

**Conceptions of Belonging among Sudanese Refugees in Canada:
Evidence and Methods**

Martha Fanjoy

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A unified national identity has remained elusive in Sudan, and what it means to be “Sudanese” is a matter of debate within the country, as are national identities in most, even all, nations. Identities in Sudan are much more complex than the traditional North-South binary often presented in the media. There are hundreds of language groups in the country, and the most commonly recognized identity categories used by Sudanese tend to be tribal and religious.

Ongoing conflict in Sudan has resulted in the involuntary displacement of large groups of people. Although refugees are considered to have left their home countries involuntarily, many researchers see their experiences as similar to those of other migrants once they reach their country of settlement (Brettell 2000). Malkki (1995), for example, argues that refugees do not represent a “naturally, self-delimiting domain of anthropological knowledge” and should be theorized the same as other displaced people such as those affected by development and planned relocations. Contrary to Malkki, however, the original cause of migration for refugees, can impact the settlement process of refugees differently than that of migrants (Brettell 2000). In addition to instabilities in their country of origin, interruptions in career and educations caused by long stays in countries of first asylum, and lack of social capital and economic resources in their resettlement country can all have an impact on the settlement experiences of refugees.

Exile is often viewed as a “complete break with one’s past, culture and identity” (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001). Yet refugees are not powerless individuals and exile is often a creative space, leading to the formation of new conceptions of self, communities and associations. The following discussion of the resettlement experiences of refugees

from Sudan highlights the affect displacement, and ongoing instability in their home country has on the development of new conceptions of self and group belonging in Canada.

The most common approaches presently used to study of immigrant and refugee identity are: narrative, biographical and performative. This paper will illustrate that each approach illuminates a different dimension of refugees' sense of belonging to a group, or reasons for claiming or rejecting certain categories of self identification, while overlooking dimensions highlighted by other approaches. While most studies dealing with refugee populations rely on the first two approaches, I will argue that in order to go beyond the normalizing discourses of refugee communities, the performative method must be used. Observing day-to-day performances of identity, will ultimately lead to a fuller understanding of the possible reconfiguration of group membership among various Sudanese groups in Canada.

I will begin by briefly reviewing the demographic and political history of Sudan in order to shed light upon, and provide a context for, the resulting refugee situation. This will be followed by an overview the resettlement experiences of refugees from Sudan in Canada and what they indicate in regards to conceptions of group membership and belonging offered by formal community narratives as well as observations of day to day interactions and performances of identity. The different approaches to the study of immigrant identity and group membership will then be presented, followed by a discussion of the importance observations of day-to-day performances of identity have for the understanding of the changes in conceptions of group membership and belonging among Sudanese refugees in Canada.

The Sudanese Refugee Context

Sudan is the largest country in Africa and its population of over 35 million people belong to over 570 distinct groups. The largest – Arab (39%), Dinka (10%), Beja, Nuer, Nuba, Nubian, Fur, Bari, Azande, Moru and Shilluk (26%), in that order, however, represent 75% of the population, with the remaining groups forming 25% of the population (Lesch 1998). More than 100 languages are spoken in the country, with Arabic being the language of the government. Seventy percent of the population, mostly in the North, is Sunni Muslim; approximately 5-10%, mainly in the south, are Christian; while the remainder maintain animist or traditional beliefs. Geographically, less than 22% of the population resides in cities (Lesch 1998).

Before the colonial era Sudan was home to hundreds of small, distinct kingdoms, city-states and peoples allied by kinship and common culture. Centuries of trade and migration, resulted in northern Sudanese identifying with the Arab Middle East, while southerners remained relatively uninfluenced by Islam and associated more frequently with the pastoralist tribes of East Africa. The development of this regional rift originated from geographic barriers but grew over time into a cultural and linguistic divide. The divide was exacerbated by the construction of racial categories encouraged by the trafficking of slaves from the south of the country to the north and west which continued into the British administration and was revived during the civil war in the 1970's and 1980's (Idris 2001). The separation between the two regions was maintained during the period of Anglo-Egyptian administration through the colonial practice of administering the two regions of the country relatively separately (Johnson 2003).

Since 1955, the country has been engaged in almost non-stop civil war, which has resulted in an exodus of millions of people from the south. This is along with a significant number of northern Sudanese, who oppose the government and have also fled the country. The primary motivations for the civil war have varied over time and include: southern demands for independence and autonomy, an attempted 'Arabization' by northern Muslim groups of the non-Muslim south, conflicts over the oil resources of the central provinces, disputes about port access in the east and political control over the plains of the West (Johnson 2003).

