The role of transnational networks and mobile citizens in South Sudan's global community A pilot study focused on Melbourne and Juba

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Contents

Key points

1. This study takes a holistic approach to the dynamics of the South Sudanese transnational community and its impact within South Sudan. Specific research on the international dynamics of the South Sudan civil war—for example, hate speech and incitement on social media—must be placed in the wider context of these informational, financial and social flows. If the realities and dynamics of this transnational network can be better understood, they may reveal alternative paths for enabling the dialogue and debate. This will be critical to future nation-building processes in South Sudan and could open up new channels that are less easily dominated by the narrow politico-military elite, as well as garner wider humanitarian and community support.

2. Governance challenges and political developments in South Sudan have rarely been examined through a transnational lens. Yet this research has confirmed that transnational networks are part of everyday life for almost all South Sudanese, woven in complex ways into economic, social and political life. South Sudan's political culture and activity is also organized across and outside of its borders, and understanding these processes is vital to any analysis of South Sudan's political futures.

3. International migrations since the 1960s have created a global South Sudanese community that has been fundamental to the challenging process of forming a South Sudanese state. These networks have also undermined political and civic responsibility within South Sudan. Powerful individuals, funding and political decisions are able to move across this international space, bypassing formal government structures and accountability. At the same time, they exploit the apparatus and legitimacy of the South Sudanese state—such as through ministerial positions—while using comparatively free foreign media.

4. The research has demonstrated that the hyper-politicized ethnic identification created by the current civil war creates an environment where any action can be interpreted in multiple ways. Where networks run primarily along ethnic and community lines, working through them can be perceived as actively undermining more national forms of identity. Elites who are most implicated in the conflict and are most able to navigate the transnational space—often through dual citizenships and family ties—bring the effects of this wider transnational community into disrepute.

5. At the other end of the network, the research has also confirmed the extreme challenges faced by South Sudanese communities in their locations of displacement. In Australia, visible immigrant communities face multiple forms of discrimination, and coping with these challenges on top of the traumas caused by mental proximity to the ongoing conflict in South Sudan presents an overwhelming emotional burden

for individuals and families to bear. This dual burden needs to be taken into account by anyone seeking to work with these communities, whether on integration, peace-building or development.

Introduction

South Sudan's political culture, including its current civil war, is international. This is due to the country's history of mass migration and displacement, particularly during the last two civil wars from the early 1960s. By the end of the last century, approximately four million of its roughly ten million estimated residents had fled across South Sudan's borders. This included tens of thousands of refugees who resettled in Canada, the USA, Australia, the UK and, in smaller numbers, elsewhere around the world. Although many regional refugees returned to South Sudan following the CPA in 2005 and independence in 2011, the renewed conflict that began in December 2013 and was reignited in the centre of Juba in July 2016, has forced at least 1.5 million residents to flee once more.[1]

As such, every community across South Sudan is part of a regional and global network. Many politicians, NGO workers, businesspeople and civil servants are themselves returnees or dual nationals. South Sudan's communities and families have long moved money and goods through international and internal networks. Today, however, as the current civil war spreads and fragments, this transnational network is under significant stress.

South Sudan's refugee communities have, and have always had, considerable influence on the way that the country's civil wars evolve. Most attention has focused on the negative aspects of this global connectivity: how communities abroad are suspected of funding rebel groups and government militias; how individuals return to join armed factions; and how rhetoric from abroad—both online and through radio and print media—is inciting ethnicized hatred and propagating political division. In this study, through research undertaken both in South Sudan and in one of the most active global South Sudanese communities in Australia, the team has attempted to take a broader perspective to understand the nature of this impact—and the mechanisms through which it is felt—more comprehensively.

The problem and approach

There is surprisingly little substantive knowledge about the dynamics of South Sudanese diaspora support and information, and their impact within South Sudan. Yet the deep-rooted community connectivity means that there are complex patterns of organization and information-sharing, and shared consequences of the war, practically and personally.

We were all affected by the war itself, because South Sudan is a country that South Sudanese Australians have invested in. They've invested in [it] materially, they've invested in

1   See UNHCR data: http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/regional.php.

terms of ideas and ideals and human capital. So when the country was at the brink of [war], it affected all of us here—and of course unfortunately the war took that ugly turn where our leaders selfishly used, you know, the innocent population [in the war], so somehow people that are here again are affected, people have families [involved]. [We have had] funerals every now and then around Melbourne, people have lost, people are losing people. … So we share in the trauma that is going on in South Sudan, the damage, the destruction, we are emotionally caught up in that … We can push the leadership towards working together, building an environment where people can peacefully coexist, and where they can restore the damage that has been done to the social fabric of the South Sudanese community back home—and even here.'[2]

This report sets out initial research on the collective impacts of the South Sudanese–Australian community in South Sudan. This study was designed to examine these impacts from within South Sudan outwards, through pilot research in Juba. Research in Juba was carried out by a team from the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Juba, co-led by Rebecca Lorins and Gabriel Kiir. The project ran a series of focus groups, a 200-person survey, and a series of interviews with South Sudanese-Australian residents, government workers, money transfer agents, journalists and church members. In Australia, Sara Maher and Santino Deng convened cross-representative South Sudanese–Australian focus groups at Monash University in Melbourne, to reflect on the findings of the research in Juba.

