *A Fractious Rebellion: Inside the SPLM-IO*, 31.
[16] "Sacked governor accepts decision, promises to support new one."

Konga, a Mundari, underscoring Kiir's strategy not only to rely on the powerful Mundari cattle-keepers to ensure security but also to isolate the Bari in Central Equatoria. In Western Equatoria, Kiir appointed Patrick Zamoi as the new governor. Zamoi, like Jemma Nunu Kumba, was a Zande from the Avongara elite. Zamoi had been a pro-SPLM Western Equatorian since the start of the liberation struggle but had never enjoyed widespread popularity in Western Equatoria. Nevertheless, his close ties to the government made him appear a reliable ally for Kiir in the region. After having seen a *subaltern*, Joseph Bakosoro, to lead Western Equatoria for five years, the Avongara elites had eventually reclaimed power. Juma Ali Malou and Patrick Zamoi both aimed to consolidate power in their respective states, with no intention of continuing the governors' nationalist project. This stance stemmed not only from their differing political priorities but also from the clear understanding that their positions depended on their loyalty to Salva Kiir's authoritarian project.

Betrayal?

What happened behind the scenes that led President Kiir to dismiss Wani Konga and Bakosoro? More specifically, a crucial question remained: why was Louis Lobong still retained as governor in Eastern Equatoria? Shortly after the dismissals of Konga and Bakosoro, rumors began to circulate that Louis Lobong had gone to Salva Kiir to accuse the governors of Central and Western Equatoria of plotting to overthrow him. Rumor indeed had it that Lobong met with Kiir and, in exchange for assurances that he would remain governor of Eastern Equatoria, informed him of the project of Equatorian leaders to form a unified front to assert Equatorian nationalism in South Sudan.[17] It is however impossible to verify such allegations, but, true or not, they became part and parcel of the

[17] Interview with various Equatorian sources, Juba, 2022 and 2023

political life of Equatorian elites: many interviewees still mentioned that the government 'captured' Lobong in 2015, suggesting the government managed to get him to give on the Equatorian project. It is however possible to elaborate competing explanations. First, it seems clear that Kiir had indeed become aware of the Equatorian elites meeting in Kampala, making him recognize the need to dismiss the governors in order to stifle their project before it could take root. However, Lobong's control over the mineral wealth in Eastern Equatoria made it difficult – if not counterproductive - for Kiir to remove him. Since 2010, Louis Lobong had indeed developed an important financial network, using his relatives, among them his wives and his son, to control various businesses in the gold-rich state.[18] Many high-ranking SPLM figures, including Salva Kiir, were tied to these business dealings, which helped elevate Lobong's status as a central player in South Sudanese politics. The corruption was seen as so widespread by some politicians from Eastern Equatoria that they submitted a petition in July 2015 demanding Lobong's resignation—but the effort ultimately went nowhere.[19] A second explanation could be that the removal of Bakosoro and Konga was driven by factors unique to each. In the past year, Wani Konga had grown increasingly vocal and was positioning himself as the Equatorian leader in South Sudan—something that made Kiir uneasy. As for Bakosoro, another explanation for his dismissal is that the Avongara elites of the Azande in Western Equatoria, among them Patrick Zamoi and Jemma Nunu Kumba, had pressured Kiir to remove him in order to regain control of the state and become the Azande power brokers.[20] All of the above explanations could have, *together*, played a role in the governors' dismissal. One should also not dismiss the possibility that Kiir himself spread

[18] *Untapped and Unprepared: Dirty Deals Threaten South Sudan's Mining Sector*.
[19] "E Equatoria govt challenges petition against governor," *Radio Tamazuj* 22 July 2015.
[20] Craze, *Jemma's War: Political Strife in Western Equatoria*.

the rumour of Lobong's betrayal to cause divisions among Equatorian elites and weaken Equatorian nationalism.

Divide et Impera

Despite the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement in August 2015, both Kiir's forces and the SPLM-IO repeatedly violated the agreed-upon ceasefire, undermining efforts to establish a transitional government of national unity. The political deadlock was further exacerbated by the delayed return of Riek Machar. Initially expected to assume his role in the new government shortly after the peace deal, Machar's arrival in Juba, somewhat pushed for by the international community eager to quickly demonstrate the effectiveness of the peace agreement, was postponed until April 2016—a full eight months after the agreement was signed.[21] Salva Kiir, however, did not wait for the reunification before taking important decisions aimed at strengthening his power. One of these decisions was the Establishment Order No. 36/2015, which unilaterally created 28 states in South Sudan in October 2015, replacing the existing 10 states.[22] As a result, the three Equatorian states – Western, Central, and Eastern Equatoria – were further divided. The Equatoria region was now composed of eight states: Gbudwe, Maridi, Amadi, Terekeka, Jubek, Yei River, Imatong, and Namorunyang:

> I don't think the objective with the division was to target Equatorians specifically […] It was more to divide and rule in Upper Nile, with the Nuers, and to change administrative borders to have Dinka leaders all over the country […] But let's be fair and say that Kiir's objective with this plan was to cut any regional leadership to emerge, anywhere in South Sudan.[23]

[21] Aryn Baker, "Rebel Leader Riek Machar Returns to South Sudan—and Brings Hopes for Peace With Him," *Time Magazine* 26 April 2016.
[22] ''ESTABLISHMENT ORDER NUMBER 36/2015 FOR THE CREATION OF 28 STATES" IN THE DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN'
[23] Interview with Michael Kenyi, Equatorian and former member of the SPLM, Juba, October 2023

Salva Kiir's official stance portrayed the division as a means to realize the SPLM manifesto and effectively 'bring towns to the people'. Kiir's objective was to decentralize, and not transfer, national power to bring administrative services and decision-making processes closer to the population. Kiir in fact only 'superficially responded to some of his critics' demands without addressing most of the fundamental governance issues that fueled political contestation and the continued demand for federalism in the country'.[24] The financial viability of this plan moreover remained uncertain, especially given the contraction of the national budget, which makes it difficult to imagine expanding infrastructure or increasing personnel costs to accommodate nearly three times as many governors. Beneath this veneer of progress lay, in fact, a shrewd political calculus: the fragmentation served not only to move away from a federalist structure based on three regions, but to amplify patronage opportunities and pit smaller administrative units against one another in a scramble for presidential favour. For Equatorian elites, this manoeuvre struck another blow to their nationalist aspirations:

> First, we were not in the peace agreement, then we lost Bakosoro and Wani Konga. Then dividing states? Instead of three governors, now we had eight of them! How can eight governors work together, especially after the peace agreement?! Equatorianism was…pfff…just gone.[25]

Yet this opposition to Kiir's decree revealed Equatorian divisions. Though 37 members of the parliamentary Equatoria caucus, backed by their leader Thomas Wani Kondo who deemed the amendment 'unconstitutional'[26] and 'in violation of the peace agreement',[27]

[24] Justin and De Vries, "Governing Unclear Lines: Local Boundaries as a (Re)source of Conflict in South Sudan," 31.
[25] Interview with Equatorian leader, former of the Transitional Government, Juba, October 2023
[26] "Equatoria Caucus divided on vote on 28 states," *Radio Tamazuj* 20 November 2015.
[27] "South Sudan Legislators Warn of Tribal War Over 28 States Constitutional Amendment," *Sudan Tribune* 20 November 2015.

boycotted the amendment vote, others either refused to join the protest or feared participating. The split of Eastern Equatoria led to the creation of two governorships: Louis Lobong was appointed to lead Namorunyang State, while Natisio Loluke Manir, who had previously served as deputy governor, took over as governor of the newly formed Imatong State. In contrast, the reorganization of power in Central Equatoria proved to be more intricate and politically charged. Juma Ali Malou became governor of Terekeka state, but authority in the region was now shared among four governors. The other three were Joseph Pachiko in Amadi state, David Lokonga Moses in Yei River state, and Augustino Jadalla Wani in Jubek State, which encompassed the capital, Juba:

> Central Equatoria was divided, and it isolated the Bari. Now the Kakwa, the Mundari, the Bari…they had to report directly to Kiir if they wanted something…I am telling you, you also want more than your neighbour, so this created discord and competition.[28]

Western Equatoria, mirroring Eastern Equatoria's division, was split into two states. Patrick Zamoi became governor of Gbudwe state, which would later undergo further subdivision to mitigate local Azande rivalries. Meanwhile, Africano Monday took the helm of Maridi state. After destroying the political power of Equatorian nationalists, Kiir aimed to foster a new Equatorian elite, one that would follow in state- and nation-building project to the letter. The new political landscape moreover thrust Equatorian elites into a fierce, localized competition, pitting them against one another. Claims of administrative ownership, discourses of autochthony, and disagreements over administrative boundaries created tensions and reopened historical fault lines among Equatorian communities, as intense fighting between the Mundari and the Bari would later confirm.[29] While the

[28] Interview with Equatorian leader, former of the Transitional Government, Juba, October 2023
[29] See for more details Justin and De Vries, "Governing Unclear Lines: Local Boundaries as a (Re)source of Conflict in South Sudan."

division of South Sudan into 28 states might not have specifically aimed at breaking Equatorian nationalism, the manner in which Equatoria was divided certainly had that objective. However, it must be noted that Equatorian elites did not need Salva Kiir to be divided; far from passive victims of political strategies, internal disagreements among them grew, and proponents of a strong Equatorian nationalism simply lost influence. The unity and influence once projected by the three governors between 2010 and 2014 had begun to fade. As a result, the idea of holding another Equatorian conference was shelved, and efforts to establish an Equatoria Coordination Council stalled indefinitely.

Tensions Across Equatoria

In the weeks following the August 2015 peace agreement, Riek Machar and the SPLM-IO, rather than disarming and working to implement the peace accord, continued their military operations. Looking for support in Equatoria, the SPLM-IO began to sense the fragility of the peace agreement. The IOs, like Equatorian leaders, were also fully aware that Riek Machar held little favour with East African regional leaders, nor with the United States.[30] Notorious for his shifting alliances and perceived untrustworthiness – something that certainly prevented a strong Equatoria-Nuer alliance, Machar's plight elicited in fact little sympathy from international actors.[31] The security landscape also appeared unfavourable for Machar's political faction. While the IO forces could not be in Juba, Kiir's government managed to play with the terms of the agreement to have around 8,000 soldiers stationed in the capital. Moreover, thousands more government soldiers had been carefully encircling Juba to prevent any major attack from any rebel group. Taking advantage of Equatorian grievances, the IOs successfully expanded their influence across the Equatoria region—a move that angered Kiir and his supporters. Equatorian discontent

[30] Interview with David Otim, Equatorian and former member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, March 2022
[31] Interview with a European Ambassador, Juba, March 2022

had indeed intensified following the dismissal of Bakosoro and Wani Konga, coupled with a growing sense that the peace agreement had only deepened their marginalization in South Sudan. However, Equatorian elites proved unable to adopt a common position, as many of them were sceptical of Machar's integrity. At the local level, especially in Western and Central Equatoria, clashes increasingly erupted between the SPLM and local militias. Locally, much of the dissatisfaction stemmed from the encroachment of Dinka cattle keepers, who expanded their operations across Equatoria, often destroying or occupying land belonging to Equatorian farmers, while the government failed to intervene and protect them.[32] Equatorian elites quickly instrumentalized such conflicts to demonstrate their national marginalization and the 'internal colonialism' of the Dinka in their territories, without however being able to recreate a collective agency. Local groups, notably in Central Equatoria, escalated their activities, organizing road ambushes and displacing an increasing number of people, forcing thousands to seek protection in hastily established refugee camps.[33] The historically constructed myth of the *peaceful* Equatorian intellectuals started to slowly fall apart. In the meantime, Kiir strategically supported local proxies, whose role was to destabilize any attempt to build an Equatoria unity by reigniting local feuds. Such a strategy certainly proved successful, especially because Kiir and his inner circle would at the same time present themselves as peacekeepers, attempting to act as a neutral actor to mediate between Equatorian communities. The 'politics of local peace agreements' would prove effective, allowing Kiir to carefully navigate the complex politics of Equatoria. Meanwhile, Kiir's inner circle continued to bring their own militias into Juba, with the most violent being General Paul Malong's *Mathyang Anyoor* from Northern Bahr el Ghazal.[34] The latter would be mostly deployed

[32] Young, *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking*.
[33] Kindersley and Rolandsen, "Civil War on a Shoestring: Rebellion in South Sudan's Equatoria Region Civil wars."
[34] Young, *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking*.

in Central Equatoria along the Juba-Yei Road, and later in Western Equatoria, to suppress the insurgency and punish Equatorians for their lack of support to the government, seriously raising the costs of Equatorian nationalism in South Sudan.[35] In his report to the Security Council, the Secretary General of the United Nations for instance reported that 'government forces reportedly continued to burn areas in Katigiri, allegedly killing civilians in an attempt to clear the area of armed groups associated with the opposition'.[36] Moreover, Paul Malong's strategy of appointing only Dinka commanders from Northern Bahr el Ghazal intensified the Equatorian elites' sense that their land was being seized.

Impossible Cohesion

The 2015 peace agreement granted Equatorians the right to select the parliamentary speaker, as Riek Machar's appointment to First Vice-President shifted James Wani Igga to second Vice-President. In 2013, in somewhat similar circumstances, Equatorian leaders, under Bakosoro, Wani Konga, and Lobong, had successfully united behind a single Vice-Presidential candidate, James Wani Igga. In May 2016, however, the situation was different. Out of the three governors present in 2013, only Louis Lobong remained in power. Moreover, the new governors did not embody the project of Equatorian nationalism, and their authority to lead Equatoria was far from recognized. Cohesiveness, it appeared, was at its lowest point. Thomas Wani Kondo nonetheless attempted to revive this unity, arguing that 'the political affiliation of the nominee does not matter as long as the person is from Equatoria [...] we need to sit together so we can get one person'.[37] Kondo started making calls and organising informal meetings. Luka Monoja, an influential Equatorian elite and former Minister of Health, publicly insisted that an

[35] Boswell, *Insecure Power and Violence: The Rise and Fall of Paul Malong and the Mathiang Anyoor*.
[36] 'Report of the Secretary-General on South Sudan', 13 April 2016, S/2016/341
[37] "South Sudan's Equatorians begin race for parliament speaker," *Sudan Tribune* 5 May 2016.

Equatorian speaker should be selected on merit.[38] However, Kondo's attempt to rebuild Equatorian unity quickly collapsed when President Kiir declared that while the speaker could be Equatorian, they must be loyal to him, because James Wani Igga was loyal to him—a twisted reinterpretation of the peace agreement, the SPLM-IO would say; its spokesperson insisted that 'she or he can be elected from any party as long as she/he is from Greater Equatoria'.[39] Kiir viewed any potential revival of Equatorian unity as a threat. Deeply distrustful of Equatorians, he refused to allow parliament to elect its speaker—fearing that even his supposedly loyal supporters might prioritize Equatorian solidarity over SPLM allegiance. In the end, he nominated Anthony Lino Makana, a former Minister from Western Equatoria.

EQUATORIANS GO TO WAR

The Vanguard fall out again

In January 2016, the Vanguard attempted to reunite its various fighting groups, despite clear enmities among liberation comrades. An extraordinary convention was held, during which the different factions of the SPLM agreed on an amended party constitution.[40] Even though sceptical of such a conference, the SPLM-IO was represented by Taban Deng. Also present were vanguard liberation brothers: the Chama Cha Mapinduzi of Tanzania (the descendant of Nyerere's TANU) and the African National Congress of South Africa, both vanguard nationalist parties. To open the convention, Kiir donned his 'national liberation hat' and described what vanguard nationalism entailed:

> Dear Comrades,

[38] "South Sudan's Equatorians begin race for parliament speaker."
[39] "Conflicting interpretations emerge over South Sudan's parliament speaker," *Sudan Tribune* 30 June 2016.
[40] "Kiir praises SPLM unity," *Sudan Tribune* 11 January 2016.