In the first episode of civil war, from 1955 to 1972, the government's response to southern uprisings and calls for autonomy included the bombing and burning of villages. This, combined with a lack of economic and institutional development in the South, resulted in the first of many mass emigrations from Sudan when approximately 500,000 people fled to neighbouring countries (Johnson 2003). Several years of peace and development, between 1972 and 1983, encouraged many who had fled to return to their homes.

In 1983, the former peacemaking president, Col. Ja'afar Numairi imposed an authoritarian version of *shari'a* law, and a redivision of administrative districts. Numairi's actions heralded the country's second slide into civil war (Johnson 2003). In response, southern opposition groups coalesced and founded the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and its affiliated army (SPLM/A) and demanded regional autonomy. Some northerners, opposed to Numairi's changing tactics, and fearful of the brewing tensions, left immediately for Egypt. Those who stayed in Sudan hoping for a return to stability were disappointed. The democratically elected government of Sadiq al-

Mahdi, which came to power in 1986 was followed by a coup led by current president Omar Hasan al-Bashir in June 1989. Those hopes were shattered; the war in the South intensified (Johnson 2003) .

Further mass emigrations were caused by the violence of the war, recurring regional droughts and famine in the 1980s and early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, the number of internally-displaced persons had reached four million. Another 430,000 refugees sought asylum outside of Sudan in neighbouring countries (USCRI 1998). From 1993 to 2001, the Bashir regime worked increasingly closely with Hassan al-Turabi and his National Islamic Front party to ‘Islamize’ the government and the nation in an overt attempt to consolidate its command over Sudanese politics. In 2001 the alliance between Bashir and al-Turabi broke down and al-Turabi was then imprisoned. Bashir then entered peace negotiations with the SPLA and other opposition political and military groups from across the country (Johnson 2003) . After one and a half years of peace negotiation, in August 2004, the last of four protocols was signed in Naivasha, Kenya, and it was agreed that a referendum on independence for the South would be held six years later. In January 2005 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed.

The peace agreements, however, have come too late to save southern Sudan from severe social disruption and devastation. The war has claimed more than two million lives, caused the massive emigration mentioned earlier and displaced another four million people within the country. Efforts to repatriate refugees from neighbouring countries have been frustrated because of the lack of infrastructure, e.g., roads, hospitals and schools. To date only about 12,000 refugees have returned to the south (Human Rights Watch 2007).

As the fighting diminished in the south of Sudan violent conflict broke out in the western province of Darfur. The fighting between rebels and the government backed Janjaweed militias intensified in 2003. Over 2 million people have been displaced both inside and outside of the country and over 200,000 have been killed (UNHCR 2005). Fighting in the region continues despite a peace deal signed in May 2006. The only international presence in the area today is an African Union peace keeping force which is deployed on the border with Chad. The option of a wider multinational force within Sudan's border is being considered by the United Nations.

Sudanese in Canada

Canada has accepted the second largest number of Sudanese for third country resettlement after the United States (see table 1). The majority of Sudanese who have arrived in Canada over the past two decades were United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) designated refugees who travelled through the third country resettlement program.

Table 1: Permanent Residents arriving in Canada from Sudan.

Source Country	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Sudan	824	729	539	761	1179	1368	1533	1508	1039	832

(Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006)

Third country resettlement is available to refugees who have been in a first country of asylum after fleeing Sudan and have attained refugee status from the UNHCR. In order to be resettled, they must be unable to settle in their first country of asylum, unable to return home in the near future, or be at risk in their first country of asylum. If they are

designated as eligible for resettlement their files are passed to the Canadian embassy for further review and processing.

Canada has accepted a smaller number of Sudanese as economic migrants or through the family reunification program. Economic migrants are defined as those who arrive in Canada through the federal government's immigration points system as skilled labourers or business investors. Family reunification allows immediate family members of resettled refugees, children, parents, and siblings under the age of 18, to join them in Canada. Resettlement and family reunification are both lengthy processes that take anywhere from one year to three years. The long wait time in the country of first asylum usually leads to large gaps in education and work experience (Deng 2006; Fanjoy et al 2006, Grabska 2005). Whether arriving through the third country resettlement program or through the family reunification program, all government-assisted refugees receive a variety of services. Resettlement agencies in destination cities, funded by the federal government, administer the Resettlement Assistance Program in which refugees are provided with immediate and essential services. Income support is provided until the refugee, or refugee family, becomes self-sufficient, for up to one year. Refugees with special needs, such as those with medical disabilities, the elderly or victims of trauma and torture, however, may receive income support for up to two years (CIC 2002). The amounts provided are very basic and cover only food, shelter and miscellaneous household costs.

