

Abstract

THESIS: Religion, Identity, and Transnationalism: South Sudanese Community Building in Indiana

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This thesis explores how a group of naturalized South Sudanese refugees living in Indiana build a sense of community through shared religious practice. Utilizing participant observation and semi-structured individual interviews, this ethnographic research project uses the theoretical framework of transnationalism to illustrate the ways in which this community takes form and is negotiated. I demonstrate that shared religious practice allows this group of refugees to transcend individual ethnic, cultural, and denominational differences and promote a sense of oneness. Their ability to effectively negotiate such differences also allows them to create community organizations linked to broader transnational social networks that engage in various activities, including the sending of remittances to South Sudan. However, since this community often lacks material resources, they also find other ways to maintain transnational connections by establishing ethnic and religious ties with their children. For this group, religion continues to play an important role in community building and establishing unity.