The research process itself highlighted many of the tensions and challenges facing the transnational South Sudanese community today. As well as practical issues of connecting, communicating, and sharing analysis between Juba, Cambridge (UK), and Melbourne, the team had to negotiate issues of insecurity in Juba, and the tense political climate and breakdown of trust within communities in both Juba and Melbourne. In Juba, the focus groups and survey were run within the University campus, considered a relatively safe space. In Melbourne, the consultations required significant negotiation with participants to clarify the aims of the research and the ways in which their information would be used. The project therefore reflects how many people's emotional and practical energies and trust are currently stretched to breaking point, and how difficult it is to convene a deep and reflective conversation around South Sudan's collective futures in this context. This study sets out some initial findings and implications, and considerations going forward.

2   Participant 5, Melbourne consultative meeting 1, 28 October 2017.

An overview of networks and families

South Sudan's four decades of civil war have created historic networks of families and communities across the world.

> I was born during the war, [like] most of us—and we had to flee, to a foreign country with our family.

This network is in constant flux. Even in the current crisis, people return to and from South Sudan—from regional and international homes and refuges—for work, marriage, familial support, or political action.[3] Around and via them flow funds, often in small sums (see *Economic crisis and social security*), financing various needs from individual medical costs or emergency food and school fees to associational life and collective organization. These flows are sustained by information, trust and emotional support, and have been central to South Sudan's political evolution since at least the first civil war in the 1960s. Exile has always been a productive place for political organization and action.
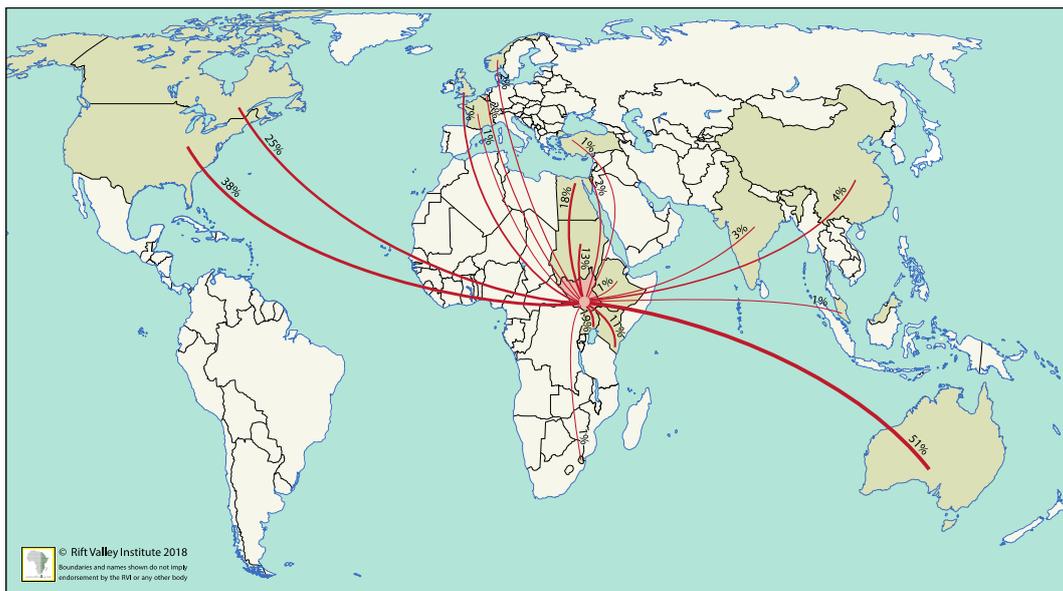
Map 1. Global and regional connectivity of the research respondents

These networks are primarily grounded in kinship—of common region, ethnicity and language, as well as family and clan. This is, in part, because of an absence of a collec-

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3   The frequency of individual and familial movement is such that there is a significant community of people who are neither entirely rooted in South Sudan nor in the diaspora, but who occupy both spaces at different times. This is particularly true of the elites, who may have family in multiple countries overseas and move regularly between them.

tive South Sudanese sense of community that binds people beyond kinship ties.[4] More practically and immediately, this reliance and primacy of kinship is due to a lack of any state-based social contract, welfare system or reliable security in an extremely insecure context. Today, within South Sudan people must organize their own provisions for care, support and crisis interventions—a financial and social network that can be drawn on, and relied upon in moments of desperate need. This social security is predicated on trust and mutual knowledge—its members know how and when to draw on its support—and the reciprocities that kinship demands.

In the current conflict, all action and organization is political—and actively politicized by antagonist government and opposition actors.

> The economic crisis and collapse of local government structures, justice and social order have also encouraged this move towards ethnic solidarity and political tribalism, breaking down previous inter-ethnic solidarities and placing significant strain on multi-ethnic families and organizations. The growing civil war and repression across South Sudan over 2016 and 2017 has entrenched political polarization on broad-brush ethnic lines. For the government, the population is either with or against them, and loyalties are increasingly imputed based on a person's ethnic and regional origin.[5]

Diaspora financial and personal support is increasingly stretched by economic and state collapse within South Sudan, forcing individuals to support fewer people within a more limited local and familial sphere. All of this is deepening divisions between kinship networks in this transnational South Sudanese community, and breaking down broader trust, mutual support, communication and possibilities for collective action.

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4   See, for example, Jok Madut Jok, *Sudan: Race, Religion and Violence*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2005.
5   Øystein H. Rolandsen and Nicki Kindersley, 'South Sudan: A Political Economy Analysis', 2017.