Overseas immigration officials decide, taking the presence of family members or friends into account, where individuals will settle. The majority of Sudanese refugees mirror the settlement patterns of the majority of immigrants to Canada and settle large

urban centres, but increasingly in the past five years, smaller numbers go to smaller cities and towns. Calgary, Alberta, and its surrounding communities, because of an economic boom, now contain the largest Sudanese population in the country (Leng 2006). Within cities, members of the same tribe tend to live in the same area. For example, in Calgary Nuer tend to cluster in the Northeast, while Dinka tend to live in the Southeast of the city (Leng 2006). This is also true among Sudanese immigrants living in smaller centres. In Brooks, Alberta, for example, members of the same tribe often tend to live in the same apartment buildings or often share homes.

The majority of resettled Sudanese in Canada come from the urban Sudanese refugee population in Egypt, large camps in Kenya, or more recently from displaced persons camps in Chad. Interviews with Sudanese in Vancouver, British Columbia, Toronto, Ontario and Calgary and Brooks, Alberta, demonstrate that although Sudanese refugees in Canada come from diverse tribal and religious backgrounds they tend to have similar settlement experiences (Fanjoy et al 2006).

Significant discrepancies between the expectations of many refugees for life in Canada and the reality they find is a striking part of their experience. Sudanese refugees in resettlement countries tend maintain strong transnational ties to friends and family still in Africa. Before traveling to Canada, the majority of refugees often have a high degree of contact with friends and family already in Canada. The time many refugees spent in Egypt, mainly in Cairo, was very insecure, but in an environment with up to date communication facilities. Many spent hours pouring over emails and letters from friends and relatives living abroad, and then discussing the information received. Their only formal source of information is a two day, low quality official orientation before

resettlement (Fanjoy et al 2006). As a result the information they had was often inaccurate and incomplete. The gaps and partial information created interesting encounters between refugees and officials. Canadian embassy officials in Egypt and workers in camps in Kenya were often baffled when Sudanese would ask to be destined to Brooks, Alberta, and only secondly to Toronto. Because many Sudanese had settled in the town, and the constant, though often misleading communication received from them, the prospective migrants to Canada believed Brooks to be an important Canadian urban center (Fanjoy et al 2006). Upon arrival in Brooks, however, most refugees were disappointed with its rural location and the lack of government settlement services. They had expected a city with the services of an important immigrant receiving area.

Resettlement, or even acceptance for resettlement, generates enormous pressure from family and friends still in Africa for financial support. In Cairo, as soon as someone has been notified they have been accepted for resettlement to Canada, they begin receiving phone calls and visits from friends, family and even distant acquaintances. The visitors and phone callers serve to remind the individual leaving of how lucky they are and to remember those who are not lucky enough to be traveling (Fanjoy et al 2006). Large groups of family and friends often accompany the resettling family or individual to the airport in order to remind them, right up until the moment of departure, of their responsibilities to those they leave behind and to Sudan (Riak Akuei 2005). Once in Canada, the pressure to send money home can be so great that many Sudanese refugees resort to changing their phone numbers frequently in an attempt to stem the flood of requests (Fanjoy et al 2006, Riak Akuei 2005). The pressure to send remittances has been identified as a major source of conflict within Sudanese refugee families and has been

cited as one of the main reasons that Sudanese communities have had difficulties gaining financial stability (Leng 2006).

The pressure on newly resettled refugees to send remittances means finding meaningful employment is their key concern. Regardless of background many refugees often spend years working in low wage jobs. They feel over qualified for their jobs and must wait to have their credentials recognized. They also voice dissatisfaction over the impression given in the preparatory orientation where the overall idea presented is that education is available for everyone who wants it in Canada. This notion is encouraged by overseas embassy and UNHCR workers who encourage refugees seeking a higher education or recertification to immigrate to Canada rather than the United States. (Fanjoy et al 2006). This hope for education is often disappointed upon arrival in Canada where education credentials from Sudan are not recognized and high tuition fees are a barrier.

