KU LEUVEN

FACULTY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

Belonging Beyond Borders

Identity Narratives and Feelings of Belonging among South Sudanese Refugees in Northern Uganda

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R0779305

Masters' thesis submitted to obtain the degree of

MASTER OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Supervisor: Dr. Amélie Godefroidt
Reporter: Prof. Arnim Langer
Academic year: 2023-2024
Word count: 10.394

"Now, how can you say that you will be belonging to your country, whether even how much you love your country. But if you see tomorrow, you are being killed by gunpoint. Do you think that you are going to be there for all your life? No, you cannot have that heart of belonging there."

Peter, July 2023, Bidibidi

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to all the South Sudanese participants who agreed to interact with me, open-heartedly sharing their experiences, reflections, and emotions. Their strength and courage, despite the hardships many encountered, are truly admirable. Furthermore, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor dr. Amélie Godefroidt for allowing me the opportunity to carry out field research in Uganda. Her guidance, extensive feedback, and valuable comments led this thesis to its successful completion and encouraged me to sharpen my thinking. In addition, I wish to express my appreciation to prof. David Mwambari for his precious insights and guidance in the jungle of *practicalia* surrounding fieldwork in Uganda.

I wish to acknowledge Enabel for believing in the added value of this research project, and for the invaluable help offered by each college at the Arua office. As gatekeepers, their knowledge of the settlements contributed to a deeper understanding of the broader political and developmental context. I further extend my appreciation to VLIR-UOS for financially supporting this fieldwork and making it possible. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their tireless encouragements and support throughout this research process. Lukas, I am deeply grateful for your helpful contributions, openness to discuss new ideas, and continued support.

This thesis is dedicated to the refugees from South Sudan, often forgotten in the midst of new waves of displacement, in search for a safe harbour, at last.

Abstract

Continued mobility has spawned a renewal of interest in the saliency of borders, opposing strengthened border securitisation to a borderless and globalised world. Current representations of the modern sovereign territorial nation-state and reification of territorial borders are increasingly contested, argued to be inconsistent with the construction and delineation of borders and boundaries in non-territorial terms. Drawing on a micro-analysis of borders and boundaries, the purpose of this thesis is to uncover a 'thick description' of the ways in which South Sudanese refugees navigate borders during their mobility trajectories across the borderland between Uganda and South Sudan. Following refugees' mobility trajectories, this thesis further aims to explore the threefold relation between subjective perceptions of borders and boundaries, the circumscription of communities of belonging, and evolving identity narratives. The particular borderland between Uganda and South Sudan, used as case study for this thesis, is characterised by a range of dynamic cross-border interactions and relations between both sides of the international border. While borders can divide sub-ethnic and/or linguistic communities, borderlands also lead to the creation of new and complex identities, often interrelated through linguistic, tribal, and cultural ties, as the findings of this research have indicated.

Based on semi-structured interviews conducted in different refugee settlements in northern Uganda, the results highlight a multidimensional perception of borders among refugees: both in a literal and symbolic sense. Although a deep sense of longing for South Sudan, and subsequent national identification, remains, refugees have demonstrated differing nationalistic, tribal, and linguistic identifications. As identification is not a linear process, affected by the evolution of time and space, refugees have demonstrated a multi-layered and interrelated process of nationalistic, tribal, and linguistic identification, grounded across multiple locations at once. By rethinking the logic of borders beyond their territorial materialisation, and by including a symbolic dimension (referring to cross-border tribal and linguistic boundaries), this thesis illustrates the diversity and complexity underlying refugee's sense of belonging and interrelated identity narratives, subjected to continuous processes of identity negotiations.

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List of abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Program

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1. Introduction and problem statement

The mobility of refugees and further implications upon global, national, regional, and local policy levels, has led to a renewed interest in borders and boundaries over the past decade. Recent debates have been articulated the around (ir)relevance of borders. More relevant than the border *an sich*, is the underlying process of its construction, delineation, and contestation and consequent circumscription of communities of belonging. As the border reasserts itself over space and time, the identities, and communities of belonging it encapsulates are subjected to various coexisting or dividing socio-political processes (Sharma, 2022). "The act of crossing and re-crossing international borders can be a complex political, symbolic and material process" (Kaiser, 2010, p. 4), whereby refugees' navigation of borders has often been disregarded. As border politics and divided communities continue to constitute a primary source of conflict (Brunet-Jailly, 2018), the purpose of this research is to grasp how borders and boundaries are perceived and made relevant in the everyday lives of South Sudanese refugees in the borderland between Uganda and South Sudan. The focus on perceptions of borders entails two specific objectives. First, by rethinking the logic of borders beyond their apparent role as a unifying and dividing dyad (Delmotte & Duez, 2018), this study challenges their reification and aims to restore the ambiguities underlying their construction, delineation, and contestation. Second, by further articulating perceptions of borders and boundaries around the principle of identity, this research aims to scrutinise the role of borders in the circumscription of communities of belonging and consequent identity narratives among refugees.

Pre-existing literature has focused on the study of borders and border discourse (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Agnew, 1994; Balibar & Williams, 2002; Brunet-Jailly, 2005; Derrick, 2020; Johnson et al., 2011; Migdal, 2004; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 1999), borderland dynamics (Feyissa & Höhne, 2010; Merkx, 2002; Wilson & Donnan, 1998), and the particular deconstruction of borders in the context of settlements (Kaiser, 2010; Vancluysen, 2020). However, few scholars have scrutinised the triple entanglement between perceptions of borders and boundaries, feelings of belonging, and identity narratives. Moreover, although studies have described the multiple ties refugees create and maintain across borders (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011), through the prevailing lens of transnationalism (Hague, 2005; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2012; Vertovec, 2001; Werbner, 1999), the construction of identities through mobility trajectories and belonging remains understudied.

Through a localised micro-analysis of borders and boundaries, this research responds to a literature gap by providing a 'thick description' of their navigation by South Sudanese refugees. A localised and context sensitive conceptualisation of border and boundary perceptions is a prerequisite to examine the attribution of feelings of belonging and identity negotiation processes. Alongside this potential academic relevance, this research further sought to give a voice to the fragilised community of South Sudanese refugees in the peripheral borderland between Uganda and South Sudan, affected by conflict, human displacement, and economic and cultural marginalisation. Therefore, this research primarily follows refugees' mobility trajectories.

To operationalise the aforementioned objectives, the following research question and sub-question have been formulated:

How do South Sudanese refugees navigate borders and boundaries throughout their mobility trajectories across the borderland between Uganda and South Sudan?

- *What is the nature of the relation between perceptions of borders and boundaries, feelings of belonging, and identity narratives?*

The overarching research question refers to the ways in which border and boundary experiences have informed the attribution of subjective border explanations and meanings, provided by refugees. The secondary focus of this research pertains to the interrelated relation between subsequent perceptions of borders and boundaries, and the evolution of feelings of belonging and identity narratives among refugees.

In the following section, the existing relevant literature and particular characteristics of the borderland between Uganda and South Sudan are briefly outlined. Then, drawing on inductive semi-structured interviews in a number of refugee settlements in northern Uganda, the relevance of the border in shaping feelings of belonging and identity narratives, is discussed. As such, this research highlights both the diversity and complexity of refugee's sense of belonging and related identity narratives in the borderland, subjected to continuous processes of identity negotiations.

2. Literature review

Combining different strands of literature, this critical review of the existing literature is built upon key insights originating from the fields of political science, political geography, political sociology, and anthropology. This section first addresses diverse conceptions of territorial sovereignty and rising contestations. Second, focussing on borderless dynamics, multiple representations of political space - borders, boundaries, and borderlands – are scrutinised. Third, the subjective dimension of mobility is captured through the notion of refugee subjectivities. And fourth, the focus is drawn to the *ethos* of borderland communities and subsequent agency as transcending entities.

2.1. The sovereignty paradox

The perception of sovereignty, linking together state power, people, and territory, has evolved to constitute one of the foundations upon which the international political system is built. Evidence of change and discontinuity in world politics have led to the ambiguous and double-edged articulation of sovereignty and political state borders (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). The dominant understanding of the nation-state as "an assemblage of mutually exclusive political entities delimited by borders" (Derrick, 2020, p. 10), has been universally institutionalised as organising principle in the international arena (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Kratochwil, 1986; Kemp & Ben-Eliezer, 2000). But closer critical scrutiny of borders challenges the reification of the sovereign territorial nation-state, in a world in which borders have become permeable to global flows op capital, commodities, and people (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Krasner, 1999; Kratochwil, 1986). Balibar's notion of 'borders are everywhere' emphasises the deterritorialisation of culture, politics, and economy, referring to the way in which bordering practices are increasingly detached from territorial borders (Balibar & Williams, 2002; Johnson et al., 2011). Kolossov's 'global paradigm' further reaffirms the way in which "state boundaries are being gradually transformed into virtual lines and are being replaced by economic, cultural and other boundaries" (Kolossov, 2005, p. 612). However, increased mobility has confoundingly increased the saliency of borders, given the reinforced relevance of mechanisms of privileged inclusion and exclusion through growing border securitisation policies and practices.

The current state of literature has reflected the contradictory, heterogenous, and multifaceted nature of borders by opposing a process of integration to fragmentation, zones of contact to zones of conflict, ambivalent identities to the aggressive assertion of difference, and a borderless globalised world to increased border securitisation (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Delmotte & Duez, 2018; Johnson et al., 2011). This contrasting rhetoric has spawned a renewal of interest in issues of mobility, borders and boundaries, and identity in a globalised world. "As the nation-state ideal of cultural homogeneity and centralised political control is both confirmed and disrupted at the border" (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999, p. 596), current representations of borders are increasingly contested (Brunet-Jailly, 2018; Fougère, 2018; Paasi, 1999).

Embodied within the modern sovereign territorial nation-state, population, authority, and territoriality are combined into one bounded entity and space. The dominant understanding of territorial sovereignty is a result of the process by which political authority has come to be consistently linked with demarcated territorial units. This exclusive association, mutually legitimising understandings of authority and territory, has been argued to be "arbitrarily divisive and disruptive of social processes" (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999, p. 598). Further description of territorial sovereign states as 'bordered power containers' or 'containers of society' has emphasised a second problematic dimension (Agnew, 1994; Giddens, 1987). While the reification of the ideal of state-territoriality lack contextualisation, it further "endows the territorial state with the legitimacy of representing and expressing the 'character' or 'will' of the nation (Agnew, 1994, p. 59). The tendency to confuse the meanings of 'nation-state' and 'territorial state' has resulted into the definition of political identity in exclusively state territorial terms, as a national phenomenon (Agnew, 1994; Reid-Henry, 2010). However, this is not consistent with the increasing development of alternative political identities of sectoral, ethnic, and regional character (Agnew, 1994).

2.2. Border, boundaries, and borderlands

The representation of political space is considered a symbolic function of "how we define what is right and wrong and whom we identify with and against" (Agnew, 1994, p. 55). Building further upon spatial practices, territoriality can be defined as a spatial strategy of enforcement, producing, and focusing attention on borders (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). In this context, a broader and more comprehensive interpretation of borders must be developed in order to guarantee the existence of a plurality of perspectives on borders (Fougère, 2018). This section respectively highlights the representation of space as a *frontier border*, coinciding with the modern sovereign territorial nation-state; as a *boundary*, encompassing various practices and discourses; and a *borderland*, operating as the *locus* of converging power dynamics.

Borders as frontiers

The etymology of the word 'frontière' refers to 'faire front', a disjuncture between here and there, inside and outside (Delmotte & Duez, 2018). As primary institution of the contemporary state (Johnson et al., 2011), much of the literature considers the border as a tool of divisive control between the 'other' and the 'us', creating internal cohesion within the communities that it simultaneously separates (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Schaut, 2018). However, considering the above, the generic term 'border' appeals to different forms, practices, and meanings over time and space. "Borders shift; they leak; and they hold varying sorts of meaning for different people" asserted Migdal, concerned with the impermanent nature of borders (Migdal, 2004, p. 5). Over different historical-political contingencies, the significance of state borders has been established as contingent, porous and in flux (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Migdal, 2004). Despite its delimitating character and role as ethno-political division, borders can alternatively be conceptualised as locations of transformation and change, as a condition of possibility for interaction and exchange, where the 'other' meets the 'us' (Chatty et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2011; Schaut, 2018). As such, borders and frontiers can alternatively be defined as unstable social processes, subject to diverse operations of

construction, reformulation, and transgression (Schaut, 2018). This plural vision highlights the fundamental cognitive operation underlying the construction of borders, continuously "redefined by socially transbordered, culturally transnational, and economically global spaces" (Balibar & Williams, 2002, p. 68; Delmotte & Duez, 2018).

Boundaries

The phenomena of dislocation and forced displacement as a consequence of migration have sparked the interest of this thesis in the relation between perceptions of borders, belonging, and identity. Critical analysis of ideas of borders has highlighted the need for cross-border perceptions of territoriality, no longer inevitably referring to material spaces (Goemans & Schultz, 2017; Newman & Paasi, 1998). To scrutinise perceptions of borders, communities of belonging, and identities, without normatively reducing this reflection to the modern sovereign territorial nation-state, the term 'boundaries' will be used in this research. Hence, boundaries convey more than static categories dividing space, and include multiple social, cultural, symbolic, and discursive practices related to the construction of social distinctions (Migdal, 2004; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 1999). The recent emergence of new ethno-territorial entities has led to contesting cultural and symbolic manifestations of territoriality. Through various practices and discourses, meaning is attributed to boundaries, which can be simultaneous, overlapping, physical or symbolic, visible or invisible, but historically contingent (Newman & Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 1999).

Borderlands

As refugees engage on their mobility journey, they become trans-local as they shift between locations, while maintaining social networks across boundaries (Chatty et al., 2013). Frontier zones or borderlands are therefore central to this research, representing the *loci* where global, national, and local dynamics and regimes of power converge and where meaning is attributed to space (Feyissa & Höhne, 2010; Reid-Henry, 2010). Borderlands can be defined as the "areas immediately beside a state's external border" (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999, p. 595). Much of the literature suggests these borderlands to be peripheral spaces neglected by respective political centres and suffering from inter-state conflicts, resulting in economic and cultural marginalisation (Feyissa & Höhne, 2010; Merkx, 2002; Sharma, 2022). However, a handful of scholars have emphasised their potential as dynamic sites of merger and opportunity (Chatty et al., 2013; Feyissa & Höhne, 2010). Considering the structuring role of state borders, borderlands further provide opportunities for communities divided by them, related to the extraction of economic, political, status and rights (Feyissa & Höhne, 2010).

2.3. Refugee subjectivities

Drawing on these borderless dynamics, refugees have been stated to construct local boundaries, characterised by different opportunity structures for different people at different times (Feyissa & Höhne, 2010; Kaiser, 2010). This subjective dimension of mobility can be best captured by the concept of 'subjectivity', by "approaching the subject as both subjected by power and imbued with the power to transcend these processes of subjection" (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015, p. 83). Contemporary studies have

further highlighted the performative dimension of borders: the extent to which borders and boundaries are reproduced in everyday transactions and the subjectivities they produce as a result (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). The positive exploitation of borders and boundaries and the production of refugee subjectivities are subjected to various processes of selective and differential inclusion (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Kaiser, 2010). As such, examining these specific borderlands and subsequent bordering processes provides insights into how "boundaries both create identities and are created through identity" (Newman & Paasi, 1998, p. 194).

