ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

REFUGEE-HOST RELATIONSHIPS IN A HEIGHTENED ETHNIC POLITICS: THE CASE OF SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES IN GAMBELLA REGION, ETHIOPIA.

BY

HIKA DEREJE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY.

JANUARY, 2025

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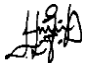
Declaration

I, **Hika Dereje,** the undersigned, declare that this thesis entitled, **"Refugee-host relationships in a heightened ethnic politics: the case of South Sudanese refugees in Gambella region, Ethiopia"** is my original work. I have undertaken the research work independently with the guidance and support of my research supervisor. Thus, this study has not been submitted for any degree or diploma program in this or any other institution. All sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Hika Dereje		January, 2025
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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by **Hika Dereje**, entitled, **"Refugee-host relationships in a heightened ethnic politics: the case of South Sudanese refugees in Gambella region, Ethiopia"** and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Masters of Arts in Social Anthropology** complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards to originality and quality.

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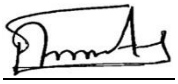
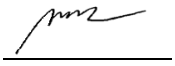
1. Advisor	Dr. Fekadu Adugna		16 January 2025
2. Internal Examiner	Dr. Teshome Emana		16 January 2025
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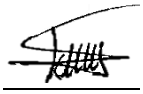
4. Chairperson	Dr. Kiya Gezahegn		27 January 2025

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Acronyms

ARRA	Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy
DICAC	Development and Inter-church Aid Commission
EHAGL	The East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD	Focus group discussion
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GoE	Government of Ethiopia
KII	Key Informant Interviewee
KIIs	Key Informant Interviewees
ID	Identification Card
IDA	International Development Association
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IDI	In-depth Interviewee
IDIs	In-depth Interviewees
INGOs	International Non-Government Organizational
NGO	Non-Government Organizational
OAU	Organization of African Union
OCP	Out of Camp policy
RRS	Refugees and Returnees Service
UN	United Nation
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refuge
WASH	Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Program

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Abstract

Due to conflict, political instability, and drought, millions of people migrated from one place to another globally seeking asylum and living as refugees. This increase in refugee populations has brought social and political tensions in many refugee-hosting countries. This study examined refugee-host relationships in Gambella regional state of Ethiopia in the context of heightened ethnic politics. The study considered two refugee camps: Kule and Piyudo-1 and their surrounding communities. The study used ethnographic research with a qualitative approach. Through purposive sampling of informants, the study employed qualitative data collection instruments such as interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and life histories. The collected data were analyzed, interpreted, and presented using thematic analysis by creating main themes and sub-themes under the broader themes derived from the study's objectives and emerging data. Thus, the study findings reveal that economic interactions between refugees and host communities occur in job markets, labor sectors, marketplaces, and financial services. Intermarriage between refugees and host communities was common primarily among the same ethnic groups. Likewise, both groups share religious practices, and access to basic services such as safe water, schools, and health centers, except in cases of conflict. Where the refugees and the host share ethnic backgrounds, their relationships are smooth and harmonious. However, conflicts are common where they belong to different ethnic groups; making ethnicity defines most interactions regardless of the people's status (refugee or host). The study also highlights a difference between the two major ethnic groups in Gambella over refugee local integration. While Nuer hosts welcome refugees' local integration, the Agnwa strongly rejects it, which badly affects the government policies on refugees' local integration. Overall, ethnic identity played a critical role in shaping refugee-host relationships in Gambella. Based on these findings, it is strongly recommended that refugees view their hosts not through the lens of ethnic background but as fellow locals. Host communities should extend their support to refugees, recognize their vulnerability, and avoid viewing them from the existing ethnic politics. Considering local realities when implementing refugees' local integration is also better. Besides, the government should also prioritize maintaining regional peace and stability.

Key words: Refugee-host relationship, local integration, ethnicity, ethnic politics.

Chapter one

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Migration from one place, region, and country to another place, region, and country is as old as the history of human beings. They existed whenever and wherever people freely moved, and man-made and natural calamities forced people to flee their homelands, making humans migrate since the earliest time (Ahmed, 2017). However, issues of refugees are a contemporary global issue and the expansion of refugees may create new challenges in the host communities, region, or country (Labiso, 2020). Globally, 1951 marked the ratification of the UN Refugee Convention, in which the international community defined a refugee as an individual who has left their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on one's race or ethnicity, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social or political group (World Bank, 2016, as cited in Nambuya et al., 2018)

Every year, thousands of people worldwide migrate to different countries to seek asylum and improve their lives (Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2021). As of 30 May 2024, over 120 million people were forcibly displaced globally; 43.4 million refugees, 63.3 million IDP, 6.9 million asylum seekers, and 5.8 million people in need of international protection.[1] From these statistics, low and middle-income countries hosted 75% of the refugees and other people in need of international protection (Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2021).

As of March 2024, the East and Horn of Africa including the Great Lakes (EHAGL) region are hosts 5.3 million refugees and asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2024d). From the East and Horn African countries, Ethiopia has a long history of hosting several refugees fleeing conflict, instability and oppression, food shortage, and drought in neighboring countries (Carver, 2020). As of 30 June 2024, Ethiopia hosts 1,064,587 refugees and asylum-seekers, making it the 3rd largest refugee-hosting country in Africa. These refugees mainly originate from South Sudan (423,163), Somalia (358,768), and Eritrea (179,276) (UNHCR, 2024a), and largely spread across five regions of Ethiopian including Gambella (394,231), Somali (357,657), Benishangul (104,785), Addis Ababa (78,531), and Afar (60,176).[2]

[1] https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/. Accesses 1 August 2024
[2] https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth. Accessed 1 August 2024

Ethiopia has traditionally pursued refugee policies and proclamations through which it provides refugees and asylum-seekers with access to its territory, asylum, safety, and services provided through Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) formerly known as Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), UNHCR and international humanitarian partners (UNHCR, 2020). In 2004, Ethiopia endorsed a national Refugee Proclamation, aligning with the global (the 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol) and regional refugee conventions (the 1969 OAU convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa). The 2004 National Refugee Proclamation on refugees focused on camp-based protection and basic services provision for refugees (UNHCR, 2018).

Later on, the FDRE parliament adopted revisions to the existing national refugee law on 17 January 2019. The policy provides refugees with the right to work and live outside of camps, getting access to social and financial services, and vital registration services, including births and marriages. The persistent insecurity, fueled by internal conflict, human rights abuses, competition for resources, and drought in neighboring countries has led to sustained refugee inflows into Ethiopia. In response, Ethiopia maintains an open-door policy, allowing refugees access to humanitarian services and protection for those seeking asylum on its territory (UNHCR, 2018). This means, Ethiopia welcomes refugees without restriction and is committed to providing humanitarian aid and protection through its legal framework.

To implement its commitments, Ethiopia developed a comprehensive policy framework, legislative actions, and strategic response mechanisms aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence and greater inclusion for refugees. A key component of this framework focused on expanding refugee rights, including through the Out-of-Camp Policy (OCP), legal residency, freedom of movement, and employment opportunities (Kassa et al., 2024). The CRRF represents a significant shift, transitioning from a camp-based model to one that emphasizes self-reliance, local integration, and economic opportunities for both refugees and local communities. For instance, refugees living in camps benefit from paid employment, refugees in protracted situations have opportunities to integrate locally; jobs are created for host communities, and the government has access to international financial and political benefits. While progress has been made, regulatory challenges hindered its full implementation of these rights (Abebe, 2018).

Gambella region is one of Ethiopia's most conflict-ridden areas, as volatile violent conflict between Agnwa and Nuer remains continued. This has brought to the forefront the

complexities of refugee integration in the region (Hagos, 2021). As of 30 June 2024, a total of 394,231 refugees were found in the region residing in seven camps including Jewi, Kule, Nygunyyiel, Okugu, Pinyudo-1, Pinyudo-2, and Tierkidi refugee camps.[3]

At a regional level, significant change continues to be made since the launch of the comprehensive refugee response framework in Gambella in May 2018. Consequently, Gambella regional government, RRS (formerly ARRA), local community leaders, youth leaders, private institutions, and the general public are progressively understanding, and embracing CRRF. Besides, human and financial resources continue to be invested in refugee-hosting areas by Ethiopian government (GoE), donors and UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society organizations. Overall, Gambella has shown progressive change from 2019 onwards as compared to 2018, when there was low awareness about the concept and less support for the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the CRRF (UNHCR, 2019).

Even though above mentioned positive actions were taking place, forced displacement and the prolonged existence of refugees in the region have greatly affected the socio-political context of the region. Similarly, the region faces recurrent and unpredictable ethnic conflicts and ongoing insecurity. For instance, ethnic conflict between Agnwa population and Nuer intensified as disputes over getting access to resources and unequal services distribution reached a tipping point (UNHCR, 2019). On top of this, the arrival of refugees to the region has still intensified demands on public services and strained existing infrastructure. Taking this into account, this study examined refugee-host relationships in the context of heightened ethnic politics, focusing on South Sudanese refugees in Gambella region.

1.2 Statements of the problem

As stated above, this thesis examined the refugee-host relationship in Gambella regional state of Ethiopia in the context of heightened ethnic politics. Gambella region is known for hosting a huge number of refugees mainly forced to flee from South Sudan. In the region, Agnwa and Nuer are the two major ethnic groups experiencing conflict over getting access to natural resources, political entitlements and diverse socio-cultural life. The majority of refugees belongs to Nuer and resides across Agnwa zones and Itang Special Woredas. The Nuer and Agnwa, have different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds as well as political interests, making the refugee-host relationship a critical issue in the region. It is based on these

[3] https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth. Accessed 1 August 2024

dynamics that this study examined the refuge-host relationship in the study areas, more specifically focusing on their economic and socio-cultural interaction, refugees' local integration vis-à-vis the national policy, and the roles of ethnic identity in enabling and hindering refugee-local integration. Given the unpredictable ethnic conflict in Gambella, the study emphasized the role ethnic politics plays in determining refugee-host relationships in the region.

Some studies have been conducted on refugee-host relationships and other related issues. For instance, Kinyanjui Sharon Mumbi (2017) studied refugee-host community relationships in Kenya. In his study, the researcher explored that refugee-host conflict in Kenya is mainly due to competition over resources and socio-cultural differences. According to him, this is evident in Kenya both in camp situations where the conflict was between refugees and communities around the camps and among the urban refugees as well. The researcher argued that local integration is indeed a forgotten solution in the country. He further argued that refugee freedom of movement is the most crucial factor for achieving a positive refugee-host community relationship and in turn, facilitating local integration in the long run (Mumbi, 2017). This insight is helpful for this study as local integration is arguably one of the 'durable solutions' government and other stakeholders working on refugees in Ethiopia are suggesting and that is what this study examined.

Mellese Madda and Wodajo Begna (2019) studied the impacts of Somali refugees on the host community in Bokolmanyo, Dolo-Ado, in the Somali region of Ethiopia. The authors mainly focused on the multifaceted impacts of refugees on their host population in the study area. They explored that refugees have visible negative impacts on hosts, causing environmental degradation, poor sanitation, scarcity of land, and security issues. However, the expansion of telecommunication services, learning institutions, solar power, health centers, cafeterias and restaurants, riverside irrigation schemes, safe potable water, and police stations were identified as advantages of the existence of the refugees in the area (Gatisso & Begna, 2019).

Tadele Tesfaye (2020) on the other hand studied similar issues - challenges and advantages of refugees' presence in the host communities using Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State in Western Ethiopia as a case. The study argued and tried to show that refugees harm both the environment and are a security threat to the host population. Refugees have, reportedly, destroyed the forest and other natural resources surrounding the refugee camps and have

contributed to fueling enter-ethnic tensions in the region (Labiso, 2020). Indeed, this is similar in many ways to the local perceptions in Gambella where this study was conducted.

Even closer to my work is a study done by Samuel Zewdie (2021) who explored refugees and local power dynamics in Gambella. The author's analysis demonstrates that political power dynamics are very complex, encompassing a range of factors, from political representation at multiple administrative levels to the strategic enforcement of political entitlements by various interest groups and minorities. In his study, the researcher focused on the political entitlement strategies of the two dominant ethnic groups; Agnwa and Nuer, in the context of changing power dynamics at the various administrative levels in Gambella following the arrival and integration of South Sudanese refugees. This is what my study would build on, based on the empirical engagement in specific camps situations.

Even though the studies mentioned above provide us with useful and very important information, they did not address critical factors, the role of ethnicity in refugee-host relationships especially in the Ethiopian context. In Gambella, multiple factors shape the refugee-host relationship. However, local ethnic identity politics is the most crucial factor that determines refugee-host relations in general and refugee-local integration in particular and this study emphasizes this. Samuel Zewdie's (2021) work focusing on political entitlement strategies between Nuer and Agnwa is closely related to this thesis.

However, this study expands the argument by Samuel with empirical data focusing on two refugee camps and their surroundings where one of the camps (Kule refugee camp) was selected as a study site due to its relatively homogeneous ethnic composition of refugees with their neighboring host communities. The second camp, Pinyudo-1 was chosen because of its diverse ethnic composition where refugees are predominantly Nuer ethnic group and a smaller Agnwa minority while all surrounding host communities are Agnwa. Besides, as the largest and oldest refugee camp in Gambella, Pinyudo-1 provides a suitable case to examine the implementation of refugee-local integration within the context of the national refugee framework. These two cases were selected to examine the role of ethnicity in a refugee-host relationship by comparing the two camps' situations. These comparative cases helped us understand the impact of ethnic differences in determining refugee-host relationships in general and refugee-local integration in particular in the region.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective

The study's overall objective is to examine refugee-host relationships in the context of heightened ethnic politics in Gambella regional state of Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

1. To examine the economic interaction between refugees and their host communities
2. To examine the sociocultural interaction between refugees and their surrounding hosts
3. To investigate refugees' local integration vis-à-vis the national refugee policy
4. To examine the role of ethnic identity in enabling and hindering refugee-local integration

1.4 Research questions

1. What are the economic interactions do refugees have with their host communities?
2. What are the sociocultural interactions do refugees have with their surrounding hosts?
3. To what extent refugee-local integration is being implemented in accordance with the national refugee policy?
4. What are the roles of ethnic identity in enabling and hindering refugee-local integration?

1.5 Research design and methods

1.5.1 Research approach

This study uses a qualitative research approach which contains constructivist ontology and an interpretive epistemology as they best align with the research problem and objectives of the study. The qualitative research approach is used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups give to a social or human phenomenon around them (Creswell, 2014). The process of research using this approach involves emerging inquiries and processes, collecting data from selected samples, inductively analyzing data building from particular or specific to general themes, and making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014). This approach is deemed suitable for examining refugee-host relationships within the contexts of heightened ethnic politics, aiming to provide pertinent insights about the issue

under study. As stated above, the qualitative approach is preferred over other approaches due to its alignment with the issues under study, refugee-host relationships, which are commonly identified by one's interaction, perception, attitudes, and relationship which are difficult to measure statistically, making the qualitative approach a suitable choice for the study.

1.5.2 Research design

In this study, an ethnographic research design has been used; this includes extended fieldwork to collect in-depth data concerning the issues under investigation. Ethnography is a qualitative research design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007; Harris, 1968). It is considered both a process and an outcome of research or is a way of studying a culture-sharing group and the final written product of that research (Agar, 1980; Creswell, 2007). From different forms of ethnographic approach, this study applies a critical ethnographic approach, which focuses on issues of power, empowerment, inequality, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization (Creswell, 2007). Given that this study centers on refugee-host relationships involving potential dominance or oppression by one group over another, a critical ethnographic approach is considered as relevant design for this study.

1.5.3 Study population

This study was conducted in Gambella Regional State of Ethiopia, taking the refugees in the region and the host communities as the study population. The region is home to numerous refugees primarily from South Sudan. Aligned with the objectives of the study, two refugee camps (Kule and Pinyudo-1) along their surrounding host communities were selected as a case or target population of this study. These camps and their hosts were chosen as they best represent the situation of refugees and their hosts in the region. Therefore, studying these areas allowed for an in-depth understanding of the refugee-host relationships in Gambella.

1.5.4 Sampling technique

As stated above, refugees residing in Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps, along with their surrounding host communities, constituted the target population of study. Taking this into account, the research participants from both refugees and their surrounding hosts in both study sites were selected based on a purposive non-probability sampling technique. Purposive

sampling involves deliberately selecting specific settings, individuals, or events to gather crucial information that cannot be acquired through other alternatives. In selecting informants using this technique, Taherdoost (2017) argued that researchers choose cases or participants for inclusion in the sample based on their perceived significant contribution to the study (Taherdoost, 2017).

Considering their perceived significance, informants with in-depth knowledge, skills, and experiences relevant to the research topic were selected to provide necessary data and information to address the research objectives. Besides, relevant criteria including age, gender, location, occupation, ethnicity, level of education, and religion are taken as the major criteria to select informants. Thus, young and old, male and female, refugees and hosts, expert and ordinary, employed and unemployed, and informants from different ethnic and religious backgrounds are involved in this study, aimed to triangulate the data. After selecting informants based on these criteria and obtaining consent from them, I began the data collection process which took place until the data saturation point, where there was no new information emerging from additional informants.