Belonging and Group Membership

Contextual approaches to identity focus on migrants and host societies negotiating a “shifting hierarchy of others” and consider identity to be a “series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness.” These negotiations and dichotomizations provide a foundation for constructing social cohesion and allegiance (Brettell 2000). Immigrants in Australia began interview sessions by discussing the importance of a constant, immutable identity to their sense of self (Batrouney and Goldlust 2005). As the interview progressed, however, this notion became problematic. When asked to elaborate on their identity, and how it had changed since migrating to Australia, it became clear that even those who claimed to possess an unchanged core identity, tended to view their identities in a hierarchical and contextual manner. Many

respondents used an onion-like model to describe their sense of identity - a core identity in the center surrounded by layers of situational identities which were emphasized or de-emphasized based on the context in which they found themselves. This contextual view of identity contradicts linear acculturation models (Berry 1986) and fits better with transnational and post-modernist theories of identity which recognize that immigration and integration “occurs within the context of two or more locations and that (new) identities are forged across this space” (Sherrell 2006). Burundian refugees who self-settled in towns in Tanzania switched between various ethnic, national and even legal identities (i.e. refugee or non refugee) depending upon the context and the advantage that each identity afforded (Malkki 1996). Their fluid identity allowed them to integrate into the local Tanzanian population, to avoid identification as refugees, and most importantly to avoid forced movement into camps by the Tanzanian government.

They ways Southern Sudanese continually reconfigure their identities while still in Sudan also illustrates the fluidity of identity. Southern Sudanese are often referred to as members of the Nilotic language group, and are represented as relatively homogenous groupings consisting, for example, of Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Anuak and Uduk, among others. They would not, however, use these classifications themselves (Southall 1976). Instead, they often employ descending levels of identification such as tribe, clan and sub clan, depending upon the audience with whom they are speaking. The more distant the perceived relation between the listener and speaker, the more general the identification provided (Berger 2001). The expression of identity relative to the social situation shows that Sudanese concepts of self are continuously reconfigured even at home in Sudan.

Symbolic and Structural Boundaries

The “location and reason for the maintenance of a we/they dichotomization” is the boundary, or conceptual line that differentiates in-groups members from out-group members (Brettell 2000). These boundaries can be constructed structurally or symbolically and are constantly shifting and being renegotiated.

Structural boundaries are objectified forms of social difference, and are much less flexible and mutable than symbolic boundaries. They are often manifested in unequal access to and distribution of resources and social opportunities (Lamont 2002). Structural boundaries are revealed in the behavioural patterns and interactions of groups and can involve specific exclusionary laws banning certain groups from residing in specific areas or entering certain professions or be the result of long term systemic discrimination against a group.

Contrastingly, symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by members of a group in order to categorize objects, people, practices and even time and space, and are often transported to new countries by immigrants (Lamont 2002). They serve to separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership. Symbolic boundaries are effective because they are imprecise, providing a range within which individuality is recognizable within the group (Cohen 1985).

In multicultural situations, whether in refugees’ home country or in their country of resettlement, interactions take place most often within the framework of the majority group’s status markers and institutions. Minority groups who wish to remain distinct from the majority must continually maintain their symbolic boundaries in order to affirm and reaffirm their group membership (Cohen 1985). For example, the University of

Calgary recently completed a program which was set up to offer training to Dinka doctors and health care workers so that they could return to Southern Sudan and help with the rebuilding efforts. The graduation ceremony was a very formal affair with many politicians and dignitaries from the university present. Family of the graduates and a small number of Dinka community members were also present. Part way through the ceremony, much to the confusion and dismay of the organizers, the Sudanese guests broke into a traditional Dinka song and dance interrupting the ceremony. This performance of symbolic identity boundaries moved their marginal identities to the centre, differentiating them from the majority group and challenging control of the ceremony.¹

Shifting Conceptions of Group Membership

Abusharaf's (2002) work with Sudanese migrants and refugees in North America² provides one theory of how migration will affect Sudanese conceptualizations of group membership and their sense of self. She argues migration to North America leads to the creation of new identity categories. These categories are broader and more inclusive of other Sudanese than those used in Sudan. The increased breadth of identity categories helps to maintain a "Sudanese" identity in the face of new groups of others. Upon immigration to North America, Abusharaf claims Sudanese begin to identify on a national level, rather than on the ethnic or linguistic level they were likely to have used while still in Sudan.

¹ This event was observed during a brief visit to Calgary. I happened to be invited to the graduation ceremony at the last minute. Unfortunately, to date, I have been unable to discuss my observations in detail with those in attendance.

² Abusharaf conducted interviews and participant observation among Sudanese communities in New York, Washington, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Michigan, California and Toronto in between 1992-1998. She also circulated 300 questionnaires in a non-random sample in those locations.