2.4. Frontier ethos

Borderland communities

Scholarship on borderlands highlights the importance of politically organised borderland communities and their culture in shaping the border (Brunet-Jailly, 2005, 2018). Much of the literature describes the role of border communities as a factor of fragmentation or threat to nation-states as they bridge and scatter onto either side of the border (Brunet-Jailly, 2018; Cohen, 2008). Through common characteristics based on culture, language, ethnicity, and feelings of belonging, they are able to enhance the effect of pre-existing territorial division claims and thereby transcend the international border (Brunet-Jailly, 2018; Cohen, 2008). As such, the relationship between borderland communities and the central state is of crucial significance, as the former can alter political influences in border regions (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Bordering, debordering and rebordering processes are no longer the exclusive authority of the nation-state. Rather, local borderland cultures, simultaneously situated at the centre and at the fringes of a state, are involved in envisioning, constructing, maintaining, and erasing national borders (Rumford, 2008; Wilson & Donnan, 1998). As they experience borders and boundaries across social spaces, refugees can alter both their social and political meaning (Johnson et al., 2011). As a result, borderwork has shifted from the state's external borders – at the edges of a polity – to strategic points within it, as borderland inhabitants can give meaning and value to the state from the outside (Leonardi, 2020; Rumford, 2008).

Borderless boundaries

Various border imaginaries often lead to the creation of a border(land) ethos that differs from the national territory. Hence, borderland cultures critically test prior assumptions of transnational refugees as passive entities and the role of the border as a 'container of society' (Vertovec, 2001; Wilson & Donnan, 1998). On the contrary, their agency is underlined in the way they experience, adapt, and appropriate both the material and symbolic meaning given to borders (Kaiser, 2010; Schmitt, 2018; Wilson & Donnan, 1998). Indeed, borders can be considered as "meaning-making and meaning-carrying entities, parts of cultural landscapes which often transcend the physical limits of the state and defy the power of state institutions" (Rumford, 2008, p. 4). So doing, boundaries are culturally constructed, and may or may not border one another (Declich, 2010). Considering that the border is "a place where representation is already compromised and fragmentary", ethnic and national identities can be configured differently at borders, subsequently impacting the 'visibility or invisibility of the border' (Nield, 2008, p. 139; Rumford, 2008).

The idea of a specific identity generated by a borderland, or "border identity", was introduced by Wilson and Donnan (1998), referring to the emergence of new and socially constructed identities, subject to rapid change. Hereby, the border serves as a machine of appearance and disappearance, a place of cultural disjuncture and displacement; where the visible becomes obscured and the invisible comes to light (Chatty et al., 2013; Nield, 2008).

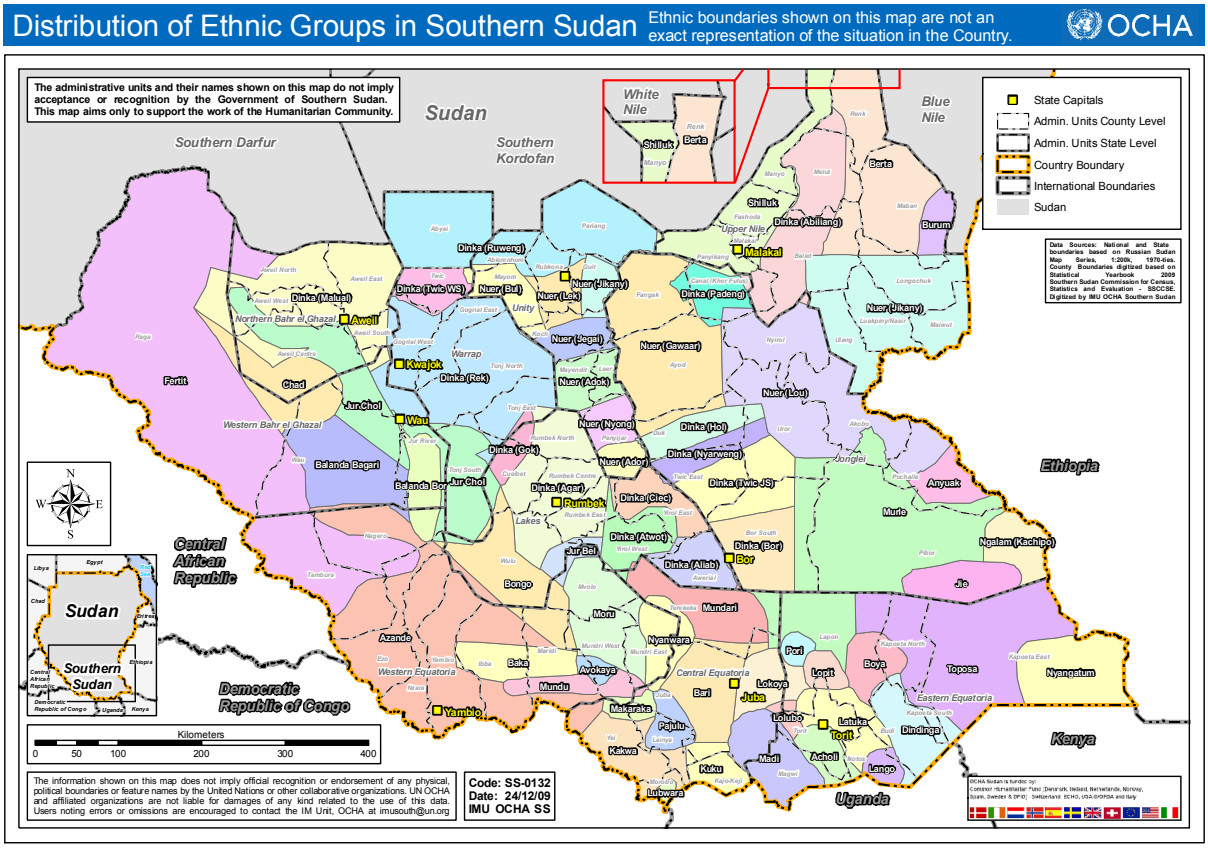
3. A case study of the borderland between Uganda and South Sudan

South Sudan's administrative borders directly stem from the period of colonial intervention, restructured along 'artificial' lines, and divided into local districts (Justin & De Vries, 2019). Throughout the post-independence period, the international border of the previous Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, although permeable, has continued to *de facto* constitute the basis of the international border, resulting in the acceptance of these past colonial boundaries (Justin & De Vries, 2019; Merkx, 2002; Zeller, 2013). However, resulting post-colonial politics have transformed the internal borders of South Sudan. Subjected to diverse social phenomena of administrative and political changes, they are continuously redefined at regional, national, and local levels (Justin & De Vries, 2019; Zeller, 2013).

After its independence in 2011, a renewed conflict broke out in South Sudan, leading to a complex situation of "multiple and interlocking threats, including armed conflict and inter-communal violence, economic decline, disease, and climatic shocks" (International Crisis Group, 2022; OCHA, 2017, p. 4). The civil war opposing the government forces of President Salva Kiir to rebel troops led by former vice-president Riek Machar, forced millions to flee. The collapse of a first peace deal in 2015 led to the eruption of fighting in the country's capital, Juba, and to previously unaffected regions, including the region of Equatoria (encompassing Eastern, Western, and Central Equatoria State) in July 2016. In 2018 a second agreement was signed: the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan. However, armed violence at sub-national and local levels has continued to occur, recently exacerbated by ongoing tensions in Sudan, and has resulted in substantial human displacement (e.g., estimated 2.2 million internally displaced and 2.4 million cross-border refugees), affecting, in turn, the Uganda-South Sudan borderland (OCHA, 2022; REACH, 2023).

Furthermore, in order to better comprehend the mobility trajectories outlined below [see Figure 2 below], it is important to briefly outline the ethnic distribution in South Sudan. As a multi-ethnic country comprising sixty-four sub-ethnic groups (tribes), South Sudan is characterised and by high levels of cultural and linguistic proximity (UNDP, 2014). The dominant ethnic groups are formed by pastoral communities in the northern part of South Sudan: the Dinka and Nuer (International Crisis Group, 2022; OCHA, 2009). Over the course of time, climate factors have increasingly pushed these communities towards the Equatorial region, composed of predominantly farming communities such as Bari, Ma'di, Kuku, Kakwa, and Acholi (International Crisis Group, 2022; OCHA, 2009). The consequent appropriation of local resources and occupation of power by the Dinka and Nuer has led to growing inter-communal tensions and alienation in the Equatoria region. An overview of the (sub-)ethnic distribution of South Sudan is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Distribution of ethnic groups in South Sudan (UNOCHA, 2009).*



Extensive literature has described the precise materialisation of the South Sudanese border, highlighting its divisive character across (sub-)ethnic and language groups (Justin & De Vries, 2019; Leonardi, 2020; Leopold, 2009; Merkx, 2002). As such, the drawing of this border is argued to have had a significant effect upon the 'border identity' of those living on both sides of the border between Uganda and South Sudan, and its legacy continues to influence the entanglement between identity and territory (Justin & De Vries, 2019; Merkx, 2002). Merkx (2002) further asserted the creation of a cross-border identity based on interaction between refugees and the host community, related through a common experience of conflict and forced displacement; and proximity of kinship, language, and culture. In this regard, borderlands can be considered as complex sites of interaction between fragile identities, giving rise to fragmented and multiple identities and relations over time and space.

4. Research design and methods

4.1. A qualitative case study of South Sudanese refugees in northern Uganda

Considering the aim of this study (i.e., to provide a 'thick description' to uncover the relation between perceptions of borders and boundaries, feelings of belonging, and identity narratives,), an inductive and context-sensitive approach is preferred. Subsequently, rather than testing hypotheses to produce generalisable findings, a *single case study* design, relying on the extensive analysis of a specific community, will be applied (Bryman, 2016; Major & Savin-Baden, 2013). Furthermore, this approach is selected for its capacity to frame in-depth examinations of the subject and understanding of the complexity in particular contexts (Major & Savin-Baden, 2013). The borderland community of South Sudanese refugees in Northern Ugandan has been selected as the unit of analysis of this thesis.

This research has been carried out in multiple refugee settlements - Rhino Camp, Imvepi and Bidibidi - in the districts of Arua and Yumbe between June and July 2023. The upsurge of South Sudanese refugee numbers in Uganda (e.g., 889.054 in 2020; 893.866 in 2022), has characterised the country as hosting the largest number of refugees in Africa in 2022 (UNHCR 2020; UNHCR 2022). Along with the neighbouring district Adjumani, the West Nile subregion of Uganda is considered one of the areas hosting the largest influx of South Sudanese refugees (UNHCR 2023). It is important to take this context into account as the issue of border perceptions and how they have informed feelings of belonging and identity, are highly context specific. Borderlands have distinctive features due to cross-border interactions and relations between both sides. Considered as "dynamic areas with an interplay between restrictions and opportunities" (Merkx, 2002, p. 116), they can produce new complex identities. In the case of Uganda and South Sudan, the border area is characterised by substantial human displacement, underdevelopment, and protracted conflict (Merkx, 2002). While borders can divide sub-ethnic (see: Madi, Kakwa, Pojulu, etc.) and linguistic communities (Lugbara, Kakwa, Arabic, etc.), borderlands can also lead to the creation of new relations and dynamics, interrelated through linguistic, tribal, and cultural ties. As such, the borderland becomes a place where refugees and hosts share experiences and exchange identities; a place where transnational communities emerge (Merkx, 2002).

4.2. Sampling and data collection methods

A single case study approach allows for the investigation of dynamic interactions between people and the structures in which they operate, using multiple sources and data collection techniques (Major & Savin-Baden, 2013). Concerned with the complexity and particular nature of perceptions of borders and boundaries, twenty-one (21) semi-structured interviews - recording life narratives of South Sudanese refugees in Ugandan settlements – have been used as the primary data collection mode, and triangulated with a creative in-depth method (i.e., the creation of drawings related to participants' mobility trajectories). Interviews have been described as the most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research, enabling

a deeper exploration and access to meanings of experiences and constructions of reality (Major & Savin-Baden, 2013; Punch, 2014). Thus, through a series of individual in-depth interviews with South Sudanese refugees, the purpose of this case study is to gain a holistic understanding of the singularities regarding mobility trajectories and the relation between borders, feelings of belonging, and identity narratives.

To collect qualitative data, participants were selected using a snowball sampling method (Bryman, 2016). First, a small group of relevant participants was sampled, considering variation in the profiles of the interviewees and practical feasibility. Participants were then invited to suggest other participants with "relevant experiences and characteristics" to the research (Bryman, 2012, p. 424). This purposive non-probability form of sampling does not seek to select participants on a random basis and is thus not representative or generalisable. In accordance with the objectives (and ethical underpinnings; see below) of this study, participants relevant to the research question were strategically selected using the following inclusion criteria: consenting participants; aged 18 or older; and of South Sudanese background. As said, caution was taken to include members of different groups, thereby maximising variation: participants of a different age, gender, socio-economic status, and professional group (students, farmers, teachers, business owners, engineers, etc.). A summary of the participant's profiles can be found in Table 1. In accordance with ethical standards (see below), pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis.

Table 1. *Mobility biographies.*

Pseudonyms used in analysis	**Regional affiliation**	**Occupation**	**Date of departure**	**Interview**
Mary Woman Age: 26	Central Equatoria Tribe: Keliko	Farmer	2016	26th June 2023 Arua
Achol Woman Age: 26	Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Business owner	2016	26th June 2023 Arua
Deng Man Age: 30	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Regional advisor of Political Affairs	1997; 2016	27th June 2023 Rhino Camp, Ocea Zone
John Man Age: 28	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Student	2017	27th June 2023 Rhino Camp, Siripi zone
Garang Man Age: 32	Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Electrical engineer	2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 10
Nyawal Woman Age: 30	Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Student	2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 10
Alfred Man Age: 25	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Student	2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 10

Elizabeth Woman Age: 24	Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Business owner	2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 10
Peter Man Age: 30	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Custom border clearance sergeant	2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 2
Kenyi Man Age: 21	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Student	28th June 2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 2
Akol Man Age: 39	Lainya Town Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Business administration and management	2016	4th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 1, Village 2
Nyandeng Woman Age: 29	Kaya Central Equatoria Tribe: Acholi	Teacher at nursery school	28th November 2016	5th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 5, Village 22
Akuja Woman Age: 22	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Acholi	Student	2016	5th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 5, Village 22
Majok Man Age: 28	Yei Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Student	2016	5th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 5, Village 22
Kuol Man Age: 25	Morobo Central Equatoria Tribe: Keliko	Student	28th November 2016	5th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 5, Village 22
Nhial Man Age: 25	Morobo Central Equatoria Tribe: Keliko	Student	2016	5th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 5, Village 22
Kenneth Man Age: 35	Central Equatoria Tribe: Kuku	Farmer	2016	5th July 2023 Bidibidi Zone 5, Village 22
Miakol Man Age: 22	Morobo Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Student	2017	10th July 2023 Imvepi Main base, Shop
Okech Man Age: 29	Otet Eastern Equatoria Tribe: Jiye	Religion teacher	2019	10th July 2023 Imvepi Zone 1, Village 5
Aduk Woman Age: 26	Unknown Tribe: Kuku	Farmer	2017	11th July 2023 Imvepi Zone 1, ICT-hub
Warang Man Age: 19	Kotera Central Equatoria Tribe: Pojulu	Student	2016	11th July 2023 Imvepi, Secondary School
Anthony Man Age: 18	Central Equatoria Tribe: Kakwa	Student	Departure: 2016	11th July 2023 Rhino Camp, High School

To collect information on complex and multidimensional topics a mixed methods approach has been employed. Two different qualitative modes of data collection have been used in this study: semi-structured interviews and visual contents. The combination of different data sources (and corresponding methodologies), all aimed at a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the same phenomenon, is often referred to as *triangulation* (Flick, 2022). In what follows, each of the data sources is further elaborated.