1.5.5 Sources of data and instrument of data collection

In this study, both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. This approach was chosen because employing multiple data collection methods or using multiple data sources is more advantageous in research than relying on a single data source. The primary data is crucial for the accomplishment of the objective of this study. From the available primary sources of data, necessary data and information were collected from selected informants by using interviews (in-depth interviews and key informant interviews), focus group discussions (FGD), and life history. This is supposed to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the study findings. Details are described below.

I. Interview

An interview is a method of gathering information by making a face-to-face interaction with selected respondents on the issues under investigation. It's one of the most popularly used tools of qualitative research and it is typically associated with both quantitative and qualitative social research and often used alongside other methods (Tufa, 2018). In this study, I have used both in-depth and key informant interviews. I have used an in-depth interview with ordinary respondents from both the refugee community and their hosts to collect

relevant data on refugee-host economic and socio-cultural interaction, the role of ethnic identity in determining refugee-host relationship as well as challenges and opportunities associated with refugee-host relationship.

In addition, I have used refugee camp administrators, government officials, and INGO professionals as key informants to collect data for the study especially to gain relevant information concerning the role of the government, non-government agencies, and implementation of established legal frameworks to integrate refugees into their surrounding host communities since they have in-depth knowledge and working experience on both communities. Thus, I have conducted a total of 44 in-depth interviews, 14 from Kule refugees, 6 from Kule hosts (4 from Nuer hosts in Terfam Kebele and 2 from Agnwa hosts in Itang), 16 from Pinyudo-1 refugees (8 from Nuer and 8 from Agnwa), and 8 informants from Pinyudo host communities were selected. In addition, 14 key informant interviews across both study sites were conducted, where 6 informants selected from government and 5 informants were from non-government organizations respectively and the remaining 3 informants were from Kule, Pinyuodo-1 Nuer site, and Pinnyuod-1 Agnwa site camp chairman. Overall, a total of 58 interviews were conducted, comprising 36 male and 22 female informants. For the interview, I recruited an assistant fluent in speaking English, Agnwa, and Nuer languages. The assistant facilitated, translated, and conducted interviews, while I managed the recording of data by using worksheets and field notes during the interviewing process.

II. Focus group discussion (FGD)

It was known that different people may have different concerns even on the same issues or concerns. Thus, I have utilized FGD method to look at the concerns of different individuals to explore diverse views on issues under the study. This has been done with purposely selected youth respondents from refugee communities and the host population separately. This has been used to collect relevant information concerning the general understanding of the refuge-host relationship and its determinant factors in the study sites. Thus, a total of 5 FGDs having 6 members each with male participants were conducted. These FGDs were selected from Kule refugees, Kule Agnwa hosts, Pinyuo-1 Nuer refugees, Pinyuo-1 Agnwa refugees, and Pinyudo-host communities. Here, my assistant played a moderating, interviewing, and translating role while I managed the recording of data by using worksheets and field notes.

III. Life history

The life history approach works with personal narratives or the unfolding history of one person's experiences. This method in qualitative research emphasizes the importance of presenting the individual's subjective evaluation of his/her experiences and of giving information about his/her social experiences (Abdullah et al., 2008). The information gathered through this instrument offers fundamental evidence for understanding social interactions and processes, providing valuable insights into human experience. Thus, a total of six (6) individuals' life histories, 3 from Kule refugees, 2 from Pinyudo-1 Nuer refugees, and 1 from Pinyudo-1 Agnwa refugees were documented. These refugees vividly recounted their experiences and relationships with the surrounding host communities since their arrival in Gambella. Refugees were the sole focus for sharing their life stories, given their greater vulnerability and limited freedom of movement compared to host communities. Here, the role of my assistant and I are identical to that in the interview process stated above.

1.5.6 Data collection procedure

To effectively collect data for my research, first I clearly defined the objectives of the study to ensure clarity, focus, and build trust with informants. Next, I develop simple, clear, and unbiased instruments or semi-structured interview guides in English to gather relevant data and information from informants. Then, I hired an assistant who could speak English, Agnwa, and Nuer languages. After that, my assistant and I went to the field with printouts of interview guides, selected informants based on their consent, informed about the objective of the study, and started data collection after their prior consent. During data collection, I adhere to structured procedures, continuously monitoring for accuracy and consistency while ensuring compliance with ethical regulations. Finally, I documented all steps taken; including any challenges encountered, and stored the collected data for analysis.

1.6 Methods of data analysis

The data gathered from various sources and informants were organized, analyzed, and interpreted using thematic analysis. In this data analysis, I begin by transcribing and organizing the collected data through interviews, FGD, and life history. Using a thematic analysis approach, I identify recurring patterns and key themes and sub-themes that emerge from the collected data. Then, I coded the responses to categorize information and highlight significant insights related to my research objectives. Throughout this process, I engage in

continuous practice, ensuring that my interpretations remain grounded in the participants' perspectives. Besides, thematically organized data were then triangulated with different data sources and literature to enhance the validity of the findings. Following this, information collected from the field was analyzed and interpreted, and results were presented through texts, direct quotations, narrative descriptions, and pictures. Overall, this comprehensive approach allows me to draw meaningful conclusions and provide a rich understanding of the underlying objectives of the issues under the study.

1.7 Scope of the study

The main concern of this study is examining the refugee-host relationship in the context of heightened ethnic politics in Gambella which is area specific i.e. the study geographically focuses on refugees and their surrounding host communities in Gambella regional state of Ethiopia. So, it doesn't show the full image of refugee-host relationships across all regions and cultures in the country. Concerning issues under study, this study aimed at examining the economic and sociocultural interaction between refugees and their surrounding host communities, refugees' local integration vis-à-vis the national policy, examining the role of ethnic identity in enabling and hindering refugees' local integration, by taking Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps as the study sites. These study sites were chosen because of their ethnic composition of refugees and the host population, where the former relatively share ethnic similarity, the later known for its diverse ethnic composition which was key focus of this study, making the sites accurately represent the study population. Besides, practical factors such as the availability of funding, logistical support, and the study's timeframe played a significant role in determining site selection as well as determining the major issues under the study.

1.8 Significance of the study

Nowadays, the world is hosting a huge number of refugees from different socio-cultural settings to other areas with new social, cultural, economic, political, and other ways of life. Ethiopia is known for hosting several refugees from different neighboring countries in Africa. Among these, South Sudanese refugees constitute the largest refugee population, residing in Gambella. The overwhelming majority of these refugees belong to Nuer ethnic group. Nuer and Agnwa are the two dominant ethnic groups in the region, which are mainly known for their divergent historical backgrounds, political views, and different economic and

sociocultural ways of life. These have shaped refugee-host relationships in Gambella giving it a different context which is different from other parts of Ethiopia hosting refugees.

Thus, examining refugee–host relationships in this region is very important both for knowledge production and for supporting policymakers and practitioners. The knowledge produced will be used by scholars and students alike. It also provides an important base to those bodies working on refugees. For instance, it is useful to know and understand the context of the refugee-host relationship in Gambella to those working on refugee governance at different levels and practitioners on the ground. Furthermore, the study is used as literature for other scholars and researchers who conduct research on refugee-related issues in the future.

1.9 Challenges and limitation of the study

The major challenge during data collection was security issues. During the period of my research, the refugee hosting areas of Gambella were in a volatile security situation and some areas faced protracted conflict that made fieldwork difficult. As a result, I was forced to postpone my fieldwork several times and forced to conduct it finally within an uncertain security situation. The other challenge which must be common to researchers conducting research outside their 'own' community is language. As I do not speak the language of both the refugees and the host community, had to rely on translators who speak English, Agnwa, and Nuer languages for data collection. There were risks of losing meanings and challenges of interpretation in the various layers of translations. There were also limitations in terms of time and resources. As an MA student, my time and the resources available for this research were limited constraining the research environment.

Due to the sensitivity of the refugee environment in Gambella, some informants were hesitant and at worse unwilling to participate in the study. Given the protracted nature of the conflicts, the status differences (some are refugees and others not), and the role ethnicity plays in the environment the concern of my informants was understandable. However, I managed to convince many of them to participate by explaining my research, my purpose, and research ethics including anonymities. Regarding the scope of the study; primarily, the research was conducted, but not confined, to two selected refugee camps and their neighboring host communities. Even though the two camps were not sufficiently representative, they presented a very good exemplary case for understanding refugee-host interaction. Thus, this study

provided an understanding of one of the cases of refugee-host relationship and refugee governance in the country's diverse contexts.

1.10 Ethical consideration

Ethical norms and values are crucial in research, guiding the researcher to strictly adhere to mandatory ethical guidelines during data collection (Dibaba, 2016). To ensure compliance with these ethical standards, an official letter of support was obtained from the Addis Ababa University Department of Social Anthropology to the RRS head office. Subsequently, the RRS head office issued an official letter to the RRS Gambella branch office. Following this, the RRS Gambella branch office provided a letter of support to the administrators of both Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps and other relevant bodies. This was essential as official permission from these entities was required for data collection purposes. After that, voluntary response, anonymity, confidentiality, and respecting local cultural ways of life have been given due respect during the time of data collection in particular and the overall research process in general. Hence, all information collected from sample of the respondents with their consent was kept confidential, limitations and failures that the study encountered have been described as well as the different facts, assumptions, and theories taken from books, journal articles, novels, reports, researches and other published and unpublished sources has been properly cited and acknowledged.

1.11 Organization of the study

The study has seven subsequent chapters. The first chapter contains the background of the study, a statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research design and methods, scope of the study, significance of the study, challenges and limitations of the study, and organization of the study. The second chapter is concerned with the various literature reviews to enhance knowledge about the area of the study. The third chapter discusses a description of the study areas. The fourth chapter deals with the economic interaction between refugees and their surrounding host communities while the fifth chapter deals with the socio-cultural interaction of refugees with their surrounding host communities. Chapter six presents refugee-local integration vis-à-vis the national policy and the role of ethnic identity in the local integration of refugees. The last chapter, chapter seven presents the conclusion of the findings and recommendations based on the study's findings.

Chapter Two

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of key concepts

2.1.1 Refugee

According to Article 1 A (2) of the 1951 UN convention relating to the status of refugees, also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention or the Geneva Convention, the term refugee applies to a person who has been forced to leave their homeland due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. They are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of this fear (United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951). The 1969 OAU definition broadened this definition, defining refugees as any person compelled to leave their home country due to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, war, severe civil unrest, and widespread violence. Unlike the narrower definition focused on persecution, this broader understanding grants refugee status to those escaping these terrifying conditions, regardless of whether they face a well-founded fear of persecution (Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, 1969).

2.1.2 Asylum Seeker

Asylum seekers can be seen as individuals or groups of people whose refugee status has not yet been determined by the authorities but whose claim to international protection entitles him or her to a certain protective status considering that he or she could be refugees, or persons forming part of large-scale influxes of mixed groups in a situation where individual refugee status determination is impractical (Ahmed, 2017).

2.2 Refugee-host relationship: Theory and concept

Refugees-host relationships have been conceptualized at different levels, some emphasize the state's involvement and the relationship between refugee populations and their surrounding host communities (Tara, 2012), whereas others prioritize the opportunity structures or opportunities available to refugees in their new environments, such as the possibility to access labor markets or on social inclusion (Agblorti et al., 2023; Esser, 2004). Penninx and Garces-Mascarenas (2016) propose a multifaceted framework for studying refugee–host

relationships. These include 1. the crucial dimensions such as legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural-religious, 2. the actors involved (refugees and hosts), and 3. the levels of analysis (individual, organizational, institutional) that are relevant to studying the process of integration. Ager and Strang (2008) on the other hand identified four levels relevant for integration. These are (1) functional aspects such as housing, health, employment, and education which are considered as means and markers of integration, (2) social connections such as social bonds, bridges, and social links, (3) facilitators – language, cultural knowledge, safety, and stability, and (4) foundation - rights and citizenship (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Other scholars, (Korac, 2003; Strang & Ager, 2010) emphasize refugee local integration, a crucial factor for refugee-host relationships and broadly differentiate between structural integration, meaning the integration into formal state systems and its services such as education or health, and relational integration which addresses the socio-cultural experience of integration experienced by the individual sense of belonging or group-level social cohesion (Korac, 2003; Strang & Ager, 2010). Mumbi (2017) on the other hand tried to clarify and specify refugee local integration as two-way traffic where refugees need to adapt to the new environment and the host population in accommodating and welcoming refugees cautiously. As such, the concept of local integration has a relationship of ways and means culminating in ends (Mumbi, 2017). This study builds upon these conceptual understandings of refugee-host relationships which are very important in examining multidimensional areas of refugee-host interaction in different refugee settings.

Theoretically, Stephan & Renfro (2002) proposed intergroup threat theory which attempts to describe the components of perceived threat that lead to prejudice between social groups. The theory has two components such as realistic threats where threats pose a danger to the in-group's well-being, and symbolic threats where there is a perceived difference between the values and worldview of an in-group and out-group (Makashvili et al., 2018; Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Zárate et al., 2004). Zárate, Garcia, Garza, & Hitlan (2004) further described a perceived realistic threat as a threat to the political, economic, or physical well-being of a group while a perceived symbolic threat arises out of the difference in an in-group's and an out-group's cultural values and believes. Power dynamics, identity, and cultural differences are the major factors that influence the degree and intensity of perceived symbolic threats (Makashvili et al., 2018; Zárate et al., 2004). This study builds on this theory as it centers on communities characterized by perceived differences in their values, worldviews, identity, and cultural differences.

Building on the aforementioned conceptual understanding and theoretical framework, this study examined various aspects of refugee-host dynamics in Gambella. It examined economic and socio-cultural interactions between refugees and host communities, assessed refugee-local integration in light of national refugee policy, explored the role of ethnic identity in determining refugee-local integration, and identified challenges and opportunities associated with refugee-host relationships in Gambella region, Ethiopia.

2.3 Refugee - host relationships in East Africa

East Africa has historically been afflicted by armed conflict and civil war leading to the growing number of refugees in the region. Besides, the prevalence of famine and food insecurity has resulted in massive refugee movements within and beyond the continent (Wanninayake, 2021). As of 31 March 2024, East and Horn of Africa including the Great Lakes region host 5,374,431 refugees and asylum seekers.[4] These make the region host 10% of global refugees while ranking among the 20 least developed countries. Four East African nations such as Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia bear the immense burden of hosting nearly four million refugees, forced to leave their homes due to conflict and changes in climate conditions, many of them often enduring protracted displacement. From these countries, Uganda, Sudan, and Ethiopia are among the top 10 refugee-hosting countries globally.[5] Yet these countries have been facing several challenges and uncertainties ranging from violent conflict even sometimes taking place between refugees and their hosts, mass displacement, climate change, and food insecurity are challenging refugee hosting countries' capacity to provide effective and continuous support for refugees and asylum seekers.[6] However, they are working on creating conducive environments for refugees by developing and implementing refugee proclamations in line with global refugee response agreements.

Uganda as a country is one of the most conducive environments for refugees and is an active participant in the UN Global Compact on Refugees project in the world (World Bank, 2016, as cited in Nambuya et al., 2018). As of 31 Mar 2024, there are a total of 1,611,732 refugees and 48,792 asylum seekers in Uganda mainly from Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, and the DR Congo respectively (UNHCR, 2024c). The applications of CRRF, introduced in 2017, come up with a transformative shift towards whole-of-government ownership and leadership of

[4] https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/rbehagl. Accessed 24 April 2024
[5] https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/east-africa-hosts-10-global-refugees-while-ranking-among-20-least-developed. Accessed 27 April 2024
[6] ibid

Uganda's refugee response. This national platform allows both aid organizations and development actors in a coordinated effort to support both refugee communities and the host population.[7] The policy allows refugees to move outside the camp freely and interact with their hosts, which contributes to the integration of refugees with their host population, fostering the development of harmonious relations or peaceful co-existence with them (World Bank, 2016, as cited in Nambuya et al., 2018).

Kenya on the other hand known for hosting refugees since the early 1970s when Kenya hosted Ugandans displaced by the political coups and tribal regimes of the time. The country receives refugees mainly from Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and DR Congo (Jecinta et al., 2018). As of 31 Mar 2024, Kenya hosts 767,294 refugees and asylum seekers basically from Somalia, followed by South Sudanese, Congolese, and Ethiopians respectively, and continues to be among the top refugee hosting countries (UNHCR, 2024b). Almost half of these refugees reside in Dadaab (44%), Kakuma (40%), urban areas (mainly Nairobi, 16%), and 18,500 stateless persons (UNHCR, 2024b). The government of Kenya allows refugees who have resources to live in urban cities. However, the growing number of refugees in the country has resulted in competition for the already scarce resources and facilities in the country, leading to tensions and conflicts between the refugee and their surrounding hosts. Therefore, refugee–host relationships around refugee camps have been having the forms of both conflicts and bitter co-existence, resulting from the host community's blaming refugees for the scarcity of resources (Jecinta et al., 2018).