Abusharaf (2002) found that while Sudanese find it relatively easy to identify themselves as solely Arab, Northern, African or Southern while still in Sudan, they find it much more difficult to maintain those distinctions after migrating to North America. She argues that a common “cosmos” causes immigrants from Sudan to realize what it is to be “Sudanese” and that the development of a more homogenous expression of culture is a way to better preserve their sense of belonging and group membership. The distinctions established in Sudan will begin to fade away upon migration to North America because they were based on previous relations and interactions between groups considered to be others. Once in a new environment, though, in which new groups are introduced, the category of other shifts and new interactions lead to the formation of new identity boundaries (Abusharaf 2002). The shift in group membership, brought about by a reconfiguring of boundaries by Sudanese migrants when faced with a new other, thus has potential to lead to the development of a pan-Sudanese, or even pan-African identity, in resettlement. Abusharaf believes these factors, and the ensuing shifts in group membership will lead to growing nationalist feelings in exile and thus contribute to the peace process and unification of Sudan.

Theorists writing on boundaries make a contrary claim that migration and encounters with new others will increase a group’s efforts to maintain, and even enhance, their symbolic boundaries (Cohen 1986, Barth 1969). Cohen (1986) argues that groups, as well as individuals, feel the need to assert or reaffirm their symbolic boundaries when they feel threatened by the presence of others because their sense of self is tied to their sense of belonging to the group, and the presence of an outsider may threaten the individual’s sense of self and belonging (Cohen 1985).

Berger's (2001) observations of interactions between Cuban educated Sudanese refugees and the rest of the Sudanese community in Alberta presents a more complex and problematic view of nationalism and pan-Sudanese identity among Sudanese living in Canada than Abusharaf's description of Sudanese in North America. The group of refugees who were the focus of Berger's study had been sent as children to Cuba by the SPLA to learn socialist ideals and be educated for an eventual return to an independent Southern Sudan. When the SPLA was removed from Ethiopia in 1991 they lost the resources to fund the children's education. The youths remained in Cuba, however, relying on the charity of the Cuban government. As time went on, their situation became more precarious in Cuba and the Canadian government eventually agreed to resettle several hundred of them to Canada. The majority of those resettled were in their late 20s and were highly educated. Berger found that although they had been taught in Cuba that nationality should not be based on tribal affiliations or religion, there were still conflicting notions of what it meant to be "Sudanese" among the group. One of Berger's informants insisted that to be Sudanese is to be "black African". "Who are these Arabs in the North? Sudan is an African country," he stated, while another informant insisted that there is no Southern and Northern Sudanese, but just Sudanese. Berger found that while they were in Cuba they extended their boundaries to include all Sudanese, and they had strong nationalist feelings toward a united Sudan. After resettlement to Canada, and increased contact with Dinka and other Sudanese who had come directly from countries of first asylum, daily interactions began to be limited to members of their own ethnolinguistic group. Cuban educated Sudanese began shifting their sense of group membership upon resettlement to Canada, and rather than expanding it, as Abusharaf

predicted, they began constricting it. In fact, Berger's observations of their interactions with other Sudanese indicate that, despite a continuing discourse on the importance of a unified Sudan, de-emphasizing tribal identities, the conceptions of group membership and identity boundaries contracted among the majority of Cuban educated Sudanese. They began associating and interacting more along ethnolinguistic lines with members of their own tribes who had not lived in Cuba (Berger 2001).

The membership and actions of community organizations provide another excellent opportunity to observe possible shifts in group interactions and identity among Sudanese refugee communities. The official view of one of the largest and most organized Sudanese community organizations in Calgary is that the organization serves all Sudanese, and the community is united in working toward a peaceful Sudan.

Conversations with staff and board members, consisting of community elders, indicate there are few divisions in the community. The president pointed out that, despite coming from different tribes and different regions of the country, they all share the same past as exiles and refugees and therefore they share the same hope for a peaceful unified Sudan. Not unlike the mythico-history told to Malkki (1996) by Burundian refugees in Tanzania, conversations with members of Sudanese community organizations in Calgary reinforce the ideal of unity through reoccurring themes of flight, asylum and finally resettlement to Canada. Taken together, the official discourse of the organization and the accounts of various community members give the impression of a unified community, indicating that boundaries had shifted as Abusharaf predicted, and a pan-Sudanese identity is indeed forming.

Upon closer observation of the organization, however, it became clear that this is not in fact the case. At social events, language and computer classes, only Dinka members of the Sudanese community in Calgary seem to participate. In fact there are several Sudanese community organizations in the city, each based on tribal lines, which rarely interact with one another. The organization has a high profile in the media and with city officials, but not because it represents a unified Calgary Sudanese community. Through its adoption of a mandate to represent the community as a whole, it was able to secure government funding while the other organizations were not. Contrary to Abusharaf's argument, observing the city's Sudanese community organizations interactions with one another, made it clear that their sense of self and group membership had not reconfigured into a pan-Sudanese identity.