Economic crisis and social security

As the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) collapses against the USD and inflation continues, many refugees and still-resident families in South Sudan and the region are increasingly reliant on remittances and other in-kind support from working relatives in Uganda, Kenya and further abroad.

Table 1. Purpose and regularity of familial financial support

Purpose	% receiving support	Regularity of financial support			
		Weekly	Monthly	Irregularly	Don't know/ unspecified
School fees or business costs	52.5%	0.4%	19.9%	30.5%	1.7%
Rent or living costs	40.3%	0.0%	19.5%	19.9%	0.8%
Marriage or funeral costs	27.5%	0.0%	1.7%	25.8%	0.0%
Cultural or regional institutions	19.9%	0.0%	5.1%	14.8%	0.0%
Legal costs	15.7%	0.0%	1.7%	14.0%	0.0%
Support to church	8.5%	0.8%	1.3%	6.4%	0.0%

Many respondents in Juba spoke of financial support coming at times of personal or community crisis, such as medical treatment or emergencies, or for food or other basic necessities. University of Juba students are often supported regularly or sporadically in their studies through money transfers and the purchase of books, mobile phones and laptops, as well as specific, one-off funds from relatives for establishing businesses. At the same time, however, many respondents said they did not receive regular, or any, financial assistance from outside South Sudan, emphasizing that the 'diaspora is not necessarily well-off'.[6] Others were keen to note that these funds only supplemented locals' own means of self-support and coping mechanisms:

> I wanted to say that it is really good that the community, the South Sudanese
> community, is keeping [their] family financially. Why? Because it happened in

6 Participant, Juba focus group 1, 27 October 2017.

2016, when the war broke out,[7] it was really very hard for people who don't have relatives outside, to get what to eat. It happened that a lot of people are suffering, because there's no food, and the villages where people are cultivating, nothing is in the village. So it happened that these South Sudanese who were in Australia formed a group [to contribute], and they opened an account, naming it the South Sudanese Suffering in South Sudan, and they were contributing— each and every one was coming with anything that they feel of giving—and then when this money was at least something that could help, they all came and they contributed the money.[8]

Juba-based respondents highlighted a 'season of support', lasting from March to May, when the hunger gap bites during the dry season. Money sent outside of this period is more likely to be given to things such as cultural activities, marriages and funerals. Money is often sent on a personal basis, or through well-networked family or clan members in Juba (see *Money and its uses*) but major disasters in home regions can see communities, particularly in the far diaspora,[9] contribute via established cultural associations or one-off humanitarian funds, including for hospital and school construction and provisioning.

The limited personal funds available to most families, and the huge financial demands of the spreading crisis in South Sudan, mean that diaspora is having to prioritize immediate family and local emergencies over wider community projects. Importantly, those who still can are investing in projects that benefit people from across tribal lines. As one Juba resident noted, however, people of the diaspora are seeing that South Sudan is 'disintegrating' and they want to support their home communities because they see everyone else doing the same.

More stable regions of South Sudan, such as—until recently—greater Bahr el-Ghazal and western-central Equatoria, have seen more opportunities for long term developmental work, rather than emergency aid remittances. These diaspora injections have had an uneven and unequal impact across the country, reflecting the ethno-regional disparities of the diaspora network itself. For example, the dynamics of the second civil war (1983–2005) mean that communities from particular territories—such as Bor or Upper Nile—are generally more likely to have entered the international resettlement systems through displacement and flight, and are thus more likely to have internationally-resident relatives.

Residents in both Melbourne and Juba noted that the South Sudanese state's inability to provide social security and welfare undermines long-term or substantive financial impact, particularly in sustaining medical or educational facilities erected by diaspora

7   The speaker is referring to the reignition of civil war in July 2016, when fighting broke out in the centre of Juba.

8   Participant, Juba focus group 1.

9   Of the UK, USA, Europe, Australia and Canada, for instance.

fundraising. In a situation where the state is unable to provide for its citizens, many people are asking:

> … how often are we going to like give that [money], [for] the children's education and the books and teachers' salaries and everything, or [for] the clinics and the medication and the doctors and the nurses. … [But] who is funding that, because the government is not?[10]

Money and its uses

The majority of diaspora funding is benevolent and essential. Some Juba residents noted that remittances actually were a form of peace-building in the sense that fewer people would be desperate enough to commit crimes as a result.[11] A focus group participant explained, 'the financial support I'm getting is not to mobilize any group to do something, but just to earn my living and do my normal activities. [So] the support coming from the diaspora is not for division.'[12]

Figure 1. Financial support received from family

Receive financial support from family?

33.5%

66.5%

▪ Yes ▪ No

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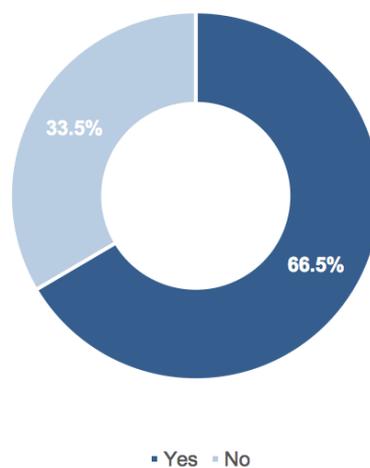
10   Participant 12, Melbourne consultative meeting 2, 11 November 2017.
11   Participant, Juba focus group 3, 17 November 2017.
12   Participant, Juba focus group 3.