2.4 Refugee-host relationship in Ethiopia

As of 31 March 2024, Ethiopia has been hosting 1,064,587 refugee communities and asylum seekers from its neighboring countries, mainly South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea, making it the third-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa (UNHCR, 2024a). The country receives a huge number of displaced people through several entry points. As of 31 Mar 2024, the largest concentration of refugees in Ethiopia is in Gambella followed by Somali, Benishangul Gumuz, Addis Ababa, Afar…Oromia and Tigray.[8] This data shows that most refugees reside in emerging regions which are relatively the least developed in the country, characterized by severe weather, high poverty, and low availability of development infrastructure.

[7] https://globalcompactrefugees.org/gcr-action/countries/uganda. Accessed on 27 April 2024
[8] https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth. Accessed 5 August 2024

In Ethiopia, there is a high degree of interaction between refugees and their surrounding host communities in different refugee-hosting areas. For example, refugees in Afar, Somali, Benishangul Gumuz, and Addis Ababa relatively enjoy amicable relations. To start from Afar, the region is known for hosting refugees all of whom are from Eritrea.[9] The Afar people are primarily pastoralists, and most refugees originate from the arid lowlands of eastern Eritrea. These refugees were hosted in an area where they share similar livelihood activities with the host communities (Tufa et al., 2021). In Afar, regardless of which country they live in, they are Afar, which is a factor that is crucial for the shape of the local refugee-host community relationship. In the region, there is a strong solidarity where commonalities in language, religion, and cultural practices are compounded by strong clan relationships. Thus, having a shared language, kinship network, and sociocultural, and religious similarities ease communication while promoting trust between host societies and refugee communities which contributes to peaceful coexistence and facilitates local integration (Tufa et al., 2021).

Somali region on the other hand is known for its exceptional refugee local integration. Since the nine pledges made by the Ethiopian government in 2016, Somali regional government has been working toward their implementation by rolling out the CRRF and adopting a new refugee proclamation. This lays the foundation for the out-of-camp policy and greater refugee local integration in the region (WB, 2020). Similarly, the research done in the region found that there is a productive refugee-host partnership based on a balance of rights and entitlements which provide them mutual benefit (Carver, 2020). In this regard, refugees in the camps of Sheder, Aw-Barre, and Kebrebeyah reported that they have a smooth relationship with their surrounding host communities as follows:

> *"Since we share the same Somali language, culture, and religion the relation between the refugee community and our community is good and getting better as time passes. [...] From my point of view, their presence attracts NGO interventions that improve our community's access to basic social services like a water supply system, health, education, and others, so their existence here in our place creates opportunities, and we are ok with that"* (HiiL et al., 2021, p.57).

On top of this, the region has a long history of mobility where Somali families move back and forth across the region in search of refuge and diverse livelihood opportunities, making the task of distinguishing between refugee and host even more difficult (WB, 2020).

[9] https://rrs.et/semera-branch-office/. Accessed 5 August 2024

Another refugee-hosting region that has a relatively good relationship with refugee communities is Benishangul Gumuz region. The region has been a zone of refuge for those escaping the Blue Nile areas of Sudan, and it has seen waves of cyclical displacement since the late 1980s (WB, 2020). Tadele Tesfaye (2020) argued that the socio-cultural interactions and relationships of Bambasi refugees and their surrounding host communities have two forms. In this area, both communities have many sociocultural elements that the two groups share in common which play a crucial role in promoting peaceful co-existence on one hand while some activities of refugees harm the local population on the other (Labiso, 2020).

Even though refugees contribute in multiple ways to local economies, local networks between refugees and host community members play a vital role in creating and enhancing economic development opportunities (Tufa et al., 2021). These show that there is a relatively harmonious relationship between refugee communities and the local population in the above-mentioned areas especially in cases where there is a strong social network between the two communities. However, this case is contrary to Gambella, which is known for hosting the largest number of refugees, where the number of refugees is greater than host communities.

According to UNHCR 2020 operational report, even though refugees and their hosts may sometimes perceive each other negatively and tensions do exist between them, they largely enjoy amicable relations except for Gambella (UNHCR, 2020). On top of this, Gambella is one of the marginalized regions, experiencing long-standing Agnwa - Nuer ethnic conflict (Hagos, 2021). These show that ethnic tension and conflict in Gambella region are far more intense than in other refugee-hosting regions in Ethiopia. Besides, the majority of refugees belong to the Nuer ethnic group, with a very small number of Agnwa refugees. Taking this into account, this study examined the refugees-host community relationship in light of heightened identity politics in Gambella region by taking two study sites (refugee camps) where there are relatively Nuer hosts - similar ethnic backgrounds with refugees in one camp and Agnwa host – different ethnic background with refugees in the other, to deeply examine the role of ethnic identity in the refugee – host communities relationship which is crucial to come up with comparative understanding of the issues under the study.

2.5 Challenges and opportunities associated with refugee local integration in Ethiopia

The implementation CRRF in Ethiopia is fundamentally driven by a commitment to refugee integration. One of the Ethiopian government's nine pledges makes specific reference to

'local integration', indicating that at least 13,000 refugees who have been staying in the country for more than 20 years would be entitled to it – although what this means in practice is yet to be defined (Carver, 2020). All of the pledges speak to different aspects of the broader 'local integration' process, seeking to increase refugees' self-reliance through enhancing employment opportunities, freedom of movement, and improving their access to registration and documentation services (Carver, 2020). The emphasis on increasing access to services, particularly education but also other social services such as health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), speaks to another key element of 'integration': bringing more closely together what are largely parallel service delivery systems. This approach is desirable because it fosters broader local integration by bringing refugees and hosts more closely together through shared services and it also potentially contributes to operational efficiency. This approach believes that refugee services should be integrated into national systems and sustained through long-term development funding, instead of relying on short-term humanitarian aid. Although the government's pledges focus more on improving access and outcomes, rather than describing precisely how these improvements are to be achieved (Carver, 2020).

According to the World Development Report 2011, refugees are mostly viewed as benefitting from access to resources unavailable to their host communities. In this case, refugee status provides refugees access to essential social services such as education, literacy programs, vocational training, healthcare, sanitation, and access to opportunities for livelihood services (WB, 2010). However, when social services provided through international funding also target host communities, the likelihood that the local population will have a positive view of refugees increases significantly (Getaneh, 2018).

2.6 The role ethnic identity plays in refugee-local integration

Ethnicity or ethnic group stands for ascribed identity bestowed on groups or categories defined by their distinctive cultural attributes such as language and religion (Barth, 1969). It is an identity based upon a presumption of shared history and common cultural inheritance. Ethnic identity is a complex interplay of self-perception and external attribution shaped by both ethnic affiliation[10] and ethnic attribution.[11] Understanding how ethnic and national

[10] Ethnic affiliation refers to individuals' own sense of group membership and the characteristics of the group as defined by its members (Barth, 1969).

identities influence the adaptation of immigrants, including refugees, requires examining the dynamic interaction between individuals and their new environment. The attitudes, characteristics, and experiences of immigrants intersect with the responses of their hosts, shaped by specific circumstances faced by particular immigrant groups (Reitz, 2002).

Briant & Kennedy (2004) argued that race and ethnicity influence the levels of discrimination between refugee communities and host populations (Briant & Kennedy, 2004). In Nairobi, Kenya, each refugee group is perceived differently by the host community and has different relations with it (Campbell & Kakusu, 2024; Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). The proximate networks of families, children, and kin become vital facilitators of social integration (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023).

According to Martén et al., (2019), upon first arrival in a new country, refugees often choose to live near co-ethnic communities to gain advantage of existing social networks and hope of gaining job opportunities beyond these ethnic enclaves through these networks. For example, Madi refugees in Pagirinya refugee settlement enjoyed this ethnic advantage because of the settlement's location in the sub-region of the Madi community of Uganda. These refugees shared a common language with their hosts, facilitating social integration, which contrasted with the challenges faced by refugees from other ethnic groups (Martén et al., 2019; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). Similarly, Madi refugees residing in South Sudan shared a strong pre-existing relationship with the host Madi community in Uganda. Commonalities in language, intermarriage, and shared kinship ties fostered a harmonious co-existence between the two communities, facilitating refugees' integration into the host community (Martén et al., 2019; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023).

Likewise, Somali and Congolese refugees are the two dominant refugee populations in Kenya. Most Somali refugees reside in the neighborhood of Eastleigh, which is widely known as a predominantly Somali section of the city. In this area, the sizable Somali-Kenyan population has provided Somali refugees with an opportunity for segmented assimilation (Lindley, 2011; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). Refugees and Somali-Kenyan host regularly and densely interact through economic activities and also at schools, mosques, and other social events within Eastleigh. As a result, the nature of the Congolese refugees and their neighboring Kenyan hosts relationships is different from those of Somali refugees, primarily

[11] Ethnic attribution on the other hand concerns the characteristics of the group as defined by outsiders (Ben-Rafael, 2001).

because Congolese refugees do not have ethnic counterparts amongst Kenya's citizenry in the ways that Somali refugees do (Lindley, 2011; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). Likewise, Somali refugees in Bole Michael, Addis Ababa closely engage with Somali Ethiopians in their day-to-day lives.

Ethnic identity tends to be strong when immigrants including refugees seek to preserve their cultural heritage and when the host society fosters a pluralistic environment. Consequently, a sense of nationality is likely to be reinforced when there is pressure to assimilate and when groups feel welcomed. However, in an environment characterized by real or perceived aggression towards immigrants or specific groups, individuals may respond in different ways. Some might reject their ethnic identity, while others might strengthen their ethnic affiliation as a means of resilience, solidarity, and a way of dealing with undesirable attitudes (Phinney et al., 2001). The relationship between these identities and adaptation is complex, influenced by both individual and contextual factors. When immigrants are receptive to assimilation or willing to adapt to the new culture and the host society encourages it, a strong national identity may correlate with positive outcomes. However, these relationships are not straightforward. Individual perceptions, interpretations, and adaptation strategies vary widely, complicating the prediction of outcomes (Phinney et al., 2001).

By taking this into consideration, this study examined refugee-host relationships in Gambella by taking Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps as a case. Kule refugees are relatively hosted by Nuer ethnic groups, while Pinyudo-1 refugees are wholly hosted by Agnwa ethnic groups. By comparing these two settings, we aim to understand the role of ethnic identity in refugee-host integration when refugees and hosts share similar or distinct ethnic backgrounds.

2.7 Refugee proclamations and local integration

On September 19, 2016, the UN General Assembly endorsed the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. This landmark agreement reaffirmed the importance of global refugee protection and outlined a comprehensive set of commitments from member states to strengthen safeguards for populations on the move worldwide (United Nations, 2016). This paved the way for the adoption of CRRF and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). The CRRF emphasizes the critical role of supporting countries, regions, and communities hosting large number refugee populations while promoting the integration of refugees into host communities, advocates for early involvement of development actors, and encourages a

comprehensive, society-wide approach to refugee response. The GCR particularly emphasizes the priority of local integration and calls for efforts by all involved parties and member states to achieve a refugee local integration process.[12] In Africa, Uganda has made substantial progress in integrating refugees into its society, through the progressive policies outlined in the 2006 Uganda Refugee Act. By promoting self-reliance and granting refugees the freedom to move outside refugee camps, the country has fostered greater interaction of refugees with their surrounding host communities, thereby contributing to legal, economic, and socio-cultural integration (World Bank, 2016, as cited in Nambuya et al., 2018).

The Kenyan government on its part uses available resources and affordability to determine the refugees' state of affairs in the country, making the country permit refugees who afford the cost of living in urban cities to live in Nairobi, Ruiru, and Eldoret (Jecinta et al., 2018). However, the growing number of refugees in the country has resulted in competition over getting access to scarce resources such as land, forests, water, and food that used to be available to them are reduced or hardly found (Jecinta et al., 2018). Thus, refugees in Uganda experience a higher level of socio-economic rights and freedom than those in Kenya.

When we came to Ethiopia, the country maintained an open-door policy for refugees, granting asylum seekers access to humanitarian aid and protection (UNHCR, 2018). While Ethiopia and Uganda share similar refugee proclamations, the practical implementation of their proclamation may differ. In 2004, Ethiopia implemented its National Refugee Proclamation, aligning with international and regional refugee conventions (the 1951 Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Convention addressing specific refugee issues in Africa. This refugee law was further revised and strengthened in 2019, positioning Ethiopia as one of the African countries having the most progressive refugee policies.

This policy grants refugees extensive rights, including work, residence outside camps, and access to essential registration services, facilitating local integration. These services and other protection provided to refugees in the country are guided under the umbrella of national and international laws, aligned with core human rights principles (UNHCR, 2018). However, the practical applicability of the policy in all refugee-hosting regions of the country is not similar. For example, Afar, Somali, Benishangul, and Addis Ababa refugees have relatively smooth relationships with host communities. But, in Gambella-the study area, there is more tension

[12] https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants. Accessed 6 June 2024

between different groups of hosts and refugees, because of prolonged ethnic conflict in the region. Considering this, this thesis examined to what extent both refugees and local communities understand and perceive local integration and what the implementation of refugee-local integration looks like compared with the established comprehensive refugee response framework.

2.8 Conceptual framework

Based on the objectives of the study, the conceptual framework that outlines key concepts to understand the refugee-host relationship in the study area was developed. These include the economic factors (marketplace interaction, labor, and employment, access to land and other natural resources as well as baking services), sociocultural exchanges (intermarriage, kinship network, and shared religious practice), national refugee policy, and the role of ethnic identity (belonging to the similar or different ethnic group) in local integration of refugees, as they are central to these relationships. Below is a diagrammatic representation of this framework

