

GIVEN NAMES AND LIVED CLOSENESS

Kinship Measurement in the South Sudanese Citizenship Office

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Abstract: Immediately after the independence of South Sudan in 2011, a nationality law was passed that defined citizenship by membership to clearly defined and bounded ethnic groups. To acquire citizenship, the testimony of a 'next of kin', taken to be an 'older blood relative from the father's line', was supposed to verify ethnicity and, thus, belonging to the new nation. Citizenship offices were tasked with checking names and assessing life histories. In so doing, they combined the logic of patrilineal names with estimations of lived closeness, creating a complex system of measuring kinship. Based on colonial legacies and methods acquired during the Sudanese civil war, kinship measurements produced new relations, but also fueled ethnic tensions and cemented social inequalities.

Keywords: bureaucracy, citizenship, documents, ethnic belonging, kinship measurement, South Sudan

Durka was living in a European country when South Sudan declared independence in July 2011.¹ To her astonishment, she became a stateless person overnight when Sudan's embassy refused to renew her passport based on the argument that she had automatically lost her citizenship after the secession of South Sudan. Staff at South Sudan's few embassies in Europe all told her that they did not yet have the capacity to deal with citizenship applications. In order to apply for South Sudanese citizenship, Durka had to travel to Juba using a temporary *laissez-passer* travel document, even though the last time she had been to her homeland was when she left for Khartoum at the age of three. At the citizenship office in the capital, her first attempt to acquire papers based on her old Sudanese passport failed. The officer from the Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Immigration (DNPI) kindly explained to her that it



was impossible for anyone to become a citizen without the testimony of a ‘next of kin’. This witness would prove her kinship—and more broadly her ethnic affiliation—and thus her eligibility for South Sudanese citizenship.

Durka had met her maternal half-brother just after her return and considered bringing him to the citizenship office to verify her ethnic belonging in order to get a new passport but was surprised to learn that he was not acceptable as ‘next of kin’ because they had different family names. Durka’s mother was from one of the Equatorian ethnic groups, and her father was a Dinka soldier. They had never married, and their relationship had been limited to the period when Durka’s father was stationed near Juba as a member of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005). Durka explained that she had never met her father but that in Khartoum her identity documents and passports had been issued based on her father’s Dinka name. When she was barely three years old, her mother had sent her to Khartoum, where her maternal uncle saw to her education, a journey that had ended in Europe a few years ago. Her mother had started a new life with a new husband in Juba. The DNPI officer replied that under some circumstances he might accept a maternal ‘next-of-kin’ witness, but because Durka’s father was Dinka and “ethnicity is inherited in the father’s line,” he could only consider a Dinka as a ‘proper’ ‘next of kin’ witness in her case. To prove her belonging to South Sudan, Durka eventually had to find her father, who fortunately turned out to be stationed in Juba. The process was not only a challenging endeavor emotionally—finding a never-seen father, meeting both sides of her family for the first time—but also financially. She estimated that the entire process to acquire citizenship had taken her almost a month and cost well over 4,000 euros.

I conducted a year of fieldwork at the DNPI in 2013. During the first six months, I mainly interacted with officials, and in the second half of the year, with applicants seeking citizenship. Given the long tradition of anthropological literature about kinship in the two Sudans, my initial plan was explicitly *not* to look at the topic of kinship but rather at the institutionalization and bureaucratization of South Sudanese citizenship. However, I soon discovered that one was not possible without the other. Durka’s story already demonstrates how bureaucratic documents used for identification are closely linked with seemingly ‘traditional’ measurements of kinship. Officials established belonging using different kinship measurements to assess closeness (see Thelen and Lammer, this issue). These included assessing witnesses’ admissibility on the basis of their legitimated knowledge about different ethnic kinship patterns (naming systems and patrilineally inherited ethnicity indicating genealogical closeness) and determining the plausibility of the applicant’s life story through measurements of lived closeness with the witness.

This article concentrates on the negotiation of such kinship measurements between bureaucrats and applicants in the citizenship office. The officials

measured kinship between applicants and their next of kin in two distinct but intertwined ways. On the one hand, officers compared names to clarify genealogical closeness. Such genealogical measuring—based on what could be seen as conventional anthropological knowledge production—is entangled in the intricacies of lived realities. On the other hand (mostly involving non-Dinka or Nuer applicants), the officers also measured lived closeness between individuals. As I will argue, the entanglement of partly contrasting and partly overlapping measurements opened room for negotiations but also posited a challenge for prospective citizens. Success or failure in these negotiations could have severe consequences for individuals and their future prospects.