Methods of Studying Identity

Given the divergent conclusions attained from previous studies of Sudanese identity, and in order to understand the nature of shifts in identity and group membership among the Sudanese population in Canada, the various approaches to the study of identity must be reviewed. In an effort to determine the most appropriate method for the study of Sudanese identity in Canada, three approaches to the study of identity are reviewed below: narrative, biographical and performative. Each approach can illuminate a different dimension of a refugee's sense of belonging, or reasons for claiming or rejecting certain categories of self-identification. Narrative and biographical approaches have dominated the literature on refugees and refugee identity (Batrouney 2005; Defina 2003; Malkki 1995b; Pegram 2005), but I will argue that in order to understand how symbolic boundaries are maintained or reconfigured observation of the manner in which a

community performs its identity on a day to day basis is required. Formal discourses and narratives may replicate ideals or aspirations of community members, international agencies and governments, but direct observation reveals actual practices in performative settings.

Narrative

In the narrative approach identity formation is said to rely on narratives of belongingness shared by the group with which one identifies. A narrative has the power to voice collective experiences, bring together and maintain shared understandings of life events and transform and shape collective realities (Defina 2003). Narratives are important because they are not merely a conduit for experiences, but a constitutive aspect of experience. They are a way to talk about oneself, as well as a way to practice certain types of identity through various interactions and within various contexts (Defina 2003). Through the study of formal group narratives, anthropologists can form an understanding of how individuals and groups conceive of and order their experience and the world around them.

In her study of Mexican migrants in the United States, Defina (2003) focused on how migrants projected themselves into certain social roles and how they spoke about their membership in certain communities. She studied the projection of social roles by noting how the self was presented in relation to others and in describing certain social experiences (Defina 2003). Expressions of community membership were identified through the relation of the self to those within the in-group as well as those considered part of an out-group. She found that these immigrants most often used ethnic identities to differentiate members of their in-group from outsiders, yet this varied depending on the

context. For example, the category “Hispanic” was used to describe both the speaker, as well as “others” who were not group members, depending on how the speaker related to the others in the narrative, as well as the audience.

Malkki’s work with Burundian refugees in Tanzania also demonstrates the importance of narrative to identity construction and maintenance among Burundian refugees living in refugee settlements in Tanzania. Through the construction of a mythico-history, the refugees in the Mishamo refugee settlement created an identity for themselves, while at the same time creating an oppositional other of the Tanzanian authorities. The mythico-history consisted of reoccurring themes which produced formulaic expressions of the group’s past, as well as individual experiences of flight and exile, representing “an interlinked set of ordering stories which converged to make (or remake) a world,” (Malkki 1995b). Through the creation and maintenance of a shared past, present, and future, the mythico-history served to empower the refugees in the camp, allowing them to recreate themselves as the “pure Hutu” nation in exile, in contrast to those refugees living outside the camp who were considered to have tainted identities, and were therefore not members of the pure Hutu nation (Malkki 1995b). In contrast those refugees outside the camp had more fluid identities and a more nuanced view of the Tanzanian population.

Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) also show how Oromo and Eritrean refugees living in Toronto, Ontario, use narratives to create mythico-histories in order to create and sustain communities, nationalist feelings in exile and remain active in politics back home. Oromo refugees are officially considered Ethiopian but have strived to form a

separate national identity. These nationalist sentiments are maintained by Oromo refugees upon arrival in Canada (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001).

The territory originally claimed by the nation-state of Ethiopia contains diverse ethnic groups, of which the Oromo are the majority. The Amhara, who originate from the Abyssinian highlands, came to dominate the country's government in the late 19th century. In resistance to repressive and assimilationist policies by the Amhara elites, the Oromo have been seeking independence since the 1970's. Eritrea, which was annexed by Ethiopia in 1963, conducted its own war of liberation and was recognized as an independent nation in 1993 (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001).

What is striking about Oromo and Eritrean identity is the extent to which many acknowledge that it is socially constructed. Many Eritreans in Canada admit to feeling strong attachments to an Ethiopian identity until Ethiopian hostility and repression led them to separate and as a consequence develop an Eritrean identity (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001). Oromo informants also mentioned previous identification with an Ethiopian identity, but explained the development of an Oromo identity in much more essentialist terms. Informants stated that it was as if "they had reawakened from a dream to recognize their true nature as Oromos" (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001). Shared feelings of history and identity conveyed through narratives are crucial to Eritrean and Oromo nationalist movements, as well as the maintenance of an Ethiopian national identity. Competing narratives exist within the communities, and control over the past and present is considered a way to regain control over what those in exile believe to be usurped identities and histories.