First, primary data was collected through twenty-one (21) individual semi-structured in-depth interviews (20 to 55 minutes) with South Sudanese refugees. These incorporate a certain degree of structure by following an *a priori* established interview guide, while simultaneously allowing participants to raise questions and pursue topics of particular interest to them (Major & Savin-Baden, 2013; Punch, 2014). The guiding principle behind the interviewing process is to stimulate participants to thoroughly describe, reflect, and attribute meaning to experiences related to their mobility journey, perceptions of borders and boundaries, feelings of belonging, and identity narratives. By ensuring that each of these components is covered in each interview, the interview guide safeguards consistency across interviews. The interview guide [see Appendix A] is inspired by questionnaires previously fielded among (South)Sudanese (in particular Beber et al., 2014), which increases the context-sensitivity of the guide. Simultaneously, the semi-structured nature accommodates individual understandings of central concepts and unfolding patterns over time, while minimising the risk of misunderstandings giving the opportunity for both the interviewer and interviewee to request further elaboration. The interviews have been conducted with minimal interviewer intervention, as the role of the researcher is limited to "a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding and of suspending or 'bracketing' preconceptions about the topics under discussion" (Punch, 2014, p. 119). Methodological choices and the formulation of specific interview questions were adjusted during the research process, taking the local context and elements of cultural sensitivity into account. The interviews have been recorded, directly translated with the help of local translators when needed (two out of the twenty-one interviews), and transcribed. Based on extensive field notes taken during the interviews, non-verbal cues, including both emotions and body language, were further integrated in the transcripts, illustrating the sensitivity and complexity of certain questions.

Second, making use of a multi-layered and innovative approach, participants were further asked to illustrate meaningful moments, places, and interactions defining (part of) their mobility journey, and changing geographical, social, and political circumstances [see Appendix B]. Inspired by Schwarz' (2020) trajectory approach, the drawing process, on the one hand, allowed for the establishment of a relation of trust, thus lowering social desirability bias, and, on the other hand, allowed participants to engage with the core of these sensitive topics in an indirect and creative manner. Recollecting the different stages of the participants' mobility trajectories, has further facilitated the visualisation and translation of abstract concepts - such as borders, feelings of belonging, and identity - into comprehensible narratives. The drawing of this social reality as experienced by participants is complementary to the broader research process.

4.3. Data analysis

As is clear from the previous section, the explorative fieldwork process resulted in a large amount of data. The primary source of data is composed of the in-depth interviews and deriving results, enriched with visual illustrations. Considering the analysis, all data collected from the interviews has been carefully transcribed as shortly after the interview as possible, to facilitate retention of the interview. To analyse these transcriptions, a dual analytical method has been systematically applied (see guidelines by Bryman, 2016; and Saldaña, 2021). All interviews were consistently coded in an iterative way. In a first phase, the interview transcriptions have been thoroughly read, examined, and conceptualised, to identify reoccurrence. In a second phase, initial topics have been openly and inductively coded, using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software - NVIVO - to highlight patterns of connection. During this phase, initially identified codes have been complemented with visual representations to ensure data triangulation. Finally, in a third phase, through an iterative and inductive process, each concept, argument, and topic has been restructured and modified into dominant codes and related sub-codes. This compilation of codes and sub-codes was then merged and hierarchically aggregated into a codebook, with corresponding content descriptions [see Appendix C], to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between various narratives (Saldaña, 2021).

However, it is important to note, prior to the analysis, that the purpose of this study and complementary research design, is *not* to produce generalisable findings to other cases or populations. Nonetheless, the limited generalisability does not hinder the principal aim of this study: an extensive examination and 'thick descriptions' of perceptions of borders, feelings of 'belonging', and identity narratives among South Sudanese refugees in Ugandan settlements.

4.4. Ethics

Fieldwork processing (non-)sensitive information necessarily entails ethical challenges. To ensure that this research meets the standards for academic research and context-sensitivity, a number of preliminary measures have been undertaken. First, the study design has been ethically reviewed and approved by the Social and Societal Ethics Committee of the University of Leuven [G-2022-5832] [see Appendix D]. Second, clearance from the Ugandan Ministry for Disaster Preparedness and Refugee Management and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has been obtained [see Appendix E]. Third, all phases of the research project have been conducted in close cooperation with local partners (i.e., through contacts with the Belgian development agency: Enabel in Uganda). Fourth, through a consent letter [see Appendix E], participants have been extensively informed about the procedure, ethical precautions, objectives, options for withdrawal, and opportunities for feedback on the research findings. Finally, all personal data has been safely stored and carefully pseudonymised, to guarantee participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

4.5. Positionality

Every research context is characterised by diverse power relations, informing interactions in the research, but also the collection and analysis of data, and the knowledge produced *post*-fieldwork (Bilgen, Nasir & Schöneberg, 2021; Browne & Moffett, 2014; Mwambari, 2019). Critical reflection on my positionality highlighted how it shaped the research process in two ways. On the one hand, as a West-European researcher, my outsider position, characterised by a lack of ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic belonging, contributed to a personal selection of relevant data and consequent interpretation (Bilgen, Nasir & Schöneberg, 2021). On the other hand, despite power asymmetries and inequalities, my position and affiliation to Enabel facilitated both access to participants and their willingness to interact with me. This external reflection of 'legitimacy' encouraged participants to openly voice personal opinions regarding settlement dynamics and prevailing issues. To avoid reducing moving personal narratives from a fragilised community to 'information', a higher number of discussion extracts have been purposefully included in this thesis.

5. Results and observations

In this section, in line with the formulated research questions, the results of the interviews are examined. First, the motivations and aspirations underlining refugee's mobility are outlined. Second, perceptions of borders and boundaries throughout participants' mobility trajectories are described, structured along a dual axis encompassing both a literal and symbolic dimension. Third, internal settlement dynamics are delineated, before drawing on participants' mobility trajectories to highlight the diversity of senses of belonging and subsequent identity narratives. Finally, data from the interviews is triangulated with visual content, for a more comprehensive understanding of refugee's navigation of borders and boundaries.

5.1. Mobility trajectories

When asked about their reason for departure, participants provided a similar description referring to the instability, insecurity, and hardships endured in South Sudan. For some, displacement has not only been repeated, but protracted, after a succession of transit camps and refugee settlements. However, the decision to flee can be more difficult to make for individuals hindered by the presence of family members, the danger of the mobility journey itself, a source of income in South Sudan, and previous negative experiences of displacement. Hence, the decision to leave South Sudan is shaped by various personal considerations and prioritisation of factors. Incentives of mobility can greatly vary among refugees, although participants indicated regional and temporal similarities. As such, all participants are originally from the Equatoria region and most fled South Sudan in 2016. This regional and temporal coincidence corresponds to the collapse of the first peace deal and the subsequent escalation of fighting in the Equatoria region by July 2016.

> *"South Sudan doesn't have food at home, at the house, and we have been chased to the bush where there is no health facility. Most of the children were dying because of hunger, sicknesses, mosquitoes are very many."*
>
> Akol, age 39, July 2023, Bidibidi

Uganda as a 'settlement destination' was driven by various aspirations, ranging from a deliberate decision to an unintentional conjunction of circumstances. For example, as demonstrated in the quote below, *Okech*'s intentional decision refers to preconditions of safety and linguistic and cultural proximity. *Kuol,* in turn, instantiates the unplanned character of participants' mobility, inspired by a broader collective movement, rather than the 'attractiveness' of Uganda.

> *"Then from there, now I look at the way Uganda it is. Because Uganda is a free country, you can move. Also, I just said that I would rather go to Uganda, because I am used to the lifestyle of Uganda."*
>
> Okech, age 29, July 2023, Imvepi

"*Because we just saw people just moving, because there are very many people moving the roadside. Just we think that these people, they are going. So, let's go.*"

Kuol, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

Reflections about participants' feelings upon arrival revealed substantial differences. While most participants, displayed a profound sense of relief and security, *Nhial* described a period of difficult adaptation and suffering.

"When I arrived here [in Uganda]*, I feel a bit fine because the security is fine and people can sleep inside, because there* [in South Sudan] *you cannot. Sometimes you hear gunshots. And if you hear such kind of bullets, you cannot sleep."*

Majok, age 28, July 2023, Bidibidi

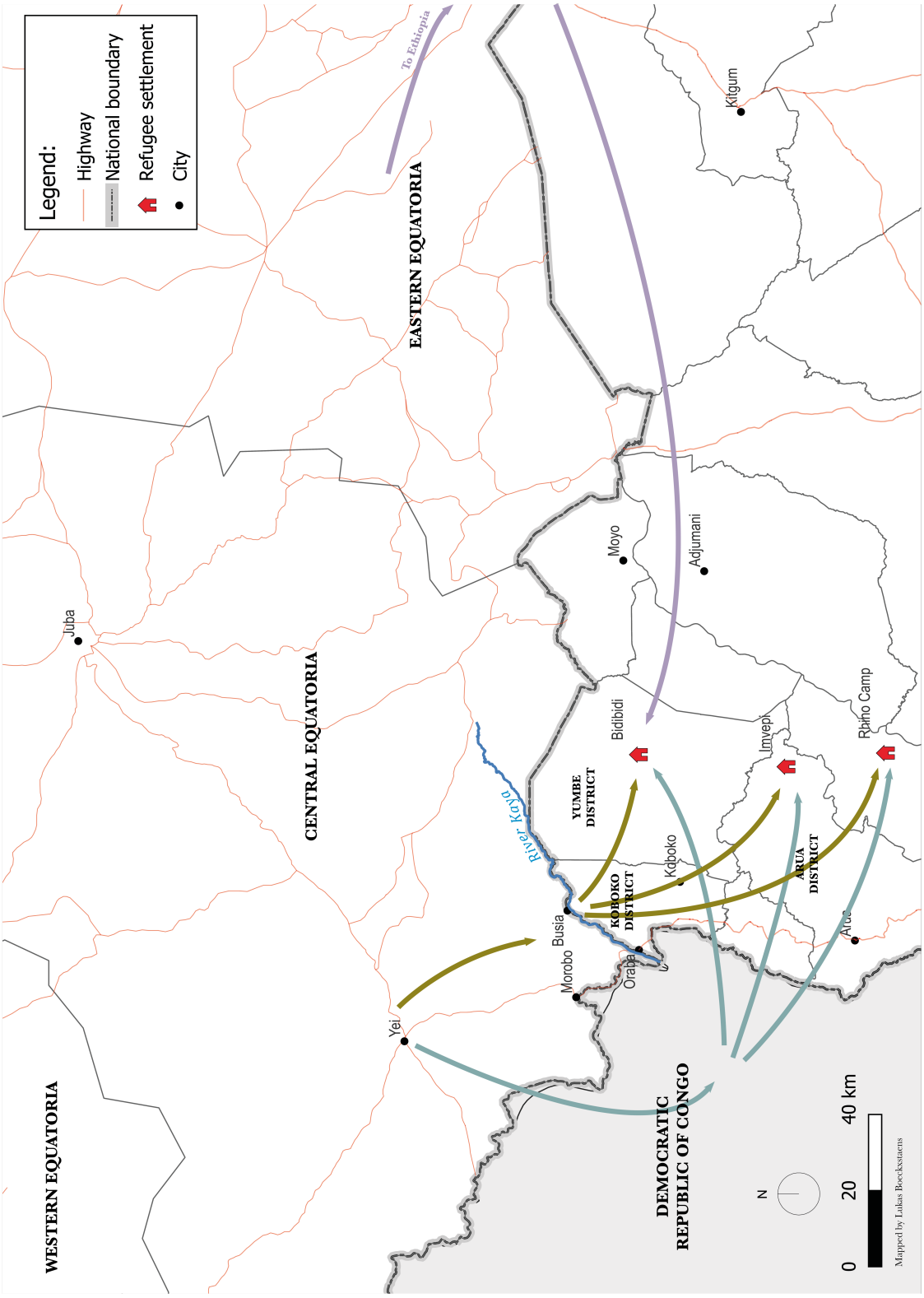
"The time I arrived here [in Uganda]*, the situation it is not good. But some like one year, because I am now used, I see now the life has now changed a bit. Because my trauma had been forgotten. I feel like now my mind is coming back."*

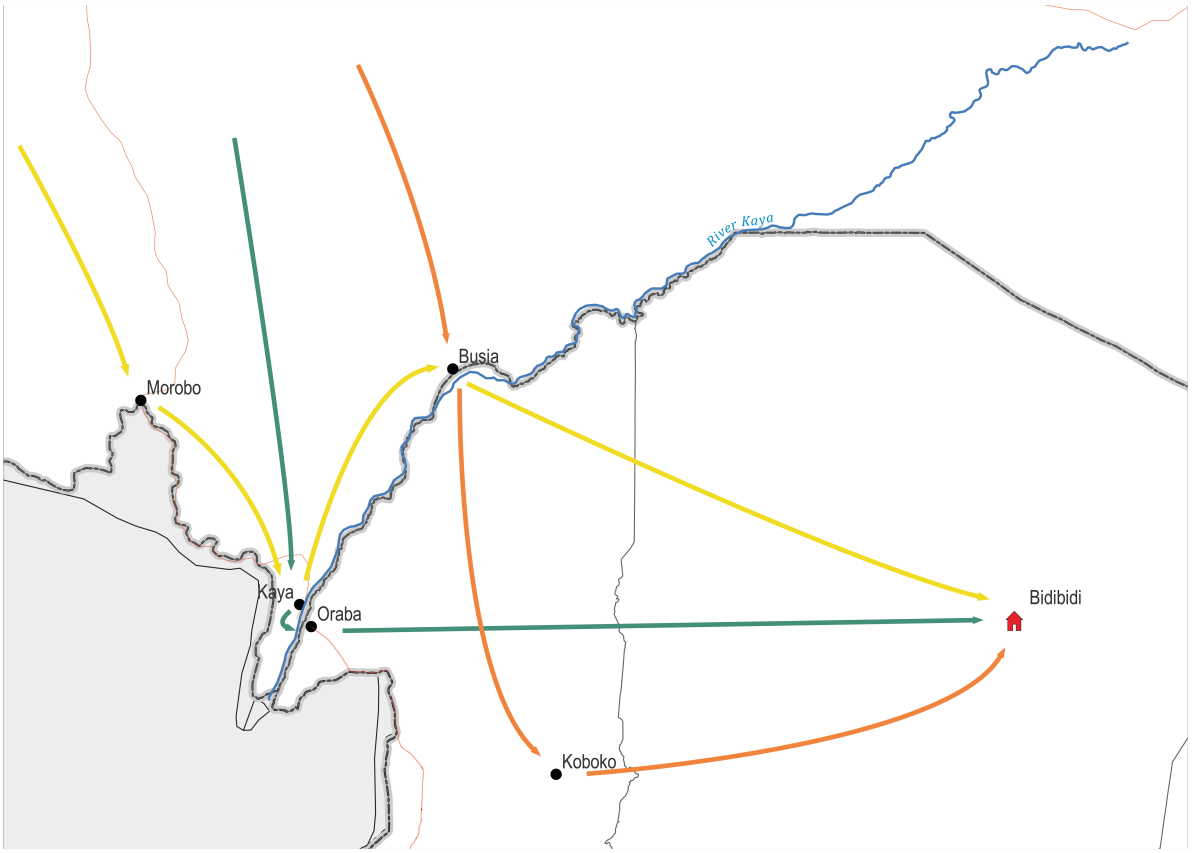
Nhial, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

5.2. Crossing borders

Discussions related to the cross-border mobility trajectories of participants highlighted a wide variety of border and boundary representations, non-exclusively associated with territorial attributes. Participants perceived borders, and especially crossing the border, both in a literal and a symbolic way. The "literal" way includes territorial, geographical, and material borders that had to be crossed, while symbolic borders (or rather, boundaries) refer to the tribal and linguistic differences that separate both countries. An overview of the most common mobility trajectories described by participants is outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Mobility trajectories.*





Note. This map is based upon reoccurring micro geographies mentioned by participants, representing the physical landscape at the time of their mobility trajectory.

5.2.1. Crossing literal borders

> *"What [I] kept in mind that place is a border is the river. And from there also there is Ugandan police. That is what that makes me to think that this one is Uganda. And there is also a plaque. Which means there is a border here."*

Kenyi, age 21, July 2023, Bidibidi

Considering the cross-border mobility of South Sudanese refugees, participants ascribed diverse dimensions to their border-crossing. A first *geographical dimension* raised by *Okech* is associated to the nature of the land when entering Uganda from the Eastern border, coming from Ethiopia. A second important geographical feature repeatedly stated by participants refers to the guiding presence of the river Kaya, operating as a point of reference between between South Sudan and Uganda.