Below I spell out the concrete methods of kinship measurement and how they were negotiated between local officials and citizenship applicants. To understand their significance, the privilege of documented citizenship and the ethnicized character of national belonging in South Sudan must first be described.

The Importance of Citizenship and Identity Papers

Being excluded from citizenship in South Sudan is equivalent to being excluded from upward social mobility: only documented citizens have access to higher education and the formal job market, or can own a business legally. Moreover, the state seeks to encourage higher participation by nationals in the humanitarian sector—one of the main segments of the South Sudanese economy. Only documented citizens can occupy positions reserved for South Sudanese citizens with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the United Nations. Thus, the importance of documents is closely tied to class mobility. Uncovering why people apply for citizenship also explains why they are willing to accept—or reject—the state’s emphasis on ethnicity and its sometimes painful kinship measurement practices.

Despite the six-year interim period between the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005) and independence (2011), South Sudan was ill-prepared to document its citizens and issue identity cards and passports. The Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Immigration (DNPI) was set up only two days prior to the declaration of independence. The DNPI is responsible for registering and documenting the population of the new country. During the two and a half years between independence and the outbreak of the South Sudanese Civil War in December 2013, the citizenship office issued 250,000 nationality certificates for the approximately eleven million South Sudanese, a mere 3 percent of the population.² During the six years of fighting, the number of documented citizens doubled to half a million, while approximately 400,000 perished in the civil war (Checchi et al. 2018), two million sought refuge across the borders, and another two million became internally displaced within the

country. Ten years after independence, the number of people documented by the state is only slightly higher than the number of people who lost their lives in the civil war.³

Even though the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other organizations run programs that help applicants and facilitate claims, access to documented citizenship overwhelmingly remains a privilege of economically better-off South Sudanese. Applying for South Sudanese citizenship—mostly due to the exorbitant costs of the state-of-the-art biometrics—cost between 25 and 50 dollars in late 2018 (UNHCR 2017). Due to the collapse of the economy after the outbreak of the civil war in 2013, low oil prices, hyperinflation, the scarcity of hard currency in the market, and the state's inability to pay salaries to its employees for years at a time, identity documents remain out of reach for the overwhelming majority. Being a documented citizen is therefore available mainly to the urban population working on the peripheries of the informal and formal economy and to educated people who aspire to work in the humanitarian or private sector or for the government. Ethnicity became the basis of citizenship in the new country, and kinship measurements the key in determinations of ethnic belonging, as the next sections show.

Imagining the Nation through Ethnic Belonging and Kinship

Bitter and tense regional and ethnic dynamics have been part and parcel of everyday life in South Sudan since colonial times. As a historical development, these mostly played out along ethnic lines between Equatorian groups from the southern part of the country and Nilotic pastoralist groups of the north, mostly Dinka and Nuer.⁴ Even before the outbreak of the South Sudanese Civil War, Equatorians frequently complained about perceived Nilotic or Dinka dominance, arguing that the majority of high-level state administrators and political leaders were from the two main ethnic groups of the SPLA. On the other hand, unemployed Dinka and Nuer similarly often complained about the dominance of Equatorians in NGO and UN jobs. These exaggerated sentiments were clearly observable in the citizenship office, where Equatorian applicants frequently charged that they received unfair treatment from the 'Dinka office'. The DNPI staff, like nearly all South Sudanese state offices, can be separated into two distinct clusters (Markó 2016). One is led by overwhelmingly Dinka and Nuer members of what Pinaud (2014) calls 'the military aristocracy' of South Sudan. This military cluster makes decisions about establishing national belonging through kinship measurement. The second cluster, staffed with young and professional officials from varied ethnic and social backgrounds, produces internationally accepted travel documents based on biometric technology and training supplied by a German identification management company.⁵

Even people from a mixed ethnic background, like Durka, were forced to belong to a single ethnic group and gain citizenship through paternal ethnicity. Her interactions with the office hark back to an existing complex history of understanding descent as the basis of belonging. If the usage of the British legal category ‘next of kin’ hints at a colonial past, the emphasis on specific ‘fixed’ kinship categories indicates seemingly strict ethnic boundaries, as in early anthropological accounts. However, the post-independence emphasis on ethnicity, imagined as a rigid and assigned-at-birth label, was not simply a direct consequence of indirect colonial rule (Mamdani 1996), but the result of the militarization of ethnicities during the decades of subsequent civil wars.