> The foundation of our social cohesion and sense of togetherness has been weakened by the two-year violent conflict. […] [The cause] is tribalism, which has created a sense of marginalization and ethnic-based injustice. I would like to say at this juncture that 'tribalism' is a cancer, *which is threatening to kill our nation-building project*.[41] […] I am aware that some of our tribes or ethnic groups feel marginalized in their own country by their own government. […] I will ensure that, together with you this practice must come to an immediate end by revisiting the SPLM coherent package of political ideals. […] Let us restore the vision and mission of the SPLM. Our vision, this time around, is the liberation of the mind sets of South Sudanese people, which is embedded in "tribalism." This liberation must start with those of us in the SPLM.[42]

Shifting attention back to the SPLM's nation-building vision, Kiir stressed the importance of keeping the focus on the original goals of the liberation struggle. He warned against allowing the vanguard nation to be consumed by tribal divisions—something he believed the Equatorian project symbolized—pointing to it as a consequence of the SPLM's failure to preserve internal cohesion. However, intra-party infighting persisted, and the implementation of the peace agreement increasingly generated a series of tensions. Despite Riek Machar's official swearing-in as First Vice-President in late April, which relegated James Wani Igga to Second Vice-President, and the appointment of 19 presidential advisers in an attempt to appease all factions, discontent continued to grow amid a very slow implementation of the provisions of the peace agreement.[43] In June 2016, tensions in Juba began to manifest in violent incidents, including shootings reported across the city, to the extent that it became 'evident that we were sitting on a powder keg,

[41] I emphasize
[42] 'THE STATEMENT OF THE SPLM CHAIRMAN ON THE SPLM EXTRA-ORDINARY CONVENTION', January 7th 2016
[43] For a more detailed analysis of the difficult implementation of the ARCSS, see John Young, *ISOLATION AND ENDURANCE: Riek Machar and the SPLM-IO 2016-2017*, Small Arms Survey (Geneva, 2017).

awaiting the inevitable explosion'.[44] The situation deteriorated to the point where most international organizations began restricting their staff from leaving their compounds. On July 8, 2016, Kiir and Machar met at J1, the colloquial name for the Presidential Palace. The objective was to appease tensions and tell journalists that both parties were calling for moderation. Outside, however, a clash erupted between Machar's and Kiir's bodyguards, resulting in the deaths of more than 100 soldiers.[45] While Machar remained inside J1, awaiting an escort back to his base, fighting spread across Juba. Two days later, helicopter gunships bombed Machar's house in Jebel. For the government, time had come to annihilate the SPLM- IO.

For Machar, the eruption of violence ushered in a surreal odyssey. Certain that the government was trying to kill him, he fled Juba, deciding to leave the country on foot. He headed west toward Western Equatoria, aiming to cross into the Democratic Republic of Congo. He was eventually rescued by UN peacekeeping soldiers of the MONUSCO, who, at the request of the Congolese government, searched for him along the South Sudanese border as he was reportedly sick. However, Machar was not alone to have fled Juba. Hundreds of soldiers and civilians accompanied him, many of them Equatorians who, after narrowly escaping death in Juba, chose to flee and form a counterinsurgency in the bush. Cirisio Zachariah, a Central Equatorian who was part of the Machar's political bureau, remembered:

> I fled with Riek [Machar] to DR Congo. I was only with my short and my slippers, we did not have any gun, nothing to protect us, no mosquito net. More than 30 days! We ate leaves and wild fruits to survive…there were a lot of

[44] Interview with former European diplomat, Rome, January 2023

[45] *UNDER FIRE: The July 2016 Violence In Juba and UN Response*, Center for Civilians in Conflict (United States, 2016).

> bombardment! But as we crossed Equatoria, Equatorians were helping, and many welcomed us and helped us hiding.[46]

Frank Matata, the Central Equatoria Governor for the SPLM-IO, added:

> I helped Riek Machar fly to Congo. In fact, Equatorian elders called us and said Riek could not be caught on Equatorian soil…because we had to pay back an alliance with Upper Nile Nuers to get Joseph Tambura elected in the early 1980s.[47]

While these narratives are incomplete and not entirely objective accounts of events in Equatoria, it's important to acknowledge that some Equatorian militias did defend Machar as he fled to Congo, their actions rooted in some narratives about the past, and determined to fight Salva Kiir's forces. Additionally, some IO soldiers remained in Equatoria, working to organize a rebellion and recruit Equatorian fighters to strengthen their front. More than two years after the 2014 Equatoria Conference emphasizing the need to stay out of the conflict to protect the Equatorian population, the Equatoria region was ravaged by war and violence.

Violence, Displacement, and Despair

If, as Kindersley and Rolandsen argued, 'the rapid spread of the civil war in South Sudan in July 2016 is a further point of rupture in South Sudan's recent history',[48] for Equatoria, it represented an unprecedented breaking point. With its main leaders removed from the South Sudanese political landscape, Equatorian nationalism became disorganized, with Equatorian actors fighting locally without being able to coordinate, as more IO soldiers

[46] Interview with Cirisio Zachariah, Equatorian and member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, October 2023
[47] Interview with Frank Matata, Equatorian and former member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, March 2022
[48] Kindersley and Rolandsen, "Civil War on a Shoestring: Rebellion in South Sudan's Equatoria Region Civil wars," 4.

from Upper Nile crossed into Equatoria. Machar proved moreover unable to sufficiently support Equatorian commanders who had joined him, leaving them poorly armed and ineffective.[49] For civilians, the toll of violence was extreme, more particularly in Central Equatoria. By early 2017, more than 400,000 people were internally displaced in the Equatoria region, and 1.5 million were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.[50] Adequate access to food was rare, and starvation was frequently used as a weapon of war. In turn, almost a million people crossed the border to seek refuge in Uganda, a movement described as 'Africa's largest refugee exodus since the 1994 Rwandan genocide'.[51] As Titeca described, 'between mid-2016 and mid-2017 an average of 2800 South Sudanese people arrived in Uganda each day, peaking at 8000 per day'.[52] Apart from Juba, no area in Equatoria was safe, and most of the region remained inaccessible to humanitarian workers. In Uganda, President Museveni took advantage of Equatoria's descent into violence. Not only would violence destabilize a region – Equatoria - which had been aiming to topple his liberation comrade, Salva Kiir, but the important influx of refugees would give him the opportunity to become a 'donor darling' by welcoming Equatorian refugees with open arms, even giving them a plot to farm.[53] Surfing on his so-called progressive policy towards refugees, Museveni organised the 'Uganda Solidarity Summit on Refugees' in June 2017 at the luxury Speke Resort Hotel in Kampala, where Western donors were invited not only to pledge contributions to support Uganda, but to praise Museveni for his policy. While the displacement of Equatorians seemed to please Museveni, allowing him to project his country as a stabilising island in the region, it was

[49] Alan Boswell, *Conflict and Crisis in South Sudan's Equatoria*, United States Institute of Peace (New York, 2021).
[50] *South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan*, United Nations (2016).
[51] Boswell, *Conflict and Crisis in South Sudan's Equatoria*.
[52] Kristof Titeca, "Who depends on whom? Uganda's refugee 'success story', corruption and the international community," *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2022): 55.
[53] On the ability of Uganda to be perceived as a 'donor darling' by the international community, see Jonathan Fisher, "International perceptions and African agency: Uganda and its donors 1986-2010" (D.Phil University of Oxford, 2011).

also a motive of satisfaction for Kiir and his government. As an Equatorian leader explained:

> The more Equatorians are out of South Sudan, the happier the government is. […] Kiir and his friends are able to allocate Equatorian plots to their Dinka fellows…but this is not just that. The more you stay in northern Uganda, the more you become Ugandan in a way…I mean you settle, you see? The border between being South Sudanese and Ugandan disappear…and then the government starts labelling you as Ugandan ! […] They just deny your citizenship, make you feel like you are not part of South Sudan anymore.[54]

The attempt by some Equatorians to organize revenge fell short and added to the complexity. Joseph Bakosoro, now a political refugee in the United States, continued attempting to revive the political project he had carried for the past five years. However, many Equatorian elites had fled to neighbouring countries or to Europe, making it difficult to communicate and disseminate information. Nonetheless, discussions took place, and the idea was to create a new political party, the South Sudan National Movement for Change (SSNMC):

> We began to think: what do we do? How can we raise our voice? You cannot raise your voice as an individual…you must be in an association or in a group. So we decided with some people to form a party to confront what is happening and to expose…we discussed and began to write our manifesto.[55]

Bakosoro learned from his experience as governor and did not frame his movement as an Equatorian one, even though its demands were almost identical to those of the Equatoria conference. Defying any attempt be labelled by the government as sectarian and tribal, the emphasis was put on South Sudan. Among the members of the group was Thomas

[54] Interview with Equatorian community leader, Juba, February 2022
[55] Interview with Joseph Bakosoro, former Governor or Western Equatorian, Juba, October 2023

Cirillo, a Bari from Central Equatoria. He was the younger brother of Peter Cirillo, the former governor of Greater Equatoria in the 1980s, who had pledged to expel Garang from Equatoria as soon as he set foot in the region. Thomas Cirillo had been the deputy chief of staff of the SPLA, one of the highest-ranking Equatorians within the vanguard movement. Now in Nairobi after his defection, Cirillo was ready to play a new political role with Joseph Bakosoro. However, at the last moment, Cirillo decided to play his own card and left the group to create his movement, the National Salvation Front, known as NAS:

> We agreed with him that we are going to launch the party on 5th of January 2017. We organised ourselves…we set the date, we invited some our friends from US State Department, from the larger South Sudanese community in the US. We decided to launch it in Atlanta, because…lots of things happened in Atlanta. As we were approaching the date, a friend called from Nairobi to tell me that Thomas was doing his own thing! I called Thomas, he promised me there was no problem. Then the next day, he called to tell me to postpone the event. We could not of course…but the day after the official launch, we could see on social media: NAS was created![56]

Cirillo maintained the strategy of nationalizing his movement, defending himself against accusations of representing only Equatorians, even though NAS was, in reality, only active in Equatoria and composed exclusively of Equatorian factions. The government and Dinka elites quickly labelled NAS as a cover for broader Equatorian domination in South Sudan, effectively preventing Nuer elites from joining Cirillo – a strategy that worked. Equatorian elites themselves were in fact not convinced by Cirillo's project, which never really made efforts to appear as the successor of Clement Wani Konga, and

[56] Ibid

NAS military operations remained limited to Central Equatoria. Moreover, as a former Equatorian minister argued:

> The project was no bad…to be fair Cirillo defends many of our [Equatorian] demands. But, you know, it came to late ! People were just tired, and it was becoming to difficult to mobilise…you know, when people survive, you don't have time to even about all these political projects and things.[57]

Cirillo's movement did, however, succeed in drawing diplomatic attention to Equatoria's fate in post-independence South Sudan. In 2017, in many diplomatic meetings of Western embassies, the questions 'what is happening in Equatoria?', 'who are Equatorians?', and 'why are Equatorians fighting?' started to emerge, with many diplomats ignoring the enduring, quiet, but nonetheless powerful idea of Equatorian nationalism and its drivers in South Sudan.[58] This heightened awareness came however too late, as peace negotiations between Riek Machar and Salva Kiir were already well underway. Between 2016 and 2018, when a new peace agreement was signed, Equatorians failed to unite effectively enough to influence the negotiations. The final agreement, brokered by Presidents Museveni and Bashir, was essentially a bilateral deal between Kiir and Machar—with the latter being pressured into signing by regional leaders who had grown weary of the civil war's dire impact in the East African region. A diplomat confirmed:

> The 2018 peace agreement is called 'revitalized' because it was fundamentally a copy-paste of the 2016 peace agreement. Never ever was it about rethinking the inclusion of specific actors, about Equatoria, or about changing the method. We wanted to stop violence as soon as possible, and this is what we did.[59]

[57] Interview with former Equatorian minister in the Transitional Government, Juba, October 2023
[58] Author experience in the diplomatic sector in Uganda and South Sudan
[59] Interview with a European diplomat, Juba, October 2023

Revamping the Vanguard Nation

Contested by liberation comrades and unable to maintain hegemony in the aftermath of independence, Salva Kiir and his inner circle staunchly aimed to consolidate their grip on power after 2018. During the civil war already, numerous former cadres from Bashir's NCP—referred to as the 'Sudanese' or 'Khartoumers'—were assimilated into the government, while many SPLM veterans were marginalized. One such significant figure was Tut Gatluak Manimeh, often nicknamed 'baby Bashir' in Juba circles, who swiftly became Kiir's closest adviser in security affairs. The added value of co-opting 'Khartoumers' was twofold. First, after decades in Khartoum, these leaders were attuned to NCP's tactics of centralization and marginalization. Second, not originating from the SPLM, they recognized their weak legitimacy in a post-independence order dominated by the legacy of the liberation struggle, thus refraining from vying for the presidency. Despite the marked decrease in its appeal during (and because of) the civil war, the SPLM has nonetheless persisted in being regarded as a symbol of liberation and self-determination, and the performative '*SPLM Oye!*' still resonates across the country.

The SPLM and its nationalist project hence remained potent political instruments in post-2018 South Sudan, both symbolically and materially, despite its initial goal to reshape state-society relations having long perished. After the civil war, it was time for the nationalist project of the SPLM to regain momentum. Since 2018, Kiir has hence intensified liberation discourses and nationalist diatribes, even re-instating the SPLM National Liberation Council (NLC) and the SPLM Political Bureau (PB) in December 2022. James Wani Igga, was elected First Deputy Chairperson of both the NLC and the PB; Riek Machar was officially excluded from the NLC. Similarly, since 2018, Salva Kiir has frequently appeared campaigning with a red shirt and a red hat, symbol of the SPLM.

Since 2016, Kiir moreover orchestrated a campaign to position himself as the SPLM's legitimate leader to strengthen his vanguard project, portraying himself as South Sudan's founding father, somewhat downplaying the role of John Garang to rewrite history. 'I did not join the SPLM', argued Kiir in a gathering in Juba, 'I was the midwife and I delivered SPLM itself […] Now for me, SPLM started with me'.[60]

This time, alternative projects were not to be allowed to exist. Since the 2018 peace agreement, and in sharp contrast to its essence, Kiir and his allies have hence intensified repression and targeted individuals who attempt to conduct political activities that counter their plans. While opposition and pluralism are officially tolerated, the bleak accounts emerging from the Blue House, the National Security Detention Center, have made open critique and attempts to deconstruct the official nationalist narrative somewhat perilous. The National Security Service (NSS) increased arrests of activists and political opponents like Kuel Aguer Kuel, the former governor of Northern Bahr el Ghazal State. The #AnaTaban ('I am tired', in Arabic) movement, founded by young South Sudanese artists in 2016, had to scale down its activities, while the Sudd Institute, an important think tank promoting democratic reforms, was shut down by the government and its managing director interrogated by the National Security. When rumours of protest emerge, South Sudanese armed forces deploy to prevent any demonstrations. Journalists are now fearful of the government, and politicians are reluctant to speak out because, as one put it, 'some people have started to disappear'.[61] Paradoxically, then, the peace agreement has strengthened Kiir's position, providing him with greater military tools, credibility, and power to impose his centralising vanguard nationalist agenda than he had at independence.