> *"The most difficult boundary, that became very hard for me to cross, there are two. [...] And then, coming on this side, crossing from Turkana* [Kenya] *on this side, coming to Moroto* [Uganda]*, the place is also mountainous. So, I had to climb up. I had to climb the mountain until I reached Moroto town."*

Okech, age 29, July 2023, Imvepi

"We have a river. River called Kaya. When you are from that side of the river, you are in South Sudan. So, when you come this side, to Uganda."

Nhial, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

A second dimension attributed to the territorial border is characterised by the materialisation of visible border signs at the margins of both territories. While *Akol* addressed the presence of signposts and flags, *Akuja* further described the material embodiment of the border through a rope. Related to this *material dimension* of the border is the registration and reception infrastructure established by national and international organisations. Provision of essential goods and services at these registration points, by both the OPM and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reiterates a sharp contrast between the two territories.

"And then at the border areas, they put some signposts for those ones who can read and write. They put the name of the place, and then they put the Ugandan flag."

Akol, age 39, July 2023, Bidibidi

"The moment you cross the river, there is a rope and policemen. Because the moment you reach, they will lower the rope down."

Akuja, age 22, July 2023, Bidibidi

In addition to material infrastructure, the fundamental presence of a complex network of public, private, local, national, and international governance has been indicated to embody the territorial border. This symbolic production of state sovereignty and authority has been expressed by *Kenneth*. Alternatively, this display of authority has been associated to a renewed state of security for refugees, as described by *Nyandeng.*

"So, they say: "we are UNHCR, don't fear, come". Then they decided to bring us to the reception. And then they register you at the border. They bring us to the reception."

Kenneth, age 35, July 2023, Bidibidi

"By the time we know that we are now in Uganda, because from that side there [in South Sudan], *a lot of guns. You just hear the guns. Even you cannot be comfortable. You just be with that fear. Now, by the time we crossed the border, we feel free now."*

Nyandeng, age 29, July 2023, Bidibidi

5.2.2. Crossing symbolic boundaries

Tribal boundaries

Numerous accounts of tribalism and subsequent tribal conflicts were reported by refugees, both within and outside the borders of South Sudan. *John* narrated the occurrence of tensions among the tribes *in* South Sudan, while *Alfred* further expressed the presence of tribal tensions along his mobility journey, conditioning participants' chance for survival when encountering rebels or government forces. These frictions are not restricted to South Sudan or the journey *out* of South Sudan, respectively affecting participants' reason for departure and chances of successful mobility, but *de facto* continue to occur *beyond* its borders. As such, tribal boundaries impede upon adaptation and integration processes within refugee settlements in Uganda.

> *"Because most specially nowadays, I can say that at times there are Dinka here* [in Uganda]*. Because they are the cause of the problem. They leave their place* [northern part of South Sudan] *and come to our place of origin* [Equatoria region]*. At times they can now use force because they wanted me to bring my cattle, everything. Then they want to resettle there* [Equatoria region]*."*
>
> John, age 28, June 2023, Rhino Camp

> *"Someone will ask you "why you are there, what is your name, what is your tribe". The bad thing when you are coming, we are mixed up with Dinka, Nuer. When they find you moving with these people you will be captured, you will be killed, all."*
>
> Alfred, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

Garang illustrated how, over the course of time, tribal tensions within the settlements have slowly started to appease. This has been stated to be the result of unforeseen settlement conditions, forcing refugees to accept the presence of members of other tribes in their immediate proximity. This pacifying tendency is reaffirmed by the institutional and administrative efforts undertaken to establish a common and open dialogue in the settlements and the organisation of common celebrations such as 'World Refugee Day'. *Alfred* further addressed the unconventional *modus vivendi* initiated in one particular village of Bidibidi settlement, where Dinka and Nuer live alongside other Equatorian tribes, despite historical alienation.

> *"People actually brought anger from South Sudan still to the settlement. So, by the time we arrived here, at the reception, when you saw in Dinka fighting broke out. Because you still have that anger from South Sudan.* [...] *Somehow it is now actually stabilizing* [in Uganda]*. Although there are some tribes who understand, but there are those who don't understand completely. So, for those ones that can't understand, you find that the anger is still there."*
>
> Garang, age 32, June 2023, Bidibidi

> *"Here* [in Uganda] *we are mixed up with the Dinka, Nuer, Kakwa. At least in zone one where you are. But in other zone, like zone two, you can't have Nuer on that side there.* [...] *But due to Uganda policies they come up with trainings, dialogues, educating people about tribes, how to stay together. Leave those things in South Sudan."*
>
> Alfred, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

Linguistic boundaries

A reoccurring theme in the interviews concerns language differences, framed as a barrier between the host community and refugees. For instance, *Warang* refers to language as a distinct boundary during her mobility journey. This linguistic contrast is further acknowledged by *Kenneth*, emphasising its dividing role, obstructing interaction, communication, and service provision opportunities between both communities.

> *"When crossing they got a Lugbara-speaking. And that is different from* [South] *Sudan. So, they knew that this is Uganda. Because, you know,* [South] *Sudan-Uganda borders are very porous."*
>
> Warang, age 21, July 2023, Rhino Camp

> *"Because people of Uganda are speaking Madi, Lugbara, Aringa. So, from there we don't know those language. For us, we speak Bari, Kuku, Kakwa, Arabic."*
>
> Kenneth, age 35, July 2023, Bidibidi

In contrast to the linguistic disparity and subsequent challenges present among host-refugee relations, *Okech*, in turn, mentioned the linguistic proximity between South Sudanese tribes and coinciding indigenous languages in the settlements, with Arabic operating as a *lingua franca* among refugees.

> *"If you look at that borderline, it is compromising of the same ethnic group. But although they are staying in different countries, they still speak the same language.* [...] *Like for here, now we have the Bari speakers, the Kakwa, the Pojulu, the Kuku. And then, we, from Eastern Equatoria, we have Lopit, we have the Jiye, we have Toposa here. But for us, the most main language that we do speak in South Sudan, it is Arabic."*
>
> Okech, age 29, July 2023, Imvepi

5.3. Crossing settlement boundaries

Refugee settlements have been characterised as "places of arrival, onward movement, temporary visits and voluntary return" (Vancluysen, 2020, p. 26). Hence, settlements are not exempt from mobility flows between the refugee and host community. Central in discussions about refugee-host relations is the issue of (un)equal access to services, allocated by external actors. The issue of land access and ownership is considered as a primary challenge by and for refugees, given the lack of unambiguously defined land rights to prevent tensions.

"Because you see that time which you arrive here [in Uganda], *they give us just a quarter that you should build it. And then you dig from this place. Now up that time when you see now, we have stayed. We are now going 6 to 7 years here. They told us we should have an agreement with this one, with the landlord or with the host. They will just give you a small place. And when they give this small place, they saw that things are going very well. Immediately they just chase away, that you should leave this thing. There is a misunderstanding with the refugees and the host."*

Kuol, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

Additional challenges pertain to the collection of firewood, lumbering issues, and employment opportunities. The latter have been stated to initiate frictions between the two communities - occasionally leading to discriminative practices towards refugees.

If I am given privilege, I will do it, for the refugees and host communities. Because here [in Uganda] *we stay together. But still they look at me like I am grabbing a place, I am grabbing services, which they are supposed to be the one doing. So, there is a conflict already."*

Deng, age 30, June 2023, Rhino Camp

As stated above, within the territory of the settlements, refugees experience various limiting boundaries in relation to the accessibility of provided goods and services. Over the course of time, their predicament has worsened and topics of access to education and training, allocation of water and food, access to health facilities, and employment opportunities have increasingly imposed a burden upon the refugee community.

"By then they used to help us. They can give us food; the school is for free. Even medication. As for now, the situation is all changed. Everything they say it needs money. The schools, they start to say that the people should give money. For us, there is no money at all."

Nyandeng, age 29, July 2023, Bidibidi

Central to these concerns, is the premature withdrawal of food, allocated by World Food Program (WFP), paired with soil exhaustion and the reduction of social services offered by implementing partners. Thereby, refugees are categorised into three distinct categories, with corresponding food ratios. This restricted access to food has led to a growing awareness of the temporary and limited character of participants' settlement, instigating rising thoughts of unfeasible survival and possible return to South Sudan.

"The current situation where we are, the transition, we are being put in categories. I don't know if you have heard about it. In category one, two and three. It means that if you are in category three, you may not receive any assistance anymore. So, here, most of the people are even thinking to go back. If there is no peace it means you also risk your life."

Garang, age 32, June 2023, Bidibidi

"It forced some of us to go back to South Sudan. They said as they are going to die because of hunger, better for them go back to their country."

Nhial, age 25, July 2023, Bidibidi

5.4. Belonging

A 'thick description' of the ambiguous navigation of borders by participants has been discussed above, underlining the subjective perception of borders and boundaries by South Sudanese refugees. Borders and boundaries cannot be considered without questioning their relation to the circumscription of communities of belonging and identity narratives. This section therefore considers the relation between mobility trajectories and subsequent perceptions of borders and boundaries, feelings of belonging, and identity narratives. When discussing participants' sense of belonging, diverse participants described a significant 'loss' of belonging following their displacement journey. This fractured belonging can be attributed to the ongoing conflict and instability in South Sudan, ensuing corruption, looting of properties, and limited sustainable opportunities for citizens. Others, in turn, emphasised the uncertain, fluctuating, and evolving nature of belonging.

"It [the war] is threatening [my sense of belonging]*. Because previously, when we are living in our country of origin, we lose a lot of properties that maybe can be able to support our life and sustain us. But all these things, we are not there now. They have all been looted and we have been demarcated back to zero. You are now going to start life from zero. That is the thing that I have seen."*

John, age 28, June 2023, Rhino Camp

"You know, I can feel that now, I even don't know who I am. Because I have lost the focus. I have lost my trust. So, whatever I am doing, I am just doing for the sake that I have to do it. So, for the issue of belonging, I don't know. I belong to South Sudan. I belong here. Still, my vision is not open to me."

Deng, age 30, June 2023, Rhino Camp

Further discussions about the circumscription of communities of belonging have highlighted multiple categories, as well as the various extents, to which one can belong. Recurrent categories of belonging refer to participants' *country of origin, language,* and *tribe*. One category of belonging is illustrated by *Aduk,* reaffirming the permanent and persistent character of her country of origin, in this case South Sudan. This sense of national belonging is further sustained by the possession of (im)material assets and familial ties in South Sudan, as expressed by *John*.

"An origin is an origin. You will always feel that belonging, the sense of belonging."

Aduk, age 26, July 2023, Imvepi

> *"As I have mentioned before, being in your country* [in South Sudan]*, I think you are free. You are free to do everything that you want. You can afford everything because since it is your own country, land will not be something challenging.* [...] *Everything that you want, you can be able to do."*
>
> John, age 28, June 2023, Rhino Camp

Another category of belonging pertains to both tribes and concurring languages. Contrary to a national sense of belonging, belonging defined by tribe and/or language can transcend borders and territories, as linguistic clusters and tribes are often present on both sides of the Uganda-South Sudan border.

> *"Normally what identifies me, myself, is three things. One, my local language. Two, our national language for South Sudan, which is Arabic. Three, the signs that I have. That will show that this person is from this location because this missing gap here* [points to his missing front tooth]*. There is a sign also here* [points to carved skin on his face]*."*
>
> Okech, age 29, July 2023, Imvepi

As such, this emerging classification of belonging is further governed by the two dimensions attributed to the border by participants throughout their mobility trajectory: both a literal and symbolic dimension. On the one hand, the relevance of a territorial and literal perception of the international border, is reiterated by participants referring to a *national* sense of belonging. The perception of symbolic boundaries, on the other hand, is reaffirmed by participants whose sense of belonging is defined by linguistic and/or tribal affiliation.

5.5. Triangulation

To complement discussions on refugees' navigation of borders, participants were asked to illustrate meaningful moments, places, and interactions throughout their mobility trajectory (see Schwarz, 2020). The border area of South Sudan and Uganda served as an entry point, as all participants moved through this area. In line with the findings from the interviews, the various drawings replicated the two dimensions attributed to the border. *Kenyi's* journey illustrates this dual perception of borders, serving as an exemplifying case for a reoccurring theme drawn by multiple other participants (see drawing below). After his home, in a village close to the town of Yei, was attacked on the 28th of 2016, he fled and spent the following weeks walking towards the Ugandan border. However, his journey was delayed by his encounter with rebels, stopping and questioning him for information about him and his family. *Kenyi* – 14 years old at the time – belonged to those unable to work, but suitable for training to fight government forces. As such, he was captured, imprisoned in a camp, and trained to become a child soldier, until an uncle of his – a senior member within the rebel group - eventually arranged for his release.

"They are looking for those categories of people who are like us, who are unable to work. So, as long as they get me, now I am with them. I told them, for me, I don't know anything about these politics. There is maybe someone with a gun. So, how will I manage? Even they end up giving me [a] gun. Big like this. I told them I don't know. If I shoot someone, is it bad? Maybe I shoot someone, it is not good. It is always a crime to me. Always they do teaching me how to make war."

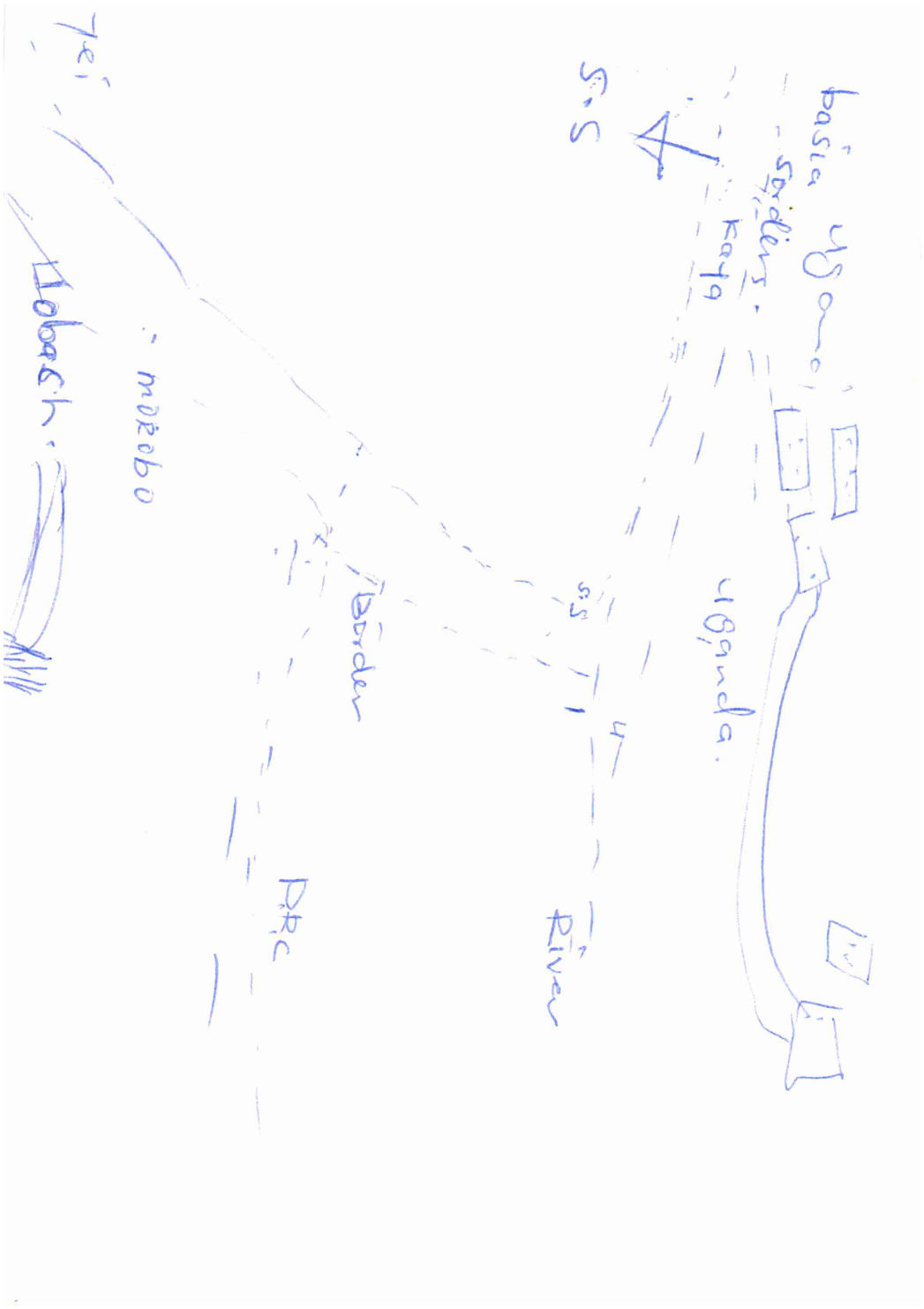
Here starts the second part of his journey towards Uganda. Alongside his brother and nephew, approaching the border of South Sudan, Uganda, and the DRC, he followed signs towards Uganda. Throughout his journey he used bush roads, in the hope to avoid further encounters with government forces and ambushes along the main road. When ready to cross the Kaya River, close to the town of Busia, he encountered Ugandan soldiers carrying guns, scaring him away further into the bush. It took him a week before daring to cross the river again, and finally reach the registration point established by UNHCR, where he was later granted his refugee status.