Figure 2. Means of receiving financial support[13]

Percentage of respondents receiving familial financial support
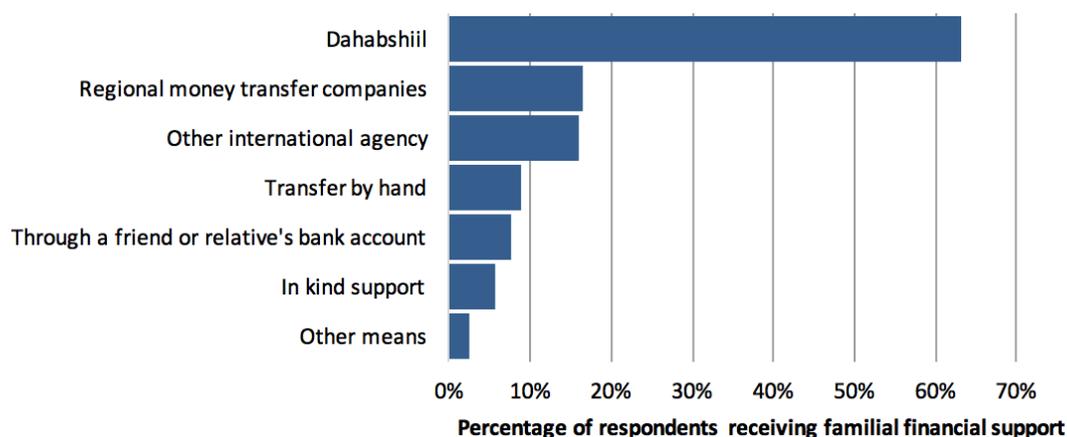
Most money is transferred into South Sudan via the Dahabshiil money transfer agency. A Dahabshiil branch manager in Juba estimated there are about 250 to 350 transfers from Australia to South Sudan per day, increasing in times of crisis and at Christmas to over 500 transfers per day, and these numbers are continuing to increase each year. These are often small sums, USD 50 to USD 300 per transfer, from both regular and irregular customers abroad.[14] Smaller regional money transfer companies, operating for specific regions and towns within South Sudan, also process considerable amounts of remittances. One small agency, founded by a South Sudanese–Australian returned refugee, receives around 50 transfers per day from Australia, mostly of amounts averaging USD 150 but ranging between USD 50 and 5000.[15] These smaller transfer companies are useful as they do not necessarily require formal ID cards from recipients in Juba and many of them provide onward transfer services to rural villages or to East African refugee camps and urban centres.

These transnational financial networks are notable for the mostly young men who work as intermediaries, using IDs to access the Dahabshiil network, and who manage the onward transfer and division of funds received. These intermediaries are well-connected on social media and news networks, and are as much involved in transferring and managing information, as they are with cash (see *Information and trust*).

These transfer networks—like elsewhere in the region—are sustained by trust, which is nevertheless under constant scrutiny as people question the use or hear of the misuse of funds, or perceive transnational investments negatively or politically. Several Juba residents noted how some diaspora development projects actually created internal community division, for example by their proximity to one village rather than another.

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13   This is the proportion of respondents who indicated they receive some form of familial financial support.

14   Interview, Dahabshiil agency in Juba, 14 November 2017.

15   Interview, money transfer agency in Juba, 21 November 2017.

As one Juba University student put it, the projects look 'polished but what is inside is poison.'[16]

Money transfers are socially hard to control, even within close families. The same respondent explained how he sent money for his brother's marriage settlement but found out later that his brother had bought a gun with the money, apparently for self-protection during a local intra-village dispute. Moreover, several Juba residents emphasized that these transnational financial flows are part of a wider financing of regional conflicts, both within and from outside the country:

> … because a big uncle or a big person who comes from the capital here will
> say: 'Now each of you will have 100 dollars, or 1000 dollars, or something like
> this, then you just go and do this and this'. Others will just be driven by money.
> And this money comes from where? [It] comes from outside. Yes, it may not
> be buying the guns and giv[ing] them [out], but the money itself will come and
> attract others to go and fight just because of money. … Just because they want
> to be paid, then they will go and do what the intellectuals want to happen and at
> the end of the day they get their money and full stop. … It is people abroad who
> send the money and the local people here are the victims. So, the elephants are
> fighting and the grass is the victim.[17]

16   Participant, Juba focus group 3.
17   Participant, Juba focus group 3.

The right to engage in South Sudan's politics

The wider transnational network includes a significant number of dual nationals or those with residential status abroad who are part of the upper echelons of South Sudan's political and military elite. This was particularly marked after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 when many people of all ages and backgrounds returned.

> For those of us who have returned to South Sudan, we are of different categories. There are those professionals who returned and they want to [be] involved on the basis of their merits. But there are those who returned here, who [were] basically invited to jobs by their relatives in the government. That is a very sad part of it. That they come knowing that they already have positions, while there are those of us who come because we feel we want to be here and find opportunities for us to be involved. … There are those who come here because they are comrades to the SPLM [Sudan People's Liberation Movement]. You in diaspora also have SPLM Chapters. So there are those who left Australia, I can think of a few individuals who are now in the government. They are in the government because this is an SPLM government and so they are there on the strength of their experience or their roles in the diaspora. And there is another group. Again, I have met a few who have come here to invest because they have made dollars and now they want to come here.[18]

Many Juba-based respondents, however, downplayed the impact of diaspora political engagement. Some respondents felt that South Sudanese people abroad were often not involved in political action or did not have influence: 'Those abroad may speak, but are not listened to in the country.'