[60] "Salva Kiir: 'SPLM started with me'," *Radio Tamazuj* 29 June 2016.
[61] Interview with XXXX, South Sudanese journalist, Juba, October 2023

‘The clouds have gathered; it is now starting to rain’

The (Un)National Dialogue

In 2016, President Kiir launched the National Dialogue, a grassroots consultation process that spanned four years and that (unofficially) aimed to revive the SPLM as the main nationalist actor in South Sudan. While power-sharing negotiations continued in Addis Ababa, this parallel initiative aimed to, in Kiir's words, ‘save the country from disintegration and usher in a new era of peace, stability and prosperity’. The dialogue, which was a nationwide process, established three subcommittees across Equatoria - in Western, Central, and Eastern Equatoria. Throughout 2017 and 2018, these subcommittees conducted extensive consultations through meetings and group discussions with civil society organizations, political stakeholders, and traditional chiefs. Grassroots consultation records from across Equatoria revealed consistent demands, echoing those first articulated at the 2011 Equatoria Conference:

> SPLA should be a national of South Sudan, independent of any political party. […] Representation of the sixty-four nationalities in the national army is necessary to balance the force from being dominated by one or few tribes.
>
> […]
>
> Confederal system of governance must be implemented by the National Government, based on the three regions of Great Equatoria, Greater Upper Nile, and Greater Bahr-El-Ghazal. […] The President of South Sudan should stop appointing governors and members of parliament to power by decrees […] The Presidency must be rotational among the three former regions of Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr el Ghazal.[62]

[62] ‘The People Have Spoken: Emerging Consensus from the Grassroots Consultations in South Sudan’, Document Three of the Steering Committee, August 2018 (unpublished)

From 26 to 31 August 2019, *the Greater Equatoria Regional Conference* convened over 500 delegates from across the region at Freedom Hall in Juba to discuss political, social, and economic priorities. The recommendations of the conference were, again, not a surprise:

> The Conference:
>
> [..] endorses the establishment of a federal system with more powers devolved to the states
>
> […] recommends that the post of president should rotate among the three regions of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile
>
> […] Calls for immediate return of all pastoralists currently in Equatoria to their place of origin and further calls for the disarmament of all pastoralists
>
> […] Strongly condemns changing of indigenous names of places and calls for reverting to original names
>
> […] Strongly recommends the relocation of national capital to Ramciel, which is more at the center of the country

Eight years after governors Bakosoro, Wani Konga, and Louis Lobong convened the 2011 Equatoria Conference, Equatorians gathered again…under starkly different circumstances, however. An Equatorian leader summarized it well:

> Oh! It had nothing to do with the 2011 Equatoria Conference…haha…the meeting was not at Nyakuron…but above all, it was driven by the President, not us! We came together because we were part a geographical area of South Sudan, not because we wanted to build something together…no, no…this conference was just us participating in a national debate..you know Upper Nile and Bhar el Ghazal had their own conference, we did not create anything.

While some external observers praised the National Dialogue as 'a credible reflection of South Sudanese thinking',[63] doubts emerged among Equatorian elites after the Equatorian Regional Conference. They felt Kiir was merely coopting them into his post-2018 revamped vanguard nationalist project. The presence of President Museveni to launch the National Dialogue in 2017 left indeed little doubt about the objective of the National Dialogue, as Museveni argued:

> SPLM is a strong movement and has respect of the people of South Sudan that is why it won by over 99 percent. Where did you get all that support...the Dinkas, Nuer and people from Equatorial province. How can you let them down? This is very good political capital which you cannot squander, you should revive SPLM and weed out all those subversive ideas. […] Misuse of identity […] can paralyze and endanger any nation. Why insist on identity at the expense of other people. The issue of identity broke up Sudan […] Yes identity is important but it can be misused. Why are you not concerned about prosperity, about common interests? Emphasizing identity and forgetting common interests is very dangerous.[64]

Some Equatorian began speaking out against the process: Western Equatoria governor Alfred Futuyo for instance refused to attend both the National Dialogue's final national conference in November 2020 and a political dinner organized by Central Equatoria governor Anthony Adil. Some, however, saw the National Dialogue as the last opportunity to advance specific demands, recognizing that rebuilding *Equatorian-ness* would prove extremely difficult in the post-2018 era.

---

[63] Ola Mohajer and David Deng, *South Sudan's people have spoken on peace. Is anyone listening?*, United States Institute of Peace (New York, 2021).
[64] "President Museveni calls for unity in diversity in war-torn South Sudan," *Sudan Tribune* 22 May 2017.

Figure 12. President Salva Kiir and President Yoweri Museveni shaking hands in 2017, at the launch of the National Dialogue
Source: https://www.yowerikmuseveni.com/president-museveni-calls-unity-diversity-south-sudan

Equatoria-ness and the Crisis of Succession

After years of violence throughout Equatoria, political elites from the region were divided and scattered across South Sudan's post-conflict political landscape. What Equatorian elites had in common, nonetheless, was the shared feeling that the civil war did not fundamentally change their status in the post-independence order, on the contrary. They indeed collectively failed to build a strong enough corporate agency to restructure the political system, leaving them marginalised and disunited in Kiir's new project. Among the architects of the 2011 Equatorian nationalist project, only Louis Lobong remained in power, having forged a strong alliance with Salva Kiir. As one of the country's key intelligence figures, he now eagerly awaits appointment to a major ministry.

Source:https://tinyurl.com/evcfybdf

Figure 13 Louis Lobong (Right) in 2022

However, it is not to say the idea of *Equatoria-ness* disappeared among elites. Instead, the civil war experience reinforced this sentiment, as Equatorian elites aligned with either Kiir or Machar felt their demands were consistently ignored, reducing them to mere pawns in the SPLM leaders' political games. Followers of the SPLM-IO were for instance livid: despite many promises, Riek Machar did not – or could not, his supporters would say- fight one second for federalism during peace negotiations. Some Equatorian elites even believe that Machar had refused an offer from President Bashir and Kiir to turn South Sudan into a federal state.[65] Moreover, Machar's appointment of his relatives, including his wife, to lucrative ministries left Equatorian elites with a bitter sense of resentment. A Equatorian, member of the SPLM-IO, summaries the feeling among them:

> The problem in this country is that Equatoria is always, and will always be, the last. The first should always be a Dinka, then Nuer…or a Nuer, then a Dinka…but Equatoria is always the last one.[66]

[65] Interview with Frank Matata, member of the SPLM-IO, Juba, March 2022
[66] Ibid.

Despite this common feeling of marginalisation, the post-2018 period however reflects a leadership crisis among Equatorian elites: Bakosoro was unwilling to serve as a figurehead, too busy to build his own political career. Wani Konga was now too old and too ill to assume political leadership, and Lobong refused to jeopardize his privileged access to the presidency. James Wani Igga showed no greater commitment to advancing Equatorian interests than he had demonstrated over the past decade. Even if Salva Kiir had eventually cancelled his project to divide South Sudan into 28 or 32 states, the three newly appointed Equatorian governors did not share any will to start a common nationalist project. Louis Lobong from Eastern Equatoria, Emmanuel Adil Anthony from Central Equatoria, and Alfred Futiyo Karaba from Western Equatoria did not share the same visions, aspirations, and political solidarities, stuck in the Kiir-Machar duality and, as one Equatorian MP mentioned, 'fully aware of who is the appointing authority'.[67] Other potential leaders decided to play their own card, being co-opted within the government to take part in Kiir's post-2018 vanguard project. In fact, in contrast to some groups where an excess of contestants led to in-group frictions, Equatoria faced the opposite challenge: nobody, despite a common agreement that someone should, was willing to step up and take the lead. Paul Bonju, a MP from Central Equatoria, summarized it perfectly:

> Equatorian elites, you see, are now busy putting their house in order. You know, Equatorians do not often rely on emotions, we always take time to analyse a lot. […] Equatorians consider themselves as one…*Equatoria-ness* is high, very high…but hidden! There is a need to speak with the same voice, to have the same vision. An Equatorian political body is needed…but how is it possible now? … Equatorian nationalism is there, but shy and not so visible. Equatoria is unique:

[67] Interview with Equatorian MP from Central Equatoria, Juba, February 2022

> there is a culture of Equatoria, a peace culture, and a love for agriculture. But I am telling you…Equatoria now lacks a leader. This is what we are…we are a nation without leader! This should be the title of your book […] Also, let me tell you, if trends of events continue, the idea of secession might be there. It is just not a minority, really! But there is no ally in the region…[68]

A former Equatorian minister insisted:

> It is now too dangerous to even think about an Equatorian project, the government is extremely nervous…you know, because of Kokora, everyone becomes paranoid when Equatorians sit together… now as soon as you start gathering, national security comes to see you…what can we do? Nobody wants to finish in jail. My friend, the clouds have gathered…it is now starting to rain.[69]

The struggle to restructure *Equatoria-ness* is most evident in how Equatorian elites have attempted to revitalize the unified Equatoria Caucus following the 2018 peace agreement. In 2021, following the national parliament's reconstitution, Equatorian leaders revived the caucus that had originated at the 2011 Equatoria conference. However, when the caucus was re-established, the selection of its leadership was postponed, deemed too sensitive. The only issue elites could agree on was the agenda:

> We agreed on three main things. First, governance. We want federalism! Second, the economy. Equatorians are marginalised! We want our share of the cake. Third, citizenship. We want to be first class citizens, and not have our belonging to this country questioned. It is not yet well structured, but we agreed on this.[70]

In fact, the caucus has only met twice since its re-establishment. Once in December 2021, where Equatorian elites could not agree on leadership. And another time in April 2022,

[68] Interview with XXXX, MP from Central Equatoria, Juba, March 2022
[69] Interview with a former Equatorian Minister, Juba, October 2023
[70] Interview with XXXX, Equatorian MP, October 2023

to discuss the enduring presence of Dinka cattle herders in Equatoria. A few weeks before, major clashes had indeed broken out in Central and Eastern Equatoria, leaving at least 28 people dead.[71] The event enraged Equatorians, who viewed it as yet another example of Dinka dominance over Equatoria. Yet, despite lengthy caucus deliberations, Equatorians failed to forge any consensus on next steps.[72]

Small Nations

As *Equatoria-ness* struggled to materialize in the post-2018 era, Equatorian elites began exploring alternative imaginaries that could better secure recognition, discovering what Ellis called the 'great power of small nations' to find a feeling of self-determination in the vanguard nation.[73] Alternative 'imagined communities' at the local level began to distinguish themselves from the broader 'Equatorian nation'. These smaller national identities weren't new creations - they had long existed but were suppressed – or at least not mobilized - when the governors' nationalist project began in 2011. With the collapse of the Equatorian project, these identities re-emerged in the post-2018 era, not as structural outcomes but as contingent initiatives driven by elites, power, and their specific political projects within the Greater Equatorian region. For Salva Kiir, such a trend was to be encouraged, as it would certainly undermine the strength of Equatoria as a category of political practice in South Sudan and reinforce his capacity to co-opt Equatorian elites within his government. Just like in the 1980s, intra-Equatorian disagreements and power struggles started to undermine Equatorian unity in South Sudan.

[71] "Makuei Appeals for Calm as gov't promises to remove cattle from Magwi," *Eye Radio* 4 March 2022, https://www.eyeradio.org/makuei-appeals-for-calm-as-govt-promises-to-remove-cattle-from-magwi/.
[72] Interview with XXXX, Equatorian MP, October 2023
[73] Elizabeth N. Ellis, *The Great Power of Small Nations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

The most striking example of this trend has been the surge in Azande nationalism in Western Equatoria after 2018, which culminated in the restoration—or reinvention—of the Azande Kingdom under King Atoroba Peni Rikito Gbudue in February 2022, 117 years after the killing of King Gbude by the British.[74] This process was supported, and even initiated, by Salva Kiir, who personally attended the ceremony in Yambio. Since the signature of the 2018 agreement, Alfred Futuyo Karaba has been the governor of Western Equatoria, appointed by the SPLM-IO, and leader of Balanda nationalism in Equatoria. After the victory of Joseph Bakosoro in the gubernatorial elections in 2010, it was the second time that the Avongara elite of the Azande had lost power in Western Equatoria, as Patrick Zamoi had to step down. Jemma Nunu Kumba, now speaker of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and close to Salva Kiir, was losing ground in the state, which did not suit Salva Kiir as he relied on the Avongara to control Western Equatoria.[75] Salva Kiir's project was thus to restore the Azande Kingdom as a cultural entity to increase his legitimacy among the Azande and reshape a strong Azande nationalism in South Sudan, thereby undermining Equatorian unity. Such an idea, that Karlström called the 'indigenization of political modernities', did not, however, fall from the sky and demonstrates how leaders borrow ideas from each other.[76] In the last three decades, President Museveni has indeed restored cultural kingdoms in Uganda, starting with the powerful Buganda Kingdom in 1993, to balance alliances and maintain power. Emphasizing only the cultural dimension of such kingdoms, with culture being understood as the antithesis of politics by vanguard movements, was both reassuring and

[74] Isaac Waanzi Hillary, "'This kingdom will not be like the kingdom(s) in the era of Gbudue": On the rebirth of the Azande Kingdom," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 14, no. 3 (2024).
[75] Craze, *Jemma's War: Political Strife in Western Equatoria*.
[76] Mikael Bo Karlstrom, "The cultural kingdom in Uganda: Popular royalism and the restoration of the Buganda kingship" (Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 1999) (9934075).

politically useful for Kiir.[77] However, once cultural nationalism evolves into a political movement, the vanguard would recognize it as time to repress.

CONCLUSION

This chapter analysed the collapse of the Equatorian competing nationalist project and the struggle for Equatorian elites to find a successor to the three governors. It revealed that the civil war had opened many wounds among Equatorian elites, wounds that proved difficult to heal as South Sudan was transitioning into a post-conflict political order. As two of the three governors were dismissed and as Salva Kiir and his inner circle emerged reinforced from the peace process by building a cross-ethnic alliance, groupness proved an even more distant reality for Equatorian elites, unable – or unwilling - to maintain unity. Again, conflict played an immense role in redefining loyalties, friendships, and aspirations, something that would endure for a long time as it structured the post-peace agreement political landscape and networks in South Sudan; a political landscape with which Equatorian elites had to interact and adjust. In this context, *Equatoria-ness* lost its appeal as a category of political practice for Equatorian elites, too aware of the costs associated with the idea of nationalism in South Sudan. Equatorian elites have since then been waiting for a 'leading light' seizing the heritage of the Equatoria Intellectual Committee, but the political context, where militarism runs high, makes it difficult for Equatorian leaders to freely develop a comprehensive vision of society. Different, more local, imaginaries emerged as sources of power, potentially more compatible with the idea of *national liberation* that still dominates the South Sudanese political landscape, reshaping the interaction between elites, power, and competing nationalisms in South Sudan. It however does not mean that the idea of Equatorian nationalism has disappeared

[77] Karlstrom, "The cultural kingdom in Uganda: Popular royalism and the restoration of the Buganda kingship."

with the dismissal of Bakosoro and Wani Konga; the legacy of the project of the three governors is however less dramatic, more hesitant, certainly deconstructing the idea that nationalism is a coherent and linear endeavor.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the role of nationalism in shaping the dynamics of elite competition in South Sudan. Through an empirical exploration of Equatorian elites' efforts to contest SPLM hegemony, transcend their marginality, and construct a competing nationalist project in post-independence South Sudan, the main claim is that nationalism has been crucial in shaping discourses, narratives, and practices of power in South Sudan. Nationalism, it has demonstrated, is not a relic of the past but continues to be a central idea through which political actors articulate aspirations, seek legitimacy, and negotiate authority. Despite its eventual collapse, studying the project of the three governors of Equatoria has revealed the enduring salience of competing elite imaginings in structuring political competition – but also the politics of violence - in South Sudan, offering a novel lens to understand the politics of South Sudan too often reduced to state collapse and a short-term 'management of decay'. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects, it demonstrated, are major drivers shaping the politics of the country. It has also

shown the difficulty for elites to transform *individualism* into *collectivism*, highlighted the sometimes-paradoxical political moralities Equatorian elites have been confronted with, and demonstrated the fluid character of belonging, confirming the need to have a nuanced approach, that means going beyond a monolithic understanding of the nationalist ideology, of nationalism, elites and their relation to power. In this conclusion, I attempt to reflect on the different empirical chapters and the substantial contributions they, taken together, make to the literature on elites, power, and nationalism. As emphasized in the introduction, this research seeks to illuminate other circumstances and develop general conclusions that, as Pierson puts it, 'can "travel" in some form beyond a specific time and place'.[1] I first begin by examining how this study of Equatorian elites in South Sudan contributes to broader theoretical frameworks on power, nationalism, and elite politics. I then analyze the implications of my empirical findings for the study of South Sudan, before contextualizing these insights within the wider Horn of Africa region. Finally, I outline directions for potential future research that emerge from this thesis.