"What kept in mind that that place is a border is the river. And from there also there is Ugandan police. That is what that makes me to think that this one is Uganda. And there is also a plaque. Which means there is a border here. [...] There are some people who come and see you, but I am now having that fear whereby if you saw someone who was shot near you, you now have that fear. [...] I saw soldiers again. From there, they also start to come and ask "come, come, come"."

Kenyi's journey illustrates a variety of differing and intersecting representations of borders and boundaries, highlighting complex mobility trajectories, no longer limited to an exclusive territorial understanding. As such, symbolic boundaries – linguistic and tribal - were described, attesting of invisible processes of border delocalisation through border practices. By gaining insights into critical encounters, modes of transportation, moments of (im)mobility, and interactions with other tribes and languages, the spatial and temporal non-linear character of cross-border mobility is reiterated.

"Because last time I know Swahili. But there is a soldier we used to speak in Swahili, and there is another one who knows how to talk with English. And this one we cannot understand ourselves. Of course, one word sometimes is enough if you know. So, from there, I told him I don't know how to talk this. So, they come and interact with me directly."

Figure 3. *Drawing by Kenyi.*



6. Discussion and conclusion

This research aimed to provide a 'thick description' of the navigation of borders and boundaries by South Sudanese refugees, with a particular focus on the relation between subsequent perceptions of borders and boundaries, communities of belonging, and identity narratives. Drawing attention to micro-practices of meaning attribution, perception, practices of (in)visibility, this thesis is centred around multiple mobility trajectories of refugees, highlighted in a range of semi-structured interviews conducted in different refugee settlements in northern Uganda. Compared with existing literature, the results have both confirmed and contested previous various academic findings. In contrast to previous research focusing on the relevance of the territorial sovereign border, multiple and integrated cross-border perceptions of territoriality have emerged from participants' narratives (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999; Agnew, 1994; Derrick, 2020; Giddens, 1987; Krasner, 1999; Kratochwil, 1986; Taylor, 1994). As such, the territorial and literal perception of the border has been complemented with a symbolic dimension, encompassing linguistic and tribal boundaries. Refugees further recognised the presence of internal settlements boundaries. Hence, this plurality of border perspectives, including both literal and symbolic practices and discourses, is characterised by phenomena of border de-localisation and deterritorialisation.

The study of mobility and displacement is inextricably connected to the concepts of belonging and place-attachment, rendering the idea of legitimate belonging uncertain (Merkx, 2002). While belonging can be considered a subjective feeling, it is socially informed by an interrelated sense of being and longing (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). From this perspective, the results illustrate the need to examine how refugees' sense of belonging is territorially (un)defined. For refugees, loss of national belonging has proven to be important, attributed the failure of the South Sudanese state to accommodate and resolve the continued state of insecurity and consequent loss of (im)material assets. As such, bonds of space are loosened in the pursuit of a prosperous life (Chatty et al., 2013; Sharma, 2022). Complex experiences of mobility and displacement have further rendered belonging shifting and fluid, at once deterritorialised and territorialised, revealing multiple and concurring senses of being and belonging. Through social processes of inclusion and exclusion in the settlements, based on language and access to services, refugees have alternatively categorised themselves along tribal and linguistic lines. These results correspond to previous research regarding the border as meaning carrying entity, transcending exclusive state territorial terms (Kaiser, 2010; Rumford, 2008; Schmitt, 2018). Nonetheless, informed by memories from South Sudan, and through settlement experiences in Uganda, a deep sense of longing for South Sudan remains present. Expected to repatriate one day, South Sudanese refugees in Uganda continue to assign importance to their country of origin, referring to themselves as 'South Sudanese' (Merkx, 2002). The results contribute to the literature on borders, belonging, and identity in two ways.

First, in contrast to previous research, the idea of a shifting identity with the transition from homeland to borderland has been contradicted (Merkx, 2002; Sharma, 2022). Instead, the findings have illustrated the presence of persistent identification narratives of national character. Enhanced by refugee's deep sense of longing for South Sudan, refugees reaffirm a territorially defined sense of belonging, ranging beyond rigid categories of (non-)inclusion (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011).

A second contribution pertains to the strong historical cross-border tribal and linguistic ties, that have gradually been instrumentalised and appropriated by refugees into new categories of belonging, deepening refugee's multiple senses of belonging. As such, the findings do not corroborate the idea of a primary 'border identity', assumed to become more important than other identities (Merkx, 2002). Rather, it can be argued that refugees continuously negotiate old and new identities, between 'here' and 'there'. The process further leads to the creation of new identity configurations of sub-ethnic and linguistic nature (Chatty et al., 2013; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011; Sharma, 2022).

The scope of these results thus reaches well beyond the predominant focus on the sovereign territorial nation-state, as key factor in the development of identities. In line with previous research, it can be argued that "boundaries both create identities and are created through identity" (Newman & Paasi, 1998, p. 194). Refugees' complex position towards the border is reflected in a newly evolving construction of identities, both deterritorialised and reterritorialised at once. On the one hand, their identity as South Sudanese is eroding due to displacement experiences and settlement dynamics. While in the settlements, most favour an identification in tribal or linguistic terms, to facilitate inclusion and cohesion in the settlements. But, on the other hand, the experience of displacement and the temporary and difficult character of the settlements, has reinforced refugee's sense of national identification, leading to rising thoughts of return and a persistent longing for South Sudan.

This research is, however, limited by a number of factors. A first limitation is the pragmatic choice of sampling strategy, leading to an unbalanced sample in terms of sub-ethnicity and gender. Overrepresentation of sub-ethnic communities is partly instigated by the personal network of the personnel of Enabel Arua, operating as a gatekeeper during this fieldwork; and the prominent presence of particular tribal communities in the settlements, due to closer proximity to the border. Furthermore, although cautiously attempted to prevent it, a gender bias persists (only one third of the participants are women), leaving out potentially valuable aspects. Second, as I did not speak Arabic or another indigenous language to South Sudan, and to avoid missing out on details and correctness in a constricted translation, participants speaking English were favoured over others. As such, 'popular targets' – fluent and proficient – are more represented than others, further sustaining a biased selection of participants. Finally, driven by time and financial limitations, in-depth interviews were restricted to a limited number of settlements. Additional time in the field, and opportunities to move to other refugee hosting areas and settlements, could have generated more complete and geographically representative information.

Despite these limitations and taking the principal aim of this study into account, this study represents a preliminary attempt to contextualise and capture the complex navigation of borders and boundaries by refugees in the borderland between Uganda and South Sudan. By rethinking the logic of borders beyond their territorial materialisation, and by including a symbolic dimensions (tribal and linguistic), this thesis sheds light on the complex ways in which borders (and boundaries) inform diverse feelings of belonging and subsequent identity narratives. In doing so, this research highlights the plurality of senses of belonging developed by refugees, in order to navigate both the literal and symbolic borders of this border area.

Influenced by dimensional perceptions of borders and boundaries, communities of belonging among refugees are formed according to the same interpretative framework, in turn affecting processes of identity negotiation. As identification is not a linear process, subject to the evolution of time and space, refugees have demonstrated a multi-layered and interrelated process of nationalistic, tribal, and linguistic identification, grounded across multiple locations. Rather than a conceptualisation of borders as outcome of structural and territorial factors, further research should be directed towards a more holistic understanding of borderland dynamics as encompassing multiple dimensions and engendering a range of (de)territorialised social, cultural, and political interactions and negotiations. Within the particular context of the refugee regime, more attention should be paid to the specific characteristic of borderlands and refugee's complex identities, irrespective of their nationality, enclosing the potential to better target the provision of relief efforts offered by aid and development actors.

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Appendixes

Appendix A – *Interview guide*

Belonging Beyond Borders:

Identity Negotiations Among South-Sudanese Refugees

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Nina Soudan

Promotor: dr. Amélie Godefroidt

Background information – Questionnaire

1. [*interviewer observation]* What is the respondents' gender? ☐ Female ☐ Male

2. How old were you on your last birthday?

3. Were you born in Sudan? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. What region are you from? Please indicate on the map.

5. In which year did you leave South Sudan?

6. What is your tribe? [open-ended]

7. What is your religion, if any? [open-ended]

   ☐ None

8. Are you currently working full-time, or part-time, or are you not working?

☐ Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐ Not working

9. Are you married? ☐ Yes ☐No

10. How many children do you have?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ More than 5


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SUDAN
EGYPT
LYBIA
CHAD
ERITREA
ETHIOPIA
SAUDI ARABIA
RED SEA
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
UGANDA
KENYA
Libyan Desert
Nubian Desert
NORTHERN
Administrative boundary
Halaib
Selima Oasis
Semna West
Wadi Halfa
Salala
Muhammad Qol
Laqiya Arba'in
Kerma
Abu Hamed
Port Sudan
Suakin
Nukheila
Dongola
Karima
NILE
RED SEA
Tokar
El'Atrun
Old Dongola
Merowe
Haiya
Karora
Jebel Abyad Plateau
Jebel Nagashush
El Damar
Atbara
Gadamai
Abu Dulu
Meroë
Shendi
NORTHERN DARFUR
Abu 'Uruq
KHARTOUM
KASSALA
Omdurman
Khartoum
Kassala
Asmara
Miski
NORTHERN KORDOFAN
GEZIRA
Wad Madani
Gedaref
Umm Badr
Sodiri
Dar Hamid
GEDAREF
El Geneina
Al Fasher
El Obeid
Rabak
Sinja
WESTERN DARFUR
WHITE NILE
SENNAR
Gonder
En Nahud
Nyala
Ed Da'ein
SOUTHERN KORDOFAN
Ed Damazin
BLUE NILE
Tullus
Nuba Mts.
Famaka
Muglad
Kologi
Kadugli
Talodi
SOUTHERN DARFUR
UPPER NILE
Radom
Abyei
UNITY
Malakal
Kafia Kingi
NORTHERN BAHAR
Bentiu
Kigille
WESTERN BAHAR
Aweil
WARAB
Raga
EL GHAZAL
Warrap
Fathai
Wau
Akobo
BAHAR EL GHAZAL
JONGLEI
Rumbek
LAKES
Ukwaa
Bor
Towot
Li Yubu
WESTERN EQUATORIA
EASTERN EQUATORIA
Juba
Kapoeta
Yambio
CENTRAL EQUATORIA
Torit
Nagishot
Ādīs Ābeba (Addis Ababa)
SUDAN
National capital
State (wilayah) capital
Town
International boundary
State (wilayah) boundary
0 100 200 300 km
0 100 200 mi

Memories of Migration from South Sudan to Uganda

- Can you tell me about an ordinary day back in your country of origin?
- What was for you the point to decide that you had to leave South Sudan?
- Did you directly migrate to Uganda? Or how did you travel? Via other countries?
- Did you travel with your spouse and/or children?
- Do you still have family and friends living in South Sudan?

Uganda / Settlement

- How did you feel upon arriving in Uganda?
- You just told me about an ordinary day back in South Sudan. What does an ordinary day in the refugee camp/Uganda look like?

Feelings of 'belonging'

- What does it mean to you to have a sense of 'belonging'? How do you know that you belong?
- Can you describe a situation that comes to your mind about 'belonging'

- blijft moeilijk
- vergelijken met eigen voorbeeld

Mobility journey

- Can you now tell me more about your journey from South Sudan to Uganda? What did it look like?
- Could you maybe make a drawing of this? Illustrating your journey and the borders/boundaries/barriers your encountered.

Perceptions of borders

*** *Reflecting upon drawing*

- Did you only experience a physical border? Symbolized by entities such as government forces, rebels, authorities? Or by fences, arms, etc.
- Or did you also experience other types of borders during your journey: language differences, encountering different ethnicities or tribes, diverging cultural practices?
- Were these ~~(internal)~~ borders already present within South Sudan, or only at the border?
- Do you still encounter ~~(internal)~~ borders/barriers here, in the settlement?

*** *Reflecting upon drawing*

- ~~Do any of these border/barriers relate to the way you identify yourself?~~
- Which themes are most important to you?
- Do any of these themes relate to your sense of 'belonging'?

Belonging beyond borders

- Can you tell me how the war affected your sense of belonging?
- How would you describe your sense of belonging now during your settlement in Uganda?
- Can you describe any incidents in which you did not feel like you belonged?
- What is important to you to get a sense of 'belonging'?
- In your opinion, is 'belonging' linked to a territory/fixed place?
- When I say, 'national identity' or 'to be South Sudanese' what does that mean to you?

Collective cultural practices

- What do you miss most about South Sudan?
- Is keeping your culture important to you?
- ~~How do you integrate your culture into your daily life here?~~
- Are there any cultural practices and activities that you are doing within your community?

