

Between Citizenship and Belonging:

Transnational Ethnic Strategies of Muslim Arab Sudanese in the Diaspora

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Among diasporic Muslim Arab Sudanese a ‘citizenship tradeoff’ can be identified, whereby families move between countries which offer refugee status leading to citizenship and those whose social norms and policies support more familiar gender roles but which do not offer the possibility of naturalization. This raises critical questions about the nature of citizenship and belonging.¹

Citizenship rights in the context of modern state immigration policies are often presumed to provide a gold standard of protection, participation, and belonging, bestowing full membership in the nation to those who, in return, abide by its regulations. Despite persistent challenges to this notion on behalf of women, youth, and ethnic, lesbian/gay/transgendered/bisexual, and other minorities, national integration programmes have traditionally assumed that granting citizenship to non-nationals (the right to naturalize through residence – *jus domicile* – or birth-*jus solis*) additionally confers loyalty and belonging. As debates over how or even whether immigrants might be incorporated into the politics of Europe, North America, and Australia grow increasingly shrill, assumptions about integration in these contexts are being revisited by policy makers seeking to engineer conditions for national belonging through compulsory citizenship curricula, language acquisition, and the

like. Furthermore, 'Western' preoccupation with 'the Islamic difference' and the purported lack of social integration of Muslims is a factor in the tightening of European and North American borders and places the question of Muslim immigrants at the centre of this debate.

This article is concerned with the gendered perspectives of Muslim Arab Sudanese in the diaspora,² which spans the Arab world, Europe and North America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia, and the possibility that forms of belonging that transcend both national citizenship and ethnic diasporic consciousness may be taking on a growing importance. Like members of other diasporas, Sudanese migrants and refugees hold a variety of citizenship documents and may divide their residence between two or more national settings. However, while there is no lack of national feeling and patriotism, especially among Muslim Arab Sudanese whose minority riverain ethnic identity has coloured Sudanese national identity (Idris 2001, Sharkey 2003), the umbrella identities produced by northern Sudan's membership in the Arab and Muslim worlds point to alternative frameworks of belonging. This is particularly significant given the transnational discourse of an 'authentic' Muslim gender system promoted by the Sudanese government (Hale 2003), some Muslim scholars, and Muslims themselves both in diasporic settings and 'at home' (Al-Ahmedi 2003, Archer 2003, Kandiyoti 1991, Petee 1993).

SCOPE OF THE ARTICLE

My previous research on gender, citizenship and belonging for Muslim Arab Sudanese in Egypt (Fábos 2001) alerted me to the increasingly transnational character of the Sudanese diaspora. Some of the Sudanese transnational practices that I am exploring in this paper, particularly as they relate to the movement of marriage partners

and family members between Sudanese communities in the Gulf, Egypt, the UK and the US, were brought to my attention through contacts in the Sudanese diaspora, who have shared their family's news with me. Other material has been collected from Sudanese exile newspapers, in particular the 'Khartoum Society' pages of El-Khartoum newspaper between 1994 and 1997. The increasing role of internet chatrooms and discussion boards has also alerted me to the particular patterns of transnational movement and the discourse of belonging which seems to be emerging.

The role of the Sudanese state in shaping this discourse is significant. Recent work on gender and the 'Islamic Civilization Project' in Sudan (Bernal 2000, Hale 2003, Nageeb 2004) contributes enormously to our understanding of the gendered nature of statecraft and citizenship and its particular manifestation in Sudan. Complementing this perspective, studies of Sudanese migration and transnationalism have explored the ways in which Sudanese women and men are differently positioned in transnational projects. Gender scholars of Sudanese migration (Assal 2004, Simich & Hamilton 2004) have shown the importance of recognising that transnational individuals are subject to both the gender-specific regulations of states towards residents and citizens, and that women and men have differential experiences of migration and forced migration. Drawing upon these insights and my own research among Muslim Arab Sudanese in the diaspora, this article unravels the strands of a diasporic identity woven from supra-national Arab and Islamic narratives of belonging, Sudanese nationalism and Muslim Arab Sudanese transnational experiences of migration, displacement, and exclusion. I propose that belonging, for diasporic Muslim Arab Sudanese, is expressed through an inclusive notion of propriety that extends to other Muslims, complicating both the concept of diasporic ethnicity and local place-making.

I first present the historical and political context of the Sudanese diaspora today, paying particular attention to Sudan's self-defined leadership role in the 'Islamic Civilization Project' and its influence on gendered identity in the diaspora. I then analyze the ways in which citizenship policies in the countries hosting large numbers of Muslim Arab Sudanese influence not only local identities but also transnational strategies for members of the different diasporic communities. Finally, I suggest that Sudanese may be making strategic decisions that challenge our understanding of national citizenship and provide insights into the sort of belonging offered to Muslims by the supra-national *umma*.

SUDANESE EXPERIENCES OF CONFLICT AND FORCED MIGRATION

The enduring Sudanese diaspora resulting from ongoing conflict in Sudan spans not only other countries of the Middle East and Africa but increasingly Europe, Australia, and the United States and Canada. A recently concluded civil war which has displaced a significant percentage of the population of Sudan, particularly in the south, has given millions of Sudanese direct experience of conflict, violence, uprooting, and the militarization of society, and has shaped the way the dominant segment of Sudanese society – described incompletely here as 'Muslim Arab Sudanese' – enact national identity. Despite multiple challenges over a fifty-year period to its authority and control of state institutions by disenfranchised segments of the Sudanese polity,³ a narrowly based nationalism equating 'Sudanese' with the cultural ideals of Muslim Arab riverain tribal groups has become entrenched through Islamisation and Arabisation campaigns, often directed towards non-Muslim African-identified Sudanese. Since the National Islamic Front coup in 1989, control of the political and economic base of Sudan has narrowed even further,

generating refugees for the first time from the dominant Muslim Arab group.

