

Learning from the Voices of South Sudanese Migrants in Alberta

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Community Partners

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South Sudan – Context



First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972)

Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005)

- Time at which many of our participants fled Sudan

South Sudan gained independence (2011)

Present Day: South Sudanese Civil War

- Ongoing conflict between the government and opposition forces
 - 400,000 people have been killed
 - More than 4 million people have been displaced (1.8 million internally, 2.5 million in neighbouring countries)
 - Famine affecting 6 million people

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Research Questions

- What are the resettlement stories of South Sudanese migrants?
- What are the resettlement needs of South Sudanese newcomers?
 - Immediate resettlement needs, long-term resettlement needs
- What are the long-term integration outcomes of South Sudanese communities in Alberta?

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Research Approach

- **Semi-structured interviews** with 31 individuals
 - *Location*: Calgary – 14; Brooks – 9; Red Deer – 8
 - *Gender*: 45% women, 55% men
 - *Average age*: 42 years
 - *Average length of time in Canada*: 17 years
 - *Language*: 45% Dinka, 35% Nuer, 20% other languages

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Research Approach

- Informed by the practice, common in Holocaust and genocide studies, of collecting **oral testimony**
- Aims to capture peoples' **lived experiences**
- Their stories, while unique, reveal **patterns, experiences and traumas shared within this community of migrants**
- The imprint of those experiences is permanent, and is often recounted as a constitutive part of an ongoing present

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Semi-Structured Interviews

- Structure:
 - 1) pre-migration life in South Sudan
 - 2) migration journey
 - 3) resettlement in Canada
 - 4) the future in Canada
- All interviews but one were conducted in English
- Approximately 60 minutes in length

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Preliminary Analyses

- Transcribed audio recordings into written transcripts
- Memoing
- Examined themes based on each research question
 - Two coders came to consensus about main themes
- Moving forward: formal coding scheme to be developed, NVivo

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Life in South Sudan

Idyllic recollections of childhood

- “It was very nice and you can grow the things in the field and it was easy to grow. And the rain is regular all the time in South Sudan. It was nice and there was no hunger” (Participant 5, woman)
- “So as a child we had good memories because we had everything that I could remember that I need as a kid” (Participant 7, woman)

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Leaving South Sudan

- “So I cannot say I made a decision to leave my parents, you know? I was just running and escaping from death.” (Participant 1, man)
- “I still remember, we are coming over, about thirty people and we come at night, and we come and we come across, and then a soldier, they come to execute us. Then me and my wife, we run in different ways with another couple of people, and then the other people - about twenty-five people - they soldiers, they will catch them, they took them and they killed them.....The reason I choose Canada, because we are traumatized in South Sudan in the war” (Participant 4, man)
- “A lot of our youth is going through trauma that is not discovered, that is not known and people call them bad people, but they don't know what they have gone through.” (Participant 9, woman)

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Early Resettlement in Canada

Gratitude

“When I came to Vancouver and then in the Welcome House, the Canadian people they welcome me very, very much and I am so proud of this and then I appreciate this one. Yeah, when I came here between Vancouver, the support ... they give me support on how to rent the house, and how to feed me for the food with my son, and they are taking care of me for one year. For one year this is the government that is taking care of me and that is why I appreciate this one and I never forget.” (Participant 12, woman)

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Early Resettlement in Canada

- “I walk with slippers in the snow. My apartment is a little bit far away and it was cold.... When I reach home I put the hot water in the tub and I put myself in. My body is totally dead, all here.... The ambulance rides to my home, my leg is swollen, it is worse and really hurts. They scared. They put me in an ambulance and they put my baby beside me and I don't know where I am going. No language.” (Participant 15, woman)
- “Now, another challenge, the families that have come from the village like that, if they end up in the big cities like this, where will they go? Someone has not worked in the factory, they have never worked in the office, they never do any activities in the town.” (Participant 2, man)
- “Yeah, the challenges were the language barrier. Like myself, I couldn't speak English. If I want to go and look for a job people won't understand me. I could only say a few words. Most of the few English words I know would be British words, and then they are different from Canadian English, so it was difficult to find employment back then.” (Participant 14, woman)