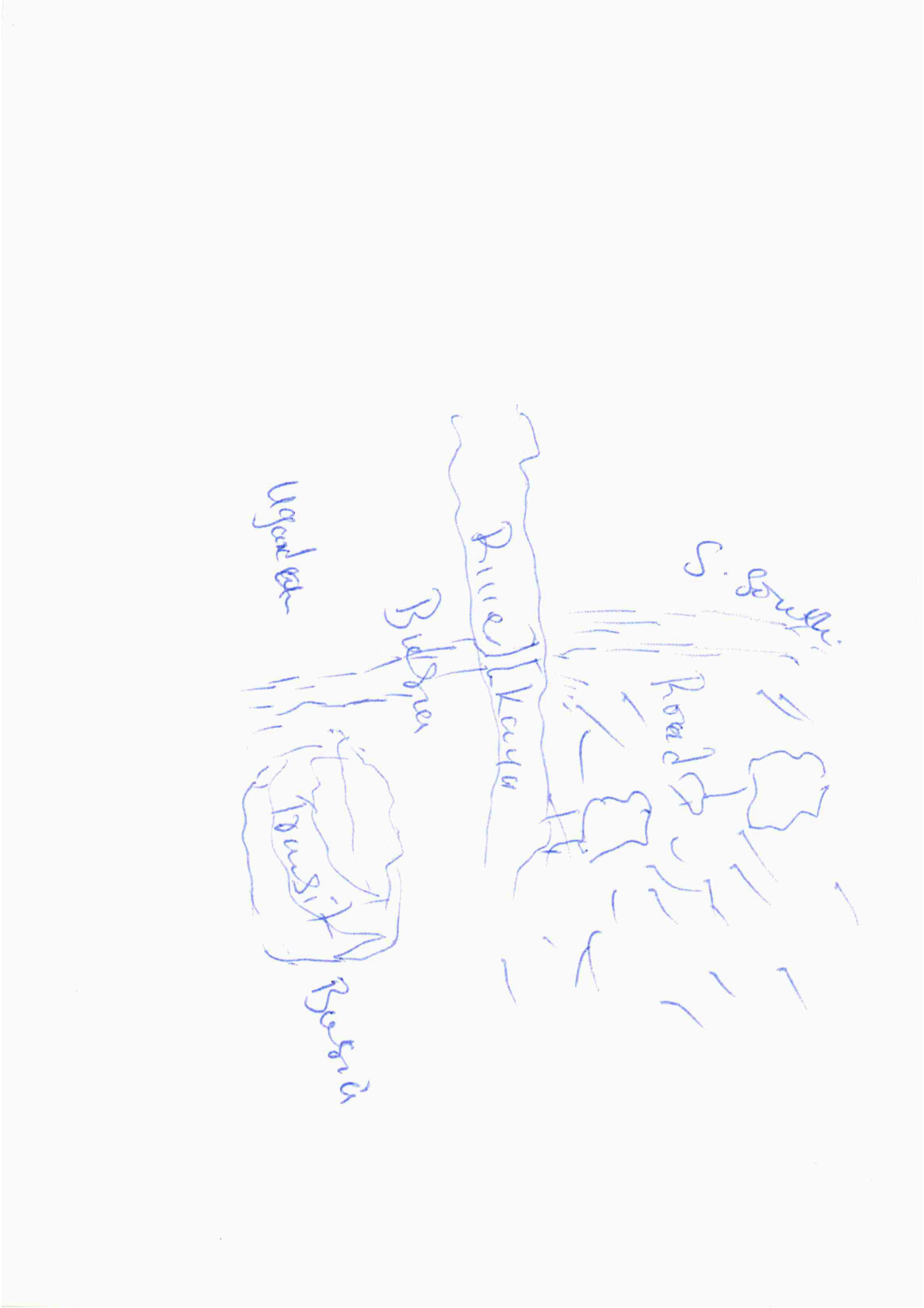
Feelings of returning

- How do you feel about South Sudan now? How do you feel after having left?
- Since leaving South Sudan, have you already travelled back there? Why?
- Do you think that you will ever go back? Why?
- Do you believe that you may have difficulties if you are sent back to your country? What do you expect to see there?
- Some people have left and occasionally return/have returned to South Sudan? What do you think is the main reason for their departure?

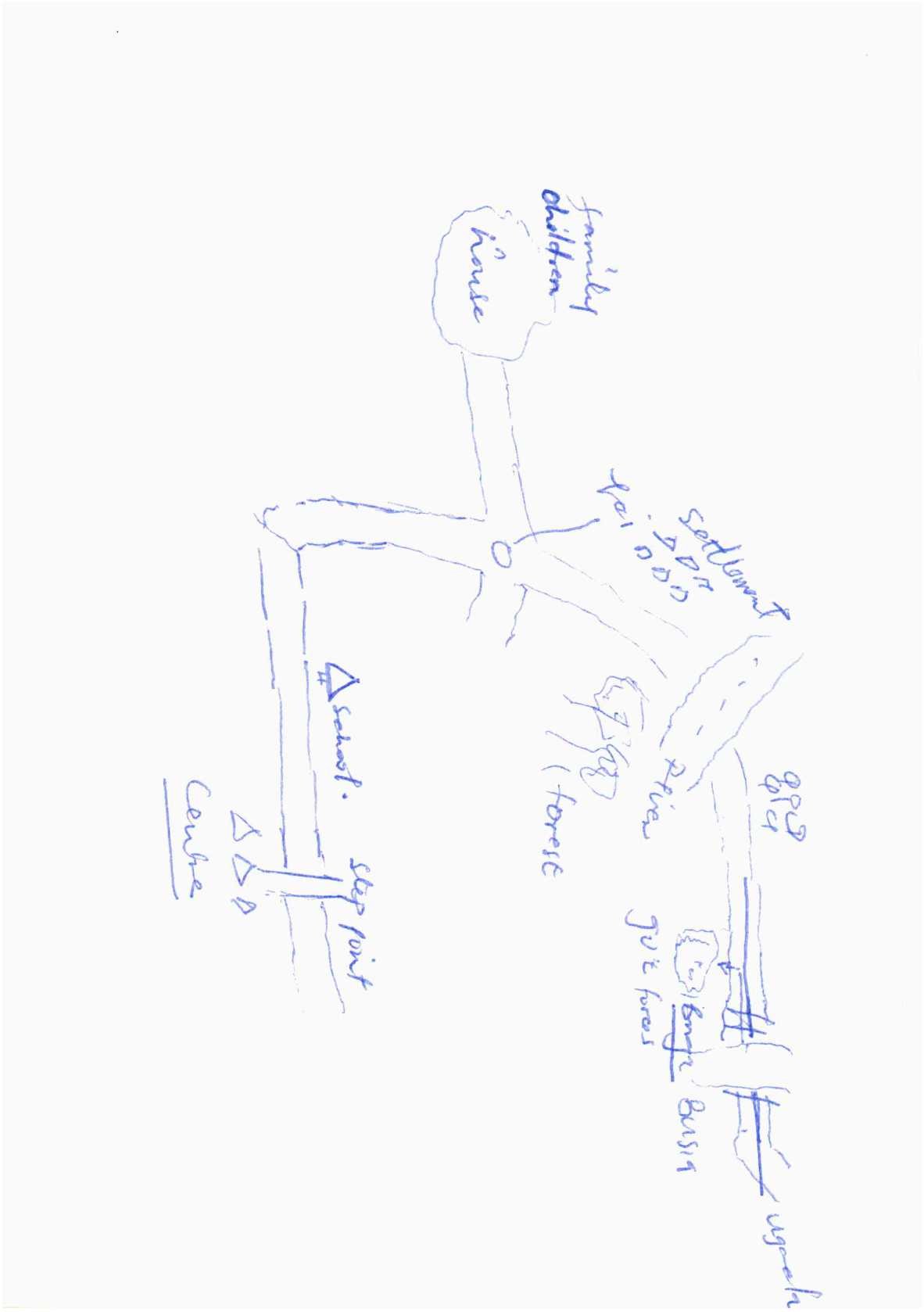
↳ food allocation suspended
dic of hunger > are in uganda

Appendix B – *Drawings*

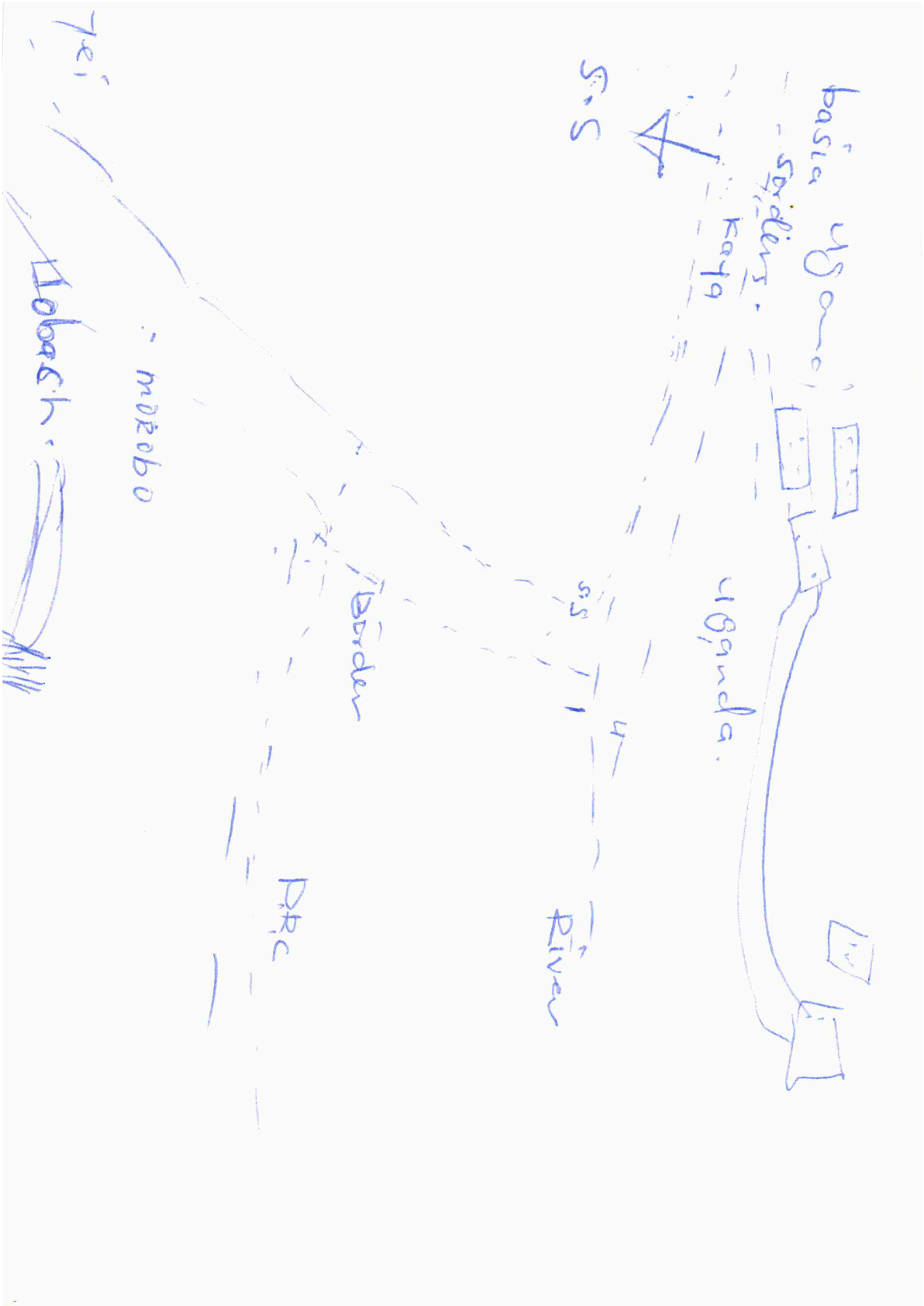
Drawing (Garang)



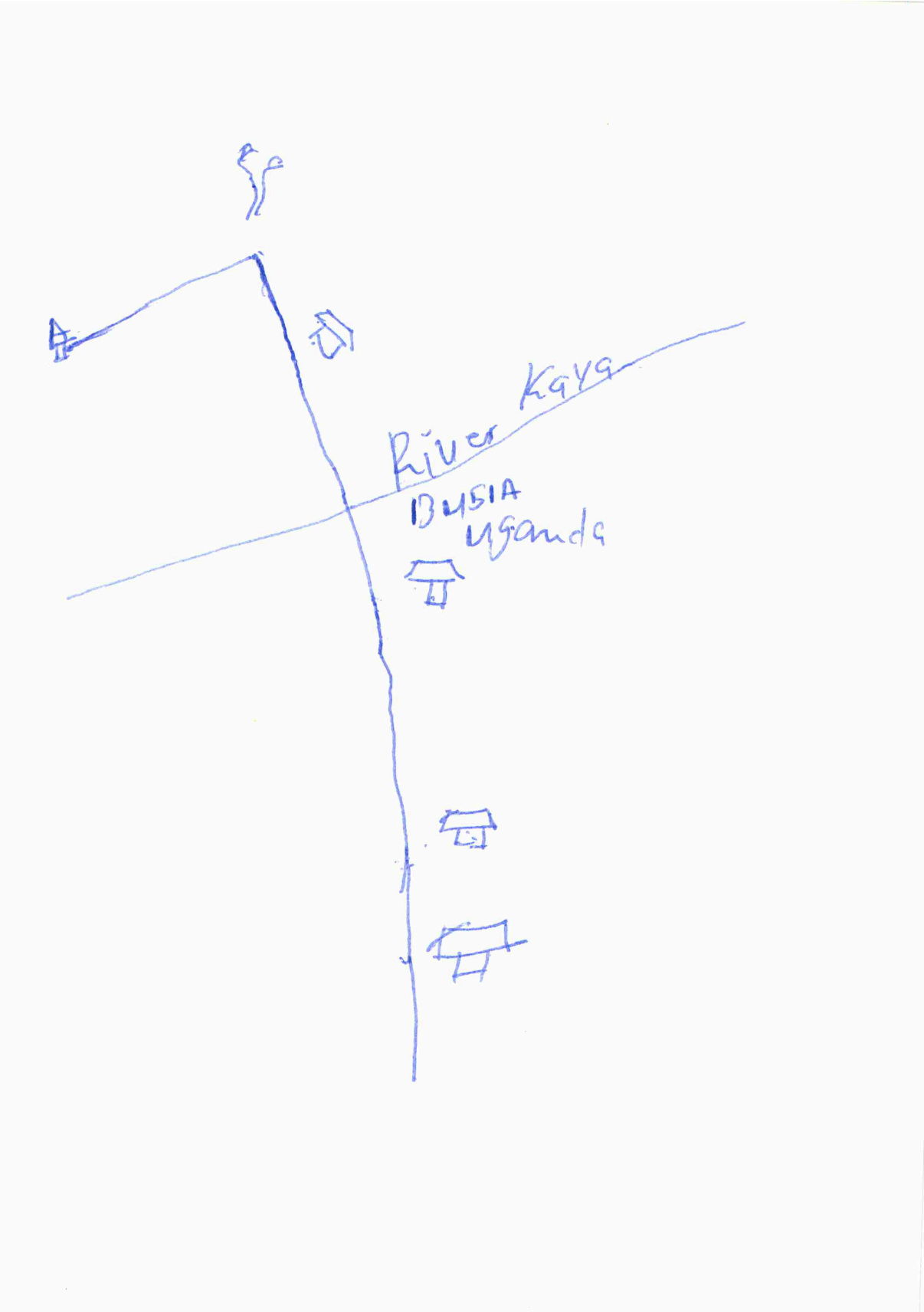
Drawing (Alfred)



Drawing (Kenyi)



Drawing (Akol)