Certainly, E. E. Evans-Pritchard’s (1940) classical study of the Nuer looms large in the understanding of kinship as agnatic descent, even though it has been academically deconstructed and reconstructed several times over (Evens 1984; Gough 1971; Holý 1979a, 1979b; Karp et al. 1983; Kuper 1982; McKinnon 2000; Rosaldo 1986). While in his later writings Evans-Pritchard (1951: 156) recognized that the lived closeness of kinship was not prescribed by patrilineality, his earlier model traveled in time and space, influencing not only other social science models and military strategies (Zitelmann 2018), but also the overall thinking about the region and within the region.

Scholars have additionally pointed to the ossifying effect that enduring warfare has had on the understanding of ethnicity. Sharon Hutchinson (1996) has demonstrated how a more essentializing notion of ethnic belonging emerged over extended periods during the two Sudanese civil wars since the mid-twentieth century and replaced a more fluid understanding of kinship. Military commanders in the Second Sudanese Civil War applied the belief that kinship was established through descent and that it was sufficient evidence of belonging, as we also see in the kinship measurements described below. This conviction emerged during the two-decades-long Second Sudanese Civil War within the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) when ethnic politics became particularly prominent, especially after the 1991 Nasir split (Rolandsen and Daly 2016: 120–132). The mostly Dinka and Nuer military commanders on the two sides of the South-South civil war of the 1990s recruited and armed militias from among their ethnic kin, turning them against each other. This ‘militarization of Nuer and Dinka ethnic identities’ (Jok and Hutchinson 1999) was based on day-to-day kinship measurement to determine someone’s belonging. Following the reconciliation of the two warring Southern factions in 2002 and the subsequent independence of South Sudan, this ‘military aristocracy’ gained control of all state institutions, including the citizenship office. When applying the national laws and regulations, the former commanders, who had become high-ranking officials, unsurprisingly used the war-tested techniques of measuring kinship to determine ethnicity through the father’s line.

The Bureaucratic Journey to Acquire Citizenship

According to the Nationality Act, there are two ways of acquiring citizenship by birth. One can be considered a native of South Sudan, first, if “any parents, grandparents or great-grandparents of such a person, on the male or female line, were born in South Sudan,” and, second, if the “person belongs to one of the indigenous ethnic communities of South Sudan” (South Sudan 2011a: 7). While the first route usually applied only to the minority of citizenship applicants with foreign ancestry (mostly descendants of Greek merchants or northern Sudanese), the majority of applicants had to use the second route to establish national belonging. The South Sudan Nationality Regulations supplementing the Nationality Act require that “the applicant must provide a witness(es) who is/are believed to be (a male) elder and next of kin” (South Sudan 2011b: 6).

The bureaucratic journey to South Sudanese citizenship for applicants like Durka took between three weeks and several months (Markó 2016). Preparing for this journey usually meant “collecting records that seemingly hold out a promise of legal inclusion” as citizenship applicants “seek to speak back to the state in its own language” (Abarca and Coutin 2018: 8). By doing so, citizenship applicants also constantly redefined and altered the very state they ‘spoke back to’. Each time applicants successfully argued with officials about why their witnesses should pass the kinship measurement test, they were influencing and changing the state’s rules. Applicants were not mere passive subjects of state rule, but very active agents in shaping how the state ‘saw’ them (Scott 1998).

Despite all the paper documentation, for most applicants this journey started not at the gates of the citizenship office but at a local medical commission. The majority of the population lacks birth certificates, so they had to acquire an age assessment certificate. Moreover, to be accepted by the citizenship office, the name on the age assessment certificate had to comply with the Dinka and Nuer naming conventions indicating patrilineal lineage, which sometimes forced people—even non-Dinka and Nuer applicants—to acquire a second certificate.

As I observed during fieldwork, in an open tent at the center of the courtyard, ‘scribes’ helped those applicants who were illiterate or needed help filling out forms or making photocopies of papers. These private entrepreneurs also provided highly sought-after information about kinship measurement techniques, including searching for possible ‘next of kin’ witnesses or respective proof of them. ‘Next-of-kin’ witnesses then became official guarantors of the applicant.⁶ At the next stop on the journey, verification officers interviewed applicants and witnesses, which is the central concern of this article. In these interviews, the verification officers measured kinship not only by assessing the authenticity of the supplied documentary evidence for genealogical closeness, but also by judging the credibility of their life stories and lived closeness. Successful applicants moved into a room where they were briefly interviewed by a high-ranking

officer from the ‘military aristocracy’. It was only in ambiguous cases that these officers also called in accepted witnesses for further questioning.