Biographical

Biographical approaches to the study of identity focus on the complexity, fluidity, multiplicity and changeability in a lifelong process of identity construction and negotiation. Bartrouney and Goldlust (2005) used the biographical method in their study of immigrants in Australia. They asked informants to speak at length about their lives before and after immigration to Australia, and how they have responded to those experiences, in order to gain insight into how the immigrants saw themselves in terms of group identity prior to and since their migration (Bartrouney and Goldlust 2005). This method provided them with the opportunity to explore how participants identified themselves, shifted their sense of group boundaries at various stages of their immigration experience and explored the contextual nature of their identity. Many participants reported feeling a sense of multiple selves or identities, for example, self-identifying as Indian when dealing with Australians who treated them as an “other” due to skin colour or accent, Australian-Indian on visiting India after a long absence, and Australian when caught up in nationalistic feelings of pride on Australian national holidays.

Leng (2006) used the biographical method to study the settlement experiences and kinship obligations of Sudanese refugees living in Calgary. He collected forty-nine life histories in order to understand shifting conceptions of kinship and their effect on remittances to extended family members still in Sudan. Informants from various tribes asserted the importance of kinship obligations to extended family members throughout their life histories. Yet, upon further questioning, Deng observed that those with children in Canada began to identify increasingly along nuclear family lines and dramatically decreased the remittances they sent to extended family members still in Sudan (Leng

2006). This discrepancy between the ideal response to kinship obligation presented in biographical narratives and the actual behaviour of refugee families highlights one of the key limitations of focusing solely on normalizing discourses.

Performative

Identity is defined by lived and real effects, bringing about the “production of real identities on top of differences, of unities out of fragments” (Hall 1993). When attempting to observe shifts in identity boundaries it is important to study the performative actions of group members, because the identities boundaries contain are affected and maintained by interactions (Barth 1969). At the group level, performances of identity articulate something about the group’s relations with others. At the individual level, they tell something about the relationship of the individual to the rest of the group (Cohen 1985).

Rituals are a form of identity performance and can confirm and strengthen people’s ties to their communities. In his work with Oromo refugees living in Australia, Gow (2002) identified several ways in which the community reinforced their ties to one another through public performances of group membership. Similar to Oromo refugees living in Canada, the majority of Oromo living in Australia left Ethiopia as refugees due to their opposition to the national government and consistently resist being identified as Ethiopian (Gow 2002). The community would come together in times mourning, holding large public mourning sessions for relatives who had died in Australia or Ethiopia. Gow describes the houses in which these gathering took place as sites of social drama, where group members would express a conscious articulation of their shared identity. While communicating group cohesion to others, the social drama of an Oromo funeral gathering

also serves as a stage to demonstrate the shifting dynamics of individual relationships within the community to group members.

Use of language is also a key way in which individuals or groups can perform and confirm their sense of group membership. Haitian-born youth in Quebec have very strong feelings toward the importance of maintaining Créole as a sign of their culture and identity (Pegram 2005). Even youth who were born to Haitian parents in Canada agree it is an important part of their identity. The importance of language to identity formation and maintenance among immigrants and refugees is also emphasized in Gow's (2002) account of distress experienced by one of his informants. In her English class all of the students were asked to place a dictionary from their language on the table in order to represent the diversity of the class. Having no Oromo-English dictionary, the woman used an Amharic-English dictionary, describing how it made her feel her identity as an Oromo was invisible. Two months later, she was able to obtain a copy of an Oromo-English dictionary which she brought to the class, and she said resulted in her feeling that her identity had been reinstated and confirmed to the others students.

Public performances of identity such as these are the "eye through which the culture sees itself" (Gow 2002). These performances allow members to continually redefine and maintain symbols that are acceptable to all, and provide a unified surface, while still allowing for individual interpretations within the collective. The spaces in which identity is articulated, called "loci of affirmation" by Gow (2002), can include any place where people live, connect and voice their collective identities. In refugee communities, "loci of affirmation" serve an important role in the maintenance and expression of group membership and belonging because they provide spaces for the

marginal to be performed as central outside of the limitations of identities based on belonging to a specific nation-state (Gow 2002).