Both Melbourne and Juba-based respondents agreed that transnational political pressure—financially, and as prominent community members—gained most leverage when applied, by petition or otherwise, at state, county and local levels.[19] Research found that there were more reservations about national-level diaspora pressure through delegations and pressure groups since those abroad—who have better access to education and democratic government—presumed they were better qualified to govern.[20]

> [They] consider themselves [as] elite: 'We are very educated, those in South Sudan they are not educated, we feel like we have to go home and talk, and take over!' Which [is what] some of them are talking about, this technocratic government.[21]

18   Interview with dual national resident in Juba, 30 October 2017.
19   Participant, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.
20   Participant 8, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.
21   Participant, Juba focus group 2, 7 November 2017.

Although it is a common criticism this one-dimensional focus on Australian returnees as a pro-democratic, education-focused elite distracts from wider, more systemic but lower-profile transnational investments in many different types of political action within South Sudan.

The international South Sudanese community has long invested in people involved in the country's multiple political spheres, including those involved in civil society and media— and in leveraging those actors to push for democratic and rights-focused reforms—as well as funding civil servants, Members of Parliament (MPs) and state-level politicians who focus on ethno-regional interests. These investments reflect class and wealth inequalities, and patronage systems that stretch beyond South Sudan. For instance, an MP interviewed for this study explained that his wife, resident in Australia, sends him USD 500 three times per month, which funds his work and allows him to invest in land.[22] This investment sustains similar individuals working in political and military opposition across East Africa—even if, as several Juba residents alleged, these individuals were only 'rebelling' in order to access this international financial patronage.

Citizenship, political change and risk

The right to political engagement in South Sudan is one of the fundamental questions encountered during research in Juba and Melbourne, including what it means to be South Sudanese and who can take legitimate political action in the current circum-stances.

> The problem is not Australians, it is that freedom that someone has to come here and go back again, challenging his own government.[23]

This question is most often debated through the topic of citizenship. Many residents in Juba questioned both the political and personal loyalties of South Sudanese people who could draw on foreign residencies to leave the country, and who thus did not have to face the consequences and risks of their political actions—or at a deeper level really fully experience what is to be South Sudanese living in South Sudan. This concern esca-lated with the violence in Juba in December 2013.[24]

> There is already divided loyalty that I could see, because especially during the conflict [in 2013], our airport was full with people with dual citizenship. They threw down our identity [referring to South Sudanese citizenship] and they raised up another identity in order to leave the country. So that alone to me is a divided loyalty.[25]

22 Interview, Member of Parliament in Juba, 21 November 2017.
23 Participant, Juba focus group 1.
24 Interview, lawyer resident in Juba, 7 November 2017.
25 Interview, Juba-based research analyst with family in Australia, 10 November 2017.

> Most of these crises we are in in our country, it is those who have the dual citizenship who are the real causes of this conflict. Because it is their families, their children, all of them are outside and for that, they feel that if they create any problem here, it is easy for them to run and leave the country. … For me, I have only South Sudanese nationality. If it is war, or if it is what, we are the victims here. For them, they will run.[26]

Many Juba residents noted that this ability to leave, and the distance of many South Sudanese living abroad from the daily realities and practicalities of living in Juba, meant that those in diaspora have 'another understanding' of events in South Sudan. This distance also meant, to one focus group member in Juba, that diaspora residents can re-theorize and re-depict events in South Sudan—or as he said, 'put the country in a different shade'—to suit their interests.[27]

During research, dozens of examples were raised of established or prospective politicians who use their mobility to trade loyalties, make speeches and access international resources and political space in a way that Juba residents cannot do. Juba respondents highlighted the real power of this mobility, and concomitant ability to manipulate messaging around events in South Sudan in well-networked and less-policed public space abroad.

26   Participant, Juba focus group 3.
27   Participant, Juba focus group 3.

Information and trust

> Politics is nothing more than words just being said to people.[28]

These networks of migration, finance and support are dependent on information exchange and cross-verification. There are very few verifiable and commonly-trusted sources of information for South Sudanese people worldwide. Findings from the University of Juba survey showed that most believed only Al Jazeera and the BBC were trustworthy enough not to need cross-verification. Otherwise, most sources can be challenged as prejudiced, ethnicized, as UN propaganda or as the product of a political faction, particularly any reports on armed clashes or atrocities in South Sudan's current war. Many apparently factual reports from international or national news agencies are challenged by the South Sudanese government or rebel media spokespeople on a regular basis.

> To be honest you can't really get any facts from anywhere at the moment.[29]

> we don't know exactly what is happening. Or exactly why it is happening.[30]

This communication is often via direct calls in crises but on a regular basis by Facebook and Facebook Messenger, Viber, Skype and WhatsApp. News reports and blog posts circulate by these mediums from Sudan Tribune, Radio Tamazuj,[31] BBC Africa and SBS Radio based in Melbourne, as well as other popular but ethnically-partisan blog sites such as Nyamilepedia and Paanluelwel. Many people in both Melbourne and Juba get their initial information and political analysis via multiple Facebook community pages set up for specific counties or ethnic communities, as well as Google Groups among Juba NGO staff, and for regional professionals in Juba, such as Equatoria 2000.

This mass of information—much of which is partial or misinformation—is carefully sifted and managed within Juba. This involves significant cross-referencing and discussion.