As Durka’s case already shows, the journey to citizenship was not always so smooth. Neither the Nationality Act nor the South Sudan Nationality Regulations came with a list of indigenous ethnic groups living on both sides of the border. Thus, the police officers who conducted the hearing as ‘street-level bureaucrats’ (Lipsky 1980) had a great deal of discretion in determining the terms of ethnic belonging and thus of national inclusion or exclusion. As a result of nearly half a century of civil wars, during which family relationships disintegrated (or were never established, as in Durka’s case), many applicants were unable to secure the ‘next of kin’ witnesses stipulated by the law. This was particularly the case among youth repatriating from Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia and among foreigners seeking citizenship illegally. Moreover, the law did not specify who counted as ‘next of kin’, making negotiations on the question of kinship measurement between applicants and the citizenship office’s bureaucrats a delicate matter.

Measuring Kinship by Given Name and Lived Closeness

The citizenship office measured kinship between applicants and their witnesses on two different scales. On the one hand, the officers tried to determine kinship as genealogical descent based on the logic of the naming system. On the other hand, in unclear or dubious cases, the officers tried to evaluate the lived closeness between the applicant and the next of kin. Both of these measurements were based on Dinka and Nuer notions of kinship. ‘Next of kin’, as an Anglo-Saxon legal category, was adopted by South Sudanese lawyers who created the legislation of the new country. However, according to the Dinka major general who was the director general of the citizenship office, officials were not given any instructions as to how exactly they should evaluate the evidence and who should be admitted as a ‘next of kin’ witness: “Here in South Sudan, we know each other ... Our task is to determine if the applicant is really from the tribe he is telling us. For this, we ask the family and the chiefs to testify under oath” (pers. comm.).

As a former major general of the SPLA and a veteran of the civil war, the director is an influential member of the ‘military aristocracy’ of South Sudan. His approach echoed the experiences of civil war, that is, hasty interviews of citizens by uniformed personnel in which the military authority had an unquestionable right to make decisions. Testimonies of chiefs and family members would act as evidence, and the lineage determined from the logic of names would prove the degree of genealogical closeness. The system set up for the citizenship office of the new country thus resembled the structures in

place during the civil war, when high-ranking, mostly Dinka and Nuer military officers ran the civilian administration.⁷

Measuring the Similarity of Names as Genealogical Closeness

The introduction and standardization of surnames has been frequently used by states to make society legible for diverse governance matters (Scott 1998). As has already become evident from Durka's story recounted at the outset, the citizenship office tried to attain this legibility through the standardization of what seems to have become shared local knowledge of Dinka and Nuer kinship through daily interaction. In these negotiations, the staff actively produced the naming system of the new state but also established a selection mechanism for 'close enough' relatives of the applicant—a method that, in their view, best ensured compliance with the law.⁸

In applying this system, male and female officers followed the rules of what they saw as patrilineal descent based on the naming systems used by the two dominant groups of the 'military aristocracy'. According to these naming systems, a newborn's given name would generally be followed by that of the father (or, in exceptional cases, the guardian) and the grandfather (or the father of the guardian) spanning several generations.⁹ "We follow the logic of names," one low-ranking DNPI officer told me, citing the genealogical clarity of the names used by Dinka and Nuer in determining possible kin relationships when, for example, looking for eligible future spouses (pers. comm.).

The requirement that the witness be 'next of kin' demanded from both officers and applicants an effort to "master the bastard algebra of kinship" (Malinowski 1930: 19). Bronisław Malinowski used this phrase to refer to "the pseudo-mathematical treatment of the too-learned anthropologist" (ibid.: 20) who tried to "reduce to formulae, symbols, [and] equations" the complexities of kinship (ibid.: 19). Since naming systems and understandings of kinship vary widely among the other ethnic groups of South Sudan, determining kinship measurement through the logic of names created legal and practical ambiguity and opened up a space for debate between applicants and officers. The opacity of the process also fueled and reinforced sentiments of ill treatment and domination by certain ethnic groups over the general population. Countless times, I heard complaints about 'Dinka domination' after an applicant was unable to convince a military officer about his or her next of kin during the kinship measurement procedure.

The supposed clarity of the naming system was based on the assumption that wives do not take their husband's name. The senior officers at the DNPI envisioned this system as the backbone of the new registry, with the stipulation that the official name must always consist of four names—three generations—with the last name being the 'family name'. 'Family name' was a

requirement of the German identification machinery, where the computerized system was organized according to the Western notion of separable family and given names. The imagined stable ‘family name’ was translated into a shifting category in the South Sudanese citizenship office, which recorded it as the fourth name (great-grandfather) of the applicant. Therefore, even if a father and a son applied for citizenship documents together, they received different ‘family names’.