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Challenges for Families

- “[T]he problem is families are breaking more, okay? Husbands and wives, it is not only the children who are stressed out, it is the husbands and wives, right?” (Participant 9, woman)
- “Over here, by law you can get separated or a divorce, so it is real different. Yeah. Different culture. We don’t understand and then we get in trouble. So young kids, some of them they are good and some of them, they don’t go to school. I don’t like it myself.” (Participant 11)

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Challenges for Youth

- “It is hard because I see some kids who were born here and they got killed here. Just eighteen, fifteen.....Because the parents, they are not there for them, so they go down a bad road and do drugs and things.” (Participant 31, woman)
- “[T]hen when they try and go from the school he never learns and then they get traumatized and they run away and go and sell drugs and not follow their school. That is why our community now falls apart from that.” (Participant 2, man)
- “Why a large number of boys drop out, and mostly the refugee kids? Most of them drop out of high school before they can even make it. Why?” He was asking the whole class and people were coming with different explanations and this and this, maybe culture shock, maybe the parents don’t take care of them, maybe they don’t do this. There was one thing that he said. He said because of systematic discrimination. Because if a kid does something wrong the weight, the punishment is not equivalent to the guilt of the mistake. It will be heavy because that kid belongs to a different case, and when it is heavy what message are you sending to that kid in that school? He is going to despise the school. And this is a fact and it is true. Most of our kids now, especially the boys, they are on the street - we have a large number of kids on the street. We have a large number of kids in jail.” (Participant 16, man)

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Implications for the Settlement Sector

Continue to Partner with Schools, Police Services, and Family/Child Services

- “There will be a different way of instructing, like to talk to the school about how to treat these people differently. Talk to the police on how to treat these people differently. We are vulnerable, we came here ... if you look at the world at large, South Sudan is the largest or the highest number of illiteracy because of our long civil wars with no chance of school and people are not exposed to the outside world.” (Participant 16, man)
- “I saw something I did not like, because social workers they intervene between the family, and that is the genesis of destruction.” (Participant 28, man)

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Implications for the Settlement Sector

Create After School Programs for Children

- “Take them {the kids} camping, make them to do hockey stuff.” (Participant 18, woman)
- “We need to pick it out and our community, when it is very strong, they bring the kids together and do the activities and the kids learn. But when the community does not do the activities, the kids, they cannot learn.” (Participant 22, woman)
- “What I see the community needs help about the children, but I think the community they don’t ask because even though the government knows - I am sure the government knows.” (Participant 5, woman)

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Implications for the Settlement Sector

Continue to Offer Job Search Strategy Workshops

- “Yeah. Right now I have a student debt of one hundred thousand and I am still working in a warehouse. A warehouse is never going to pay [enough] to feed my family and pay my student loans! See? And that is not good. So like having ... we have, I think, a mother tongue that will make you, whatever you do, it will not make you speak fluently, like a native and I don't think for employers know that having a different accent cannot prevent you from doing what you are doing.” (Participant 1, man)

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Implications for IRCC

Requests to Resettle More South Sudanese Refugees

- “[E]ach of the Canadians is talking about how Syria suffers, and how Syria suffers, but there is war and our people are suffering. War is the same; it is the same gun, it is the same killing, you know?” (Participant 3, woman)
- “If the government of Canada, if they need to help to do that it would be appreciated because there are people out there dying because there is no clean air, no clean water, the pollution is killing people. If they do that it is a really big help, or if there are organizations who are going to do that it would help.” (Participant 25, man)

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Implications for IRCC

Requests that Canada do more to aid South Sudan

- “We are the poorest in the world right now because of man-made disasters. So in the back of my mind, if the international community, if the world, Canada, US, the other nations, decide to back South Sudan to become a nation they will ignore the suffering of people in South Sudan. Right now we have the Chinese pumping oil, the UN tried to sanction the government of South Sudan, the Chinese jump in, the Russians jump in, and so South Sudan becomes like a warzone for politics and the innocent people are dying every single day. When somebody cuts your limb and tells you to eat it, this is your government forces. This is the government you brought to power. Worse than what happened in Rwanda.” (Participant 16, man)

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Next Steps

- Complete analyses using Nvivo
- Explore additional themes: education, environment, gender dynamics
- Conduct comparative regional analysis

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