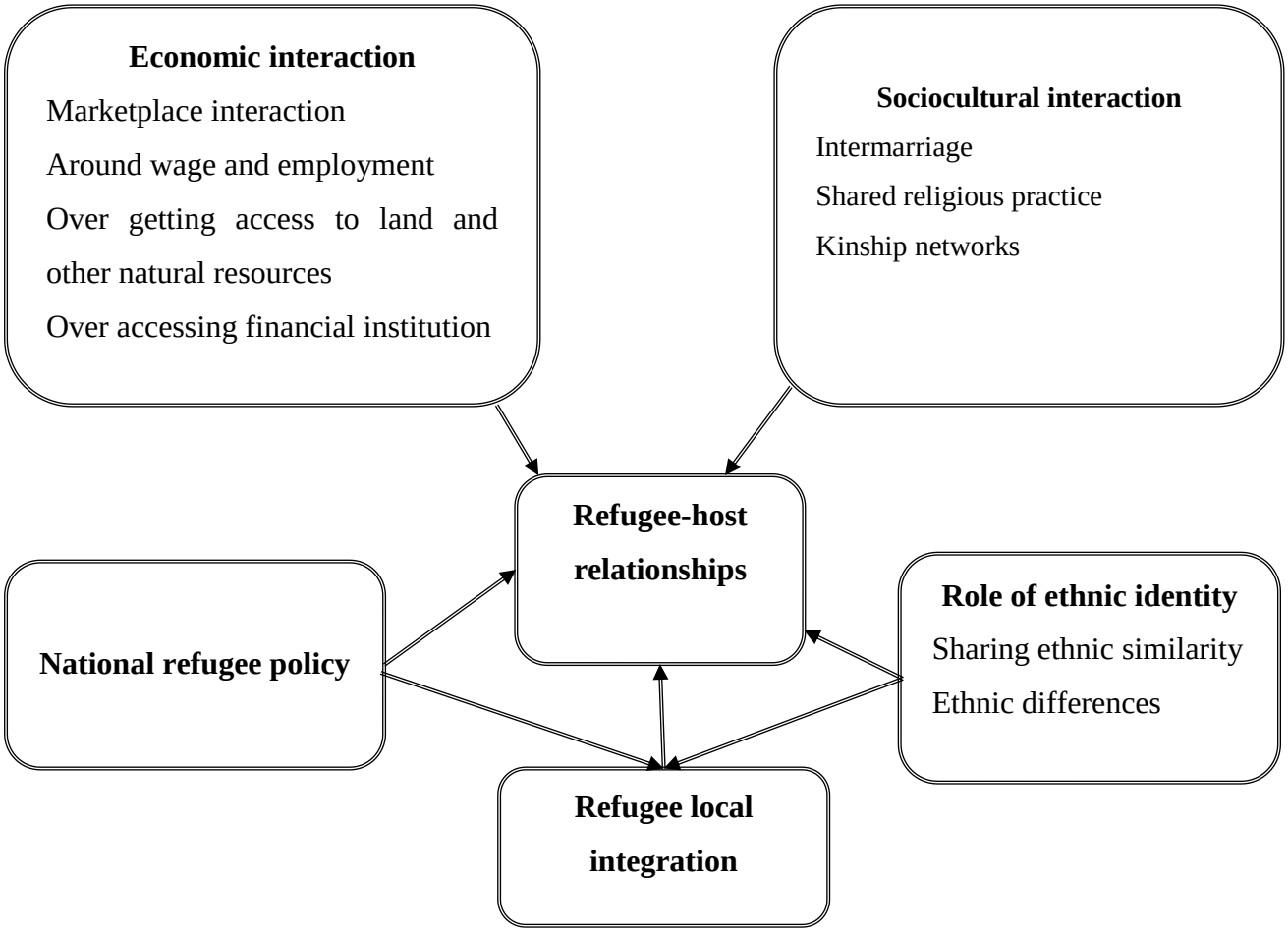


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Chapter Three

3. Description of the study area

3.1 Location

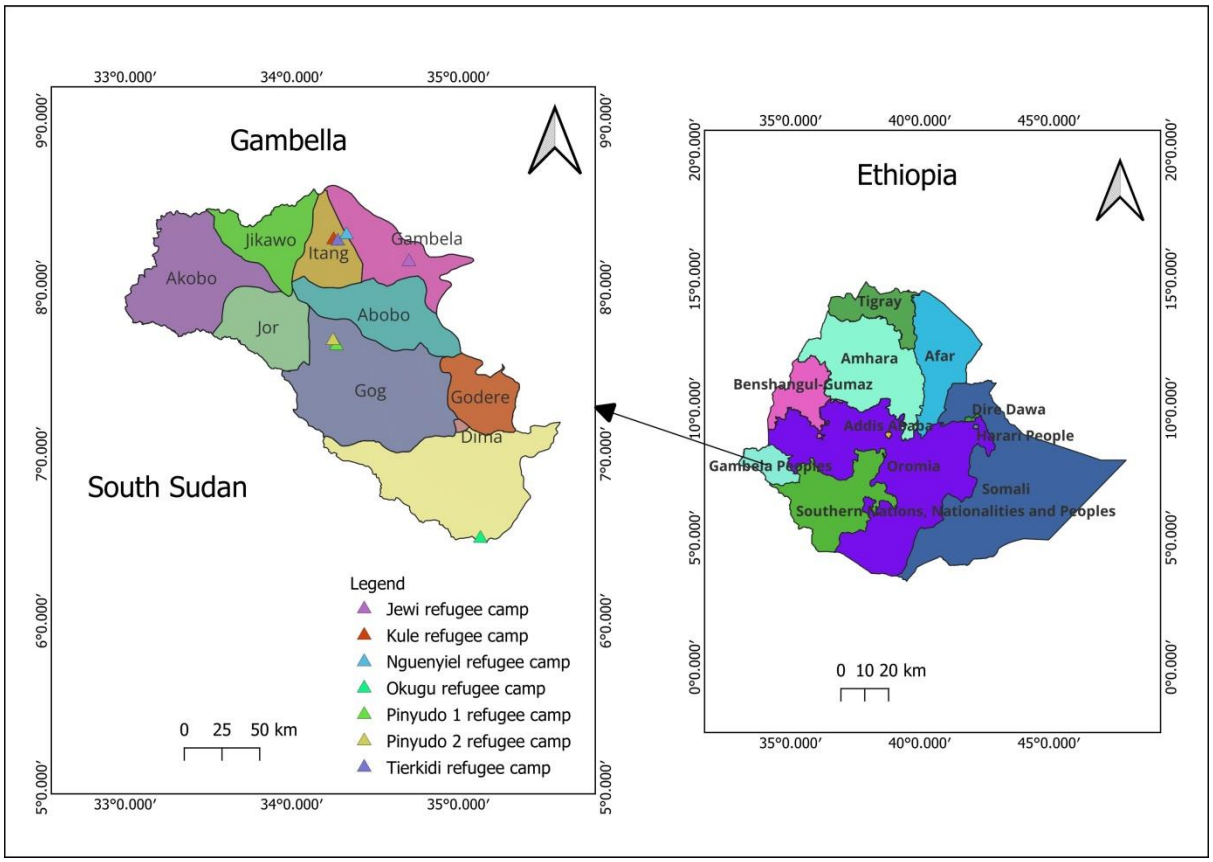
The study was conducted in Gambella regional state of Ethiopia. Gambela is located in the western part of the country, which is 714 KM away from Addis Ababa, the country's capital.[13] The region is bordered by South Sudan to the west, Oromia region to the northeast, and SNNPR to the southeast. The Region has four administrative Zones such as Agnwa Zone, Nuer Zone, Mezhenger Zone, and Itang Special Zone, and 12 Woredas. It is home to five indigenous ethnic groups: Agnwa, Komo, Majanger, Nuer, and Opo. Additionally, other ethnic groups from different parts of Ethiopia, locally known as "highlanders" reside in the region. Nuer and Agnwa ethnic groups are the two largest ethnic groups in Gambella, followed by the "highlanders". These two ethnic groups in the region are known for their diverse socioeconomic and cultural ways of life.[14]

Following frequent South Sudanese conflict, resulting in the displacement of many South Sudanese to Gambella, the region hosts 423,309 refugees in seven camps found in the region as of 30 April 2024.[15] Among these camps, this study covers Pinyudo-1 and Kule refugee camps and their hosts. Pinyudo-1 is the largest and oldest refugee camp in the region which was established in 1993 in Agnwa Zone, Gog Woreda, Pinyudo Kebele, at a specific place called Pinyudo. The camp's location is 889 km from Addis Ababa, 112 km from Gambela, the regional capital, 70 km from the Zonal town, and just 5 km from the Woreda town.[16]

The other study site, Kule refugee camp was established on May 17, 2014, in Itang Special Woreda, Terfam Kebele. Itang is categorized as a Special Woreda within the Region, functioning akin to an autonomous area. The Woreda shares borders with Agnwa Zone to the south and southeast, Nuer Zone to the west, South Sudan to the northwest, and Oromia to the north, with Alwero River defining part of its southern boundary. The camp's location is 817 km from Addis Ababa, 40 km from Gambella regional capital, & 16 km from Woreda town.[17]

[13] https://www.distancecalculator.net/from-addis-ababa-to-gambela). Accessed 15 June 2024
[14] https://epo.acleddata.com/gambela/. Accessed 14 June 2024
[15] https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth. Accesses 15 June 2024
[16] https://rrs.et/gambella-branch-office/. Accessed 15 June 2024
[17] https://rrs.et/gambella-branch-office/. Accessed 15 June 2024

The map below indicates the location of the study area or the study sites.



Map 1: Map of the study area

3.2 Population distribution of the study area

As stated above, the study encompasses two sites as a case, one of which is Puniyudo-1 refugee camp located in Gog Woreda, part of the Agnwa Zone. According to the 2007 Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA) report, Gog Woreda has a total population of 16,836, with 7,751 men and 9,085 women, covering an area of 3,250.25 square kilometers. The population density is 5.18 persons per square kilometer, higher than the Zone's average of 4.83. Urban inhabitants account for 5,617 or 33.36% of the population. The predominant religious affiliation is Protestantism, with 77.52% of the population adhering to this faith. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is practiced by 15.08%, Catholicism by 2.6%, and traditional religions by 1.82% of the population. The largest ethnic groups in Gog were the Agnwa (95.59%), Amhara (1.17%), Oromo (1.11%), and Mezhenger (1.01%). All other ethnic groups constituted 1.13% of the population. Agnwa is the primary language for 95.67% of residents, Afaan Oromoo for 1.16%, Amharic for 1.09%, and Majang for 1.01%. The remaining 1.11% speak other reported primary languages (CSA, 2008).

As of October 2022, Pinyudo-1 refugee camp hosts 48,840 refugees, the numbers of surrounding hosts are 28,213 and 14,116 at the Woreda and Kebele levels respectively. The camp is actively working in collaboration with RRS, UNHCR, WFP, and 15 other local and global partners.[18]

The second study site is Kule refugee camp, located in Itang Special Woreda. According to the 2007 population and census made by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), Itang Special Woreda has a total population of 35,686, marking a 190.14% increase since the 1994 census. Of this population, there are 17,955 and 17,731 men and women respectively, residing in an area of 2,188.34 square kilometers. The population density of Itang is 16.31 persons per square kilometer. Urban inhabitants constitute 16.7% (5,958 individuals), while pastoralists make up 0.78% (278 individuals). There are 6,578 households in the Woreda, averaging 5.4 persons per household, with 6,248 housing units available. The dominant ethnic groups in the Zone are Nuer (63.96%), Agnwa (25.17%), foreigners from Sudan (4.62%), Shita (2.66%), and other ethnic groups (3.59%). Languages spoken include Nuer (68.72%), Agnwa (25.75%), and Opuo (2.66%). The largest religious affiliation is protestant, with 81.63% of the population, followed by followers of traditional beliefs (7.54%), Orthodox Christians (6.27%), and Roman Catholics (2.62%) (CSA, 2008).

As of October 2022, Kule refugee camp hosts 51,524 refugees and is surrounded by 59,212 and 3,736 members of the hosts at the Woreda and Kebele levels respectively. RRS, UNHCR, WFP, and 17 other local and international partners are working in the camp, providing essential protection and support to refugees. The camp faced stabilization challenges until 2016 and has since reached its full capacity. However, the shortage of housing remains a pressing issue for refugees in this refugee camp.[19]

3.3 Climate condition of the region

Gambella is predominantly flat, having a hot and humid climate. The annual rainfall averages around 600 mm, with minimum and maximum temperatures ranging from approximately 21.1°C to 35.9°C.[20] Most parts of the region are flat, having a hot and humid climate. The average annual rainfall is about 600 mm, and the minimum and maximum temperatures are approximately 21.10C and 35.90C respectively. The city's yearly temperature is 31.33ºC

[18] https://rrs.et/gambella-branch-office/. Accessed 15 June 2024
[19] https://rrs.et/gambella-branch-office/. Accessed June 15, 2024
[20] http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org/gambella.html. Accessed 13 June 2024

(88.39ºF). This is 9.1% higher than Ethiopia's averages. Gambella Peoples usually receives approximately 65.85 millimeters (2.59 inches) of rainfall annually, spread over 127.27 rainy days, which accounts for 34.87% of the year. Longitude - 34.1531947, Latitude - 7.9219687, Attitude/Elevation - 427.36m (1402.1ft), Annual high temperature - 35.92ºC (96.66ºF), Annual low temperature - 25.23ºC (77.41ºF), and Humidity - 50.06%.[21]

3.4 Economy and Livelihood

Gambella region's economy is dominated by agriculture, and agro-pastoralists, having mostly agricultural-dependent people with beekeeping and fishing (Agalu, 2020). Besides, ninety percent (90%) of Gambella population reside in rural and most of the people are thus subsistence farmers focusing on coffee cultivation, gold exploration, cotton farms, and selling some of their product on local markets. The two largest ethnic groups in the region, Nuer and Agnwa known for their varying economy and livelihoods, where the Nuer are largely agro-pastoralist, and the Agnwa are commonly known for their crop cultivation or farming activities.[22] Agnwa people reside along the Baro, Gilo, and Akobo rivers, focusing mainly on the production of crops like maize and sorghum. Also, fishing and wild food consumptions are daily dietary intake.[23]

Agnwa areas are considered more resource-rich because their main settlements are located along riverbanks with lower population densities (Eticha, 2013). Conversely, a huge number Nuer population resides along the Ethio-Sudanese border such as Akobo and Jikawo Woredas, which is too dry for rain-fed agriculture (Feyissa, 2008, as cited in Eticha, 2013). During the time of rainy seasons, Akobo and Jikawo experience the challenge of being flooded. As a result, Nuer community residing in this area moved to the highland areas with their cattle until the river banks reed. As stated above, unlike Nuer communities, Agnwas are mainly agricultural-dependent people with slight livestock farming, fishing, hunting, and gathering (Agalu, 2020). In Gambella, Agnwa as an ethnic group occupies a wide area of fertile land while Nuer ethnic faces challenges in getting access to such land. The Nuer has gained access to these lands in two ways. First, they form alliances through intermarriage or military agreements with local Agnwa in major Agnwa settlements, and second, they move into areas where Agnwa settlements are smaller through effective forceful occupation. This

[21] https://weatherandclimate.com/ethiopia/gambela-peoples. Accessed 14 June 2024
[22] http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org/gambella.html. Accessed 13 June 2024
[23] http://www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org/gambella.html. Accessed 13 June 2024

resource-driven movement of the Nuer has resulted in their territorial and demographic expansion (Agalu, 2020).

According to Eticha (2013) through radically formulated assimilation, the Nuer has assimilated many Agnwa into their society. He stated the processes of ethnic conversion (Agnwa is becoming Nuer) in some parts of mixed settlement areas are underway in the region. The Agnwa strongly resent this, and they have developed an identity system that emphasizes territoriality and purity of lineage. Thus, it is believed that Agnwa's resistance to increased Nuer influence arises mostly from fears of becoming a neglected minority group in their own land (Eticha, 2013). Thus, Agnwa and Nuer ethnic groups' relations have continued to be characterized by continuous conflicts over land entitlement claims, competition over scarce natural resources, and political representation in various levels of political structure in the region (Abraham, 2002, as cited in Eticha, 2013).

3.5 Socio-political structure

Ethiopia's adoption of an ethnic-based federal system grants ethnic autonomy while maintaining national unity. Gambela Region demonstrates this structure, comprising five indigenous ethnic groups: Agnwa, Nuer, Majang, Opo, and Komo. The region is divided into 4 Zones, and 12 Woredas, with governance largely reflecting the benefits of dominant ethnic groups. The Agnwa and Nuer hold varying positions in key political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres.[24] Culturally, the Agnwa live in close-knit communities with limited external interaction, contributing to a perception of suspicion toward outsiders.[25] Village governance is overseen by Headmen, whose authority can be revoked if community expectations are not met, reflecting Agnwa beliefs rejecting the authority of "God-men". In contrast, Nuer society is structured around clans and sub-clans, each with distinct traditions and religious elders who mediate disputes and maintain community cohesion. Cattle hold immense symbolic, religious, and economic importance within Nuer culture.[26]

[24] https://www.grin.com/document/376703. Accessed 14 June 2024
[25] https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/anuak-threatened-culture. Accessed 6 December 2024
[26] https://study.com/academy/lesson/nuer-people-south-sudan-language-facts-traditions.html. Accessed 15 June 2024

Chapter Four

4. Economic Interaction of Refugees with Host Communities

Recent literature shows a high degree of economic interdependency between refugees and surrounding host societies (Sahledengil, 2022; Tufa et al, 2022; Betts, 2019). The largest number of refugees reside in low and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2020; Betts et al., 2023). De Berry & Roberts (2018) also argued that refugees usually live in either camps or cities, often close to members of their surrounding host societies. As a result, their prospects for local integration and socio-economic outcomes are affected by the degree of smooth and cohesive relationship between the refugee communities and the host population (Betts et al., 2023; De Berry & Roberts, 2018). In Africa, a strong relationship between the local and refugee communities was formed at the individual level and at the collective level through the exchange of food, tobacco, goats, and other marketable products (Alam, 2022).

As mentioned above, this study covers two refugee camps in Gambella with distinct demographic profiles: Kule refugee camp, situated in Itang Special Woreda, is characterized by a relatively ethnically homogeneous population, with refugee and host populations sharing similar ethnic backgrounds at Kebele level, the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. In contrast, Pinyudo-1 camp, located in Gog Woreda Agnwa Zone, exhibits a more heterogeneous population, where several refugees are Nuer and the host communities belong to Agnwa ethnic group.

Economic relations between refugees and hosts in Kule exhibit a positive and substantial interdependence. The two groups have largely overcome challenges associated with accessing shared economic resources. However, this dynamic contrasts sharply with the situation in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp. There is minimal economic interaction between Nuer refugees and Agnwa hosts. Conversely, Agnwa refugees and their Agnwa host community share a history of frequent interaction, fostering harmonious relationships. To examine refugee-host economic interaction, I focus on four key areas of interaction such as marketplace exchanges, employment opportunities, access to land and other resources, and access to financial institutions. These sectors provide a framework for understanding the economic relationship between the two communities in the study sites.

4.1 Refugee-host interaction in the marketplace

In Kule refugee camp, the most common interaction of refugees with their surrounding host communities is frequent economic forms of interaction for getting access to markets for the sale and purchase of goods and services for different purposes. For example, refugees often go to nearby local markets to buy clothes, local products, foodstuffs, and other items they want from host communities' merchants. In Kule, a refugee FGD participant stated, "*Frankly speaking, we [refugees] have good relationships with our surrounding host communities over market exchange so that we can freely purchase local products from host communities and sell to them our rations in exchange on a daily or weekly basis"* (FGD-KR). Similarly, a 35 years old informant from host communities further stated, *"We share the same market center for transactions or buying and selling necessary goods and services…For example, we [host communities] purchase rations from refugees and sell our local products such as maize, sorghum, millet, tobacco and the like to them [refugees]"* (IDI-KNH-1).

Girma Mekonnen (2020) based on his study in Benishangul-Gumuz region argued that the establishment of a common market for refugees and their hosts is considered a positive impact on the local communities because there is a flow of refugees' food into the local market. He argued that refugees do not like eating wheat and thus they take it to the local market and exchange it with other cereals that they prefer to eat (Mekonnen, 2020). This argument resonates with my informants in Gambella from both refugee communities and the host population clearly indicated that refugees mostly sell their rations and purchase local products not because it is sufficient rather they look for culturally familiar local food for their daily consumption. In the same cases, key informants from refugee camp chairperson further argued:

> *There is smooth refugee-host interaction, especially in business sectors, for instance, if we [refugees] purchase certain goods or commodities from the town for the refugee camp, they [host communities] deliver purchased items to the refugee camps effectively and efficiently. Therefore, there's a strong connection between both communities [refugees and the local people] here* (KII-KR).