The paternal lineage alone would show the generational degree because the names of the Dinka and Nuer maternal or affinal relatives contain only the paternal ancestors of the ego. In the following paragraphs, I seek to shed light on the logic of Dinka and Nuer names and thus on the state-recognized, official South Sudanese naming systems used in the citizenship office. Based on this logic, the degree of similarity of names was understood as an indicator of genealogical closeness and could be used for measuring kinship.¹⁰ Demonstrating this through a concrete example, let us assume that a Dinka man called Jok Deng Adout Kiir was applying for citizenship and had brought another Dinka man called Achuil Luol Adout Kiir as a next of kin. As table 1 illustrates, the third and fourth names—those of the grandfather and great-grandfather—are the same. This would allow the official to assume that they were relatives and measure their genealogical closeness to be that of paternal cousins. The disputes about names between the officers and the non-Dinka or Nuer applicants were particularly long and sometimes very heated. The DNPI’s logic, which at first seemed like a strictly patriarchal system that allowed only older paternal relatives to act as witnesses, turned out to be more complex when it came to the strategies of individual applicants and officials. Both sides in these debates displayed and/or appropriated knowledge in kinship categories and ethnic belonging.

TABLE 1: Dinka applicant, a hypothetical ‘ideal’ case

Applicant	Jok (name)	Deng (father)	Adout (grandfather)	Kiir (great-grandfather)
Witness (cousin)	Achuil (name)	Luol (father)	Adout (grandfather)	Kiir (great-grandfather)

Deviations from the Patrilineal Naming System

Several factors complicated the seemingly straightforward kinship measurement on the basis of patrilineal names. Some had to do with actual naming practices that do not comply with the model, and some with lived kinship. Both required efforts to align the similarity of names with the genealogical and

lived closeness it was supposed to measure (see also McKinnon, this issue). Well aware of both kinds of complexities, state bureaucrats and citizenship applicants engaged in numerous practices of adapting to or manipulating the measurements, thereby producing ever more complex mixtures.

The first level of complexity arose from the additional baptismal names given to the child. For instance, Dinka or Nuer often take on a baptismal name—usually, but not always, placed after the first given name, so that in our hypothetical case our witness would be called Achak *John* Luol Adout. In certain cases, the father's or grandfather's baptismal name falls off the genealogical name passed on to and recited by their children. The daughter of Achak *John* Luol Adout, for example, might be called Rakelleh Achak Luol Adout, with the baptismal name of *John* falling out. However, as there has been no codified and strictly followed application of this rule, there was a great deal of compromise between bureaucrats and applicants when they decided about the final name of the applicant that would be printed on the ID card and recorded in the state registry. I saw numerous occasions when the high-ranking military officer conducting the official investigation and kinship measurement changed the name of an applicant on the form. In certain cases, either at this stage or later during the entering of biometric data into the database by low-ranking officers, the applicants successfully 'appealed' the name change and convinced the officers to revert to the name that they had first applied with. In most cases, however, applicants accepted the change of their official name.

Cases of children born out of wedlock further complicate the situation. In many cases, Dinka or Nuer men cannot pay the bride price because they lack a herd of cattle. As a result, their children become associated with the patrilineal line of the maternal uncles and are named accordingly (Pendle 2018; Sommers and Schwartz 2011). As in the case of Durka, who grew up with her maternal uncle for different reasons, individuals may also feel closer to their maternal relatives even while officially associated with (and named after) their paternal relatives.

During fieldwork, I encountered different strategies used to apply for citizenship at the DNPI in cases where measurements of kinship based on the similarity of names or on lived closeness did not match. Some, like Durka, sought out their genetic father to ask him or one of his relatives to testify for them. In these cases, they had used their maternal names previously; now their official names would be those of their fathers or, as the case may be, of their grandfathers and sometimes great-grandfathers, replacing former names derived from their maternal uncles and their patrilineal ancestors.

Others claimed that their maternal uncle was their father and then brought any of the relatives they grew up with to the office to testify. For example, the child of their uncle, a matrilineal cousin, would testify at the office to being a patrilineal sibling. Recycling the names used in the previous example, let us

suppose that a Dinka called Jok Deng Adout Kiir, who was born out of wedlock and raised by his maternal uncle, applied for citizenship. If he followed the paternal line, he would have to get a new name; however, in order to be able to use the maternal line, he would have to indicate another person as father, thus making the witness’s degree of kinship measurable (see tables 2 and 3). In both cases, the applicant’s choice of kinship affiliation was the result of lived closeness, which included geographical closeness (e.g., which branch of relatives was easier to contact in Juba), and emotional closeness or personal proximity (e.g., which branch was more convenient to ask for favors). Also, the emphasis that the applicant placed on ‘real’ descent and the official name that would then appear on the identity card played a role. In cases where individuals refused to change their descent, and thereby their name, the decision about national belonging was made in the negotiations of measurements with the officers.