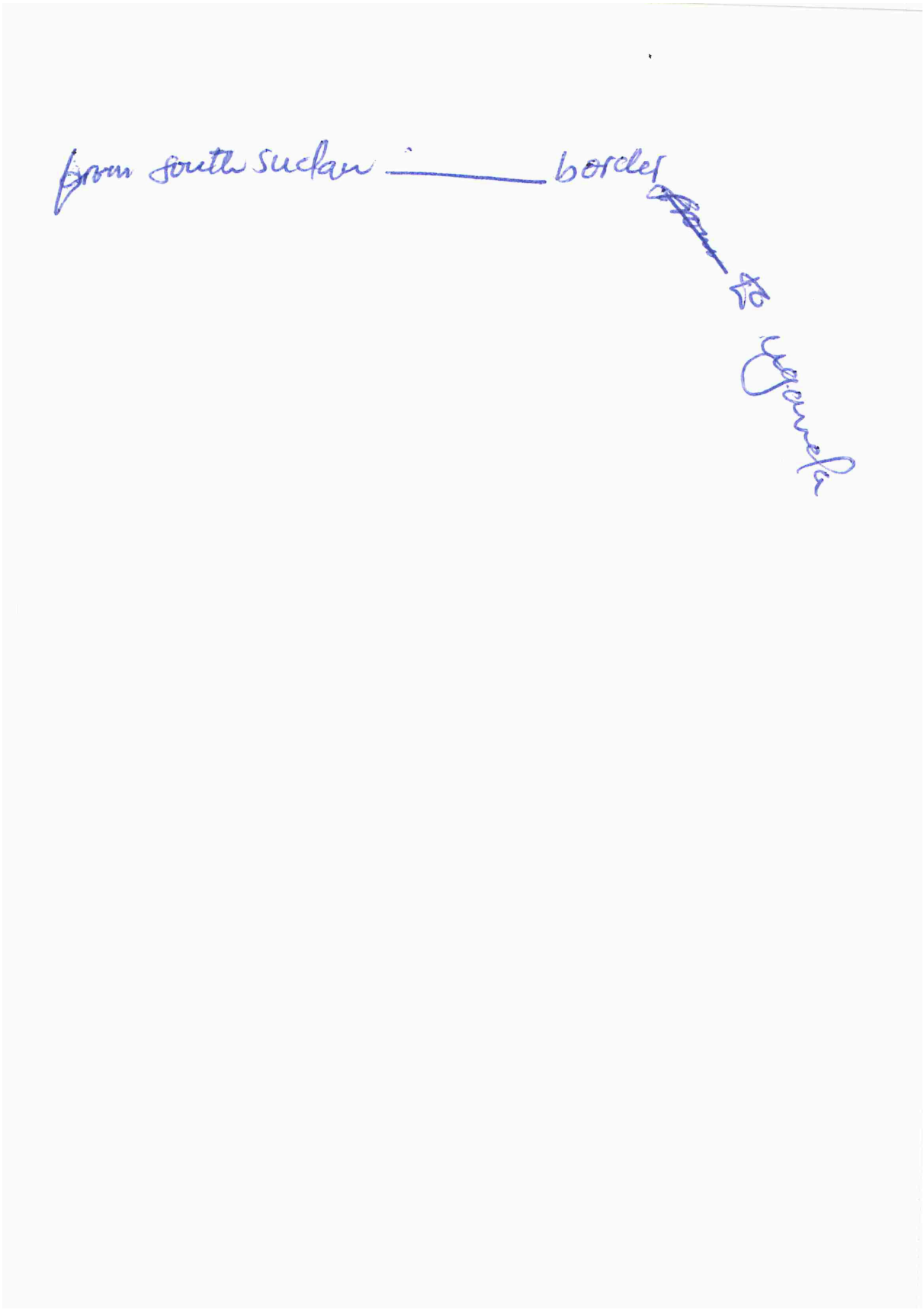
Drawing (Nyandeng)



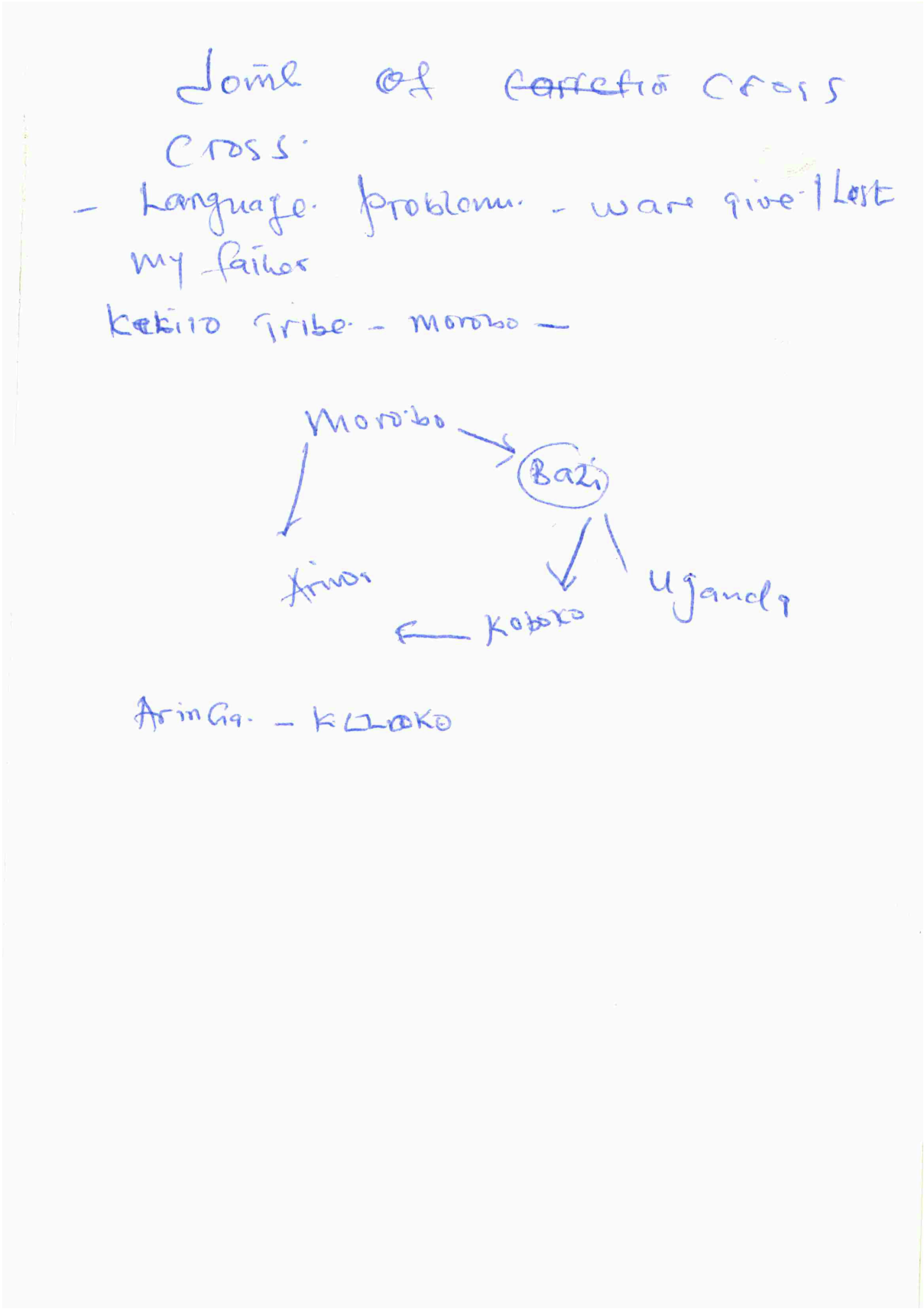
Drawing (Akuja)



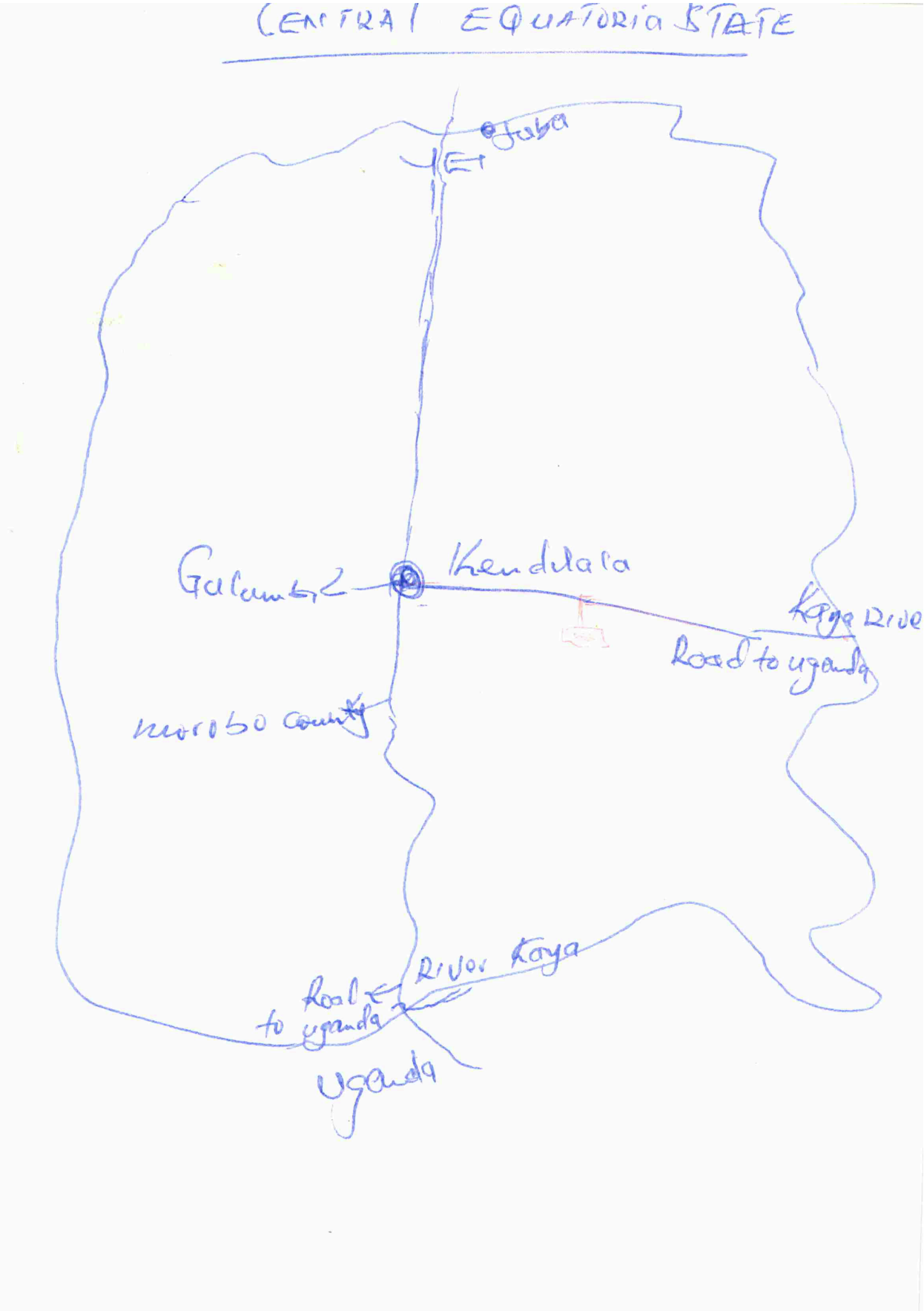
Drawing (Majok)



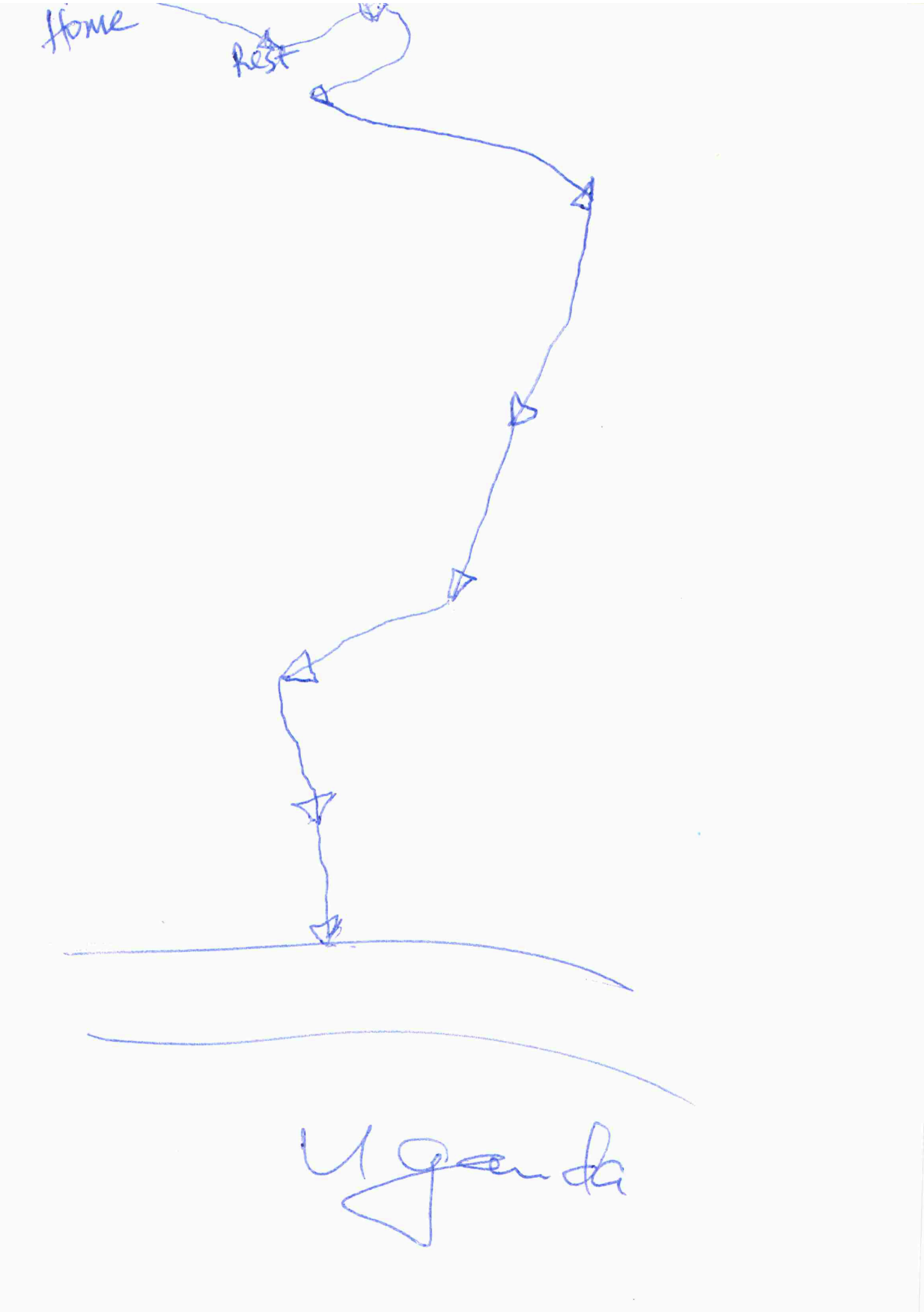
Drawing (Kuol)



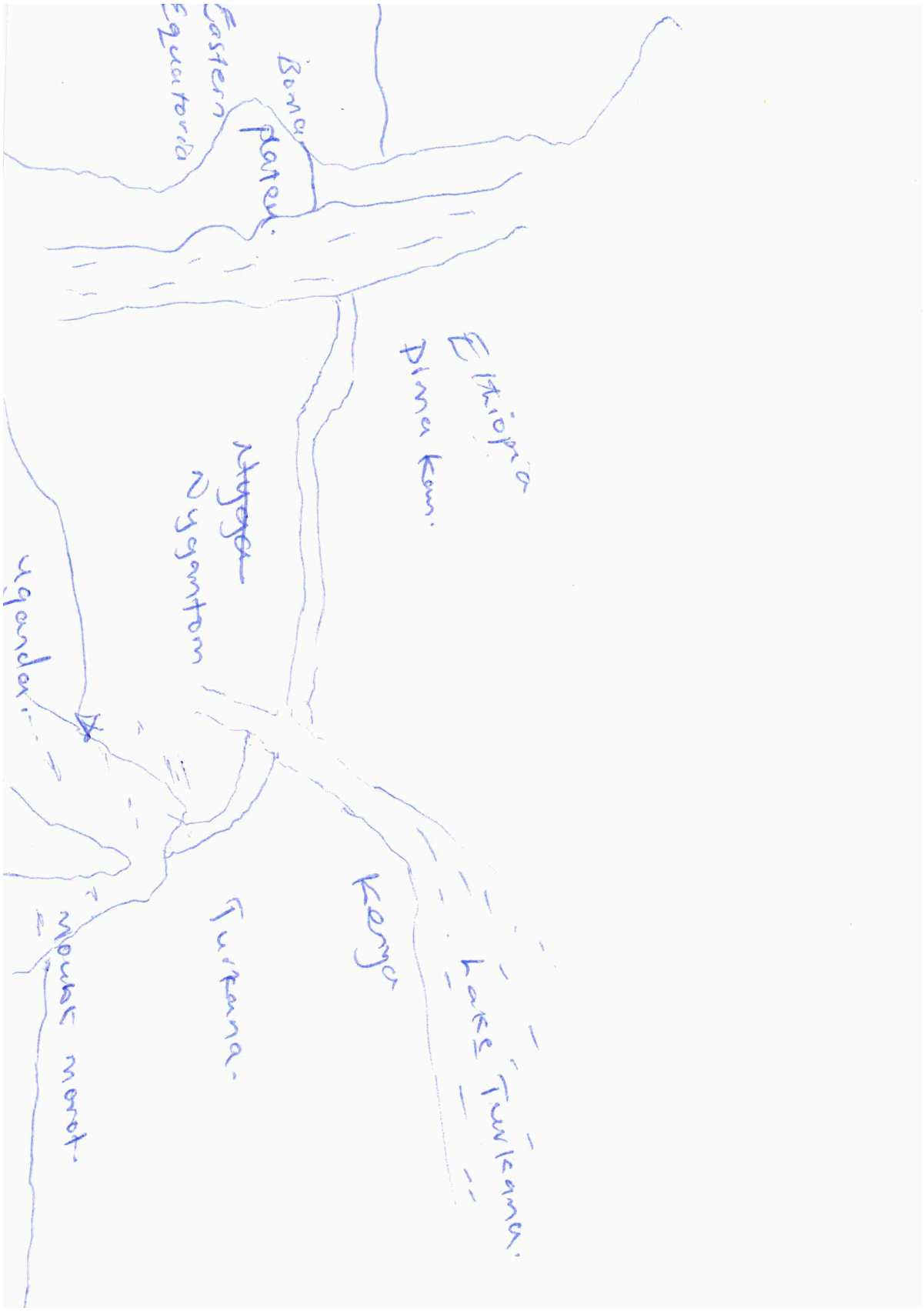
Drawing (Nhial)