> There is a way of looking for facts … When there are facts [my cousin in Juba] will direct me and ring to me and talk to me really about what is happening. Then also the people of that village of my husband, there is a man there, sometimes I ring him [to ask:] 'What is happening?' He would tell me exactly what is happening to them. So when I ring to them to find for some news I look for the facts.[32]

28   Participant 11, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.
29   Participant 10, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.
30   Participant, Juba focus group 2.
31   Although these two websites are blocked within South Sudan.
32   Participant 5, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.

Figure 3. Most popular sources of information on South Sudan

Percentage of survey respondents using source
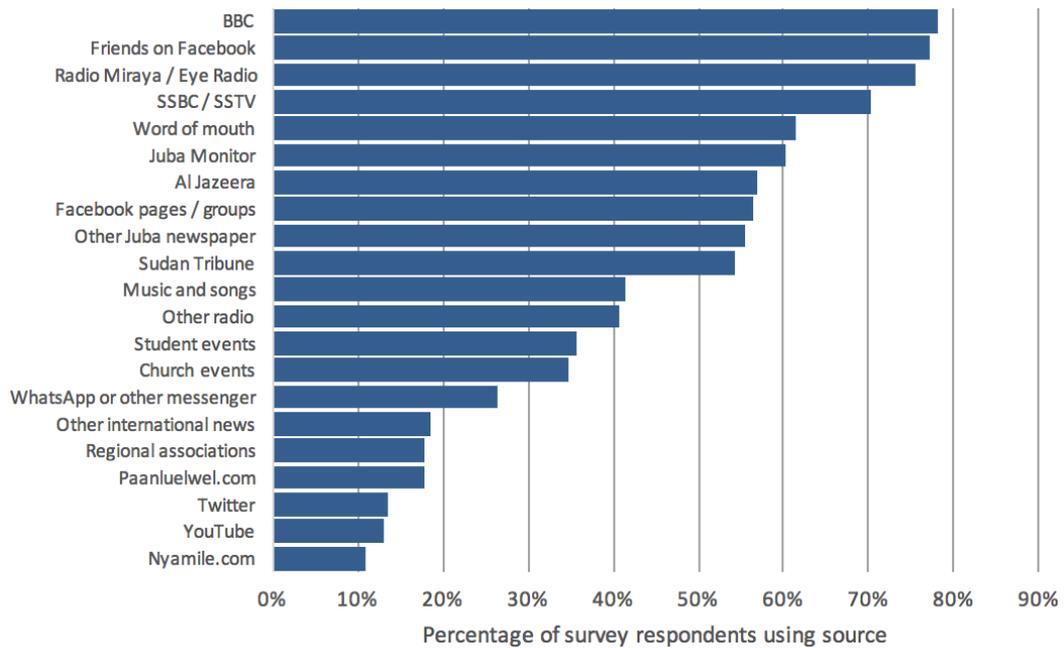
There is a distinct hierarchy of information depending on how it is accessed and how it is deployed across this transnational information network, which brings advantage to some actors. Those with extensive personal and social networks, and who have contacts within political and security elites and/or across combat lines, are able to more confidently determine good data. As a result, these actors are often more confident in manipulating onward messages and making decisions on this basis.

In Juba, cross-verification and the spread of immediate word-of-mouth news—particularly around troop movements or other armed incidents—is a rapid and practiced process.

> Anything that is happening in South Sudan, it is we who are in South Sudan that get the news and [inform] them [outside]. Like what happened in 2016, it happened that we who are here who took the pictures of those people who are killed, like the photo of the lady who was killed and her legs were cut, her legs and everything, when those people find [her], it is we who get those information and post them on social media, where they get the information [about what happened], and they transfer [it] back to us.[33]

> It is we South Sudanese who are feeding them with those news. For instance, [in the clashes in December 2013,] my auntie started calling me, personally, and she said that I find this in social media that there is killing in Juba, is it really true? We need to confirm from [you]. I told her yes, because I witnessed someone who was killed, so I told her here, yes that one happened, but I'm not sure whether—

33   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

because I'm now not in one place, I'm really in a bad place, I won't tell you in detail, when I reach [a safe] place like UN House, I will tell you more. It seems like it is me who gives the news to her.[34]

This allows those in Juba to vet information passed through these networks. For instance, a dual national South Sudanese–Australian university lecturer notes that he carefully restricts what he passes on via social media or phone, particularly anything that could be interpreted as partisan or inciting.[35] Those outside of Juba, on the other hand, can feel overwhelmed by access to so many sources of information. One university student in Juba noted that diaspora residents have greater access to opposition news and discussions but are far removed from these local processes of verification and cross-referencing.

> The diaspora have a lot of news but what they have is just rumours. … And because here the news that we have can be justified in South Sudan. We know the source. But most of the news that they [have] doesn't have a source.[36]

For less well-connected Juba residents, an important function of the South Sudanese diaspora is to 'alert' them of breaking news and events that may create immediate personal risk for those in South Sudan. For instance, the military clashes in the presidential compound in December 2013 that led to mass violence across Juba within hours. Another student noted that international residents are 'good followers' of news feeds, sharing information not readily accessible across South Sudan—such as rumours on troop movements, checkpoints and local clashes—with family and friends to aid decisions about security and flight.[37]

In this information market, the diaspora plays a key role in framing news and events. The Juba research team noted a common understanding that South Sudan residents are the source of raw information that is then framed and politically packaged by those living outside the country, and re-disseminated through social and other media.[38] This elaborated commentary is prevalent on Facebook and Juba residents commented on the manipulation of photographs and narratives there.