TABLE 2: Dinka applicant raised by maternal uncle who secures a patrilineal kin witness

Applicant	Jok (name)	Deng (maternal uncle, guardian)	Adout (uncle’s father)	Kiir (uncle’s grandfather)
Applicant’s official name	Jok (name)	Achuil (father)	Luol (grandfather)	Wek (great-grandfather)
Witness (paternal sibling)	Kuol (name)	Achuil (father)	Luol (grandfather)	Wek (great-grandfather)

TABLE 3: Dinka applicant raised by maternal uncle who secures a matrilineal kin witness

Applicant	Jok (name)	Deng (maternal uncle, guardian)	Adout (uncle’s father)	Kiir (uncle’s grandfather)
Applicant’s official name	Jok (name)	Deng (maternal uncle, guardian)	Adout (uncle’s father)	Kiir (uncle’s grandfather)
Witness (‘real’ cousin/ maternal sibling)	Kuol (name)	Deng (father)	Adout (grandfather)	Kiir (great-grandfather)

However, this was not a one-way street: bureaucrats also learned every day, and this shaped their future decisions. I witnessed daily how high-ranking, off-duty military officers sat in the small, shady courtyard behind the verification office, drinking tea and discussing difficult cases. They argued with each other when they thought that one of them had made a wrong decision. In certain tricky cases, I saw officers postpone their decision and tell the applicant to “come back tomorrow.” They would then seek out their colleagues to inquire if they had previously encountered something similar. In cases when a dispute between an applicant and an officer became contentious, the highest-ranking commanding officer frequently took over the dispute and restarted the entire investigation.

From time to time, bureaucrats made exceptions. Instead of seeking degrees of distance in lineage, they were occasionally more interested in trustworthiness and assessed the closeness between the applicant and the witness, irrespective of the genealogical relations. In his final book on the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard (1951: 156) wrote about the deviation of patrilineal, segmentary rigidity in everyday life among the Nuer: “The sentiment of *mar*, of communion with his kin, gives a Nuer the comfort of security ... irrespective of their precise category of relationship.” The similar notion is known as *ruääi* or *kaar* among the Dinka. The DNPI officers in certain cases would measure the level of *mar/ruääi*—lived closeness—during the citizenship interviews.

For example, in one citizenship interview, a Dinka officer did not accept a next-of-kin witness—a maternal cousin—of an Equatorian Kakwa applicant, arguing that the law required a paternal, older relative. The two sides got into a heated discussion about who qualified as a relative. Insisting on measuring genealogical closeness through the similarity of names, the officer argued that he could only accept a witness who shared at least one of the four names with the applicant, in line with the Dinka and Nuer naming system described above. By the end of the discussion, the applicant managed to convince the officer that although the Kakwa are also a patrilineal ethnic group, maternal uncles—and, accordingly, their children—are emotionally closer and more important than the father, and that due to the logic of the Kakwa naming system kinship would not be clear even in the case of paternal relatives. After some hesitation, the Dinka officer accepted the applicant’s arguments and agreed to question the witness. While the Dinka officer first insisted on the logic of names, the Kakwa applicant questioned the adequacy of such measurements for determining his ethnic belonging, arguing that the Dinka and Nuer measurement of kinship failed at attesting Kakwa kinship due to different naming practices, and that Kakwa kinship should be measured on the basis of closeness in family life rather than shared names. The questioning thus changed to a different and improvised kinship measurement that tested lived closeness. The officer first asked the applicant a series of trivial questions about the place where the

applicant claimed to come from: What is the name of the river nearby? What is the name of the paramount chief of the county? He then cross-examined the witness alone, asking the same questions to determine if the two were really from the same place.

However, officers at the citizenship office did not always accept such arguments about ethnic difference as being legitimate reasons to deviate from the logic of names for kinship measurement. Another citizenship applicant provides an example. He worked for a non-governmental financial institution, but was also the leader of the semi-official umbrella organization of the Acholi community in South Sudan. His birth certificate was issued at a hospital in Khartoum, and he used this to apply for citizenship, bringing along a paternal cousin as 'next of kin' witness. The official politely told him that the birth certificate was not acceptable because his name did not match the official naming system. First, it only consisted of three names; second, it did not include the names of his paternal ancestors. The applicant argued in vain that while the Acholi are a patrilineal ethnic group, in their naming system it was outright unacceptable for people to be named after their own father. Finally, he had no option but to request the Age Assessment Form from the medical commission under a new name that complied with the state's accepted naming system. He was perplexed and annoyed by the fact that his passport would be under a different name, and that each time he used it, he would have to explain why. For him, this was proof of 'Dinka dominance' over something as fundamental and sacred as a person's name.