ELITES, POWER, AND NATIONALISM

Focusing on the project of Equatorian elites, this thesis emphasized the enduring salience of nationalism in structuring the politics of elite competition and political contestation in South Sudan. Too often, scholars studying the contemporary politics of Africa have dismissed the usefulness of nationalism as an explanatory variable, deemed an empty rhetoric hiding the *real* drivers – rent-seeking, ethnic feuds, and short-term interests - of political dynamic. This aligns with the fact that the politics of Africa has been heavily dominated by a focus on *what went wrong*, an approach overwhelmingly emphasizing the

[1] Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis*, 5.

criminalization of elites in Africa and producing Africa as a site of pathology.[2] Moreover, economistic approaches and the quest for – sometimes deterministic – universal causal logics have all considerably reduced the spectrum of possibilities when studying Africa and its politics. The dominance of rational choice theory and causal econometric analyses of human behaviour in an era of post-Cold-War neoliberal, market-oriented global policies, have indeed reconfigured both political science departments and the study of politics. The literature has in turn most often underestimated how political actors see, interpret, draw from, and engage with historical, social, and political events, and how they develop 'a set of ideas that « transcend the present » and are geared towards the future'.[3] In contrast, contributing to and building upon a (re)emerging scholarly trend that refocuses attention on ideational and ideological factors as key explanatory variables for understanding diverse political outcomes across the continent, this thesis showed how political actors in South Sudan mobilized nationalism as an ideology to materialize their political aspirations. What the empirical chapters demonstrated is that competing nationalisms have in fact been at the center of political competition in South Sudan; nationalism can therefore not be dismissed, or undervalued, as a mere peripheral idea. Far from being a forgotten relic of bygone aspirations, nationalism is, the empirical chapters showed, more present than ever in South Sudan; nationalism 'decisively shape what political actors identify as both possible and desirable outcomes and strategies'.[4]

In highlighting the centrality of nationalism in the politics of South Sudan, this thesis has rejected the structural and apolitical assumptions underlying dominant modernist approaches. Of course, Anderson, Gellner, and others modernists made, together, a

[2] Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia*.
[3] Sinisa Malesevic, "Nationalism and the Power of Ideologies," in *Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, ed. G. Delanty and K. Kumar (London: SageEditors, 2006), 309.
[4] Harry Verhoeven, "The real politics of the Horn of Africa. By Alex De Waal," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 1022.

crucial contribution to the literature by asserting that nations are fundamentally 'invented', 'constructed', and 'imagined', thereby debunking many of the central tenets of 'scientific nationalism'.[5] The historical chapter on the genesis of the idea of Equatoria indeed demonstrated how Equatoria as an idea was 'imagined' by elites in the 1980s, mobilizing a specific understanding of the interplay between identity and the environment, rooted in colonial thinking, to construct a political identity to compete for power; Equatoria is thus not, far from it, an *organic* or *primordial* identity. Similarly, as modernist scholars have convincingly demonstrated, nationalism must be properly historicized and its constructive processes thoroughly analyzed. In this regard, the empirical chapters have meticulously traced the genesis and evolution of Equatorian nationalism in South Sudan, employing the constructivist framework, embedded in historical sociology, championed by modernist scholars.

However, this thesis has argued that nationalism is not the outcome of a teleological, neutral, and structural process that, like Smith's invisible hand, would simply *create* nations and national identities within which 'ethnic conflicts' would unfold. Post-colonial societies and their relationship to nationalism have too frequently been interpreted through a restrictive modernist framework that, following Anderson's influential distinction, artificially separates the supposedly 'benevolent politics of nationalism' from the 'violent internal politics of ethnicity' in post-colonial states.[6] Ethnic or local identities, understood as a mere extension of neo-patrimonialism, have, modernists argue, consistently undermined nationalist aspirations, leading to the widespread characterization of nationalism as a *failed* project in post-colonial contexts. This thesis has demonstrated, however, that a *political* understanding of nationalism and nationalistic

[5] Anderson, *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.
[6] Noren-Nilsson, "Imagining Cambodia: Competing Nationalisms in the Second Kingdom (1993-)."

imaginations is fundamental to understanding patterns of competition, violence, and political contestation in African societies. One indeed needs to think *politically* about nationalism, as behind claims of 'modern nations' lie power struggles and hegemonic projects – something that modernist scholars simply do not account for. Nationalist projects thus inevitably create, following a Gramscian understanding of power and hegemony, exclusion and marginalisation. Violence is integral part to these processes, rather than being defined as the outcome of 'failure', as the liberal approach would suggest. What comes out of such an 'anti-modernist' perspective is that there is fundamentally nothing like nation-states, but rather states captured by specific nationalist projects that can, and are, constantly contested and negotiated by different actors. Competing visions of the nation therefore occupy the central terrain, not the periphery, of political contestation in Africa.

Elites are, the empirical chapters have demonstrated, crucial actors when it comes to understanding not only the enduring salience of nationalism in Africa, but also the *praxis* of competing nationalisms and their interactions over time. As Barker argued, 'nationalism seeks exceptional representatives of its mundane virtues, and has a long history of fondness for heroes and patriarchs'.[7] The empirical chapters have demonstrated the prominent role of the three elected governors of Equatoria – Joseph Bakosoro, Clement Wani Konga, and Louis Lobong - in the making of Equatorian nationalism in post-independence South Sudan, but also the larger role of Equatorian elites in the unmaking of the Equatorian project. Mobilizing the past and (re)imagining the future proved useful – even crucial - to reconstitute 'Equatoria' in post-independence South Sudan. The three governors integrated their political project into broader narratives about culture, civilisation, and social distinction to promote unity among Equatorian elites—

[7] Rodney Barker, "Whose legitimacy? Elites, nationalism and ethnicity in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 21, no. 2 (1995): 207.

narratives that severely disparaged the Nilotic peoples and their alleged incapacity for education and effective governance. The governors attempted to mobilize symbols to create cohesiveness and a sense of belonging, an endeavor made possible by the 'cult and mystique of eliteness'.[8] The interaction between culture and power proved however difficult to activate for the governors as 'Equatoria', a recent construct based on the idea of a geographical cohesion, lacked the primordial appeal of ethnic kinship, offering no foundational myth of origin to mobilize collective identity. Cohen argued about the Creoles of Sierra Leone that 'Creoledom is essentially a status grouping marked off from other social groups in the country by a special lifestyle and by a dense network of social relationships'.[9] *Equatoria-ness* is very similar to such description – cultural distinction, rather than kinship, is at the basis of the Equatorian identity, making it, it appears, a less powerful instrument of mobilization than kinship.

What the study of the Equatorian project demonstrates is that personalities, more than formal institutions, have a profound impact on the rise and fall of nationalist projects. In this regard, the empirical chapters confirmed that it is crucial to, in order to understand the role of nationalism, see elites primarily as *social individuals* who need to accommodate their project to their own empirical realities. Elites are indeed not merely isolated, rational powerholders but are embedded in complex cultural contexts and social structures that shape their identities, decisions, and actions. In turn, contrary to what many empirical studies of nationalism have done, I did not presume the autonomous ideological existence of Equatorian nationalism but rather saw 'social relations as a permanent flux within which, through the exercise of forms of power, entities arise that are never finally fixed nor ever permanent, remaining always dependent on the constant interplay of

[8] Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture*, 2.
[9] Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture*, 21.

hegemonic and counterhegemonic forces'.[10] As Brubaker argued, nationalist projects are not internally homogeneous and externally bounded.[11] The problem with viewing nationalism as autonomous is that elites are often seen as merely instrumentalizing a pre-existing, ready-to-use concept; this approach is too deterministic. Instead, elites should be understood not as passive users but as active *agents* navigating into specific political environments. Examining how, why, and to what effect elites act and how they inscribe their political actions into larger ideational structures reveals, this thesis revealed, important political dynamics. Focusing on elites as social actors demonstrates that nationalism as an ideology is inherently *contingent, unfinished,* and *relational*. The nationalist ideology is *contingent* because it depends on specific historical, political, and social conditions upon which political actors decide to act – or not. Nationalism is not inevitable or natural; rather, it emerges out of particular contexts and are shaped by shifting power dynamics, ideologies, and events. The nationalist ideology thus evolves over time as actors need to accommodate their ideas with the reality. Nationalism is *relational* because it defines itself in relation to others—often through contrast or opposition. Nationalism as an ideology is *unfinished,* being constantly reinterpreted, debated, and reimagined by elites over time.

This thesis has also highlighted that social networks were at the heart of the attempt of the governors to embody and project *Equatoria-ness* in post-independence South Sudan, confirming the argument that 'the elite collaborate informally through their exclusive network of amity – a web of primary relationships which are governed by moral rights and obligations, and objectified and kept alive in the course of frequent, elaborate, and costly ceremonials'.[12] Nationalist projects can therefore not be understood without

[10] de Pina-Cabral and Pedroso de Lima, *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession*, 2.
[11] Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*.
[12] Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture*, 60.

exploring the historically constructed interactions among elites. Social networks were at the center of the difficulties for Equatorian elites to balance the tension between individualism, 'a social pattern consisting of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives', and collectivism, 'a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives'.[13] The legacy of the self-proclaimed 'liberation struggle' against Khartoum left in this regard an enduring mark on political actors, their networks, their loyalties, and their friendships in post-independence South Sudan, demonstrating how nationalist projects are constrained by enduring structural legacies of history and how actors' worldview is shaped by a collection of personal experiences. After the signature of the CPA, Equatorian elites were spread across the political spectrum, and while the idea of 'Equatoria' was certainly present, it was not embodied in a way that could drastically reshape networks and loyalties.

Equatorian governors, the empirical chapters have revealed, boldly attempted to restructure networks of political loyalty in South Sudan by mobilizing Equatorian nationalism as an idea to transcend Equatorian elites' marginality. They however constantly struggled to accommodate elites emerging from different networks, the latter shaping loyalties in ways that frequently undermined the coherence of the Equatorian project. In fact, studying the nationalist project of the three governors highlighted the blurred distinction between non-dominant and dominant elites, demonstrating not only that the same individual can simultaneously occupy positions within both groups—depending on the context—but also that individuals, including the governors, can move fluidly between these groups over time. This challenges static, or binary, conceptions of domination often present in structuralist approaches of domination in critical studies.

[13] Harry Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 3.

Instead, this thesis calls for a more dynamic, relational understanding of power that recognizes the contingent and negotiated nature of elite positioning. The study of elites and their interactions hence becomes crucial for a more nuanced analysis of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic nationalist projects. They are not linear processes, but contested and often contradictory field of practices, where actors continuously redefine the boundaries of inclusion, legitimacy, and power.

EQUATORIAN ELITES AND POST-INDEPENDENCE SOUTH SUDAN

This thesis attempted to understand how a group of elites hailing from the Equatoria sought to transcend its marginality by revamping a nationalist project centered on the idea of Equatoria in South Sudan. By doing so, this thesis demonstrated that nationalism remains an important ideology shaping the dynamics of power in South Sudan; such a conclusion runs counter to many approaches that have looked at South Sudan exclusively through a lens of neo-patrimonialism and Big Men politics, portraying South Sudan as a Hobbesian political space where ideas and ideologies are absent. Political elites, this thesis revealed, constantly rely on specific nationalist imaginings to seek political legitimacy and insert their political projects. This is not new; as the historical chapters demonstrated, nationalism as an idea has been at the heart of many political projects in the region and will certainly continue to do so. In this regard, this thesis offered a new perspective on post-independence South Sudan and demands a reconsideration of South Sudan's historiography; as Johnson has argued, 'there are lingering stereotypes in the earlier literature commonly referred to and promoted by South Sudanese themselves that must be confronted'.[14]

[14] Johnson, *South Sudan : A New History for a New Nation*, 18.

Popular narratives often depict independence as a linear – even sometimes teleological - trajectory led by the SPLM, followed by a post-independence era framed as a flawed but uncontested project of state and nation-building. The historiography in accounts of South Sudan consistently centers on southern nationalism—rooted in the colonial era and embodied by the Anyanya and the SPLM—as a triumphant force that overcame Khartoum and secured the right to self-determination.[15] This view of a 'national liberation', however, obscures – or reduces to mere details- the internal contestations that have shaped the country's political landscape. The story of a new nation celebrating independence in unity, as the empirical chapters demonstrated, is simply a myth. It is a myth crafted by the SPLM, which has carefully silenced debates, key figures, and important historical events that could jeopardize its hegemony over the politics of South Sudan. 'Whose nation' has however been a fiercely and openly debated question within elite circles, and the centralization of power by the SPLM was far from an inevitable. What this thesis demonstrated is that in the early years of independence, debates over the future and uncertainty were at the heart of South Sudanese politics – debates that the SPLM is now not willing to recognize, even less emphasize. These years fundamentally transformed South Sudan, as, like in many other African countries, ideas of federalism, decentralisation, and self-determination have continued to be debated to this very day. In fact, one might argue that it is the civil war that radicalized the militaristic ideology of the SPLM and President Salva Kiir; what might have happened to the Equatorian project, had the civil war not erupted, is a question that will remain unanswered. This is a strong reminder not only to take *contingency* seriously, but also to explore the 'roads not taken' to illuminate important political dynamics in South Sudan. Independence in 2011 represented, after two decades of struggle, a possible renegotiation of political

[15] Johnson, *South Sudan : A New History for a New Nation*.

geographies, center-periphery relations, and political identities. Equatorian elites attempted to take advantage of this moment to transcend their marginality and reimagine a new political order. What it shows is that at independence, different 'imagined futures', rooted in nationalist aspirations, coexisted, so that the centralised, SPLM-dominated political system was not a fatality. Even though Equatorian leaders supported a SPLM-led independence, they at the same time imagined an autonomous Equatorian region. The fact that Equatorian elites did eventually not push for that outcome does not mean that it was not originally powerful idea, nor that they had abandoned their ambition to recast the South Sudanese political order. This thesis demonstrated that Equatorian nationalism is hence not a fixed or inevitable phenomenon; rather, it is *contingent* on historical, political, and social circumstances.

Equatorian elites today are divided between competing strategies. Some have reconfigured their non-dominant position by aligning with the SPLM project, while others have openly called for an independent Equatorian state. Yet, as long as the SPLM continues to exert strong appeal among influential Equatorian elites, the push for Equatorian independence remains the ambition of a radical minority. Such a project will inevitably face a persistent challenge within Equatorian circles—one that traces back to the very construction of Equatorian identity in South Sudan: the chronic inability to unite under a single leader, driven by both internal divisions and external constraints. The idea of Equatoria seems to linger as a potent imaginary—always present in political discourse and affective memory, yet suspended in a state of perpetual becoming, never fully actualized. The literature, constrained by both a linear conception of political projects and an overwhelming focus on projects that succeeded, has largely remained silent on such *unrealised* imaginaries. Equatorian elites are undeniably frustrated by their marginalization and the continued dominance of the so-called 'Nilotes' in South Sudan.