In other words, the ethnic commonality between the refugees and the host smoothen the economic relationships. Pinyudo-1 is split into two: one part is inhabited by the Agnwa and the other one by the Nuer. The Agnwa inhabited part enjoys the same harmonious economic

relation with the host where there is no problem regarding the refugee-host interaction over getting access to the market (IDI-P1AR-1). However, this is not the case in Pinyudo-1 where the Nuer refugee camp is located next to the Agnwa host. During the time of data collection, I observed that there was little or no interaction between the Nuer refugees and the surrounding Agnwa host communities. Speaking about how much the situation has worsened, a key informant from the Nuer refugee camp chairman stated, "*Previously, we [refugees] had smooth and harmonious relationships with our surrounding host communities. However, now we don't have any kind of interaction. Let alone sharing the same market, there is no way for refugees to go outside the camp because of the worsening recurrent conflict"* (KII-P1NR).

Employees working in both government and non-government organizations living in Pinyudo towns with whom I had informal discussions and interviews regrettably confirmed the seriousness of the problem. An NGO worker had stated:

> *The region's escalating ethnic tensions and conflict have completely broken the relationship between Nuer refugees and surrounding Agnwa host communities. Mutual suspicion and fear have created a hostile environment, preventing any form of interaction between the two communities. As a result, Nuer refugees are confined to the camp, while host Agnwa community members avoid entering the refugee settlement* (KII-INGO-4).

Overall, accessing the surrounding local markets is crucial for the refugees in the camps to purchase necessary items such as clothes, shoes, local cereal crops, and other food items. Similarly, it had been customary for the host communities to purchase food rations from refugees in cash or exchange for different items. The refugees give their food ration mostly wheat flour to host communities and receive local cereal crops like maize, sorghum, and fish in return. This has now been hampered due to inter-ethnic violent conflict in camps where the refugees are Nuer and the surrounding host communities are the Agnwa. As a result, no Nuer refugees go to a local market freely. In need of a special case requiring access to the local market for refugees, a few numbers of refugees were chosen to purchase essential items. This process was carried out in coordination with federal security forces to ensure safety and order, aimed to meet refugees' needs while maintaining their safety and security. This coordinated effort provided refugees with necessary supplies while adhering to the protocols established for such sensitive situations.

4.2 Refugee-host interaction around wage and employment opportunities

Refugees and their surrounding host community members often interact with employers, employees, or daily laborers at the workplace. These regular interactions of refugees occur both with host communities and organizations working on refugee assistance. However, the degree of this interaction varies from one camp to the other. One of my informants who were 32 years old and living in Kule refugee camp stated:

> *Since the rations we [refugees] receive from relief organizations on a monthly basis are insufficient; we are forced to seek additional income, especially through daily labor. In this case, a network of brokers from both refugees and hosts connects us with potential employers. This has facilitated frequent interactions between refugees and the members of the host community, primarily employers and co-workers. These relationships usually tend to be positive, as refugees are typically diligent workers and the hosts are happy and pay them fairly* (IDI-KR-2).

Refugees' involvement in daily labor around camps in Ethiopia is common (Sahledengel, 2022; Tufa et al 2021; Betts, 2019). However, the participation of brokers from both the refugee and the host community in the market shows the exploitative nature of the situation for the refugee daily laborers. Thus, 20% of the daily earnings of refugees engaged in daily labor, which is commonly 120 ETB ($1), are deducted as a form of commission for the broker (IDI-KR-8). At the climax of the farming season, the host communities who want labor from the refugees go to the camp, mostly on market days. Most of them know the brokers and ask them to recruit laborers. After they reach an agreement, refugees move to the local farmland and may engage in different activities such as plowing, cultivating, preparing the land, and sawing. The participation of brokers exists in Kule and their hosts. In Pinyudo-1 Agnwa refugees, there were no brokers reported between daily laborers and employers because of the refugees-host close attachment in the area. Inversely, no Nuer refugees are working as daily laborers for host Agnwa communities in Pinyudo, because of the worsening Nuer-Agnwa ethnic conflict (IDI-P1H-3).

What is more interesting concerning the theme I am pursuing in this study is how much ethnicity plays in the interaction around refugees' attempt to get access to wage labor. During my fieldwork, no Nuer refugee could leave the camp and get access to labor work in the Pinyudo town and surrounding where the Agnwa hosts were dominant. On the other hand, in

Kule refugee camp where the refugees are all Nuer and most hosts were Nuer, no problem was reported in relation to going out of the camp and accessing jobs.

Another very important economic type of interaction is the refugee-host interaction over getting access to employment opportunities. There are many INGOs and local civil society organizations most of them work on refugees. They have created a good deal of job opportunities for the host communities though many of the better-paying posts come from the highland Ethiopia. Refugees also get access to this opportunity but only as incentive workers that pay them much lower than other employments. This opportunity allows them to interact with their surrounding host communities for different purposes. One of my key informants stated:

> *I consider refugees as a driver of host economies because the presence of over 56 INGOs and other local civil society organizations, established primarily to serve refugees, has generated substantial employment opportunities for the host communities too. These employment opportunities are well recognized and valued by the host population, fostering positive interactions and peaceful coexistence between refugees and their surrounding hosts as far as I understand* (KII-INGO-3).

This extract strongly suggests that the presence of NGOs and civil society organizations in the region, mainly driven by the influx of refugees has an impact on the lives of host communities as they are benefiting from these opportunities. The mandatory requirement of a national ID card for most jobs has hindered refugees' access to these positions, as they possess only refugee ID card. Nevertheless, a small number of refugees have managed to secure employment as incentive workers, earning around 1000 ETB per month. A 28-year-old informant stated:

> *There are employment opportunities among the NGOs. However, it requires a national ID card to apply and get access to such opportunities. Since we don't have a national ID card it is impossible to apply and get employed professionally. Yet, some of us are employed and working as incentive workers and assist different organizations and workers inside the camp with ration distribution, latrine construction, and other refugee camp-based activities for about 1000 birr/month* (IDI-KR-3).

My informant, a 45-year-old Nuer who is working as an incentive worker in the Piyudo-1 (Nuer site) complains that, "*If you qualify, you can get employed as incentive workers, one of the few opportunities available to refugees and it's because of the availability of this opportunity that I got employed. However, I am getting extremely low payments, making it challenging to make a living"* (IDI-P1NR-2).

However, my informants from host community members either may not have the full understanding of the situation of the refugees or deliberately accuse them of unfairly taking up jobs. They usually argue that refugees have equal rights with their surrounding host communities over getting access to employment opportunities. The following informant who was a 35-year-old government employee wrongly argues that, "*Competent and qualified refugees have equal access to employment opportunities similar to the host community members. Their skills, competency, and qualifications are the primary requirements to get employed rather than their refugee status"* (KII-GO-1). Of course, this is wrong as the refugees' access to employment is complicated by several difficulties in meeting the requirements. According to government direction, FDRE Refugees Proclamation No. 1110/2019, article 24 granted recognized refugees and asylum-seekers the right to get employed in the same circumstance as the most favorable treatment accorded to foreign nationals. Here, refugees who have authenticated academic credentials and desire to practice their profession are allowed favorable treatment in areas permitted to them (FDRE Refugees Proclamation No. 1110/2019, 2019).

The Ethiopian government pledges towards a more comprehensive response also permit refugees to work in the sectors open to foreign workers…building industrial parks to employ up to 100,000 employees, with 30% of the jobs reserved for refugees (UNHCR, 2018a). This data shows that refugees are permitted to work or get employed in the sectors open to foreign workers, making them not to work in every organization in the country. In reality, there are no same rights and privileges between refugees and surrounding hosts over getting access to employment opportunities. On the other hand, some informants from the host community deliberately imply that the refugees get access to the job opportunity using illegal means. One of my key informants, a 42-years-old employee at a non-government organization strongly agrees with this notion. He stated, "*Refugees easily get employed after completion of their diploma or degree studies. They can get Kebele ID cards in different ways, which allows them to get access to employment easily. Consequently, different refugees are employed and working in both government and non-government organizations"* (KII-INGO-5).

Kebele ID card, which the informant implies, is given only to citizens; refugees may access it through different forms of networks. Those refugees who have such exclusive networks have an opportunity to access a wide range of services like citizens, regardless of their status. Irrespective of a limited number of refugees who have different networks with their surrounding hosts, the employment opportunities and refugee-host interaction in this sector across both study sites are almost similar, where refugees primarily get employed as incentive workers.

4.3 Refugee-host interaction over getting access to land and other natural resources

Another major area of refugee-host interactions is over-accessing land. In both Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps, refugee-host interaction commonly occurs when refugees leave the camp to access grazing land, herd cattle, purchase local resources such as fish, and get access to firewood, trees, and straw for house construction. Agriculture, herding cattle, and goat are considered the major livelihood strategy and are highly subsistence base of the people in the study areas. Refugees' lack of access to farmland is the main driver of tension associated with refugee-host relationships in the study areas. Refugee informants who participated in FGD and in-depth interviews in Kule and Pinyudo-1 Agnwa site refugees argued lack of land for crop production is a significant barrier that hinders their ability to actively and effectively interact with their surrounding host communities (FGD-KR).

Economic stability is often essential for building relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and surrounding community, and land ownership especially for farmers can contribute to this stability, which refugee communities lack as a whole other than having a small plot of land probably 0.25 hectares given to each refugees around their home, and communal land allocated for cattle herding around camp for those who have cattle (IDI-P1AR-2). In the similar case, a 42-year-old man informant from Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp stated, "*I have a very small plot of land given to me by the government near my home here inside the refugee camp, but its size is very small probably ¼ hectare and it has been cultivated for a long since I arrived here. So, it loses its fertility at this moment [data collection period]* (IDI-P1NR-3). These data show that refugees consider land ownership, a symbol of wealth, making someone secure his/her socioeconomic well-being. It's actual that having farmland positively contributes to one's socioeconomic status, however, refugees' refugees' limited access to farmland hinders their economic stability or self-sufficiency,

thereby limiting their interactions with their surrounding host communities. Below pictures indicate refugees' small plots of land nearby their homes.

Picture 1: Refugees' small plot of land in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp

In addition, one of my FGD participants from host communities argued that increasing the number of refugees from time to time leads to a scarcity of natural resources. They stated that, *"The recurrent influx of refugees has contributed to rising inflation, particularly affecting essential local resources. For example, the cost of fish has steadily increased due to increased demand from the growing refugee population in the area"* (FGD-KR). Similarly, a 54-year-old woman informant from Kule refugee camp argued, *"When I was in South Sudan, I could easily get fish, but now I'm not in the position to do so because of financial problems"* (IDI-KR-10). On top of this, FGD participants in pinyudo-1 refugee site stated, *"We are prohibited from accessing the river to catch fish"* (FGD-P1NR), further compounding the issue.

These data reveal that increasing the number of refugees' results in a high rate of inflation on the costs of local products. In addition, there is also the case where refugees can be taken as a threat to natural resources. These issues have been observed in both study sites where refugees have trouble finding fish even unable to catch it in nearby rivers, making them couldn't easily get the most demanding food in the area. Concerning getting access to different natural resources, one of my informants from host communities further argued, "*We [host] consider refugees as a threat to the local environment and natural resources. Because they consume too much firewood which destroys a lot of forests" (*IDI-KAH-1).

On the contrary, nearly all refugee informants from the sites where the Agnwa are both refugee and host such as Pinyudo-1 (Agnwa site) and Kule where Nuer are both refugee and host indicated that there is good interaction over access to natural resources with host communities, with an exception for land ownership and fishing. According to an informant from Pinyudo-1 Agnwa site refugee camp, "*We [refugees] have no problem with our surrounding host communities concerning getting access to firewood, grasses, and forest trees for different purposes. However, we are not able to have land [ownership], and fish directly from the river. Instead, we can purchase fish from the local market, but fishing from the river is not permitted" (*IDI-P1AR-3).

In cases where refugees and host communities are from diverse ethnic groups, there is a case when host communities deny refugees cutting down trees, straw, collecting firewood, and other resources, significantly affecting refugees and their surrounding host communities' interaction over getting access to natural resources. In Pinyudo-1 refugee camp, Nuer refugees face significant challenges in getting access to such resources outside the camp. Concerning this, Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp chairman stated:

> *For about a year now, there has been no freedom of movement outside the camp at all, following the heightened conflict between Nuer and Agnwa. So, it is difficult for us [refugees] to move outside the camp to collect firewood, catch fish, and get access to grasses and forest trees for house construction. Attempts to access these resources often result in attacks by host communities. So, we can get access to such resources here inside and in the nearby camps* (KII-P1NR).

The quote above highlights fundamental issues refugees were facing such as restriction of movement, failures to access critical resources due to heightened ethnic conflict and

insecurity, making refugees dependent on limited resources in the camp. Also, hostility from host communities aggravates the situation, making refugees vulnerable to the risk of attack when they leave the camp reported as a symptom of deeper tensions between refugees and their surrounding host communities.

4.4 Refugee-host interaction over getting access to financial institutions

A financial institution an institution engaged in the business of dealing with financial and monetary transactions. This encompasses a wide range of services such as deposits, loans, investments, savings, and currency exchange. Banks, Credit unions, and Insurance companies are among the major financial institutions, which play a vital role in the economy of the nation. For this study let's look at the refugee-host community members' interaction over getting access to Bank, the predominant financial institution. The refugee-host interaction over accessing this institution varies from place to place or from one refugee site to the other, ranging from positive engagement to outright conflict, leading to no interaction at all. Concerning this dynamics, one of my informants from Kule refugees stated:

> *To be honest, there is no challenge and uncertainty associated with refugees-host communities' interaction over getting access to Bank; we [refugees] share the same bank with host communities, as you can see, there is no Bank in the camp, so we can use it in the host communities. In case we go to use Bank we meet host communities there and bankers serve all of us [refugees and host communities] equally so we can deposit, withdraw, and transfer money as we want* (IDI-KR-3).

This shows that there is a good atmosphere between refugees and their surrounding host communities over getting access to Bank in Kule. Also, the same case was reported in Pinyudo-1 Agnwa refugees. However, the situation in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp or Nuer refugees is the reverse of this case. A 32-year-old informant from the camp stated:

> *Let alone using the same Bank with our [refugees] surrounding host communities, there is no any kind of interaction between us, Nuer refugees, and them, Agnwa hosts in Pinyudo. As a result, we are suffering a lot, if you have a small amount of money in your bank account there is no way to go to the host community where there is a Bank to withdraw your money. I don't have words to express how much we are suffering at this moment, because we are living in an extremely troubling and life-threatening situation that is beyond our expression* (IDI-P1NR-4).

Host communities including one of my key informants working in Commercial Bank of Ethiopia in Pinyudo confirm this data, stating, *"Previously every refugee got access to a financial institution. However, at this moment [data collection period], no Nuer refugees come to this town to use banking services because of security threat triggered by ethnic conflict between Agnwa and Nuer ethnic groups in the region"* (KII-GO-6). This data implies that Kule refugees and Pinyudo-1 Agnwa refugees get access to banking services, and have positive interactions with their surrounding host communities. Conversely, Nuer refugees in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp restricted from getting access to the service, remain confined to their refugee settlement.

Chapter Five

5. Socio-Cultural Interaction of Refugees with Host Communities

According to Weber (2008), social interaction refers to the communication, actions, or relationships between particular individuals or groups. These kinds of interactions can be made in various ways, like friendship, sexual attraction, loyalty, and other socially shared activities (Weber, 2008, as cited in Alam, 2022). In this thesis, I tried to understand the role of refugee-host socio-cultural interactions in Gambella based on my two case study camps: Kule and Pinyudo. Socio-cultural interaction is very much shaped by ethnic belongings. In Gambella the two major ethnic groups featured in this thesis, Agnwa and Nuer, both belong to the Nilotic groups. Yet, their socio-cultural interactions are not only quite complex but also full of tensions. As I have discussed in the above chapter on economic interactions, refugees expressed a desire to build stronger relationships with their surrounding hosts from similar ethnic backgrounds (Carver, 2020). In the following sub-sections, I discuss these interactions as they take place following intermarriage, shared religious practices, and kin relationships.

5.1 Refugee-host marriage relationship

Intermarriage can be defined as marriage taking place along the lines of different ethnicity, nationality, or race (Nottmeyer, 2015). Marriages between members of different ethnic, cultural, or racial groups, are therefore called “interethnic,” “intercultural,” or “interracial” respectively. In this context, most often the term “intermarriage” is used for marriages of refugees with the host community members. In the Western countries' context, marriages between ‘immigrants’ and ‘natives’ are determined by affordability, and economic success which are considered key indicators of refugees’ social integration (Nottmeyer, 2015). In the context of Gambella, however, intermarriage between refugee and their host shows social integration, which shows either the two, belong to the same ethnic group or peaceful interactions are allowing for integration. Though, intermarriage may not be the primary driving factor for economic success, but rather its byproduct. Improved education and inherent qualities may simultaneously enhance economic potential and facilitate intercultural relationships. Also intermarriage can be highly stressful, both positively and negatively, associated with an increase in severe stress, potentially increasing the risk of divorce. Also, there is a case where native spouses can provide access to social networks that help their immigrant partner join paid employment, making them successful (Nottmeyer, 2015).