However, discrepancies between kinship as similarity in names and lived closeness also affected officials themselves. Several high-ranking officers tried to find jobs for their relatives at the citizenship office. One older Dinka colonel—who perhaps checked and enforced most strictly that witnesses be paternal relatives—secured a guard position for a young protégé. He had told me that the boy was a 'next of kin' to him. In later conversations it turned out that the young man was the grandson of his maternal aunt, a degree of kinship that the Dinka language has no word for (Deng 1972). The officer still felt close to him, considering him and his aunt, who entrusted him with care obligations, to be part of his *ruääi*. Applicants and officers together engaged in flexible kinship measurements that combined the standards of patrilineal naming systems with assessments of lived closeness. Their disagreements occasionally strengthened ethnic divides and stereotypes. The next section shows how these negotiations resulted in new types of kinship relations.

The Productivity of Measuring Kinship

In certain cases, citizenship applicants produced evidence of kinship to successfully apply for identity documents. These attempts were based on careful

observation of the office routines and demonstrated a fair understanding of different types of kinship measurements. Two of my interlocutors came from Southern Kordofan, Sudan. They had fled the Sudanese Civil War for Khartoum and then Juba, South Sudan, looking for work and a better life. They met in Juba for the first time and moved to a shared house. Both of them had UNHCR-issued identity papers for refugees; however, they could not get permanent jobs, as these jobs are usually reserved for South Sudanese nationals. They applied for citizenship together, even though they knew that they were legally not eligible. According to the law, they were not South Sudanese because—despite the Christian population of South Kordofan having supported the SPLA for decades—the area remained in Sudan upon South Sudan’s secession. In order to become eligible, they had to create measurable kinship for each other. Although they came from different ethnic groups, they testified for each other as ‘next of kin’, and created new biographies for themselves, for which they obtained evidence.

First of all, they selected an appropriate South Sudanese ethnic group—it had to be a group with a small population whose language was not spoken at the citizenship office, lest they be caught—and created new names and life stories for themselves, and then testified as each other’s brothers. The new names followed the state-desired logic of names described above: their imagined fathers’ names became second names, grandfathers’ names third, and so on. In order to get prepared, they visited the office several times, months before actually applying, and also consulted fixers about the process. The requirement of ‘next of kin’ witnesses and the bureaucrats’ kinship measurement methods thus spurred great interest among citizenship applicants to acquire knowledge about the different kinship categories used during measurement in order to have a successful application.¹¹ After successfully applying for South Sudanese citizenship, the two men from South Kordofan have been renting a house together in a new district in Juba, where they told everyone that they are brothers. In this case, the kinship measurements not only led to national belonging but also helped to forge a lasting relationship acknowledged locally as kinship.

This productivity of measuring is also evident in the following case. One of my Equatorian Kuku interviewees traveled to Juba to acquire citizenship documents from a Ugandan refugee camp. Once in Juba, and having learned about the requirements of the procedure, he had to look for a distant paternal relative because his entire family lived in Uganda. This cousin, whom he would not have contacted and met otherwise, traveled to Juba from a nearby village to help him, and in the three weeks they spent together, they became such good friends that my interviewee decided to move to his cousin’s village instead of returning to Uganda. Measurements of kinship as similarities in names produced the very closeness of kinship that the similar names were supposed to indicate.

Measuring patrilineal descent and lived closeness to make decisions about national belonging may thus be experienced as coercive, yet it may also allow actors to create new kinship relations that can prove surprisingly stable, as in the example of the two young men living together as brothers. Likewise, Durka, who returned from her European home and had to search for her never-before-seen father to testify for her, developed a very good relationship with him afterward. Toward the end of her visit, Durka decided to move out of her hotel room to spend a few days with her father's family. This flexibility that actual lived closeness offers has constantly influenced people's view of kinship based in normative assumptions about mutual obligations. Of course, these normative foundations are not closed sets expressed through formulas; oftentimes, even two Dinka officials may disagree about a disputed issue. And these experienced, flexible kinship relations—such as the official naming system thus set up—are themselves continually affecting the normative foundations treated as reference points.