The collapse of the governors' project has left many disillusioned, prompting many to turn to violence, reminding us of the need to develop a historically-situated understanding of violence going beyond the New Wars and 'Greed or Grievance' paradigms.[16] It also led to the development of smaller identities as avenues for self-realization. As Chapter 6 demonstrated, the revival of so-called 'traditional' kingdoms is an indication that Equatorian elites seem to have withdrawn from a certain idea of South Sudan. Equatorian elites seem in fact to have growingly adopted a *static* understanding of marginality; as one Equatorian leader insisted on, 'what can we do? We are simply losers…we wait for something to happen'.[17] How long Equatorians are willing to wait is however uncertain. In a Horn of Africa currently witnessing a complete reconfiguration of alliances and power relations, and as South Sudan seems on the verge of a new civil war as I write these lines, if and how the idea of Equatoria will materialize remain open questions.

ELITES AND NATIONALISM IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

The study of the nationalist project championed by Equatoria's three governors stands as a captivating story in its own right, but also represents a crucial lens through which to understand the evolving political landscape across the Horn of Africa. The study of political dynamics in the Horn have been mostly dominated by de Waal's 'political marketplace' theory that sees the Horn as being exclusively driven by, as the title of his book summarises, 'money, war, and the business of power'.[18] His study is presented as a 'contemporary historical ethnography of [political elites]: their power, their relationships with one another, and their norms and ethics'.[19] While such an approach resembles the one taken in this thesis, there could not be more strikingly different outcomes, as de Waal

[16] Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975–2002*.
[17] Interview with an Equatorian MP from Central Equatoria, Juba, October 2023
[18] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*.
[19] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*, 2.

argues that elites in the Horn 'exchange services and rewards, loyalty and money, for prices that are set by the elementary principles of supply and demand, and also influenced by whoever is able to regulate the market'.[20] Another dominant approach has been the dynamics of 'state formation and decay' presented by Christopher Clapham.[21] Clapham insisted on the processes - the 'histories' - of state creation and collapse as the main drivers shaping the politics of the Horn of Africa.[22] The approach of this thesis, that is going beyond nationalist, SPLM-centred histories and highlighting alternative, counter-hegemonic nationalist projects in South Sudan, represents, I believe, an interesting approach on how to bring the study of the Horn of Africa into a new direction; it is indeed an invitation to take the idea of competing nationalisms seriously in the study of power, legitimacy, and political authority in the Horn.

Nationalist imaginings represent an important framework for elites to compete for power in the Horn, an aspect that has however not received much attention in the recent literature. The Horn is however home to different past and present nationalist revolutionary regimes; these regimes have emerged from varied liberation struggles and revolutionary movements such as the Eritrean's People Liberation Front in Eritrea, the Somali National Movement in Somaliland, the National Resistance Movement in Uganda, the Tigray People's Liberation Front in Ethiopia, but also the former revolutionary Islamist Al-Ingaz regime in Sudan. The literature on revolutionary regimes – socialist or not - in the Horn still overwhelmingly focuses on revolutionary leaders, their hegemonic narrative, their consolidation of power, and their foreign policy. Such a focus derives from the assumption that the military victories of self-styled liberation movements gave them ultimate control in the political, economic, and cultural spheres –

[20] de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa*, 2.
[21] I thank Harry Verhoeven for emphasising this approach to me
[22] Christopher Clapham, *The Horn of Africa: state formation and decay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

an ex-post, somewhat over-determinist account that assumes a linear and teleological history of 'liberation' and that continues to focus on 'winners'. Ottaway for instance asserted that in the early 1990s, 'nationalism triumphed' in the Horn.[23] Many, it appears, seemed to have embraced the 'end of history' narrative projected by Yoweri Museveni, Meles Zenawi, Hasan al-Turabi, or Isaias Afwerki. Such a biased approach came at the cost of other stories of opposition and backlashes to dominant nationalist agenda. While the objective here is not to deny the importance of these movements and leaders, such an exclusive approach erases, with no clear justification, swathes of the population, potential alternatives, political dynamics, and historical continuities from the political landscape. How the so-called 'losers' of self-proclaimed 'liberation' have responded to hegemonic nationalist projects remain a poorly understood phenomenon. Such an approach has started to gain ground in the Southern African literature, but the Horn is yet to embrace it fully.[24]

Competing nationalisms are at the heart of political dynamics in the Horn. Nationalism needs to be taken seriously and be understood, as Verhoeven put it, as an 'idea worth dying for'.[25] There is indeed no 'End of History' but dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony in which the ideology of nationalism plays a crucial role for elites to articulate their political projects. Ethiopian politics has been dominated by competing visions of the nation that has led to intense violence between the Oromo, the Amhara, and the Tigrayans, among others. Erlich demonstrated the fierce competition between a 'Amhara thesis' and a 'Tigrayan thesis' when it comes to define what 'Ethiopia' means. 'The region's history',

[23] Marina Ottaway, "Nationalism Unbound: The Horn of African Revisited " *SAIS Review (1989-2003)* 12, no. 2 (1992).
[24] Alexander et al., " Liberation Beyond the Nation: An Introduction."
[25] Verhoeven, H. (2023). "An Idea Worth Dying For": Power, Conflict and the Enduring Primacy of Nationalism in the Horn of Africa, presentation at the European Conference on African Studies, Koln, June 2023

he argued, 'has often rotated around the axis of struggle between these two visions'.[26] After almost three decades of domination, the end of the hegemony of Tigrayans over Ethiopia in 2018 has reopened intense competition among different groups, all with their own internal struggles for power, leading to widespread violence across the country. Federal-regional relations, centralization, and representation remain, like in South Sudan, ongoing debates.[27] In Sudan, the definition of the nation has been captured by elites from central Sudan, leaving peripheries constantly unrepresented. The ongoing civil war, while certainly the result of military competition, raised important questions about the role and place of Darfur in Sudan and has highlighted how competing visions of the nation have continued to co-exist since the independence of South Sudan, stuck in between concepts of Arabism and Africanism.[28] The question of the Somali nation, an imagined future spread across different countries in the Horn, continues to challenge modernist assumptions about the nation-state. It also shows the contingent character of nationalism and the role of elites in mobilizing it (or not) depending on changing webs of power. Competing nationalisms are hence not a relic of the past in the Horn of Africa, inviting researchers to explore the role of elites, nationalism, and power as a catalyst of political change across the region.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis has aimed to make a compelling case for revisiting the study of elites and nationalism as a lens for understanding political power in Africa. It is my hope that it encourages future research that takes a social approach to elites, shedding light on the

[26] Haggai Erlich, *Greater Tigray and the Mysterious Magnetism of Ethiopia* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2023).
[27] Jonathan Fisher and Meressa Tsehaye Gebrewahd, "'Game over'? Abiy Ahmed, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and Ethiopia's political crisis," *African Affairs* 118, no. 470 (2018).
[28] Amal Ibrahim Madibbo, "Conflict and the conceptions of identities in the Sudan," *Current Sociology* 60, no. 3 (2012).

dynamics and processes behind the rise and collapse of nationalist political projects and their consequences. This thesis moreover raised important questions that could offer valuable directions for future research. First, it appears urgent to investigate the intersection of gender and elite formation, especially how masculinist ideologies shape the terms of political legitimacy and inclusion. Existing power structures often rely on gendered assumptions that privilege certain performances of masculinity while marginalizing or excluding alternative gender identities and expressions from political spaces. Although this thesis underscores the significance of gender, it merely begun, if at all, to explore the depth and complexity of these entanglements. Future research should critically examine how gendered hierarchies are reproduced within elite networks, how women navigate or resist these structures, and how these interactions mean for the making and un-making of nationalist projects in Africa.

Second, how states are built and how they attempt to project authority and maintain sovereignty has been at the centre of much scholarly attention. *State weakness,* sovereignty, and the attempt by African elites to overcome this conundrum – or not – has been an important topic for discussion in the African politics scholarship. Jones, Soares de Oliveira, and Verhoeven's *illiberal state-building* argument has in this regard paved an important path that many scholars have followed since.[29] They indeed presented an important argument: elites, instead of passively managing their rents, have aspirations and clearly defined state-building projects aimed to assert sovereignty and (re)shape the society they live in. A political-economy approach on state-building gained ground, focusing on elites' historically situated ideas and aspirations. Verhoeven for instance insisted on the central role of the 'hydro-agricultural mission' to the state-building aspirations of the Al-Ingaz regime in Sudan in the early 2000s. 'Turabi and his

[29] Jones, Soares de Oliveira, and Verhoeven, *Africa's Illiberal State-Builders*.

lieutenants', he wrote, 'identified the Nile as Sudan's lifeline and its most important political artery, crucial to Al-Ingaz' ambition to remake state and society and its own exercise of power over them'.[30] Soares de Oliveira demonstrated how the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola started a state-led and oil-fuelled national reconstruction in post-conflict Angola, transforming Angola into Africa's third largest economy.[31] More recently, Terrefe explored, through an analysis of a railway that connects Ethiopia to the Red Sea, how the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front understood infrastructures as a tool of state-building in Ethiopia, allowing the ruling party to project authority into contested territories.[32] However, these have consistently downplayed 'nationalism's role in modern state building by analytically separating the rise of nationalism from that of the modern state'.[33] Understanding how nationalism is integral part – and not a secondary issue – of the political projects of state-builders should bring new light on state-building in Africa.

Third, this thesis has focused on the internal politics of South Sudan, only briefly integrating the nationalist project of Equatorian elites within the broader East African region. However, the role of regional politics and transnational networks on the internal dynamics of competing nationalisms should be further explored, as this thesis has demonstrated how the regional East African security structure did not favour the expansion of the Equatorian project in South Sudan. Moreover, this thesis has emphasized the role of nationalism in shaping dynamics *within* a state, but how nationalism structures

[30] Verhoeven, *Water, civilization, and power in Sudan : the political economy of military-Islamist state-building*, 4.
[31] Oliveira, *Magnificent and beggar land : Angola since the Civil War*; Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, "Business success, Angola-style: postcolonial politics and the rise and rise of Sonangol," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 4 (2007).
[32] Biruk Terrefe, " Renaissance derailed: The politics of infrastructural statecraft in Ethiopia" (D.Phil University of Oxford, 2024).
[33] Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation–state building, migration and the social sciences," *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 306.

the politics *between* states in Africa remains unexplored.[34] The international relations of Africa have too often been understood solely in terms of Realpolitik and extraversion.[35] How nationalism shapes both interstate relations and dynamics of hegemony and counter-hegemony across the African continent warrants rigorous investigation in future research agendas – particularly the Great Lakes region, where Rwanda has demonstrated a hegemonic expansionist agenda, and the Horn of Africa, where contested borders and enclaves persist, offering potentially significant analytical insights.

[34] Note that Verhoeven recently touched upon that issue in a presentation at the European Conference on African Studies (2023), arguing that 'projects of nation-building, state-building and revolutionary transformation and the nationalist opposition which they generate cannot be understood separately from the international relations of the Horn of Africa'.
[35] Roessler and Verhoeven, *Why Comrades Go To War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict*.

Appendix

List of Interviews (anonymized – list made available to examiners)

ID	Name	Description	Place
1	Alan Boswell	South Sudan Analyst, International Crisis Group	Remote
2	XXXX	Director, Horn of Africa Programme, ICG	Remote
3	XXXX	Political Advisor to Ministry of Cabinet Affairs	Juba
4	XXXX	Former Minister of Finance, Sudan & Founder of the Ebony Center for Strategic Studies	Juba
5	Jacob Dut Chuol	Associate Professor of Politics, University of Juba	Juba
6	XXX	Central Equatorian MP	Juba
7	Yosa Wawa	Professor of History, University of Juba	Juba
8	Taban Lo Liyong	Equatorian Intellectual, former politician	Juba
9	Aggrey Tisa Sabuni	Former Minister of Finance, South Sudan	Juba
10	XXXX	Central Equatorian MP	Juba
11	Benjamin Taban	Equatorian Diaspora Representative in the UK	Juba
12	XXXX	Journalist, Eye Radio	Juba
13	XXXX	MSF Operations Manager, East Africa	Nairobi
14	David Otim	Eastern Equatorian Community Leader, Former SPLM-IO representative in Kampala, Uganda	Juba
15	James Oates	Diplomat, UK High Commision in South Sudan	Juba
16	Charles Jibi	Political Affairs Officer, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in South Sudan	Juba
17	Richard Aludra	Development Cooperation Officer, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in South Sudan	Juba
18	XXXX	Central Equatorian MP	Juba
19	Daniel Thiong Akech	South Sudan Analyst, International Crisis Group	Remote
20	Jerome Tubiana	Independent Researcher	Paris
21	XXXX	Equatorian Intellectual and Dean of the University of Juba	Juba
22	XXXX	Central Equatorian Politician, former member of SPLM-IO	Juba
23	XXXX	Former Diplomat, Swedish Embassy in South Sudan	Rome
24	Joseph Bakosoro	Former Governor of Western Equatoria	Juba

25	XXXX	Independent Consultant	Nairobi
26	Christian Bader	Ambassador of France in South Sudan	Juba
27	Aly Verjee	Former advisor to the chief mediator of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development-led peace process for South Sudan	Remote
28	XXXX	Equatorian, former Member of the SPLM	Juba
29	XXXX	Central Equatorian MP	Juba
30	Sapana Abui	Former Deputy Governor of Western Equatoria	Juba
31	Manase Lomule	Former Deputy Governor of Central Equatoria	Juba
32	XXXX	Central Equatorian Community Leader	Juba
33	XXXX	MSF Head of Mission, South Sudan	Juba
34	XXXX	Former South Sudan Political Advisor to the European Union Special Representative to the Horn of Africa	Remote
35	XXXX	SPLM-IO, Central Equatorian, former Governor for Yei River State in South Sudan	Juba
36	XXXX	South Sudanese Political Analyst	Juba
37	Cirisio Zachariah	Central Equatorian Minister of Education, Member of the SPLM-IO	Juba
38	XXXX	Founding director of the Sudd Institute	Remote
39	XXXX	Political Affairs Adviser, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs	Juba
40	XXXX	Humanitarian & Conflict Analyst, Save the Children South Sudan	Paris
41	Tomoko Watanabe	Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of Japan in Juba	Juba
42	XXXX	South Sudan Senior Programme Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue	Nairobi
43	XXXX	Equatorian Professor, Juba University	Juba
44	Douglas Johnson	Historian, specialist of the Nuer and the SPLM	Oxford
45	XXXX	Former Central Equatoria State Minister and Equatorian intellectual	Juba
46	XXXX	Equatorian intellectual, leader of the Equatorian Diaspora in the UK	Oxford
47	XXXX	Equatorian intellectual, member of the Equatorian Diaspora in the UK	Oxford
48	XXXX	Leader of National Democratic Movement, former member of the SPLM	Remote
49	XXXX	Research Fellow, University of Oxford	Oxford
50	XXXX	Press Secretary of Louis Lobong, Governor of Eastern Equatoria	Juba

Bibliography

Abdelhay, Ashraf, Busi Makoni, and Sinfree Makoni. "The Colonial Linguistics of Governance in Sudan: The Rejaf Language Conference, 1928." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2016): 343-58.

Aberbach, Joel F., and Bert A. Rockman. "Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35, no. 4 (2002): 673–76.

Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa ". *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 782-94.

Adebanwi, Wale. *How to Become a Big Man in Africa: Subalternity, Elites, and Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Nigeria.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2024.

———. *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning.* Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora. Boydell & Brewer, 2016.