Drawing (Kenneth)



Drawing (Okech)



Drawing (Aduk)



Drawing (Anthony)



Appendix C – *Codebook*

Categories	***Subcategories***	***Code Descriptions***
Feelings upon arrival	Relief	Codes refer to an expressed sense of relief upon arrival in Uganda.
	Security	Codes refer to an expressed sense of security upon arrival in Uganda.
	Support	Codes refer to an expressed sense of support by external actors upon arrival in Uganda.
	Trauma and suffering	Codes refer to an expressed sense of trauma and/or suffering upon arrival in Uganda.
Reasons for departure	Armed conflict	Codes refer to the armed conflict in South Sudan, as primary motive to flee.
	Hardship	Codes refer to participants' endured hardship in South Sudan, as primary motive to flee.
Reasons for non-departure	Dangerous journey	Codes refer to the dangerous journey towards Uganda, as hindering factor to not leave South Sudan.
	Employment	Codes refer to participants' employment and/or income, as hindering factor to not leave South Sudan.
	Family	Codes refer to the location of participants' familial ties, as hindering factor to not leave South Sudan.
	Negative experience of displacement	Codes refer to previous negative experiences of displacement, as hindering factor to not leave South Sudan.
Intentional resettlement to Uganda	Peace	Codes refer to peace and/or security as reason to flee towards Uganda.
	Proximity	Codes refer to the geographical and/or cultural and/or linguistic proximity as reason to flee towards Uganda.
	Support of UNHCR	Codes refer to the facilitating presence and/or support of UNHCR as reason to flee towards Uganda.
Unintentional resettlement to Uganda	Circumstances	Codes refer to concurring circumstances as reason to flee towards Uganda.
	Collective movement	Codes refer to a broader collective movement as reason to flee towards Uganda.
Loss of belonging from South Sudan	Conflict and instability	Codes refer to an eroding sense of belonging from South Sudan, due to conflict and instability.
	Corruption	Codes refer to an eroding sense of belonging from South Sudan, due to corruption.

	Displacement	Codes refer to an eroding sense of belonging from South Sudan, due to displacement.
	Insufficient opportunities	Codes refer to an eroding sense of belonging from South Sudan, due to a lack of opportunities and/or services.
Loss of belonging from Uganda	Difficult conditions	Codes refer to an eroding sense of belonging from Uganda, due to difficult conditions within the settlements.
	Limited development	Codes refer to an eroding sense of belonging from Uganda, due to limited development opportunities for refugees.
"New" belonging	Education	Codes refer to a newly acquired sense of belonging in Uganda, due to educational opportunities.
	Freedom	Codes refer to a newly acquired sense of belonging in Uganda, due to freedom of movement and/or rights.
	Security	Codes refer to a newly acquired sense of belonging in Uganda, due to a sense of security and/or stability.
	Support and services	Codes refer to a newly acquired sense of belonging in Uganda, due to the presence of support by external actors and/or service provision.
Non-territorial belonging	By family	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by familial ties.
	By language	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by language and/or linguistic cluster.
	By tribe	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by participants' tribal affiliation.
	By status	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by a legal status as 'refugee'.
Territorial belonging to South Sudan	By (im)material assets	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by the possession of (im)material assets.
	By country of origin	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by participants' country of origin.
	Uncertain sense of belonging	Codes refer to an uncertain and/or undecided sense of belonging.
Belonging to Uganda	By (im)material assets	Codes refer to a sense of belonging determined by the possession of (im)material assets.
Linguistic boundaries	Host community and language	Codes refer to the relations between host and refugee community centred around language.
	Mobility and language	Codes refer to mobility experiences centred around language.

	Tribes and language	Codes refer to relations between tribes centred around language.
Settlement boundaries	Host-refugee relations	Codes refer to the arising challenges between the host and refugee community.
	Firewood and lumber	Codes refer to issues of firewood collection and/or lumbering.
	Land ownership	Codes refer to issues of access to land and land ownership between the refugee community versus host community.
	Services	Codes refer to issues of differential access to services.
	Refugee-refugee relations	Codes refer to the arising challenges among refugees.
	Acces to employment	Codes refer to employment access and/or opportunities.
	Acces to health facilities	Codes refer to the access and/or cost of health facilities.
	Access to education and training	Codes refer to the access and/or cost of education and training opportunities.
	Access to food	Codes refer to the reduction of the food allocation and/or access to food.
	Access to services	Codes refer to the access to service provision for refugees.
	Access to water	Codes refer to the access to water.
Territorial border: geographical dimension	Nature of land	Codes refer to the nature of the land and/or geographical elements.
	River	Codes refer to the river Kaya.
Territorial border: material dimension	Border mark	Codes refer to material, physical and/or visible border marks and signs.
	Registration	Codes refer to the registration and reception infrastructure and/or services and/or goods.
Territorial border: symbolic dimension	Presence Ugandan authorities	Codes refer to the presence and/or actions of Ugandan authorities and/or forces of order in general.
	Presence UNHCR	Codes refer to the presence and/or actions of UNHCR.
	Safety	Codes refer to a sense of safety and/or security when crossing the international border.
Tribal boundaries	Dialogue	Codes refer to organized mediation and dialogues efforts between tribes within the settlements.

	Diversity	Codes refer to the diversity of tribes within the settlements.
	Tensions in settlements	Codes refer to tribal tensions within the settlements.
	Tensions in South Sudan	Codes refer to tribal tensions within South Sudan.
Mobility narratives	Child soldier	Codes refer to the capture of children throughout participants' mobility trajectory, to be trained to become child soldiers.
	Duration	Codes refer to the durations of participants' mobility trajectory.
	Encounter with government forces	Codes refer to the encounter with government forces throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Encounter with rebels	Codes refer to the encounter with rebels throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Main vs bush road	Codes refer to the type of road used throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Registration and reception	Codes refer to the reception and/or registration of refugees at the border of Uganda.
	Transportation	Codes refer to the various transportation modes employed throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Violence	Codes refer to the episodes of violence endured throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
Mobility drawings	Geographical features	Codes refer to geographical elements throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Mobility difficulties	Codes refer to the difficult conditions endured throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Transportation	Codes refer to the various transportation modes employed throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
	Tribes	Codes refer to the interactions with other tribes throughout participants' mobility trajectory.
Personal information	Age	
	Birthplace	
	Children	
	Date of departure	
	Family in SS	
	Marital status	
	Occupation in settlement	

	Occupation in South Sudan	
	Religion	
	Tribe	
Challenges going back to South Sudan	Access to food	Codes refer to a difficult access to food in South Sudan, if sent back.
	Become soldier	Codes refer to the risk of being forced to become a soldier in South Sudan, if sent back.
	Employment	Codes refer to difficult employment opportunities in South Sudan, if sent back.
	Insecurity	Codes refer to insecurity and/or armed conflict in South Sudan, if sent back.
	Loss of properties	Codes refer to a loss of properties in South Sudan, if sent back.
Longing for South Sudan	''Home''	Codes refer to a missing sense of 'home'.
	Abundance of land	Codes refer to the freedom of land in South Sudan.
	Family and friends	Codes refer to a missing family and/or friends.
	Material possessions	Codes refer to missing material possessions.
	Time pressure	Codes refer to a sense of time pressure and/or lost time in Uganda, in terms of long-term development.
Reasons for non-return	Access to opportunities	Codes refer to the access to opportunities in Uganda.
	Educational system	Codes refer to the educational system in Uganda.
	Reluctancy to 'start over'	Codes refer to an expressed reluctancy to "start over" "from zero".
Reasons for return	Family and friends	Codes refer to family and friends
	Land crisis	Codes refer to issues of land and land ownership in Uganda
	Food crisis	Codes refer to the ongoing food crisis in Uganda and/or aid allocation reduction
	National sentiment	Codes refer to a national sentiment
	Opportunities for development	Codes refer to the unlimited opportunities for development in South Sudan (services, employment, education, land, etc.). Sense of urgency to build a life.

Appendix D – *Ethical review*

SOCIAAL-MAATSCHAPPELIJKE ETHISCHE COMMISSIE (SMEC)
SOCIAL AND SOCIETAL ETHICS COMMITTEE

3000 LEUVEN, BELGIË
SMEC@KULEUVEN.BE

February 28, 2023

ONS KENMERK Ethical review SMEC

UW KENMERK

Amélie Godefroidt, Nina Soudan

LEUVEN

Dear researchers,

Your research protocol entitled: ""Belonging Beyond Borders: Identity Negotiations among South-Sudanese Refugees in Northern-Uganda" (Master Thesis in International Politics)" was reviewed by the SMEC board on February 10, 2023.

The board confirms that your protocol meets the expected ethical standards regarding the voluntary involvement of human participants in scientific research.

Its decision with regard to this protocol is therefore: **Favorable**.

Your protocol received the following approval number:

G-2022-5832-R2(MAR)

This is your final approval number. Please refer to the G-number in future communications. This approval is valid for 4 years.

Yours sincerely,

p.p. Prof. Dieter Baeyens
Chair - SMEC Review Board

https://www.kuleuven.be/english/research/integrity/smec

Appendix E – *Clearance from the Office of the Prime Minister*

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

DEPARTMENT OF REFUGEES, ARUA REFUGEE DESK, PLOT 49 AVENUE ROAD. P.O. BOX 648, ARUA, UGANDA
TELEPHONES: General Line 0476 420251, 0772 854919, Web: www.opm.go.ug, E-mail: solomonosakan@gmail.com and otaati@yahoo.com

In any correspondence on this subject, please quote No: OPM/AR/162

20/03/2023

The Settlement Commandant

Imvepi refugee settlement

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH

The bearer of this letter, Ms Nina Soudan, is a student attached to Enable Uganda- Arua Offices and is studying a Masters Degree at KU Leuven University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Centre for Research on Peace and Development.

Permission is granted for her to conduct social research at Imvepi refugee settlement on the topic:- Belonging Beyond Borders; Identity Negotiations among South Sudanese refugees in Northern – Uganda(MA thesis). Data collection shall be through in depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Please introduce the student to refugee community leaders, partners' agencies at Imvepi r/s to enable her collect data. The student is free carry video recording and focus group discussions as a means of data collection. The student must observe research ethics such as respecting the privacy of refugee households and individuals while in the settlement and furthermore ensure confidentiality of all data collected, which is for private use . Any assistance rendered to her is appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Solomon Osakan

REFUGEE DESK OFFICER

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
REFUGEE DESK OFFICE- ARUA
20 MAR 2023
PLOT 49 AVENUE RD
P O BOX 648 ARUA, UGANDA
TEL 047620251

CC: Ms Nina Soudan
University of Leuven-Belgium

CC Dr Amelia Godefroidt , University of Leuven Belgium

Vision:-A Public Sector that is responsive and accountable in steering Uganda towards rapid economic growth and development.

Appendix F – *Informed consent*

Informed consent

Title of the research: **"Belonging Beyond Borders: Identity Negotiations Among South-Sudanese Refugees"**

Researcher: Nina Soudan
nina.soudan@student.kuleuven.be
T+ 324 83 18 54 97
Faculty of Social Science, KU Leuven

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Amélie Godefroidt
amelie.godefroidt@kuleuven.be
Parkstraat 45, 3000 B-LEUVEN
Faculty of Social Science, KU Leuven

Goal and methodology of the research:
The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the **identity formation processes** among South Sudanese refugees. Particular attention will be paid to the role of perceived borders and border contestations to address the process of identity negotiations, meaning making, and feelings of 'belonging' in the context of contested border regimes.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

- I know that I will participate in two interviews on my identity perceptions and feelings of 'belonging'. The interview will also touch upon my views on the Sudan-South Sudan border and conflict.

- I know that both interviews will take about one to two hours.

- I know that my participation may be associated with **emotional discomfort** or other difficulties as we will discuss sensitive topics such as conflict, migration, social and political identities, feelings of belonging, etc.

- I know that I can safely express such discomfort to the researcher and that I am free to skip questions.

- I know that my participation will contribute to scientific research, but I also know that I will not receive any further reward or monetary compensation for my participation.

- I understand that my participation in this study is **voluntary**. I have the right to skip certain questions or stop participating at any time. I do not have to give a reason for this, and I know that it will not negatively affect me.

- At any time, I can also ask to end any further processing of my data and to delete the data that have already been collected.

- I understand that in the context of this research data will be collected that are categorized as particularly sensitive by the General Data Protection Regulations [GDPR] of the EU. I explicitly give my consent for these data to be collected in this research. This concerns the following data: **ethnic origin and religious or philosophical beliefs.**

- I know that audio recordings of me will be made and deleted right after their transcription.

- The results of this study can be used for scientific goals and may be published. **My name will not be published.** The confidentiality of the data will be protected in all stages of the research. The researchers will take the following measures to protect my privacy:

    → Personal data pseudonymization: names of participants and any identification materials will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

- I would like to be informed about the results of this research: ☐ Yes ☐ No

CONTACT INFORMATION

(1) For questions about this **research project** and its results, as well as for the execution of **your rights as a participant** [i.e., to access your data or for rectification of the data] after participation, feel free to contact **Nina SOUDAN** at nina.soudan@student.kuleuven.be [mail] or at + 324 83 18 54 97 97 [telephone], or the supervisor of this research project, dr. Amélie Godefroidt, at amelie.godefroidt@kuleuven.be [mail].

(2) For more information regarding **privacy**, see https://kuleuven.be/privacy/en/. For further questions about privacy, you can contact the data protection officer: dpo@kuleuven.be

(3) This study has been reviewed and approved by the Social and Societal Ethics Committee (SMEC) of KU Leuven **[G-2022-5832-R2(MAR)]** In case of questions, complaints, or other concerns regarding the **ethical aspects** of this research project, you can contact SMEC: smec@kuleuven.be [mail].

(4) This study is authorized by the **[G-2022-5832-R2(MAR)]** and is supported by Enabel [i.e., the Belgian Development Agency] and Support for Skilling Uganda [SSU]. You can contact the Enabel team in Uganda at representation.uga@enabel.be [mail] or + 256 414 23 05 43 [telephone].

INFORMED CONSENT

I have read and understood the information in this document and have received an answer to all my questions regarding this research.

I hereby give my consent to participate.

Date:

Name and signature of the participant

Name and signature of the researcher