Conclusion

The nationality laws of 2011 define South Sudan as a hodgepodge of well-defined and bounded ethnic groups (Markó 2015). The emphasis on ethnicity as the building block in defining the new nation and thus the cornerstone of the application process might have been understood as an innocent and logical choice by the new state. However, with the well-documented militarization of ethnicities in South Sudan (Jok and Hutchinson 1999) and the ethnic nature of the civil war that broke out in 2013 (Craze 2019; Craze et al. 2016; Pinaud 2014), the primacy of bureaucratic ethnicity uncovers deeper levels of connections between the violent state and ethnic politics. Leaders of the formerly militarized ethnicities grabbed power in 2005 and created ethnicized bureaucracies from the beginning of the new state. What started as a political struggle for power within the highest echelons of the governing party quickly developed into a brutal civil war with ethnic killings, massacres, and the absolutization of ethnic identities.

While the civil war was obviously not the direct consequence of the kinship measurements within the citizenship office, the new country's emphasis on ethnicity as the basis of nationhood predicted the future cracking lines. Despite numerous examples of vertical solidarity across ethnic lines—for example, several Nuer officers of the DNPI who were escorted to the safety of the peacekeepers' base during the first nights of the civil war by Dinka colleagues who risked their own lives, and the two Nubians who 'invented' their brotherhood and have lived as brothers ever since—once that state collapsed it disintegrated along the lines it was supposed to follow as the foundations of the new nation.

Some frustrated citizenship applicants felt oppressed by kinship measurements based on the logic of the official naming system, which reinforced their preconceptions about 'Dinka domination'. Some of my highly educated friends in Juba, returning from long exiles just after the declaration of independence, were quite annoyed that the citizenship application form starts with a question about 'tribe'. One, a writer by profession, put South Sudanese instead of giving her tribe. Unable to get her documents, she had to change the form, filling it out according to the ethnic logic of the office and confirming belonging through a 'next of kin' witness. Even though she comes from a powerful and 'immaculately' Dinka family, has a high socio-economic status, and definitely can 'speak to power', she was unable to negotiate her 'extreme' position and had to conform to the rules and accept the ethnic emphasis, and with it the kinship measurements. Her story shows the limits of civic action in a society where militarized ethnicity was translated into ethnicized bureaucracy even before the outbreak of the civil war in South Sudan.

Immediately following the declaration of independence, South Sudan was in dire need of procedures that could establish citizenship and on that basis issue identity documents. Driven by good intentions, the leaders of the citizenship office turned to the methods used during the Second Sudanese Civil War and created legislation with an emphasis on ethnicity. This article has highlighted that a single approach toward kinship measurement through the attestation of names proved insufficient in practice to determine ethnicity, and verification officers thus applied different types of measures. Combining the logic of names with lived closeness of kinship opened the possibility for applicants to become active participants. During this process, both the applicants and the officers constantly redefined official state practices by applying flexible kinship measurements. While sometimes this flexibility can produce new relations and belonging, the apparatus created to measure kinship can also increase political tensions, strengthen ethnic stereotypes, and cement inequalities in access to state resources.

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Notes

1. All names have been changed to ensure anonymity.
2. Throughout the article, the Second Sudanese Civil War refers to the Southern rebellion against the Sudanese state between 1983 and 2005, while the South Sudanese Civil War refers to the war that broke out in December 2013 in Juba and reached a ceasefire and peace agreement in September 2018.
3. Meanwhile, the size of the biometrics database tied to aid distribution by the World Food Programme and the International Organization for Migration grew to four million entries, basically documenting one-third of the most vulnerable part of the South Sudanese population (private sources).
4. The detailed history of the colonial policies of uneven development between regions of South Sudan is discussed by Douglas Johnson (2003). For the legacy of *kokora*, the decentralization policy of the short period of peace that started in the 1970s (1972–1983), see Willems and Deng (2015).
5. For a more detailed history, see Markó (2016), and for an analysis of various social classes among the officers in the citizenship office, see Markó (2022).
6. See Markó (2016) for a more comprehensive description of this process.
7. For the wider context of this system, see Branch and Mampilly (2005) and Rolandsen (2005).
8. In this way, they acted in a similar way to the insurance adjusters described by Irene Moretti (this issue), who also use a combination of measurements for assessing closeness that they try to adapt to the complexities of everyday life.
9. For a detailed description of the Dinka naming system, see Deng 1972: 38–40.
10. See also Thelen and Lammer (this issue) on the various indicators of kinship, such as closeness and similarity.
11. Similarly, Caren Freeman (2011) shows how the Korean government encouraged Chinese Koreans to ‘discover’ kinship relations on the peninsula and produce new kinship.

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