———. *YorùBá Elites and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria : ỌBáFẹ́Mi Awọ́LóWọ̀ and Corporate Agency.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Adebanwi, Wale "The City, Hegemony and Ethno-Spatial Politics: The Press and the Struggle for Lagos in Colonial Nigeria." *Nationalism & ethnic politics* 9, no. 4 (2003): 25–51.

Adebanwi, Wale, and Rogers Orock. *Elites and the Politics of Accountability in Africa.* Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 2021.

Agamlong Guem Bol, Fabian. *Memoirs of a Village-Born General.* Bourchier Books, 2016.

Ahram, Ariel, Patrick Köllner, and Rudra Sil. *Comparative Area Studies : Methodological Rationales and Cross-Regional Applications.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Ajak, Peter Biar. "Building on Sand: The Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army (Splm/a) and State Formation in South Sudan." PhD University of Cambridge, 2017.

Al Youha, Ali. " Inventing the Khalīj̄ī State: Formation of Political Sovereignty in the Gulf." University of Oxford, 2024.

Aleir, Abel. *Too Many Agreements Dishonoured.* Reading: Ithac Press, 1990.

Alexander, Jocelyn, Paolo Israel, Miles Larmer, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira. " Liberation Beyond the Nation: An Introduction." *Journal of southern African studies* 46, no. 5 (2020): 821-28.

Alexander, Jocelyn, JoAnn McGregor, and Terence Ranger. *Violence & Memory : One Hundred Years in the "Dark Forests" of Matabeleland. .* Oxford: James Currey, 2000.

Allman, Jean Marie. *The Quills of the Porcupine : Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana.* Madison, UNITED STATES: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

Anastasiou, Michaelangelo. *Nationalism and Hegemony: The Consolidation of the Nation in Social and Political Life* London: Routeledge, 2022.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 1983.

Anderson, David M. "'Yours in Struggle for Majimbo'. Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955-64." *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005): 547-64.

Annex 4 - Report on the Research on the Proliferation and Trafficking in Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in Yambio, Maridi, Kajo-Keji, and Yei River Counties, Equatoria, South Sudan. Larjour Consultancy (2002).

Archer, Margaret S. *Being Human: The Problem of Agency.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009.

———. *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Atieno-Odhiambo, Elisha Stephen. "Hegemonic Enterprises and Instrumentalities of Survival: Ethnicity and Democracy in Kenya." *African Studies Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 223-49.

Autesserre, Séverine. *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding.* Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Awenengo Dalberto, Severine. *L'idée De La Casamance Autonome.* Paris Khartala, 2024.

Awi Vuni, Federico, "Deploring Recent Equatorian Governors' Dismissal by Kiir," *Pachodo.org*, 2015.

Ayom Dor, Malual. "Conflict Resolution as a Learning Process: The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army 1983-2005." PhD, King's College London, unknown.

Badiey, Naseem. "Les Dynamiques Locales De La Construction Étatique à Juba, 2005-2008." *Politique Africaine* 122 (2011): 21-39.

———. *The State of Post-Conflict Reconstruction : Land, Urban Development and State-Building in Juba, Southern Sudan.* Eastern Africa Series. Woodbridge, Suffolk England: James Currey, 2014.

Badiey, Naseem "The Strategic Instrumentalization of Land Tenure in State-Building: The Case of Juba, South Sudan." *Africa* 83, no. 1 (2016): 57-77.

Baker, Aryn. "Rebel Leader Riek Machar Returns to South Sudan—and Brings Hopes for Peace with Him." *Time Magazine*, 26 April 2016.

Baker, Samuel. *Ismailïa: A Narrative of the Expediton to Central Africa for the Suppression of the Slave Trade.* New York Harper & Brothers, 1874.

Balibar, Etienne, and Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities.* London: Verso, 1991.

Ballentine, Karen, and Jake Sherman. *The Political Economy of Armed Conflict: Beyond Greed and Grievance.* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

Bank, World. *Public Finance Management Assessment: South Sudan.* (31 May 2012).

Barker, Rodney. "Whose Legitimacy? Elites, Nationalism and Ethnicity in the United Kingdom." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 21, no. 2 (1995): 207-14.

Bassin, Mark. "Politics from Nature: Environment, Ideology, and the Determinist Tradition." In *A Companion to Political Geography*, edited by John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell and Gerard Toal. London: Wiley & Sons, 2007.

Bates, Robert, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R. Weingast. *Analytic Narratives.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Bayart, Jean-Francois. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly.* Second Edition ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

Bayart, Jean-Francois, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou. *The Criminalization of the State in Africa.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

Bentrovato, Denise, and Merethe Skårås. "Ruptured Imaginings Amid Emerging Nationhood: The Unsettled Narrative of "Unity in Resistance" in South Sudanese History Textbooks." *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (2023): 1041-56.

Bereketeab, Redie. *National Liberation Movements as Government in Africa* Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.
Berridge, Willow. "Colonial Education and the Shaping of Islamism in Sudan, 1946-1956." *British journal of Middle Eastern studies* 46, no. 4 (2019): 583–601.
———. *Hasan Al-Turabi : Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
Bloom, Peter J., Stephan F. Miescher, and Takyiwaa Manuh. *Modernization as Spectacle in Africa.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.
Booth, David, and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi. "Developmental Patrimonialism? The Case of Rwanda." *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012): 379–403.
Boswell, Alan. *Conflict and Crisis in South Sudan's Equatoria.* United States Institute of Peace (New York: 2021).
———. *Insecure Power and Violence: The Rise and Fall of Paul Malong and the Mathiang Anyoor.* Small Arms Survey (October 2019).
Bourdieu, Pierre , and Loïc Wacquant. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992.
Braak, Bruno, and John Justin Kenyi. *Customary Authorities Displaced: The Experience of Western Equatorians in Ugandan Refugee Settlements.* Rift Valley Institute (Nairobi, Kenya: 2018).
Branch, Adam. " Decolonizing the African Studies Centre." *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 36, no. 2 (2018): 73-91.
Branch, Adam, and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly. "Winning the War, but Losing the Peace? The Dilemma of Splm/a Civil Administration and the Tasks Ahead." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2005): 1-20.
Branch, Adam, and Zachariah Mampilly. "Winning the War, but Losing the Peace? The Dilemma of Splm/a Civil Administration and the Tasks Ahead." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43, 1 (2005): 1-20.
Bratton, Michael, and Nicolas van de Walle. "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa ". *World Politics* 46, no. 4 (1994): 453-89.
Breuilly, John. *Nationalism and the State.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.
Brooke, Peter. "Looking at Listening: Gender and Race in Commercial Advertising for Radio Sets in Southern Africa from the 1950s to the 1970s." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 36, no. 1 (2024): 74-93.
———. "Radio in Africa: Past and Present." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 36, no. 1 (2024): 1-5.
Brubaker, Rogers. *Ethnicity without Groups.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
———. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe.* Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1996.
Burr, Millar, and Robert O. Collins. *Requiem for the Sudan : War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile.* New York: Routledge, 2018.
"C. Equatoria Governor: 'We Stand for Federalism'." *Radio Tamazuj*, 5 June 2014.
Carrier, Neil, and Celia Nyamweru. "Reinventing Africa's National Heroes: The Case of Mekatilili, a Kenyan Popular Heroine." *African Affairs* 115, no. 461 (2016): 599-620.
Cash Grab: How a Billion-Dollar Credit Scam Robbed South Sudan of Fuel, Food, and Medicine. The Sentry (New York: October 2022).
Castelein, Klaas. *Zo Scherp Als Een Pijl: Het Verhaal Van De Arrow Boys Uit Oost-Oeganda* Leiden: African Studies Centre, Leiden University, 2014.

Cawood, Stephanie, and Jonathan Fisher. "“It Should Be a Constant Reminder”: Space, Meaning and Power in Post-Liberation Africa." *Political Geography* 99 (2022): 102782.

"Central Equatoria Residents Reject Governor-Elect, Petition Nec." *Sudan Tribune*, 11 May 2010.

Chabal, Patrick, and Jean-Pascal Daloz. *Africa Works : Disorder as Political Instrument.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Chandra, Kanchan. "Redefining the Relationship with the Field." *Comparative Politics Section Newsletter* 25, no. 2 (2015).

Chandra, Rajshree. *Competing Nationalisms: The Sacred and Political Life of Jagat Narain Lal.* Gurugram: Penguin Random House, 2022.

Checchi, Francesco, Adrienne Testa, Abdihamid Warsame, and Rachel Burns. Le Quach. *Estimates of Crisis-Attributable Mortality in South Sudan, December 2013-April 2018.* The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (London: 2018).

Chemouni, Benjamin. "Introduction to the Issue: The Debated Research on the Rwandan State." *Politique Africaine* 160, no. 4 (2020): 7-34.

Chemouni, Benjamin, and Assumpta Mugiraneza. "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda.". *African affairs* 119, no. 474 (2020): 115–40.

Civilian Devastation: Abuses by All Parties in the War in Southern Sudan Human Rights Watch (June 1994).

Clapham, Christopher. *African Guerrillas.* Oxford: James Currey, 1998.

———. *The Horn of Africa: State Formation and Decay.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

———. "The International Politics of African Guerrilla Movements." *South African Journal of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (1995): 81-91.

———. *Third World Politics: An Introduction.* London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1985.

Cliffe, Lionel, and John Markakis. "Editorial." *Review of African political economy* 11, no. 30 (1984): 2.

Coghlan, Nicholas. *Collapse of a Country : Memoirs of a Diplomat in South Sudan.* London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017.

Cohen, Abner. *The Politics of Elite Culture.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Coleman, James. *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism.* Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958.

Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War ". *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004): 563-95.

Collins, Robert O. *A History of Modern Sudan.* Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

———. *Shadows in the Grass: Britain in the Southern Sudan 1918-1956.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Collins, Robert O. . *Land Beyond the Rivers : The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. "Africa Observed: Discourses of the Imperial Imagination’ Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation." In *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation*, edited by R.R. Grinker and C.B. Steiner, 689-703. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.

Communique of the 23 Rd Extra-Ordinary Session of the Igad Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Situation in South Sudan. Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa 27 December 2013.
"Communique of the 24th Extra-Ordinary Session of the Igad Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Situation in South Sudan." news release., 31 January 2014.
Conflict in Western Equatoria. Small Arms Survey (Geneva: 2016).
"Conflicting Interpretations Emerge over South Sudan's Parliament Speaker." *Sudan Tribune*, 30 June 2016.
Connell, Dan. *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution.* Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1997.
Cormack, Zoe. " The Making and Remaking of Gogrial: Landscape, History, and Memory in South Sudan." PhD, University of Durham, 2014.
Craze, Joshua. *Jemma's War: Political Strife in Western Equatoria.* Small Arms Survey (October 2023).
Cristina Roque, Paula. *Insurgent Nations: Rebel Rule in Angola and South Sudan.* London: Hurst Publishers, 2024.
Daloz, Jean-Pascal. *The Sociology of Elite Distinction: From Theoretical to Comparative Perspectives.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
Daly, Samuel Fury Childs. *Soldier's Paradise: Militarism in Africa after Empire.* Duke University Press, 2024.
Dar, Abdul Maajid. "Revisiting Key Debates in the Study of Nationalism." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9, no. 1 (2022): 411.
de Oliveira, Ricardo Soares. "Business Success, Angola-Style: Postcolonial Politics and the Rise and Rise of Sonangol." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 4 (2007): 595-619.
de Pina-Cabral, João , and Maria Antónia Pedroso de Lima. *Elites : Choice, Leadership and Succession.* Lisbon: Etnográfica Press, 2000.
de Simone, Sara. "Playing the 'Fragile State' Card
the Splm and State Extraversion in South Sudan." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 56, no. 3 (2018): 395-420.
———. *State-Building South Sudan : International Intervention and the Formation of a Fragmented State.* . Leiden: Brill, 2022.
de Waal, Alex. "Hunger in Global War Economies: Understanding the Decline and Return of Famines." *Disasters*: e12661.
de Waal, Alex *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa.* London: Polity 2015.
"A Debate on Federalism at Juba University." news release., 2014.
Del Vicario, Danielle. "The Lives, Deaths, and Afterlives of John Garang: History-Making and Politics in Sudan and South Sudan." University of Oxford 2023.
Del Vicario, Danielle "John Garang on Air: Radio Battles in Sudan's Second Civil War." *Journal of African history* 63, no. 3 (2022): 309–27.
Delannoi, Gil. "Le Nationalisme Et La Catalyse Ideologique." In *Nations Et Nationalismes*, edited by Serge Cordellier and Elizabeth Poisson. Paris: La découverte 1995.
Democracy on Hold: Rights Violations in the April 2010 Sudan Elections. Human Rights Watch (New York: 30 June 2010).
Denzin, Norman , and Yvonna Lincoln. "Transforming Qualitative Research Methods:Is It a Revolution?". *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 24, no. 3 (1995): 349-58.

Desrosiers, Marie-Eve, and Aidan Russell. "Histories of Authority in the African Great Lakes: Trajectories and Transactions." *Africa* 90, no. 5 (2020): 952-71.
Doll, Christian. "How ThÖƆ Piny Became Juba Na Bari: Naming and Place-Making in Urban South Sudan." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 48, no. 2 (2024): 244-62.
———. "Sovereignty from 'Ground Zero': Power through Performance in Independent South Sudan." *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (2023): 633-47.
Dorman, Sara Rich. "Born Powerful? Authoritarian Politics in Postliberation Eritrea and Zimbabwe." In *From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa*, edited by Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close and Gary Prevost, 157-79. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007.
———. "Post-Liberation Politics in Africa: Examining the Political Legacy of Struggle." *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 6 (2006): 1085-101.
———. *Understanding Zimbabwe: From Liberation to Authoritarianism* London: Hurst Publishers, 2016.
Driscoll, Barry. "Big Man or Boogey Man? The Concept of the Big Man in Political Science." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 58, no. 4 (2020): 521-50.
Dülffer, Jost, and Marc Frey. *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century.* London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011.
Dye, Barnaby Joseph. "Introduction: The Ideology of the Illiberal Modernisers in Africa." *Critical African Studies* 14, no. 3 (2022): 219-30.
"E Equatoria Govt Challenges Petition against Governor." *Radio Tamazuj*, 22 July 2015.
Elgenius, Gabrielle. *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism: Celebrating Nationhood.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
Ellis, Elizabeth N. *The Great Power of Small Nations.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022.
Ending the Crisis in South Sudan through Mediatio: A Progress Report of the Special Envoys to the Igad Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (31 January 2014).
Englebert, Pierre. "Pre-Colonial Institutions, Post-Colonial States, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa." *Political Research Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2000): 7-36.
Englund, Lena. "Autobiography as Archival Act: Reckoning with Personal and Political Pasts in They Called You Dambudzo and Cocktail Hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness." *Life Writing* 20, no. 3 (2023): 509-26.
"Equatoria Caucus Divided on Vote on 28 States." *Radio Tamazuj*, 20 November 2015.
"The Equatoria Consultative Conference, Nyakuron Cultural Center, Juba, South Sudan.". *PaanLuel Wël* 11 May 2013.
"Equatoria Postpones Extraordinary Conference." *Catholic Radio Network*, 8 January 2014.
"Equatoria Students Urge Unity for Prosperous S. Sudan." *Sudan Tribune*, 7 Paril 2014.
"Equatorian Caucus Demands Kiir Release Governor Bakosoro." *Radio Tamazuj*, 19 August 2015.
"Equatorians Advocate for Justice and Equality in S. Sudan." *Sudan Tribune* 15 April 2011
"Equatorians Hold Pre-Independence Conference." *United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, 17 April 2011. https://unmis.unmissions.org/equatorians-hold-pre-independence-conference.
"Equatorions Need to Talk Leadership, Economic Issues." *Catholic Radio Network*, 10 May 2013.