> They are using [fake] images … like bringing us 'something happened in South Sudan' [but from] earlier in 2013 … what do you think if someone is just giving you [fake] facts? Something which did not happen in your country? Then I consider it a joke.[39]

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34   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

35   Interview, Juba University lecturer, 2 November 2017.

36   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

37   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

38   An unresolved debate in research groups in Juba was over the extent that this framing feeds conflict narratives and political action back in South Sudan.

39   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

Free speech, too much speech and hate speech

> Here in South Sudan, the access to news has no security.[40]

This international framing and re-packaging of news and information from South Sudan is enabled and possibly exacerbated through the comparative freedom of speech and media activity in countries like Australia. The most frequent example of this, cited by residents in both Melbourne and Juba, is of SBS Radio, a national public radio with broadcasts in Dinka.

SBS is accessible online in Juba, mostly through clips and transcribed statements circulated through Facebook and WhatsApp, and its output is significant, particularly as it hosts—often quite uncritically—major political figures including Dau Aturjong, Mabior Garang and other often disaffected leaders. SBS stands in contrast to the South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation (SSBC) and TV network, managed by the South Sudan government and broadcasting a highly redacted version of current events and pro-government statements.[41] As an NGO worker in Juba commented, 'unlike in Australia and elsewhere where freedoms are free, that was not the case back in South Sudan'. A focus group participant noted that,

> If for example, a person in diaspora wants to talk about political reform, for example, [in Juba:] [if he] wants to talk about political reform on SSBC, which is government owned television—he will be denied, he will be denied to air out his grievances on the TV itself.[42]

A government official interviewed for this project criticized the misuse of Facebook by international residents as it encouraged people to 'say what is on their minds.'[43] For many in Juba, social media—particularly for long-term or permanent diaspora residents who are disconnected with the daily realities and immediate personal risks of the conflicts they are commenting on—encourages flippant partisan comment. A South Sudanese-Australian participant commented:

> [If] my tribe had a fight with another tribe and then maybe that tribe were defeated, automatically I shared it to my friend, it's like a football game.[44]

Juba residents criticized this form of reaction from diaspora residents:

> Most of them … they just heard the information through phone or where, and just post it. And this is where they incite a lot of problems. And even they don't care what will happen because they are not in South Sudan. They don't know

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40   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

41   Despite this, though, SSBC/TV has a high viewing population and comparatively high trust, based on our research in Juba.

42   Participant, Juba focus group 2.

43   Interview, South Sudanese civil servant in Juba, 11 November 2017.

44   Participant 4, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.

what is happening on the ground. Most of them, they keep on talking, talking, talking, and they don't know what is happening. So they are contributing a lot to hatred and violence.[45]

This is not an uncritical discourse of tribalism and incitement. Many people commented that 'what is happening in our country is not tribal violence but it is political violence with tribal cultures.'[46] The continuing violent events in South Sudan, however, are deeply traumatic and provoke highly emotional responses, which political actors on all sides deploy in pursuit of partisan ends. For instance, after recent violence around Wau town, a participant in Juba noted a diaspora-based individual commenting on Facebook:

> … calling upon his people in Wau, saying: 'My people, get out of your houses. The government is coming. You will be massacred today.' This person suggested that an organized killing was underway. This was an emotional statement coming from the diaspora, designed to spread fear and anger.[47]

The tit-for-tat retaliatory nature of violence in South Sudan encourages concomitant inflammatory retaliation online. When Dinka people were killed on the Yei road by apparently Equatorian fighters, participants noted images of corpses posted online with taunting messages, including the statement 'keep mourning'—a threat of further violence and an expression of retaliatory pain in a zero-sum conflict.[48] This is not confined to social media, but as a Juba-based South Sudanese political analyst noted, social media 'amplifies the fault lines that were already there.'[49]

This situation is exhausting for both Australian and South Sudanese residents. Many people are restricting their social media and news intake in both places.[50] In Australia, xenophobic antagonism and stigmatization of black immigrant populations—and partic-ularly the South Sudanese community—has intensified over the last few years. Black residents face harassment and intimidation in public space, including by far-right and white supremacist groups, and suffer attacks in national media.

Many young South Sudanese–Australians are quitting Facebook because of this combi-nation of 'the South Sudan conflict, also the Australian reportings of young people. It was just negative.'[51] The impact of social fragmentation in Juba, where neighbours and friends of different ethnicities are increasingly disconnected and distrustful because of

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45 This sentiment is echoed by Melbourne residents, for instance when discussing how people are mis-interpreting or repeating tribalist comments: 'it's like, "wait a minute, where did you get that from, aren't you supposed to not listen to [this] … what's actually the facts?"' Participant 10, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.