According to informants from both refugee and host communities, several marriages take place between refugees and their surrounding local communities, most frequently between the same ethnic groups meaning Nuer refugees with Nuer host communities, and Agnwa refugees with the Agnwa host are quite frequent and considered normal. On the other hand, intermarriage between the Agnwa and Nuer in refugee camps and its surroundings is quite rare. In other words, in both refugee camps marriage is mainly within the same ethnic group regardless of their refugee status. A 28 years old informant among refugees in Kule camp stated:

> *Intermarriages between refugees and their hosts are a personal decision. If a refugee and a host community member choose to marry, there are generally no legal or societal restrictions. While intermarriage can occur between individuals from any background, it often happens between those who share similar ethnicities, cultures, traditions, languages, and lifestyles. This is because shared cultural values can facilitate understanding and connection* (IDI-KR-1).

Informants from host communities also confirmed this view arguing that intermarriage between refugee and host is not an issue as far as the two share similar ethnic backgrounds (IDI-KNH-2). This is incident I am discussing in the interaction between the refugee communities and host population is indeed embedded in the relationship between the Agnwa-Nuer ethnic groups in Gambella. Already about a decade ago, Nottmeyer (2015) wrote that marriage between Agnwa and Nuer is less common in Gambella (Nottmeyer, 2015). Certainly, in case conflict between the two ethnic groups intensifies in Gambella, the broader marriage between the two ethnic groups across the region in and around refugee camps decreases significantly. In Pinyudo-1 refugee camp, according to informants, marriage between Nuer refugees and Agnwa hosts has been drastically reduced following the recent Agnwa and Nuer ethnic conflict. Regarding this, an informant from Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee central committee member stated:

> *Previously [at a time when there was peace and stability between Nuer and Agnwa ethnic groups], marriage relations between Nuer refugees and the Agnwa host communities members had been 'normal' as long as they could afford the bride price - irrespective of their ethnic group. Now, however, there is little/no intermarriage between the two* (IDI-P1NR-4).

The bride price the informant is alluding to is a sum of money or goods given to a bride's family by that of the groom or groom's family. Here, Agnwa host communities, adhering to Nuer cultural norms, often provide livestock, typically cattle or goats, as a form of matrimonial exchange when marrying Nuer refugees. This practice, rooted in Nuer traditions, contrasts with the absence of a formal bride price within the Agnwa community.

On the other hand, marriage between Agnwa refugees and their hosts is common. A 35-year-old informant from Pinyudo-1 host community member reiterated this issue:

> *In earlier times when there was peace, there was intermarriage between the two [Agnwa and Nuer] refugees and the surrounding host communities. However, nowadays there is no intermarriage between Nuer refugees and Agnwa hosts; let alone marrying each other there was cases where previously married couples from the two communities got divorced* (IDI-P1H-1).

In the above discussion, it is clear that ethnic conflict in the Gambela region affects social interaction including refugee-host intermarriage relationships, making it difficult even impossible for Nuer refugees to marry or be married to members of their surrounding host Agnwa communities.

5.2 Religious practice and refugee-host interaction in Gambella

Religious practices are the other sites of refugee-host communities' interaction. When we see the religious composition in Gambella, 73.4% of believers were Protestant, 14% were Orthodox, 4.7% were followers of traditional beliefs, 3.7 were Muslim, 3.1% were Catholic, and 1.1 were other religious followers (CSA, 2008). A large number of both refugees and host communities belong to Protestant Christians. Even though they belong to the same religious institution, the levels of their interactions over religious practices in the two camps are different. In Kule, refugees and their surrounding host communities share churches and worship together, irrespective of their belongingness to refugees or hosts (IDI-KR-4). A recent study done in Gambella found that refugees and host communities interact at religious events and ceremonies across all regions of Ethiopia (Vemuru et al., 2020). The study further argued that the church has a major site of connection, especially in Itang, Gambella. Thus, there was a case when refugees and members of the host community in Itang held joint prayer conferences, both in Kule camp and Mazoria, which were organized with the permission of ARRA, currently, RRS.

Vemuru et al (2020) also stated the following about the Kule camp:

> *Both communities also interact through religion. They interact through joint prayer programs in the form of a conference. Refugees can go to the host community and the host community can also come to Kule here to have conferences in the refugee camp. Church leaders can simply ask for a permission letter from ARRA [currently known as RRS], and join refugees in the refugee camp to participate in the program until their conference is over* (Vemuru et al., 2020, p.41).

The same applies to Pinyudo-1 where both refugees and their host belong to the Agnwa. In Pinyudo, Agnwa refugees worship together with their surrounding host communities in the same church. A 42-year-old informant from Pinyudo-1 Agnwa refugees stated:

> *Gladly, we [refugees] don't have any problems concerning getting access to the same church or sharing religious practices with our host communities. Thanks to God, we can share religious practices such as worship, sermons, praying, and other religious aspects with host communities in a good spirit. Furthermore, there was a time when we prepared spiritual conferences in partnership with host communities, allowing us to worship God together. These opportunities highly allow us to have smooth and harmonious relationships with our surrounding local communities* (IDI-P1AR-4).

The data stated above justifies that there are frequent and quite smooth interactions around spiritual practices and religious institutions between refugees and surrounding hosts where the two share a common ethnicity. However, when it comes to camps inhabited by Nuer refugees and surrounded by the Agnwa host there is almost no religious engagement at least at the time of fieldwork. Showing how much the two live in a segregated environment. A Nuer refugee in Pinyudo said little/no such interaction in the case of Pinyudo–1 Nuer site refugee camp. One of my informants from Nuer refugees stated, *"We [Nuer refugees] do not have interaction with host communities over religious practices, so we are using our church [found in a refugee camp] to worship God here in the camp. They [hosts] do not come to ours and we do not go out to participate in theirs, too"* (IDI-P1NR-5). "Our" and "theirs" are not only about refugees versus hosts. Rather it implies the Nuer church, which is bound to the camp, and the one outside is considered the Agnwa and there is no interaction between the two. In other words, like marriage, as I described above, religious interactions in the context of refugee-host relationships in Gambella are also shaped by ethnicity.

One of my key informants tried to assert the pivotal role religious institutions play in creating harmonious relations between refugees and hosts citing those who participate in religious practice together, *"Those refugees and host communities sharing the same church and worship together relatively have smooth and harmonious relationship resulting in a sense of oneness compared to those who do not worship together"* (KII-GO-4).

However, the reality on the ground is worshiping together is restricted to those who belong to the same ethnic group.

Picture 2: Refugees' church in Pinyudo-1 Nuer Site refugee camp

5.3 Kinship networks and refugee-host interaction

A kinship network or having close relatives outside the camp plays a great role in helping individuals navigate the existing refugee-host community relationships in the study areas. Indeed, according to my informants, these connections are highly valuable, enabling refugees to access several services like their surrounding host communities or citizens. On top of this, having kin-based ties within host communities grants refugees greater freedom to leave camp and interact with host community members compared to those without such connections. This fosters smoother and more harmonious relationships between refugee communities and their surrounding host populations (IDI-KR-5).

A 28-year-old Agnwa refugee in Pinyudo, who is pursuing his undergraduate study at Gambella University, shared the following view on the importance of having a relative:

> *I consider Ethiopia like my home country because I have an uncle who has been living in Gambella and who assists me in different ways. With his assistance, I obtained an Ethiopian Kebele ID card, granting me access to several services typically available to Ethiopian citizens. Consequently, I spend most of my time in Gambella town and rarely return to the camp except for essential matters like registration, ration distribution, and the like. Currently, I am enrolled in undergraduate studies, and I feel like increasingly integrated into Ethiopian society and have a diminishing sense of refugee identity* (KII-P1AR).

This privilege is also reported in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp where refugees having kinship connections enjoy positive interaction with their surrounding host communities. A 28-year informant from Pinyudo-1 Nuer refugees stated:

> *Having a close relative in Gambella town provides me with relatively greater freedom of movement compared to other refugees. Besides, as you see, my lack of Gaar [Nuer facial marking] in my face helps me to move freely, even in Agnwa-dominated areas if I want. However, my inability to speak their language limits my interactions with them. Therefore, to avoid potential spontaneous conflicts, I prefer to restrict myself to areas where I feel safe, as it's currently common for both Nuer refugees and citizens to restrict their movement from Agnwa-dominated areas* (KII-P1NR).

The above data reveal that kinship networks have a positive and significant correlation with refugee-host relationships, where refugees with such connections have better interactions with their hosts than those who don't have these ties. Similarly, a report by the Overseas Development Institute stated that many refugees lived in the 'host community' despite being South Sudanese, having arrived with those registered in the camps, and then securing space to live from local authorities via kinship connections (Carver et al., 2020). A similar case was reported among Madi South Sudan refugees, who shared a strong pre-existing relationship with the host Madi community in Uganda where shared language, intermarriage, and kinship ties fostered a harmonious coexistence between refugees and hosts, facilitating refugees' integration into the host community, which contrasted sharply with the challenges faced by refugees from other ethnic groups (Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023).

Chapter Six

6. Refugees' Local Integration Vis-a-Vis the National Refugee Policy

In the literature in displacement study; repatriation, resettlement, and local integration are considered key durable solutions to the growing refugee issues. In this chapter, I discuss refugees' local integration in Gambella within the context of Ethiopian government's national refugee policies. Local integration is the process by which refugees become part of the society, 'often used to imply a one-way adaptation or acculturation to the dominant culture' (Mumbi 2017, p.23). However, it has been argued that refugee local integration is a two-way traffic where refugees show a willingness to adapt to the new environment and the host community also needs to welcome them (Mumbi 2017, p.23). According to the government of the FDRE Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019, article 41, local integration means a process whereby recognized individuals or groups of refugees who have lived in Ethiopia for a long period are provided with a permanent residence permit upon their request to facilitate their broader integration with Ethiopian nationals until they fully attain durable solutions to their problems (FDRE Refugees Proclamation, 2019).

To implement refugee local integration, RRS officials in Gambella argued that the office in collaboration with other partners is implementing projects focused on refugee local integration through creating inclusive social and economic growth opportunities. In this process, farmers' cooperatives from the refugees and hosts were selected, given farmland, and engaged in farming activities together for a common benefit. This aimed to create a web of connection between both communities through working together. To achieve this, government and non-governmental organizations support these efforts by providing agricultural inputs and fertilizers to both groups (KII-GO-2). On the ground for both the refugee and host communities, the concept of local integration is unclear. Many of them understood it as it inherently implies the host country's provision of citizenship to the refugees. However, local integration does not always lead to, or require, the provision of citizenship. An FGD participant from Kule refugees stated:

> *We [refugees] want local integration if we get an opportunity, if not we wants to return to South Sudan as much as possible if the security issues there get resolved. However, we haven't taken any legal steps towards local integration or return to our home country so far. Overall, we don't want to stay long here in this camp [Kule refugee camp], because camp life is very difficult and challenging* (FGD-KR1).

The same thing is reported in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp, where informants from the Agnwa refugees argue that they want local integration. My FGD participant from these refugees stated, *"We want local integration and become Ethiopian citizens if the opportunities are open to integrating refugees to their surrounding host communities or host country"* (FGD-P1AR). These are views in places where refugee-host relationships are positive and strong. On the contrary, in Pinyudo-1 where the refugee-host interaction was very tense, the Nuer refugees were hesitant about local integration and preferred resettlement in other countries. One of a 35-year-old informant from Nuer refugees stated, "*From the beginning, we were displaced from our homeland due to violent conflict. Here also, we continue to suffer from ethnic strife and are imprisoned [confined] in this camp. If possible, I would prefer resettlement in a third country, as staying in Ethiopia or returning to South Sudan is not viable due to ongoing conflicts in both countries"* (IDI-P1NR-6).

In both contexts, local integration is considered part of the whole complex environment. Where there were relatively peaceful situations, refugees consider their future lives to be in Ethiopia, integrating for them is becoming Ethiopian if they get the opportunity. However, those in very tense political situations such as the Nuer in Pinyudo-1 consider local integration to be the continuation of the current challenge and therefore prefer resettlement in a third country. In other words, they know other potential alternatives.

6.1 Local integration: a contested issue in Gambella

Since Ethiopia signed an agreement to implement comprehensive refugee response frameworks, local integration has emerged as a central point of discussion. While this policy offers potential opportunities for refugees, it also presents significant challenges and uncertainties for host communities. In a focus group discussion held with Agnwa hosts in Itang, all FGD participants argued that they refuse refugee-local integration, as it leads to a demographic shift in the region, and probably tends to increase the existing ethnic conflict in the region (FGD-KAH-4). One of my FGD participants stated:

> *From the beginning, we don't have clear knowledge and understanding of the objectives of 'refugee-local integration'. Besides, we are concerned that refugee-local integration could negatively impact the local economy, politics, demographics, social structures, environment, and cultural ways of life. Therefore, we don't want refugee-local integration at all* (FGD-KAH-1).

During the discussions and from the above quote, it was clear that the host community members have developed a common position and have similar responses toward refugees' local integration. A 32-year-old government employee informant from Pinyudo also pointed out a more or less similar view concerning refugee-local integration and its impacts on host communities.

> *Now, refugees outnumber host communities. If they locally integrate, it will lead to a demographic shift [in Gambella], which may directly allow them to gain direct control over political, economic, social, and other aspects of life in the region. This may create extremely damaging conflict due to competition over getting access to resources in the future. Even today, the increasing number of refugees has led to the destruction of the environment in the region, as refugees are cutting and burning trees for different purposes including charcoal [causing deforestation]* (IDI-P1H-4).

From the above quote, it is clear that the Agnwa host community members do not want refugees' local integration because they have already convinced themselves that integration would lead to different social, economic, political, and environmental problems. Generally, the host community tends to use similar arguments. For instance, Girma's (2020) study in *Bambasi refugee camp and its surroundings in Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Western Ethiopia*, show a similar host community argument. However, the context in Gambella is different due to the ongoing violent ethnic conflict which also took the form of refugee-host in areas where the two belong to different ethnic groups (Mekonnen, 2020). My key informant who was working for an international NGO accuses the government of not clarifying local integration in that sensitive political environment. He stated, "*Local integration of refugees is a highly sensitive and politicized issue. Consequently, many host communities are resistant to the idea. A key grievance among these communities is that the government implemented the policy without prior consultation with local stakeholders and achieving any consensus with them [host]"* (KII-INGO-3). This view was shared by another key informant who was working in a government office in Pinyudo:

> *In the beginning, host communities were not informed about the concept of refugee-local integration as far as I know. Upon hearing of the initiative, a strong and widespread opposition emerged, significantly hindering refugee-local interactions in Pinyudo-1 Nuer refugees. This resistance has posed a major challenge to the successful implementation of the integration process in the area (*KII-GO-1).

These data imply that host communities especially Agnwa ethnic groups strongly oppose refugee-local integration. However, the Nuer host community members support refugee-local integration. They expressed explicit support for refugee-local integration and emphasized their willingness to fully participate in and contribute to the successful implementation of the process. In this regard, a 38-year-old informant from Kule who belongs to the host community stated, "*I don't have any problem concerning refugees' local integration and its implementation. Even we [the Nuer] agree and support the implementation of this process as much as we can* (IDI-KNH-3).

On the other hand, government and non-government organizations are trying to work towards diversifying and improving the livelihood of refugees and surrounding host communities through establishing inclusive and shared projects. This plays, according to informants, a pivotal role in improving one's socioeconomic status, and a network of connections while promoting refuge-local integration. According to my key informant from RRS:

> *Nowadays, we [RRS] are trying to integrate refugees into host communities by implementing peaceful co-existence through community dialogues, strengthening livelihood activities, and mainstreaming basic social services. We are also working on creating awareness in collaboration with higher government officials at all levels to reduce conflict between refugees and the host population. Nowadays, there is a conducive atmosphere, and the degree of conflict has downsized and become relatively stable and more secure than it was before. Moreover, we are working on identifying refugees who want and fulfill the criteria for local integration and facilitate their local integration process including other related issues like employment and residence issues. Furthermore, we have given a pass permit and resident ID cards to a few refugees who want to live in the country [Ethiopia] with host communities* (KII-GO-3).

The RRS is trying to take some positive measures in this very complex environment to facilitate refugee-local integration. This progress is evidenced by some refugees who have residence permits and get paid employment and a pass permit. However, the number of refugees who got residence permits, and pass permits claimed above by the government authority is quite small.