Erikson, R.S, and K.L. Tedin. *American Public Opinion (6th Ed.).* New York Longman, 2003.
Erlich, Haggai. *Greater Tigray and the Mysterious Magnetism of Ethiopia.* London: Hurst Publishers, 2023.
Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *The Nuer a Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
———. "The Origin of the Ruling Clan of the Azande." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 4 (1957): 322-43.
Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press, 1963.
Fearon, James, and Alexander Wendt. "Rationalism V. Constructivism: A Skeptical View." In *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons. London: SAGE Publications, 2006.
Feyissa, Dereje. "Aid Negotiation: The Uneasy "Partnership" between Eprdf and the Donors." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011): 788-817.
Final Report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan. AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan (Addis Ababa: 15 october 2014).
Fisher, Jonathan. *East Africa after Liberation : Conflict, Security and the State since the 1980s.* African Studies Series. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
———. "International Perceptions and African Agency: Uganda and Its Donors 1986-2010." D.Phil, University of Oxford, 2011.
———. "Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda's 2007 Intervention in Somalia." *African Affairs* 111, no. 444 (2012): 404-23.
Fisher, Jonathan, and Meressa Tsehaye Gebrewahd. "'Game Over'? Abiy Ahmed, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and Ethiopia's Political Crisis." *African Affairs* 118, no. 470 (2018): 194-206.
Foucher, Vincent. "Cheated Pilgrims: Education, Migration and the Birth of Casamançais Nationalism (Senegal)." School of Oriental and African Studies, 2002.
Francis, Suzanne. *Institutionalizing Elite: Political Elite, Formation and Change in Kwazulu-Natal Provincial Legislature.* Leiden: Brill 2011.
"From Power Struggle to Uprising ". *Africa Confidential*, 19 December 2013.
From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa. Edited by Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close and Gary Prevost. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007.
Fumanti, Mattia. *The Politics of Distinction : African Elites from Colonialism to Liberation in a Namibian Frontier Town.* Canon Pyon, [Herefordshire]: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2016.
"G. Equatoria Politicians Discuss Federalism as Igga Lashes out at Rebel Leader Machar." *Sudan Tribune*, 25 May 2014.
Galaty, John "How Visual Figures Speak: Narrative Inventions of ``the Pastoralist" in East Africa." *Visual Anthropology* 15 (2022): 347-67.
Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism.* 2nd Edition ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
Gerring, John. "Mere Description." *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2012): 721-46.
Gettleman, Jeffrey. "After Years of Struggle, South Sudan Becomes a New Nation." *New York Times* (Juba), 9 July 2011.
Gorski, Philip. "The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism." *The American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 5 (2000): 1428-68.

Gray, Richard. *A History of the Southern Sudan, 1839-1889.* London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
"Greater Equatoria Youth Leadership: We Stand Firmly Behind Governor Clement Wani Konga." *South Sudan News Agency*, 7 June 2014.
Green, Daniel M. *Constructivism and Comparative Politics.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.
Greenfeld, Liah. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1992.
Guba, E. G., and Yvonna Lincoln. "Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry." *Educational Communication & Technology Journal* 30, no. 4 (1982): 233–52.
Hagmann, Tobias, and Markus V. Hoehne. "Failures of the State Failure Debate: Evidence from the Somali Territories." *Journal of International Development* 21, no. 1 (2009): 42-57.
Hamilton, Rebecca. "Special Report: The Wonks Who Sold Washington on South Sudan." *Reuters*, 11 July 2012.
Hidden in Plain View: Refugees Living without Protection in Nairobi and Kampala. Human Rights Watch (New York: November 2002).
Hillary, Isaac Waanzi. "“This Kingdom Will Not Be Like the Kingdom(S) in the Era of Gbudue”: On the Rebirth of the Azande Kingdom." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 14, no. 3 (2024): 606-18.
Hirschi, Caspar. *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011.
Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
Homewood, Katherine. *The Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies.* Oxford: James Currey 2008.
Horswell, Mike, and Kristin Skottki. *The Making of Crusading Heroes and Villains.* London: Routledge, 2020.
Howlett, Marnie, and Bohdana Kurylo. "Reframing Reflexivity: Collaborative Ethics, Collective Responsibility, and Learnings from Researching Russia’s War against Ukraine." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (2025): 1-14.
Hutchinson, Sharon E. "A Curse from God? Religious and Political Dimensions of the Post-1991 Rise of Ethnic Violence in South Sudan." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39, no. 2 (2001): 307-31
———. *Nuer Dilemmas : Coping with Money, War, and the State.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
Hutchinson, Sharon E., and Jok Jok Madut. "Sudan’s Prolonged Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities." *African Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (1999): 125-45.
Hutchinson, Sharon E., and Naomi Pendle. "Violence, Legitimacy, and Prophecy: Nuer Struggles with Uncertainty in South Sudan." *American ethnologist* 42, no. 3 (2015): 415–30.
"‘I Am Splm and Splm Is Me’ – Says New Governor of W. Equatoria." *Sudan Tribune*, 26 May 2010.
Iom South Sudan, Vol.1 Issue 3. The International Organisation for Migration (November 2011).
"Is South Sudan Government Trying to Mute Federalism Debate? ." *Voice of America*, 1 July 2014.
Iyob, Ruth. *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism 1941-1993.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *For a Theory of Nationalism*. Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Sciences Po (June 2003).
———. *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy.* Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2021.
Jangaling, Lujang John. *Major General Clement Wani Konga : A Hero or a Villain* Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers 2023.
Johnson, Douglas H. "Briefing: The Crisis in South Sudan." *African Affairs* 113, no. 451 (2014): 300-09.
———. *Empire and the Nuer: Sources on the Pacification of the Southern Sudan, 1898-1930.* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2016.
———. "The Fighting Nuer: Primary Sources and the Origins of a Stereotype." *Africa* 51, no. 1 (1981): 508-27.
———. "The Heglig Oil Dispute between Sudan and South Sudan." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, no. 3 (2012): 561-69.
———. *Nuer Prophets : A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Oxford
New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1994.
———. "Political Ecology in the Upper Nile: The Twentieth Century Expansion of the Pastoral 'Common Economy." *The Journal of African History* 30, no. 3 (1989): 463-86.
———. *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Old Wars & New Wars.* African Issues. Suffolk James Currey, 2016.
———. *South Sudan : A New History for a New Nation.* Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016.
———. "Tribal Boundaries and Border Wars: Nuer-Dinka Relations in the Sobat and Zaraf Valleys, C.1860-1976." *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 2 (1982): 183-203
Johnson, Hilde F. *South Sudan the Untold Story : From Independence to Civil War.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2016.
Jones, William, Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, and Harry Verhoeven. *Africa's Illiberal State-Builders.* Oxford Department of International Development (Oxford 2013).
Jovchelovitch, Sandra, and Martin W. Bauer. "Narrative Interviewing [Online]. London: Lse Research Online." 2000.
"Juba Jitters ". *Africa Confidential* 2 November 2012.
Justin, Peter Hakim, and Lotje De Vries. "Governing Unclear Lines: Local Boundaries as a (Re)Source of Conflict in South Sudan." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34, no. 1 (2019): 31-46.
Kaldor, Mary. "In Defence of New Wars." *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* (2013).
Kaldor, Mary *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era.* Cambridge: Polity 2012.
Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Lelan Read. *Field Research in Political Science : Practices and Principles.* Cambridge Cambridge University Press., 2015.
Kaplan, David H., and Guntram H. Herb. "How Geography Shapes National Identities." *National Identities* 13, no. 4 (2011): 349-60.
Karlstrom, Mikael Bo. "The Cultural Kingdom in Uganda: Popular Royalism and the Restoration of the Buganda Kingship."Ph.D., The University of Chicago, 1999 (9934075).

Katumba-Wamala, Edward. "The National Resistance Army (Nra) as a Guerilla Force." *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 11, no. 3 (2000): 160-71.
Kennes, Erik, and Miles Larmer. *The Katangese Gendarmes and War in Central Africa.* Bloomington, UNITED STATES: Indiana University Press, 2016.
Khan, Shamus Rahman. "The Sociology of Elites ". *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012): 361-77.
"Kiir Praises Splm Unity." *Sudan Tribune*, 11 January 2016.
"Kiir Raises Fears of 'Kokora' under Federal System." *Radio Tamazuj*, 10 July 2014.
Kindersley, Nicki, and Øystein H. Rolandsen. "Civil War on a Shoestring: Rebellion in South Sudan's Equatoria Region Civil Wars." *Civil wars* 19, no. 3 (2017): 308-24.
Kratz, Corinne, and Robert Gorden. "Persistent Popular Images of Pastoralists." *Visual Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (2010): 247-65.
"Lagu's Appointment as Presidential Advisor Welcomed by Splm-Ns." *Sudan Tribune*, 19 August 2010.
"Lagu's Family Celebrates Acquittal of Corruption Charges." *Sudan Tribune*, 6 May 2010.
Larmer, Miles. *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia.* London: Routledge 2011.
Larmer, Miles, and Jean Sebastian Lecocq. "Historicising Nationalism in Africa." *Nations and nationalism* 24, no. 4 (2018): 893–917.
LaRocco, Annette Alfina, Jamie E. Shinn, and Kentse Madise. "Reflections on Positionalities in Social Science Fieldwork in Northern Botswana: A Call for Decolonizing Research." *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 3 (2020): 845-73.
Laruelle, Marlene. *Russian Nationalism : Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields.* Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.
Lecocq, Jean Sebastian. *Disputed Desert Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2010.
Lefèvre, Raphaël. *Jihad in the City: Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
Leonardi, Cherry. *Dealing with Government in South Sudan : Histories of Chiefship, Community & State.* Eastern Africa Series. Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2013.
———. "Violence, Sacrifice and Chiefship in Central Equatoria, Southern Sudan." *Africa* 77, no. 4 (2007): 535–58.
Leopold, Mark. "Crossing the Line: 100 Years of the North-West Uganda/South Sudan Border." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): 464-78.
Letter of the Three Special Envoys to the Heads of State and Government. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (13 March 2014).
Levine, Victor. "African Patrimonial Regimes in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 18, no. 4 (1980): 657-73.
Lynch, Gabrielle. *I Say to You : Ethnic Politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya.* Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.
"Maapss – Mapping Actors and Alliances Project – South Sudan." Small Arms Survey, https://maapss.org.
Macdonald, Philip. "Tant De Sang Coulera En Ruisseaux. Sources Orales Et écrites Et Le Stéréotype Du Nuer Belliqueux (Soudan)." *Cahiers d'études africaines* 215 (2014): 623-64.
"Machar Warns against Sliding into Regional Politics in the Country." *Sudan Tribune*, 2 June 2013.

Madibbo, Amal Ibrahim. "Conflict and the Conceptions of Identities in the Sudan." *Current Sociology* 60, no. 3 (2012): 302-19.
Mahoney, James, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
"Makuei Appeals for Calm as Gov't Promises to Remove Cattle from Magwi." *Eye Radio* 4 March 2022. https://www.eyeradio.org/makuei-appeals-for-calm-as-govt-promises-to-remove-cattle-from-magwi/.
Malesevic, Sinisa. "Did War Make Nation-States in the Balkans? Nationalisms, Wars and States in the 19th and Early 20th Century South East Europe." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 25, no. 3 (2012): 299-330.
———. "Nationalism and the Power of Ideologies." In *Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism*, edited by G. Delanty and K. Kumar. London: SageEditors, 2006.
Mama, Amina. "Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom." *African Studies Review* 50, no. 1 (2007): 1-26.
Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject : Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism.* Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996.
Manoeli, Sebabatso. *Sudan's "Southern Problem" : Race, Rhetoric and International Relations, 1961-1991* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
Matthew, Arnold, and Matthew(Leriche. *South Sudan: From Revolution to Independence.* London: Hurst & Co Publishers 2012.
Mazrui, Ali. "The Re-Invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Beyond." *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 3 (2005): 68-82.
Mbembe, Achille, Comi Toulabor, and Jean-Francois Bayart. *Le Politique Par Le Bas En Afrique Noire.* Paris: Khartala, 1992.
McAdams, James *Vanguard of the Revolution : The Global Idea of the Communist Party.* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020.
McGregor, JoAnn. *Crossing the Zambezi: The Politics of Landscape on a Central African Frontier.* Woodbridge: James Currey, 2009.
Médard, Jean-Francois. "L'etat Sous-Développé Au Cameroun." In *Cean: Année Africaine 1977*, 37-84. Paris Pedone, 1979.
Metelits, Clare. "Reformed Rebels? Democratization, Global Norms, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army." *Africa Today* 51, no. 1 (2004): 65-82.
Migdal, Joel. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World.* Princeton Princeton University Press, 1988.
Miley, Thomas Jeffrey. "The Nation as Hegemonic Project." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 2 (2018): 183-204.
Miller, Robert. "Elite Formation in Africa: Class, Culture, and Coherence." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 12, no. 4 (1974): 521-42.
Mkandawire, Thandika. "Neopatrimonialism and the Political Economy of Economic Performance in Africa: Critical Reflections." *World Politics* 67, no. 3 (2015): 563-612
Mohajer, Ola, and David Deng. *South Sudan's People Have Spoken on Peace. Is Anyone Listening?* United States Institute of Peace (New York: 2021).
Mpofu, Shepherd. "Making Heroes, (Un)Making the Nation?: Zanu-Pf's Imaginations of the Heroes' Acre, Heroes and Construction of Identity in Zimbabwe from 2000 to 2015." *African identities* 15, no. 1 (2017): 62–78.
Mudimbe, Valentin. "African Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge: An Introduction." *African Studies Review* 28, no. 2:3 (1985): 149-233

Munck, Gerardo L., and Richard Snyder. "Debating the Direction of Comparative Politics:An Analysis of Leading Journals." *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 1 (2007): 5-31.
Mylonas, Harris, and Maya Tudor. *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, Cambridge University Press.
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo. *Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo of Zimbabwe: Politics, Power, and Memory.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
Nicoll, Fergus. *The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon.* London: Sutton Pub Ltd, 2005.
Noren-Nilsson, Astrid "Imagining Cambodia: Competing Nationalisms in the Second Kingdom (1993-)." PhD University of Cambridge 2012.
Nugent, Stephen, and Cris Shore. *Elites Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives.* London: Routeledge, 2002.
"Number of Returnees to South Sudan Passes the 300,000 Mark." news release., 10 February 2009.
Nyaba, Peter Adwok. *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan : An Insider's View. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers, 1997.* Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1997.
Nyombe, Bureng G. V. *Some Aspects of Bari History : A Comparative Linguistic and Oral Tradition Reconstruction.* Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press, 2007.
O'Brien, Jay. " The Formation of the Agricultural Labour Force in Sudan." *Review of African Political Economy* 10, no. 26 (1983): 15-34.
Oil or Nothing: Dealing with South Sudan's Bleeding Finances. International Crisis Group (Nairobi: 6 October 2021).
Oktay, Julianne S. *Grounded Theory, Pocket Guides to Social Work Research Methods* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012.
Oliveira, Ricardo Soares de. *Magnificent and Beggar Land : Angola since the Civil War.* Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.
Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre. "Science Politique Et Anthropologie : Une Formule Gagnant/Gagnant ?" [In fr]. *Politique africaine* n° 161-162, no. 1 (2021): 309-23.
Onomake, Umoloyouvwe Ejiroghene Ovbije. "Elite Exchanges: The Cultural Politics of Chinese Business in Nigeria." University of Sussex, 2023.
"An Open Letter to Vp James Wani from the Equatorian Youths." *PaanLuel Wël* 5 June 2014.
Ottaway, Marina. "Nationalism Unbound: The Horn of African Revisited ". *SAIS Review (1989-2003)* 12, no. 2 (1992): 111-28.
Pailey, Robtel Neajai. "De-Centring the 'White Gaze' of Development." *Development and Change* 51, no. 3 (2019): 729-45.
Pantuliano, Sara, and Irina Mosel. *The Long Road Home: Opportunities and Obstacles to the Reintegration of Idps and Refugees Returning to Southern Sudan and the Three Areas.* Overseas Development Institute (London: 2008).
Parkinson, Sarah Elizabeth. "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War." *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013): 418-32.
Pearce, Justin. *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975–2002.* African Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Peet, Richard. "The Social Origins of Environmental Determinism." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75, no. 3 (1985): 309-33.