46 Participant, Juba focus group 2.

47 Participant, Juba focus group 3.

48 Participant, Juba focus group 2.

49 Interview, research analyst in Juba, 10 November 2017.

50 Participant 12, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.

51 Participant 12, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.

this overwhelming and violent politicization of ethnic identity, has reached Australia as well:

> … the fragmentation that is here [in Juba] hit us so hard [in Australia]. Today you cannot talk about [anything] … even at funerals we don't meet these days. If there is a funeral among the Dinkas you don't see Equatorians there! You don't see people from Nuer community! We are so fragmented! … So as much as ten years ago there was a possibility of us coming together for a cause, today it is not possible. The Acholi would only make [financial] contributions to meet the issues in the Acholi-land. The Dinka Bor will only meet to make a case in the Bor area. So that's the most painful to me because when I went there [Australia] in 2000 there was nothing like that. I was a pastor to all, but today when I go to Australia—I'm not a pastor to all. I'm not. They will still respect me, but I'm not. I'm not.[52]

This fragmentation, and social and political ostracism and alienation, among the South Sudanese–Australian community is recognized by Juba residents:

> Most of us in here have witnessed bad things being committed against their tribal members. … [But outside South Sudan they are] posting negatively and writing negatively because of the privileges that they have. And even here we don't have the access whereby you express yourself. There, it is open—[he'll] be talking, vomiting, saying how he feels. Sometimes the diaspora, they play negatively because they don't have a source of recognition.[53]

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52 Interview, dual national resident in Juba, 30 October 2017.
53 Participant, Juba focus group 2.

Conclusion

Examining South Sudan's current crisis through its transnational community brings a sharp focus on two critical implications of the on-going conflict. First, accessing trusted information is not only difficult but potentially dangerous in a conflict where core aspects of personal identity mean every individual is politically coded. This hyper-politicization of individual agency and ethnic community is not just the dismantling of South Sudanese national identity, it is a tactic of the current war that has sought to foster community fragmentation as a means to mobilizing support, legitimating violence and enforcing consent to new orders. This collapse of citizenship is entrenched by the economic crisis, the exigencies of which limit families and communities to emergency support to fewer people. This is in stark contrast to the collective sense of development and purpose fostered both by the CPA and by the work towards the independence vote and secession in 2010–2011.

Second, international migration and diaspora networks have been fundamental to the formation of the South Sudanese state. These networks—and the power and authority held by individuals who can move within these networks—however, have also since served to undermine political responsibility and civic order from a local to national level in South Sudan. As such, funding and political leadership is able to bypass formal government structures while at the same time exploiting the apparatus and legitimacy of formal state institutions and figures, such as parliamentary and ministerial positions. This was also true of the past civil wars in South Sudan and remains a fundamental aspect of the South Sudanese state's lack of civic contract or legitimacy.

These twin challenges—of fragmented citizenship, and mediated state and governing institutions—are personally and socially exhausting for South Sudanese people resident in both Juba and Melbourne. Participants in this study commented that a focus on treating symptoms—such as forms of hate speech, better and verified information provisions, and the rebuttal of so-called fake news—will not address the fundamental and systemic issues that drive these phenomena in the first place.

> We can talk and talk and talk for hundreds of years. We're talking and not solving the problem. Because the right people are not in the right place now.[54]

The Juba research emphasized the positive power of South Sudanese–Australian family for psychological, emotional and practical support to families and communities in very difficult times. This is something often overlooked in understandings of diaspora dynamics and the reciprocal impact of this stress within the Australian community. Residents in Australia are currently confronted by a hostile political environment domestically as well as social and economic alienation. Moreover, they are struggling with their

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54   Participant 9, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.

own position as first, second, and third generation migrants, and the immense practical and personal burden of the ongoing civil war.

> Even though you are in a good place, sleeping is not easy with your children back there. … We're here we sleep in a good place, we eat something good and you look behind you and you feel pain of what you've left behind.[55]

As one South Sudanese–Australian returnee noted during research in Juba:

> We must celebrate the few South Sudanese who have come here generally trying to make an impact, but let's not hope that the children we are raising in Australia are future leaders. They are not—they are not. These guys are not South Sudanese. These guys may not be Australian completely. They are in between. They are struggling with their own issues. That's the reality.[56]

Future directions for research

This has been a pilot study, and therefore limited in scope, but it confirms the importance of transnational networks in South Sudan's economic, political and social life. Given the absence of holistic research into these networks, and the challenges facing the country in all these areas, there is a strong case for undertaking more comprehensive work. The study has revealed a number of possible avenues for further research:

- Expanding the research into more rural and harder to reach settings in South Sudan —to the extent feasible in the current climate—to examine the local impacts of diaspora interventions and support. It may be that transnational networks could provide an important means to expand representation of inaccessible areas but there is not enough information to confirm this.

- Expanding the research to explore financial flows in more detail. This study has high-lighted the significance of remittance flows in maintaining many people's personal and familial finances, business and educational projects, and family cohesion, through marriages and funerals. Money transfers are also means of investing—in community projects, political movements or positions, and educational or business options—and in many respects these small investments demonstrate South Sudanese survival strategies and ideas of possible futures within the conflict and after it. Understanding these financial flows and decisions will provide both a far better sense of South Sudan's economy (an under-researched area in itself) and an understanding of South Sudanese planning processes and projections.

- Within these transnational systems, (often young) men and women mediate and organize the flow of money, information and people in transit. This includes running small money transfer agencies and acting as family liaisons in Juba, Kampala and

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55 Participant 11, Melbourne consultative meeting 2.
56 Interview, dual national resident in Juba, 30 October 2017.

other regional towns. The role of these people is crucial and deserves further exploration.

- This study focussed on one set of communities in Melbourne but there are many different types of South Sudanese community across the world. There would be value in undertaking more comparative research to seek to understand what factors influence levels of both integration and cohesion within these communities, how these affect their impact in South Sudan, and what implications this has for host country interventions and approaches. There would also be value in better understanding the different roles and responsibilities taken on by those in distant countries, in regional capitals, and in refugee camps.