Discussion

Although narrative and biographical accounts can demonstrate how an individual or group orders their experience and the world around them, they are not sufficient to fully understand changing conceptions of self and group membership among refugees and other populations living in exile. In order to study people living in such disruptive states, “anthropologists must work against the normalizing discourses, even of their informants,” (Navaro-Yashin 2003). Instead of paying sole attention to formal oral histories and other formalized narratives of identity, anthropologists must look for more revealing signs such as “passing comments, exclamations, statements made out of despair, sighs, interrupted sentences, ironic phrases, laughter, and the like,”(Navaro-Yashin 2003). By focusing solely on the collective discursive practices of groups, such as oral narratives or biographical accounts provided by individuals, anthropologists neglect the effect the actions and choices of individuals may have had in the process of creating narratives. Identity is codified in narratives and enacted in performances, making the “loci of affirmation” where identity is enacted a key part of the study of shifting conceptions of self and group membership in exile.

Gow (2002) describes the tension that exists between the formal narratives and performances of identity in the Ethiopian and Oromo communities in Australia. The formal narratives of the National Ethiopian Association in Australia present a unified Ethiopian nation, while the day to day performances of Oromo identity challenge this view by asserting their independence and the importance of a sense of belonging based

outside of the context of the nation state (Gow 2002). He notes how, at the 1996 African Communities Cultural Festival, Oromo community members continuously attempted to undermine the Ethiopian Association's efforts to represent a unified nation through political lines inserted in songs as well as making changes to posters advertising the event, adjusting the fonts so the word "Oromo" stood out much larger than "Ethiopian". Gow's observations of these loci of affirmation, public displays of identity at a large festival, and the previously mentioned elaborate mourning ceremonies that occur in Oromo households, demonstrate how the marginal is made central through performances of identity. This allows the Oromo community to reinforce its sense of group membership, subvert attempts to assimilate them into a broader Ethiopian national identity, and differentiate themselves from the broader Ethiopian community.

Observations of Sudanese community organizations in Calgary also demonstrate the discrepancies between formal narratives and performances of identity. Community leaders and elders state that their shared experiences of flight, asylum and resettlement, combined with their shared hopes for Sudan, have led to the decreased importance of tribal and religious identities and the reconfiguring of group membership to include a broader Sudanese national identity. However, the identification and observation of loci of affirmation in social events and classes held by community organizations and the settlement patterns and day to day interaction indicate that many continue to identify themselves along tribal lines, reinforcing their membership in a particular group through performances of identity.

The apparent lack of movement toward a pan-Sudanese national identity runs counter to modern conceptions of the nation-state as the dominant basis of identity and

group membership. This “national order of things” - the commonsense notion that the world is composed of “sovereign, spatially discontinuous units” (Malkki 1995a) is reflected in the Canadian government’s policy which, counter to official multicultural discourses which state that groups are free to pick their affiliation and ethnic groups can in fact “will themselves into existence,” prefers to grant official recognition of minority groups based on national origins (Dusenbery 1997). The majority of refugee receiving states require that community groups and NGO’s groups represent all Ethiopians, not just Oromo, or all Sudanese, not just Dinka or Nuer or North or South if they wish to receive funding (Gow 2002; Kernerman 2005; Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001). The resettlement experiences of Sudanese refugees, including the continued importance of group membership defined along ethnolinguistic lines, and the development of transnational networks within those groups through remittances and communication, highlights the fact that the approach of the majority of refugee receiving states ignores the evidence that the nation-state is not always the most relevant context in which deterritorialized people define their sense of self and group membership.

Conclusion

Studies of Sudanese living in North America report both broad identification with the national ideal of being Sudanese as well as social divisions marking boundaries of ethnic or religious difference. This paper considered ways to study the expression of group membership and sense of belonging among Sudanese refugees living in Canada, and questioned the assumption that a Sudanese national identity will form in exile.

A broad national Sudanese identity is difficult to define. In Sudan, it exists primarily on a political level, and the most common identity categories expressed in daily

practice remain ethnolinguistic and religious. In Canada, Sudanese immigrants, a majority of whom arrived as refugees, share similar settlement experiences. Observations of the loci of affirmation, where Sudanese identities are performed on a daily basis, indicate that contrary to formal community narratives, not a national Sudanese identity, but tribal categories of group membership remain the key to individuals' concept of self. That said, based on available evidence, the questions about the extent to which various identity levels - ethnolinguistic, national or religious – are used interchangeably in varying contexts cannot yet be answered.

In reviewing approaches to the study of immigrant and refugee identity boundaries it is clear that a methodology that highlights the different dimensions of belonging and group membership as well as reasons for claiming or rejecting certain categories of self identification will produce better results. In order to increase our understanding of the shifts in conceptions of self and group membership that occur upon exile and resettlement, we must include not only the formal narratives and biographies of the community, but also observations of the interactions between in-group and out-group members and how their identities are performed on a day to day basis.

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