Pendle, Naomi. "Contesting the Militarization of the Places Where They Met: The Landscapes of the Western Nuer and Dinka (South Sudan)." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2017): 64–85.
Pendle, Naomi Ruth. *Spiritual Contestations - the Violence of Peace in South Sudan.* Woodbridge, UNITED KINGDOM: Boydell & Brewer, Limited, 2023.
Pierson, Paul. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
Pinaud, Clemence. "Military Kinship, Inc.: Patronage, Inter-Ethnic Marriages and Social Classes in South Sudan." *Review of African political economy* 43, no. 148 (2016): 243–59.
———. "South Sudan: Civil War, Predation and the Making of a Military Aristocracy." *African Affairs* 113, no. 451 (2014): 192-211.
Pool, David. "Revolutionary Crisis and Revolutionary Vanguard: The Emergence of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front." *Review of African political economy* 7, no. 19 (1980): 33-47.
Pourtier, Roland. "Middle Africa, Equatorial Africa: Environment and History." *Herodote* 179, no. 4 (2020): 8-39.
" A Power Struggle, Not a Coup 1st August 2013 ". *Africa Confidential*, 1 August 2013
"President Museveni Calls for Unity in Diversity in War-Torn South Sudan." *Sudan Tribune*, 22 May 2017.
Prunier, Gérard. "Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare: Uganda, Sudan and the Congo (1986–99)." *African Affairs* 103, no. 412 (2004): 359-83.
Prunier, Gérard. *Africa's World War : Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe.* Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
Ranger, Terence. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." In *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 211 - 62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992.
———. "Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe.". *Journal of southern African studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 215–34.
Reid, Richard James. *A History of Modern Uganda.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017.
Reim, Lena. "History-Making as Othering: Perspectives on Zimbabwe's Patriotic History from Matabeleland." In *States and the Making of Others: Perspectives on Social State Institutions and Othering in Southern Africa and Western Europe*, edited by Jeanne Bouyat, Amandine Le Bellec and Lucas Puygrenier, 43-75. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.
Reno, Will. *Warlord Politics and African States* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.
Reuss, Anna. "Politicization, Professionalization, and Personalisation of the Uganda People's Defence Forces." PhD Ghent University, 2018.
Reuss, Anna, and Kristof Titeca. "When Revolutionaries Grow Old: The Museveni Babies and the Slow Death of the Liberation." *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 10 (2017): 2347-66.
Revolutionary Movements in Africa: An Untold Story. Edited by Pascal Bianchini, Ndongo Samba Sylla and Leo Zeilig. 1 ed.: Pluto Press, 2024.
Reyntjens, Filip. *The Great African War : Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996-2006.* Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
———. "Post-1994 Politics in Rwanda: Problematising 'Liberation' and 'Democratisation'." *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 6 (2006): 1103-17.

Rivas, Althea-Maria, and Brendan Ciarán Browne. *Experiences in Researching Conflict and Violence : Fieldwork Interrupted.* Bristol: Policy Press, 2018.
Roach, Steven C. *South Sudan's Fateful Struggle: Building Peace in a State of War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.
Roberts, George. *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
Roberts, M. . *Cast Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of Karava Elite in Sri Lanka.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
Roessler, Philip. *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
Roessler, Philip G., and Harry Verhoeven. *Why Comrades Go to War : Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
Roessler, Philip, and Harry Verhoeven. "Hobbes Revisited: The Commitment Problem, Trust and Preemption." APSA Annual Meeting, 2011.
Rolandsen, Øystein H. " Democratisation in the Sudan and Splm's Second National Convention." Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008
Rolandsen, Øystein H, and M. W. Daly. *A History of South Sudan : From Slavery to Independence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016.
Rotberg, Robert I. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences.* Princeton University Press, 2004.
"S. Sudan Lawmakers Unanimously Endorse Wani Igga as New Vp." *Sudan Tribune*, 24 August 2013.
"Sacked Governor Accepts Decision, Promises to Support New One." *Radio Tamazuj*, 17 August 2015.
Saich, Tony. *From Rebel to Ruler : One Hundred Years of the Chinese Communist Party.* Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press, 2021.
"Salva Kiir: 'Splm Started with Me'." *Radio Tamazuj*, 29 June 2016.
Sanctioned South Sudanese Businessmen Are Skirting Us Sanctions. The Sentry (New York: October 2021).
Schmidt, Elizabeth. *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror.* New York: Cambridge University Press 2013.
———. *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nation*
Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958. Heinemann, 2005.
Schomerus, Mareike. *The Lord's Resistance Army: Violence and Peacemaking in Africa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
———. *Violent Legacies: Insecurity in Sudan's Central and Eastern Equatoria.* Small Arms Survey (Geneva 2008).
Schomerus, Mareike, and Lotje de Vries. "Improvising Border Security: 'A Situation of Security Pluralism' Along South Sudan's Borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 3 (2014): 279-94.
Scott, John. *A Matter of Record : Documentary Sources in Social Research.* Cambridge Polity Press, 1990.
Scroggins, Deborah. *Emma's War: Love, Betrayal and Death in the Sudan.* New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
"Senior Splm Colleagues Give Kiir Ultimatum over Party Crisis." *Sudan Tribune*, 6 December 2013.
Sennesael, Francois, and Harry Verhoeven. "Breaking from the Past? Environmental Narratives, Logics of Power, and the (Re)Production of Food Insecurity in South Sudan." *Disasters* 49, no. 1 (2025): e12658.

———. *Energy and Water for Sovereignty: South Sudan's Regional Diplomacy and the Geopolitics of the Nile Basin.* Columbia University in the City of New York (New York: December 2022).
Singer, Marshall. *The Emerging Elite: A Study of Political Leadership in Ceylon.* Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1964.
Skinner, Kate. *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland: Literacy, Politics and Nationalism, 1914–2014.* African Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Sklar, Richard. *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
Smith, Anthony. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.
Smith, Victoria Ellen. "Radio and the Nation: Histories of Broadcasting, Conflict and Race in Southern Africa." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 55, no. 2 (2021): 393-99.
Soares de Oliveira, Ricardo. *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea.* London: Hurst & Co, 2007.
The South Sudan Defence Force: A Challenge to the Sudan Peace Proces. Institute for Security Studies (8 April 2004).
South Sudan Food Security Update, July 2005. FEWS NET (24 July 2005). https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/south-sudan-food-security-update-july-2005.
South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan. United Nations (2016).
"South Sudan Legislators Warn of Tribal War over 28 States Constitutional Amendment." *Sudan Tribune*, 20 November 2015.
"South Sudan Opposition Head Riek Machar Denies Coup Bid." *BBC* 18 December 2013.
"South Sudan Parliament Intimidated as Power Wrangles Continue." *Sudan Tribune*, 27 August 2013.
"South Sudan to Probe 'Dura Saga' Grain Swindle ". *Voice of America*, 16 May 2013.
"South Sudan Vips Series (Part Iii): Dr. James Wani Igga, a Loyal and Humble Cadre of the Splm/Spla." *PaanLuel Wël*, 28 April 2020.
"South Sudan: "Tribalism, Sectarianism -Wrong Ideology"- President Museveni." *AMECEA*, 2015.
South Sudan: Soldiers Target Ethnic Group in Juba Fighting Human Rights Watch (19 December 2013).
"South Sudan's Equatoria Region Calls for Peaceful Leadership Contest." *Sudan Tribune*, 9 May 2013.
"South Sudan's Equatorians Begin Race for Parliament Speaker." *Sudan Tribune*, 5 May 2016.
South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias. International Crisis Group (Nairobi: 25 May 2016).
"South Sudanese Rebels Say No Differences among Equatorian Opposition Leaders." *Sudan Tribune*, 30 June 2015.
Southall, Roger. *Liberation Movements in Power: Power and State in Southern Africa.* Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013.
Spear, Thomas. "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa." *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003): 3-28.
Srinivasan, Sharath. "War by Other Means: The Politics of Peace Negotiations in Sudan " PhD, University of Oxford, 2010.
———. *When Peace Kills Politics : International Intervention and Unending Wars in the Sudans.* London: Hurst & Company, 2021.

Steytler, Nico. "Non-Centralism in Africa: In Search of the Federal Idea. ." In *A Research Agenda for Federalism Studies*, edited by John Kincaid, 175–86. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019.

Sudan: Roots and Future of the Southern Insurgency. Central Intelligence Agency (February 1986).

"Sudan's Greater Equatoria Conference Discusses Security, Lra." *Sudan Tribune*, 28 February 2007.

Sudan's Nimeiri: Surviving in a Tumultuous Period - an Intelligence Assessment. Central Intelligence Agency, United States of America (June 1983).

Swain, Jon, and Brendan King. "Using Informal Conversations in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 21 (2022).

Tapscott, Rebecca. *Arbitrary States: Social Control and Modern Authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Tendi, Blessing-Miles. *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

———. "Patriotic History and Public Intellectuals Critical of Power." *Journal of southern African studies* 34, no. 2 (2008): 379–96.

Terrefe, Biruk. " Renaissance Derailed: The Politics of Infrastructural Statecraft in Ethiopia." D.Phil, University of Oxford, 2024.

Terrefe, Biruk, and Harry Verhoeven. "The Road (Not) Taken: The Contingencies of Infrastructure and Sovereignty in the Horn of Africa." *Political Geography* 110 (2024): 103070.

Thiong, Daniel Akech. *Politics of Fear in South Sudan : Generating Chaos, Creating Conflict.* London: Zed Books Ltd, 2021.

Thomas, Edward. *South Sudan: A Slow Liberation.* London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Tilly, Charles. *The Vendee: A Sociological Analysis of the Counter-Revolution of 1793.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1964.

———. " Why and How History Matters." In *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, edited by Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006.

Titeca, Kristof. "Who Depends on Whom? Uganda's Refugee 'Success Story', Corruption and the International Community." *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2022): 55-73.

"Top Equatorian Rebel Leader Slams Governors' Stance on Federalism." *Sudan Tribune*, 22 February 2015.

Tounsel, Christopher. *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press 2021.

Triandis, Harry. *Individualism & Collectivism.* Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

Truth and Debate Fall Victim to 'National Security' Rhetoric Amid South Sudan's Crisis. Amnesty International (7 July 2014).

"Two Days Greater Equatoria Ends in Yambio." *Sudan Tribune*, 25 February 2011

Udal, John O. *The Nile in Darkness.* Wilby, Norwich: M. Russell, 1998.

Under Fire: The July 2016 Violence in Juba and Un Response. Center for Civilians in Conflict (United States: 2016).

Untapped and Unprepared: Dirty Deals Threaten South Sudan's Mining Sector. The Sentry (April 2020).

van de Walle, Nicolas. "The Path from Neopatrimonialism: Democracy and Clientelism in Africa Today." In *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and Beyond* edited by Daniel Bach and Mamoudou Gazibo. London: Taylor & Francis, 2012.

van den Berghe, Pierre L. "Race and Ethnicity: A Sociobiological Perspective." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1, no. 4 (1978): 401-11.
Vaughan, Megan. "Africa and the Birth of the Modern World." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (2006): 143-62.
Verhoeven, Harry. "Climate and Water in a Changing Africa: Uncertainty, Adaptation and the Social Construction of Fragile Environments." *Daedalus* 150, no. 4 (2021): 260-77.
———. "The Party and the Gun: African Liberation, Asian Comrades and Socialist Political Technologies." *Third world quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2020): 560–81.
———. "The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa. By Alex De Waal." *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 1021-22.
———. "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Failed States: Somalia, State Collapse and the Global War on Terror." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): 405-25.
———. *Water, Civilization, and Power in Sudan : The Political Economy of Military-Islamist State-Building.* The African Studies Series. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
———. "'What Is to Be Done?' Rethinking Socialism(S) and Socialist Legacies in a Postcolonial World." *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2020): 449-64.
Verhoeven, Harry, and Tefera Negash Gebregziabher. "From Imperial Power to Regional Policeman: Ethiopian Peacekeeping and the Developmental State." *International Affairs* 100, no. 3 (2024): 1067-88.
Verjee, Aly. "How Mediators Conceive of Peace: The Case of Igad in South Sudan, 2013–15." In *Making and Breaking Peace in Sudan and South Sudan*, edited by Sarah Nouwen, Laura James and Sharath Srinivasan, 277-96. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
Vial, Theodore. "Modernity and Teleology." In *Modern Religion, Modern Race*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
Wallis, Andrew. *Stepp'd in Blood : Akazu and the Architects of the Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi.* Winchester: Zero Books 2019.
Walraet, Anne. "Le Sud-Soudan Dans L'attente Du Référendum. Un Regard Sur La Formation De L'etat Par Le Bas." *Politique Africaine* 119 (2010): 189-205.
Wani Igga, James. *South Sudan: Rediscovering Our Roots.* Kampala, Uganda: Roberts & Brothers General Printers, 2010.
Wedeen, Lisa. "Acting "as If": Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 3 (1998): 503-23.
———. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.
Wël, PaanLuel. *The Genius of Dr. John Garang - Speeches on the War of Liberation.* Independent, 2013.
Wendt, Alexander. *The Social Theory of International Politics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
"Where Do the Governors of Equatoria Stand on Federalism?". *Sudan Tribune*, 2015.
White, Luise. "Telling More: Lies, Secrets, and History." *History and Theory* 39, no. 4 (2000): 11-22.
Wild, Hannah, Jok Madut Jok, and Ronak Patel. "The Militarization of Cattle Raiding in South Sudan: How a Traditional Practice Became a Tool for Political Violence." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3, no. 1 (2018): 2.
Willis, Justin. "The Southern Problem: Representing Sudan's Southern Provinces to C.1970." *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 2 (2015): 281-300.

Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick Schiller. "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation–State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences." *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301-34.

Woldemariam, Michael. *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa: Rebellion and Its Discontents.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Wood, Elisabeth "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones." *Qualitative sociology* 29, no. 3 (2006): 73–386.

Woodward, Susan L. *The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Yimenu, Bizuneh. "Federalism and State Restructuring in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Origins, Rationales, and Challenges." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 54, no. 1 (2023): 6-33.

Young, Alden. *Transforming Sudan : Decolonization, Economic Development, and State Formation.* African Studies. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Young, John. *A Fractious Rebellion: Inside the Splm-Io.* Small Arms Survey (Geneva: September 2015).

———. *Isolation and Endurance: Riek Machar and the Splm-Io 2016-2017.* Small Arms Survey (Geneva: 2017).

———. *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia : The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

———. *South Sudan's Civil War : Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking. London: Zed Books Ltd, 2019.* London: Zed Books Ltd, 2019.

———. *South Sudan's Civil War: Violence, Insurgency and Failed Peacemaking.* London: Zed Books, 2019.

Young, John "The Splm/Spla and Governance in South Sudan." *Politique africaine* 88 (2002): 103–19.

Young, Michael *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist, 1884–1920.* New Haven: Yale University Press 2004.

Zeleke, Elleni Centime. *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964-2016.* Brill, 2019.