6.2 The role ethnic identity play in the local integration of refugees

Ethnic identity indicates an identity based on a shared sense of belonging among individuals or groups who possess common traits, including cultural heritage, historical experiences, nationality, religion, language, or geographic origin (Trimble & Dickson, 2005). In Gambella, ethnic identity plays a great role in determining refugee-local integration. Belonging or not belonging to either of the two politically and demographically dominant ethnic groups in Gambella is critical in local integration. As discussed above, ethnic belonging is more important than citizenship status evidenced in the Nuer host community members' support for local integration as opposed to the Agnwa. In this context, a participant of an FGD from hosts Agnwa communities stated:

> *It is clear that refugees are Nuer who came from South Sudan following the civil war broke out there. For us [Agnwa communities] there is no difference between the Nuer who are citizens and those who are refugees. This is because whenever ethnic conflict arises between Nuer and Agnwa host communities, the Nuer who are refugees organize themselves and stand on the Nuer side. What is important in Gambella is belongingness to the same ethnic group. This has been intensifying existing ethnic conflict in the region. That is why we don't want refugees' integration into host communities* (FGD-KAH-1).

This data revealed that Agnwa ethnic group opposes local integration of refugees, as they consider refugees as a threat to their community's peace and stability. Conversely, there was no evidence from the refugee side that supports the host communities' view. However, it is public knowledge that the division in Gambella is usually along ethnic lines and that regardless of their citizenship status individuals support their ethnic groups (Hagos, 2021). Due to the same enter-ethnic conflict and security situation, refugee-local integration is not going well or at least far less than what the government actors are claiming. According to my Nuer refugees FGD participant, "*As far as we [Nuer refugees] know, the implementation of refugee-local integration on the ground is not going well. This is mainly because of the continuing ethnic conflict. To our knowledge, no refugees are locally integrated, and even we don't want to integrate in such an insecure environment"* (FGD-P1NR-2). Of course, this was directly contrasted by Agnwa refugee informant in the same camp, who prefers local integration.

In contrast to the data obtained and stated above from the Nuer informant, one of my informants from Agnwa refugees in Pinyudo-1 stated, "*We [Agnwa refugees] belong to the same ethnic group with our surrounding host communities; we share a similar culture, and speak the same language. Therefore, if we get an opportunity, we prefer to locally integrate into the host communities* (IDI-P1AR-6).

Belongingness to similar ethnic groups and having close relatives in the locality play a significant role in determining refugee-local integration. There are some locally integrated refugees, in the political sense, even beyond socio-cultural integration. These are mainly those who have nearest relatives in the host communities. The more refugees belong to the same ethnic groups with host communities and have nearest relatives in the region the more they locally integrate, as they get residence in the locality and local ID card (FGD-P1H-1).

The data indicates a strong correlation between shared ethnic backgrounds and a sense of collective identity between refugees and host community members. As noted above, the Nuer host community members affirmed this by their acceptance of Nuer refugees in Kule, and Kule refugees also showed willingness for refugee-local integration. However, the Nuer refugees in Pinyuod-1 were hesitant about local integration in the locality where the host community surrounding the refugee camp is predominantly Agnwa ethnic groups. Similarly, the Agnwa host communities who strongly oppose Nuer refugees' local integration in Kule encourage the Agnwa refugees' local integration in Pinyudo where they share ethnic similarities. Agnwa refugees are also comfortable with it.

These contrasting approaches highlight the prominent role of a shared ethnic identity in determining refugee-local integration in the study sites. Recent literature also emphasized the roles proximate networks of ethnicity, families, children, and kin play in facilitating social integration (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). Newland et al (2007) also further argued that ethnic divides have great impacts in determining refugee local integration where a group of people from the same ethnic groups have a strong sense of oneness which is very important for local integration and the reverse has true for a group of people from different ethnic groups (Newland et al., 2007).

6.3 Recurrent conflict between refugee and host communities

Ethnic conflict is extremely affecting refugee-host relationships in Gambella. This conflict is along ethnic lines: predominantly between the two dominant ethnic groups – the Nuer and Agnwa. This has been occurring for a long time, and beyond tearing down the refugee-host interaction, and it has directly affected refugee governance in the region.

As discussed above, the complexity of the problem is that it is very much related to the ethnic politics in Gambella. A host community member who participated in an FGD conducted with Kule host communities stated, *"… whenever conflicts arise between Ethiopian Nuer and Ethiopian Agnwa, refugees organize themselves and stand by the side of their respective ethnic group [either Nuer or Agnwa] and, and take part in the conflict rather than being neutral"* (FGD-KAH-3). This data reflects that conflict along ethnic lines affects the refugee-host relationships in Kule. Similar cases were reported in Pinyudo–1 Nuer site refugee camp, a 42 years informant, who is working as an incentive worker in the refugee camp explained:

> *There is no explicit reason for conflict between refugees and host communities. It is rather due to the deep-rooted and prolonged conflict between the Ethiopian Nuer and the Ethiopian Agnwa. Thus, whenever such conflict arises between Nuer and Agnwa, the Nuer refugees are vulnerable to attack because Agnwa citizens see and treat Nuer refugees similar to the way they treat Nuer citizens just because we belong to the same ethnic group…some Agnwa men intensify this conflict with their attitude that refugees should not settle on their land [Agnwa land]. As a result, Nuer refugees are vulnerable to continuous attacks by Agnwa hosts* (KII-P1-NR).

The quote above provides a compelling data that conflicts between refugees and their surrounding host communities are not always directly caused by refugees' presence in conflict with their hosts. Instead, they can be manifestations of pre-existing inter-group tensions and conflicts, where refugees become targets due to shared ethnicity with one of the conflicting group. The case presented demonstrates how a long-standing conflict between the Nuer and Agnwa communities in Ethiopia is the underlying cause of violence against Nuer refugees, with the refugees becoming intertwined in a conflict that predates their arrival.

Due to this recurrent violence, many refugees were displaced from Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp out of fear for their lives. They left this refugee camp and reportedly moved to other camps that were surrounded by Nuer hosts (IDI-P1NR-7).

Generally, in Pinyudo the Nuer refugees and the surrounding host community have little interaction. The refugees are restricted to the camp and unable to move freely outside the camp, at least when I did fieldwork in July 2024.

Below are the pictures of displaced refugees' homes in the Pinyudo-1 Nuer site camp.

Picture 3: Displaced refugees' homes in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp

In most cases, minor disputes between individual refugees and host community members often escalate into larger group conflicts, tragically resulting in loss of life. This rapid escalation hinders positive relationships and local integration efforts. Thus, refugee informants emphasized the challenges of maintaining positive relationships, let alone local integration, under such circumstances; because such conflicts quickly ignite broader tensions, creating a significant obstacle to peaceful coexistence and integration within the host community. Eventually, this cycle of escalation undermines stability and jeopardizes the well-being of both refugee communities and their surrounding host populations.

An in-depth interview conducted with Kule refugees' central committee member highlighted the conflict between two individuals, one from the refugee, and the other from a host community member in Kule refugee camp in 2019 as follows:

> *In 2019, two boys - one from a refugee and the other from a host community began fighting after excessive alcohol consumption inside the camp, on the day of the Ethiopian New Year holiday celebration. The conflict escalated as host communities organized themselves and stood by the side of their man. Tragically, this conflict resulted in the death of two persons from refugees and many others injured. Similarly, sometimes host community children beat refugees' children when refugee children go outside the camp, often escalating into a broader violent conflict between the two communities [refugees and hosts]* (IDI-KR-12).

On top of this, refugee informants reported that intimidation by host communities is another significant issue affecting refugee-host relationships. The host communities deliberately create fear and tension among refugees. In this regard, an FGD participant from Kule refugees stated, "*Host community members sometimes frighten us, and their use of firearms occasionally supports this strategy. As a result, we live in a constant fear for our safety"* (FGD-KR-4). Overall, the prolonged and continuous ethnic conflict negatively impacts refugee-host relations, intensifying ethnic tensions, fueling disputes, and leading to violent conflicts between refugees and their surrounding host communities. A previous study also argued that, Agnwa and Nuer ethnic conflict in Gambella has persisted for decades in the region (Abraham, 2002, as cited in Eticha, 2013; see also Feyissa, 2010), and made ethnic conflict the major challenge in the refugee-host relationships.

With the protracted conflict in Gambella, South Sudanese refugees have continued to face violence that makes them flee from their country. The following stories from one of the refugee informants would help to understand the longstanding impact of this violence on individual households.

> *I fled from South Sudan to Ethiopia in 2014 to save the lives of myself and my children from the brutal civil war that broke out in the country. I arrived here with my mother, brother, and seven children. My husband died in the conflict between the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups in 1992. Unfortunately, I lost both my mother and brother in the violent conflict between refugees and the host community in the Kule*

camp in 2019. My home is here in a refugee camp, where life is extremely difficult…I belong to Nuer. Recurrent conflicts between refugee communities and hosts have also strained our relationship. Likewise, there is a high degree of distrust between refugees and host communities, where host communities see refugees as thieves whenever host communities' property such as cereals, sheep, goats, and other properties gets lost. As a result, I choose to remain within the camp for safety reasons since there are limited opportunities for positive interaction of refugees with their surrounding host community members (LH-KR-3).

The life story of this woman highlights the ongoing security threat refugees were facing. After losing her husband in South Sudan, she was forced to leave her country and raise her children alone. Again she lost her mother and brother here in Ethiopia in the violent conflict between refugees and their hosts. On top of this, she has been suffering from poverty, lack of freedom of movement, security threats, and being treated like a thief by her hosts, making her confined to the camp where life-threatening challenges and uncertainties remain continued. Another telling story of life in protracted displacement and violence is described as follows:

I came to Ethiopia in 1994 following the war that broke out between Sudan and South Sudan to save the life of my family and my own. From the moment I arrived; we have been mainly sustained by different support given to us by aid organizations. Also, I'm an incentive worker working as a security guard, as a supplementary livelihood opportunity. Since the service given to me and my salary is too low, my family and I have been facing several challenges and uncertainties in our lifetime. For instance, poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and lack of adequate shelter, mattresses, blankets, and deficiency in other necessary goods and services, are preventing me from providing improved care and protection for myself and my family members.

Since I arrived in Ethiopia, I have been living here in Pinyuod-1 Nuer site refugee camp. We have been living in an area with continuous conflicts and security threats. Now imagine I can't even move outside the camp as I am a Nuer and the surrounding host communities are Agnwa. The interaction between Nuer refugees and Agnwa hosts has been violent for many years resulting in several deaths. My home area in South Sudan is still in a violent conflict, and we are also suffering from ethnic conflict and political instability here in Ethiopia. Thus, a solution for us is resettlement in another country (LH-P1NR-2).

This story is more or less similar to the above one. Even though the stories are from two different camp situations, the data revealed that there is a security threat in both camps though the degree of the threat is different. What makes the second story differ is that there is little/no interaction between Nuer refugees and Agnwa hosts during the data collection period. Besides, the informant argued that conflict forced refugees to flee their home country and they are also suffering from constant ethnic conflict in Ethiopia, making them prefer resettlement in a third country than staying in Ethiopia or returning to their home country.

6.4 Organized robberies and gender based violence

In this violent situation, another major challenge associated with refugee-host relationships is organized thieves or robbers in the middle between a refugee camp and the host community reinforcing the ethnic-based conflicts. Concerning this issue, a 22 years old informant in Kule refugee camp stated that:

> *There are organized thieves, sometimes supported by guns in the middle between the refugee camp and host communities. These thieves are organized from both communities [refugee and host] but we don't know who they are and what are their immediate as well as long-term goals and objectives. So far, they have been robbing personal properties such as mobile phones and valuable goods and abducting women. They are also causing distrust between refugee and host communities, leading to conflict between the two communities. However, we don't know why concerned security bodies can't eliminate these criminals yet* (IDI-KR-13).

There is also a high prevalence of rape and forced abduction around refugee camps. For instance in Kule camp, due to this issue, women refugees can't move from one place to another place freely. Concerning this, a 26 years old woman refugee informant stated:

> *When we [women refugees] leave the camp to go to market, gather firewood, or for any other purposes, we are in constant fear of the host communities. Many women face the threat of being raped and abducted by local youths. These issues negatively impact our daily activities and overall safety, making it extremely difficult for us to fulfill our basic needs without encountering such risks* (IDI-KR-14).

This data showed that women refugees were facing gender-based violence including rape and forced abduction. Such pervasive violence and insecurity in these areas exacerbate

the already challenging situation. These have badly affected refugee-host community relationships in general and refugee local integration in particular. That is why around the two camps: Kule and Pinyudo-1 Nuer site, there was no/little movement of refugees to host communities with different ethnic groups and vice versa at the time of data collection due to fear of all forms of violence. The fact that there was no such case reported in Pinyudo-1 Agnwa site refugee camp (where the refugees and the surrounding community are the same ethnic group) makes the problem part of the broader ethnic-based conflict in Gambella.

6.5 Some opportunities associated with refugee-host relationship

In the above sub-sections, I have discussed the challenges associated with refugee-host relationships. Here, I discuss some opportunities that bring refugee and host communities together and promote refugee-host relationships and eventually local integrations. Belonging to similar ethnic groups, mutual interdependence, expansion of public infrastructures and service inclusion that promote collaboration and create supportive networks are some opportunities associated with refugee-host relationships.

6.5.1 Belonging to the same ethnic groups

In the above discussions, ethnic identity was analyzed from the viewpoints of its negative contribution to the refugee-host interactions. Here I discuss the opposite, i.e., belongingness to the same ethnic group creates strong refugee-host relationships, making those refugees sharing similar ethnic groups with their surrounding host communities have relatively smooth relationships with them and vice versa. A 40-year-old informant from Agnwa refugees in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp stated:

> *Our [Agnwa refugees] relationship with the surrounding host communities is characterized by a high degree of harmony, largely due to our shared ethnic background. As a member of the same ethnic group, we possess similar cultural practices and an overarching sense of commonality, which fosters positive interactions and mutual respect with host communities* (IDI-P1AR-7).

Similarly, a 35 years old Nuer refugee informant from Kule refugee camp stated:

> *We don't have any issues with the host communities [who are Nuer] due to our similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The common background we possess*

facilitates mutual understanding and strong social cohesion, thereby minimizing potential sources of conflict. This alignment in cultural and historical context effectively mitigates potential friction and enhances the overall relational dynamics between us [refugees] and the Nuer community. However, we can't have such opportunities with Agnwa hosts (IDI-KR-5).

The quotes above justify that areas or localities that share ethnic or cultural backgrounds can be considered as the major opportunities for refugee-host relationships, where those who belong to the same ethnic group have a harmonious relationship than those who share different ethnic backgrounds. A similar finding was reported among Somali refugees in Kenya. Lindley (2011) argued that the presence of a large Somali-Kenyan population has offered Somali refugees a space for 'segmented assimilation' (Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). Refugees and Somali-Kenyan hosts regularly interact through economic activities and also at schools, mosques, and other social events within Eastleigh. According to the authors, the nature of the relationships between Congolese refugees and their neighboring Kenyan hosts was quite different from those of Somali refugees, primarily because Congolese refugees lack ethnic counterparts amongst Kenyan citizens in the ways those Somali refugees do (Opono & Ahimbisibwe, 2023). This very much reflects the Gambella situation, but in Gambella, the differences have been accompanied by violence.

6.5.2 Mutual interdependence

Mutual support or interdependence creates a sense of cooperation and attachment which play a great role in promoting and maintaining social life and local integration. The very important and interesting opportunity associated with refugee-host relationships in Pinyudo-1 and Kule refugee camps is mutual interdependence where both communities provide necessary support to each other. Concerning these points, a 28-year-old informant from Kule refugees stated, "*We [refugees] and our surrounding host communities live together by providing different kinds of help and support to each other in different challenging situations as much we can"* (IDI-KR-12). Similarly, Pinyudo–1 refugee camp, Agnwa refugees also have a smooth and harmonious relationship with their surrounding host communities. The refugees are living closely with surrounding host communities in harmonious ways and sharing several aspects of socioeconomic life. During times of challenges, such as food shortages, host communities assist them including providing them with cereal. On top of that, refugees sell their ration and purchase local products in return from host communities. Overall, according to my

informants from both refugees and the host community, Agnwa refugees in Pinyudo-1 camp and their surrounding communities rely on each other (IDI-P1AR-8; IDI-P1H-10). Thus, in Gambella refugee governance, actors could use these peaceful and harmonious interactions as a point of departure and expand to more challenging environments.

6.5.3 Expansion of public infrastructures and service inclusions

There is an expansion of infrastructures and basic social services following the massive arrival of refugees in the study areas. This expansion of different infrastructure in and around refugee camps in the name of refugees benefits the host communities too, contributing to interactions between both communities. These infrastructures including roads, schools, health facilities, and safe water, are built in a way that benefits refugees and surrounding hosts indicating also the government and partner organizations' policy of inclusive service. In this sub-section, I discuss each of the most crucial services and their inclusive involvements.

1. Safe water

In Kule refugee camp, there is frequent refugee-host community interaction over getting access to tap potable water and a river outside the camp. Government agencies, in partnership with international NGOs and refugee organizations, have installed tap water in the refugee camp. Other water sources, such as pumps and rivers, are also located outside the camp by the same institutions. The host community members come to a refugee camp to fetch water if the water supplies are interrupted outside the camp. Similarly, refugees also go outside of the camp and fetch water from the nearby host community members leading to increased refugee-host interaction. However, these interactions existed because of the prevailing peace in the area and the two communities. In a violent environment such as Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp and the surrounding host community regardless of the attempt to build the infrastructure, the two communities could not freely move from one place to another and interact. A key informant, who is working in Pinyudo-1 Nuer refugee camp stated:

> *Currently [the time of data collection], the growing volatile ethnic conflict between Nuer and Agnwa in the Gambella region has created a terrifying environment for refugees, exposing them to physical attack and harm. This volatile situation has severely impeded shared access to essential water services, which were previously shared by both refugees and host communities when there was a peaceful and harmonious relationship between the two groups* (KII-P1-NR).

Similarly, one of my informants from refugees stated:

> *It's known that water is essential for human survival, making it a vital service. Recognizing this, government agencies, in partnership with international NGOs and refugee organizations, have installed tap water in the refugee camp. Other water sources, such as pumps and rivers, are also located outside the camp. There is a case when the host community members come to a refugee camp to fetch water in case the water supplies get lost or disappear there [host areas]. The same is true for refugees, leading to increased refugee-host interaction. On this occasion, there is direct interaction between refugees and host communities. However, this exists when there is peace between refugees and host communities. If not, it is difficult to freely move from one place to another, especially for refugees* (IDI-KR-6).

This data points out that refugee-host interaction has been taking place between Kule refugees and their surrounding host communities over getting access to water. Though, this interaction takes place when there is a smooth and harmonious relationship between both refugee and host communities. However, in case there is tension there is no such kind of interaction. Similarly, the study done by Vemuru, Sarkar, & Fitri Woodhouse (2020) on the impact of refugees on hosting communities in Ethiopia revealed that places where the community gathers include watering points, for example when some of the boreholes encountered damage and there was a water shortage. If this shortage occurs, both communities (refugees and hosts) gather where water is available be it on the host community side or refugee side (Vemuru et al., 2020).

Informants from the host community around Kule refugee camp confirmed that there is a positive interaction over getting access to water. They also noted that the interactions can be challenging in the presence of conflict, tension, and hostilities in and around the refugee camp. In this context, one of my FGD participants, who is a government employee from the host community stated, "*Shared access to tap water regardless of its location or ownership is common, including with refugees. Nevertheless, instances of conflict, hostility, fear, or insecurity within the camp, among refugees, and host communities, or between the two, significantly hinder such cooperation"* (FGD-KH-3).

Picture 4: Tap water in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp

Similar to the data mentioned above, a study conducted by Betts, Stierna, Omata, and Sterck (2023) titled, refugees welcome? inter-group interaction and host community attitude formation in Turkana discussed that there are persistent interactions between refugees with their hosts through the shared use of basic social services clinics and water supply inside the camp irrespective of occasional communal violence between the refugee community and their surrounding hosts (Betts et al., 2023).

2. Health services

In Gambella, Kule, and Pinyudo-1 where the Agnwa refugees are hosted, refugees have frequent interaction with their surrounding host communities over getting access to health services or at health facilities. There is 1 health center, and 1 clinic; a total of 2 health services institutions in Kule refugee camp and 3 health centers are found in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp giving services to both the refugees and the host community members.[27] The host community members surrounding the camp can access treatment in the health facilities established mainly for refugees in the camp. Refugees would also be referred to facilities outside the camp for better treatment (IDI-KR-8). One of my key informants from RRS official argued, *"We are working to realize refugees' right to get access to health services by ensuring that suitable health care is available to all refugees, with reliable health assessments and monitoring systems put in place"* (KII-GO-2). However, one of my

[27] https://rrs.et/gambella-branch-office/. Accessed 12 August 2024

informants from refugees argued that health institutions established for both refugees in refugee camps and for host communities lack better health facilities and equipment by explaining his views as follows:

> *There are health centers in refugee camps and the host communities too, but none of them has sufficient and accessible health facilities, equipment, and effective medication. As a result, patients seeking treatment often encounter challenges in finding effective laboratory services and appropriate drugs to address their illnesses. These are the most common problems that both refugee communities and their hosts in Gambella are facing* (IDI-KR-7).

These issues are prevalent in both Pinyudo-1 and Kule refugee camps and their surrounding host communities, as reported by refugees and community members interviewed (IDI-KR-8; IDI-P1H-7).

Picture 5: Refugees' health center in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp

3. Education

The other major area of refugee-host community interaction is the education sector. There are schools where students from both communities come together and attend classes either inside the camp or outside the camp, just preferring the nearest school. According to my Key informant working in an international non-government organization in Pinyudo, *"There are several schools established in between refugee camp and host communities' location, to help both refugee and host communities' children get access to education and learn in the same school together, aiming to improve refugee-host relationship* (KII-INGO-1).

In Gambella, refugee education is run by Development and Inter-church Aid Commission (DICAC), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church development wing. This is part of the UNHCR-Ethiopian government agreement that outsourced service provisions to NGOs. DICAC and a few other NGOs run a collaborative project promoting "conflict-sensitive, risk-informed, and inclusive education for host and refugee children". The project was established as a way of constructing some schools in primary and secondary schools in Jewi, Kule, Tierkidi, and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps (UNHCR, 2019). FGD participant from Kule refugee described his view concerning getting access to education as follows:

> *We [Kule refugees] attend class with host communities' children. It is common for host communities' children to attend a school established inside the refugee camp based on their preferences. Similarly, there are cases where refugee children attend school in the host community. Preference is mainly based on the distance of the schools from their homes* (FGD-KR-5).

However, attending common schools and these harmonious interactions were taking place in the camps that shared common ethnic backgrounds. In those camps where there were conflicts, it has been difficult for the students to share same schools. One my informants working in NGO stated:

> *… Regarding inclusion, in principle, we provide 70% and 30% of services to refugees and host communities respectively. Previously [at a time when there was peace], the schools have been serving both communities, but now [during the time of data collection] in Pinyudo-1 refugee camp, the Nuer refugees and the Agnwa host students are not attending schools together due to the ongoing violent conflict* (KII-INGO-5).

In Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp the conflict forced refugee students to drop out of school, *"About 75% of secondary students have dropped out of school in the Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp following the heightened ethnic conflicts in the area. The school's location outside the camp poses a significant security risk to students, forcing them to drop out of school"* (KII-INGO-5). Thus, while policies promoting service inclusions in each local area hosting refugees are quite important, conflicts continued to be obstacles.

The following pictures are refugee school in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp.

Picture 6: Refugee school in Pinyudo-1 Nuer site refugee camp

In this chapter, using empirical data, I tried to show refugee local integration in the context of national refugee policy, focusing on the challenges that hinder the implementation of local integration of refugees in Gambella, a region plagued by inter-ethnic conflict. Thus, ethnic conflict, intimidation, organized robberies, and gender-based violence are identified as key obstacles to successful refugee-local integration. Also, I tried to highlight, potential opportunities for refugee-local integration, including shared ethnic similarities, mutual interdependence, expansion of public infrastructure, and inclusion of accessible basic social services in efforts to promote and implement local integration of refugees.

Chapter Seven

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study examined refugee-host relationships within a context of heightened ethnic politics taking the case of South Sudanese refugees in Kule and Pinyudo-1 refugee camps and their surrounding host communities in Gambella Regional State of Ethiopia. More specifically, the study explored economic and sociocultural interactions, refugee-local integration in light of national refugee policies, and the role of ethnic identity refuge local integration. In line with these objectives; the study found that economic refugee-host interactions primarily occur in job markets, labor sectors, marketplaces, and financial institutions. However, the nature of these interactions is greatly influenced by ethnic affiliation. As a result, refugees in Kule and Pinyudo-1 Agnwa sites experience more positive interactions with host communities due to their shared ethnic identity. Conversely, Nuer refugees in Pinyudo-1 face challenges in interacting with host communities largely resulting from ethnic tensions and conflict between Nuer and Agnwa.

Concerning the socio-cultural interaction of refugees with their surrounding host communities, the findings of the study found that intermarriage relationships exist primarily within the same ethnic groups. Also, religious practices were often shared, especially between Kule and Pinyudo-1 Agnwa refugees and their hosts. Likewise, both groups share basic social services such as access to safe water, learning institutions, and healthcare services, except in cases of conflict. On the contrary, Nuer refugees in Pinyudo-1 could not share these services with their hosts because of the heightened ethnic conflict. In this situation, the study findings also showed that refugees having kin relatives in the host community fostered positive refugee-host interactions.

Stephan & Renfro's (2002) intergroup threat theory's argument that attempts to describe a threat that affects the relationship between different social groups is closely related to the findings of this study. In this theory symbolic threats such as the existence of a perceived difference between the values and worldview of an in-group and out-group or social group taken as threats to the social group's safety, security, and well-being (Makashvili et al., 2018). Thus, differences in ethnic groups, traditions, ideology, language, and other aspects of life are mainly considered the driving factors for Nuer and Agnwa ethnic conflict which in

turn affects refugee-host relationships. Thus, the high prevalence of perceived symbolic threats, leading to perceived realistic threats between ethnically diverse refugee communities and the host populations, significantly affected refugee-host relationships in general and refugees' local integration in particular in Gambella. For example, the study revealed that the Agnwa ethnic group opposes local integration of refugees, as they consider refugees as a threat to their community's peace and stability. Similarly, the Nuer refugees in Pinyuod-1 were hesitant about local integration since the host community surrounding the refugee camp is Agnwa ethnic groups. Furthermore, treating Nuer refugees like Nuer citizens by the Agnwa hosts and refusing Agnwa by the Nuer community just by tracing their shared ethnicity is common in Gambella, where one ethnic group is perceived as a threat to the safety and security of the others.

When we see refugee-local integration vis-à-vis the national refugee policy of Ethiopia, the study found that the mismatch between national refugee policies and local realities creates significant challenges to the integration of refugees. These obstacles significantly hinder the prospects for successful integration at the grassroots level. Besides, ethnic identity significantly influences refugee-local integration, where the Nuer are generally more welcoming to refugees, and the Agnwa on the other hand strongly oppose refugee-local integration as mentioned above.

In Gambella, refugees who have close relatives in the host communities get an opportunity to easily integrate into the host communities at an individual level. Concerning this, this study found that some locally integrated refugees, in the political sense, even beyond socio-cultural integration by getting residence in the locality and local ID cards through this web of connection. At a group level, ethnic groups play an immense role in determining refugee-local integration. As a result, the more refugees belong to the same ethnic groups with their hosts the more they locally integrate, which is evidenced above, by Nuer host community members' acceptance of Nuer refugees' local integration in Kule, and Kule refugees also showed willingness for refugee-local integration. On the contrary, the Nuer refugees in Pinyuod-1 don't want local integration in the locality since their surrounding host communities are Agnwa ethnic groups. Similarly, the Agnwa host communities who strongly oppose Nuer refugee's local integration in Kule encourage the local integration of Agnwa refugees in Pinyudo where they share ethnic similarities; Agnwa refugees also showed their preferences for local integration.

Moreover, recurrent refugee-host interethnic conflict and intimidation, organized robberies, and gender-based violence are the major challenges associated with refugee-host relationships. Tensions and conflicts are being raised between refugees and their hosts mostly due to cultural differences, competition over getting access to resources, and other related problems. Women and girls in refugee populations are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. On the contrary, belonging to the same ethnic groups, mutual interdependence, and expansion of public infrastructures such as safe water, health centers, and education sectors and making these services inclusive presented as some opportunities associated with a refugee-host relationship and refugee local integration. The study findings revealed that shared ethnicity and mutual interdependence facilitate common understanding, cooperation, social integration, and mutually beneficial relationships while promoting resilience and sustainable development. Likewise, the presence of refugees have stimulated the development of public infrastructure and services than before in the region, benefiting both refugees and host communities. In general, ethnic identity played a pivotal role in shaping refugee-host community relationships and refugee-local integration in Gambella.

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were forwarded to refugees, host communities, government, INGOs, and other stakeholders as follows:

- Refugees have to work on creating close relationships with host communities in different ways as much as they can
- Refugees have to stay neutral, or act as mediator rather than fueling the conflict whenever unfortunate conflict arises between local groups of people
- Refugees need to work on activities that promote peace and stability because they leave their habitual residence in search of peace
- It is better for refugees not to understand and see local communities from the angle of their ethnic background and other identification processes; just see and act with them as local ones irrespective of their ethnic identity
- It's also better for host communities not to understand and see refugees from the angle of their ethnic background and other identification processes; just see and act with them as refugees irrespective of their ethnic identity

- Host communities need to provide different help and support for the refugees because they are vulnerable groups of people in need assistance and understanding instead of seeing everything from political side
- The host community also needs to recognize the positive contribution of refugees in the region beyond the existing identity politics
- Government and I/NGOs have to continue providing humanitarian goods and services but also have to transit to development nexus.
- Government and human rights organizations have to work on maintaining peace and stability in the region
- Governments have to take positive and significant legal measures against criminals who disrupt the security of the region.
- Governments has to implement refugee policies and proclamations by prioritizing the mutual benefit of both refugees and surrounding host communities

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Appendix

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Interview Guide

Dear respondents, first of all, I would like to thank you for your voluntary participation in this study. These research questions are prepared to collect data from you; the respondents or the research participants. The purpose of these questions is to collect data/information regarding Refugee-host relationships in the context of heightened ethnic politics: the case of South Sudanese refugees in Gambella region, Ethiopia. Hence, the validity and adequacy of the study depend on your response; you have to respond to the real answer as much as possible. Thank you in advance for your voluntary cooperation!

Part I. Personal Information

1. Sex: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Marital status: _____
4. Religion: _____
5. Occupation: _____
6. Level of Educational: _____
7. Ethnic group: _____

Part II: In-Depth Interview Questions

A: For Refugees

1. What do you do for a living or what is your job/s?
2. Do you have cattle? If yes, where do you keep them?
3. Do you have land? If yes, how did you get it?
4. Are you living in the camp or outside the camp? If outside the camp, how did you get the opportunity, and how about your relationship with your neighbors?
5. Can you access rationing, education, health, financial, telecommunication, and vital registration services well?
6. Do you have an opportunity to move outside the camp freely? If not, why?
7. Do you have an identity card and travel document? If not, why?
8. How do you describe refugee-host interaction over getting access to job opportunities and natural resources?

9. Do host communities share markets and religious centers with refugees? If yes, how do you describe their interaction over these spheres? If not, why?
10. What are the critical challenges that you are facing?
11. Does your belongingness to certain ethnic groups affect your relationship with your surrounding host communities? If yes, please provide details.
12. Are there any conflicts between refugees and surrounding host communities? If so, what are the causes of the conflict?
13. Do you think there are threats of host communities to the refugees and vice versa? If yes, please provide details.
14. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the refugee-host relationship?
15. Are there refugee associations in your camp? If yes, how and why are they organized?
16. Did you have any special status in this camp? If yes, please provide details.

B: For Host Communities

1. How do you think about refugees around you?
2. How do you describe refugee-host interaction over getting access to job opportunities and natural resources?
3. Do host communities share markets and religious centers with refugees? If yes, how do you describe their interaction over these spheres? If not, why?
4. Do intermarriage relationships take place between refugees and host communities? If yes, please provide details. If not, why?
5. Do you think there are threats of host communities to the refugees? If yes, please provide details.
6. Do you consider refugees as a threat to the host communities? If yes, please provide details.
7. What are the challenges associated with the refugee-host relationship?
8. What are the available opportunities for refugee-host relationships?

Part III: Key Informant Interview Questions (For Both)

1. What initiatives are in place to help refugees integrate into their host communities?
2. Do refugees have better access to education, healthcare, financial services, telecommunications, and registration services? Inclusion into service provision?

3. What actions are taken to facilitate local integration of recognized individuals or groups of refugees who have lived in Ethiopia for a long period?
4. What measures are taken by the government and non-government international humanitarian organizations to foster smooth relationships between refugees and host communities?

Part IV: Questions for Group discussion (For Both)

1. Would you discuss the refuge-host relationship and its determinant factors in Gambella?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the refugee-host relationship?
3. Would you discuss the role of ethnic identity in refugee-local integration?
4. Would you discuss the implementation of refugee-local integration on the ground?
5. What are your thoughts on the extent to which refugees have access to necessary services such as rationing, education, health services, financial, telecommunication, freedom of movement, and vital registration and documentation services?

Part V: Life History Questions (For Refugees)

1. When and why did you come here?
2. With whom did you come and who did you leave behind?
3. What do you do for a living or how can you afford your necessary consumption?
4. Do you have a job/s?
5. Do you live in the camp or outside the camp?
6. Which ethnic groups do you belong to?
7. Does your ethnic belongingness affect your interaction with host communities? If yes, please provide details.
8. What challenges and opportunities impact your relationship with the host communities around you?
9. Can you access education, health, financial, telecommunication, vital registration, and documentation services? If no, details
10. Do you prefer returning to your country, local-integration, or resettlement in a third country in the future? Please write a detailed reason for your choice.