Muslim Arab Sudanese had previous experience of migration, mainly to other Arab countries including Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE (Birks 1978, Hallaj 1993, Mahmoud 1992). There is also a long history of Sudanese traveling abroad as students, some of whom established themselves as immigrants in the UK, the US, Norway, and Canada (Abusharaf 1997, Salih 1969). The Islamist military coup and the repression, violence and social control it spawned led to tens of thousands of Sudanese joining these established Sudanese communities. Following the coup, some labor migrants felt unable to return to a Sudan captive to the political conditions generated by the Islamist government, while others, especially those who had developed sympathies for the conservative Wahabi strand of Islam that informed Sudan's ruling National Islamic Front (NIF), returned to Sudan as supporters of the government. Another event which led to the mass displacement of Muslim Arab Sudanese was the 1991 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The NIF's support of Saddam Hussein's attempted military take-over of Kuwait was the principal reason for the subsequent harassment and expulsion of Sudanese labour migrants in Kuwait and, to some degree, other Gulf countries (Abusharaf 2002). The Muslim Arab Sudanese diaspora includes all of these strands, many of which describe different pathways taken by members of the same families.

GENDER AND AUTHENTICITY

Scholars have long noted the mapping of power relations onto the female body (Sharkey 2003, Yuval-Davis 1997), particularly around symbolic notions of a woman-identified nation in need of protection by male citizens. Tying women's reproductive role to the maintenance of 'traditions' is

another way in which national leaders in a variety of contexts have made women the symbolic representatives of authenticity. Shahnaz Khan's argument that "the body of the Muslim women often becomes contested terrain between competing visions of authenticity, and as such is experienced by individual women as a site of contradiction" (Khan 1995) has resonated especially strongly in Muslim-identified diasporas in recent years due to the way in which Muslim women's bodies, through the discourse on 'covering' and 'controlling', have become so significant in the Western public sphere. In migrant and refugee communities where the essentialised home is associated with a national (territorial) homeland, women are often charged with the responsibility of maintaining 'traditions', including gender roles that relate women with domestic activities such as cooking, and raising children, often with the added objective of passing on cultural, linguistic, and religious practices.

The role that gender plays in helping Sudanese to define their identity seems also to shape their strategies for belonging, though identity discourses in different nodes of the diaspora reflect the particularities of place, historical context, and mode of residency. In Cairo, for example, particular Arab and Islamic practices associated with *adab* (propriety) have allowed Sudanese refugees and migrants to carve out an ethnic identity that, though based on Arab and Muslim norms and values shared with Egyptians, asserts a more authentic enactment of them (Fábos 2007). London-based Sudanese, on the other hand, may recognise a sharper cultural and religious divide between British society and the Muslim Arab Sudanese diaspora, also described in terms of propriety. In particular, gender roles and gender relations encountered in the British context are seen to be at odds with those of authentic Sudanese society. British gender values are viewed as undermining women's responsibilities as wives and mothers and

threatening children's 'Sudanese' by exposing them to 'inappropriate' influences at school and in society generally (Belail 1998). Increasingly, Sudanese refugees in Western countries offering asylum are making strategic choices that weigh legalistic aspects of right of permanent residency or citizenship with a socio-cultural need for belonging (Abusharaf 2002). Something similar is described by Al-Sharmani (2006) for Somalis with citizenship documents from Western countries who have chosen to live in Cairo.

The interaction of citizenship, migrancy, and state discourses towards 'others' has had particular implications for gender relations in the areas where Sudanese are concentrated. Gender systems in the 'Arab world', though historically constructed, processual and with distinct regional, national, class, and ethnic, differences, have nevertheless been reified not only by 'Western' observers, with their history of Orientalist interpretation of the Middle East but also by Arabs themselves. In recent years, a discourse of authenticity regarding the Arab and Muslim way of life has been contrasted with decadence as symbolized by Western popular culture. The themes of this debate have been taken up among Muslims living in European, Australian and North American nations in parallel to a Western discourse characterised by unease, fear and hostility towards reified characteristics of Muslim identity such as Islamic dress, religious rituals and gender relations. Assal describes a conference organised by Sudanese and Somali Muslims in Norway at which Muslim scholars were invited to lecture on "conditions of Muslim minorities in the West, the relationships between Islam, Islamic versus Western values, *fatwa* in Islam, *hijab*, etc." as a "quest for authenticity" (2004). The conference was designed to address worries about child-rearing, maintaining cultural and religious values and appropriate ways of establishing relationships with non-Muslims, but a rift was

clearly evident between scholars coming from outside of Europe and diasporic Muslim scholars based in Europe. Assal suggests that

“the discourse on authenticity needs to be looked into within the specific socio-political circumstances in Norway, and also within the general migration framework. The Sudanese government is engaged in discourses about Islamic authenticity. But that authenticity is totally different from the one Sudanese Muslims are talking about here” (2004).

Political projects such as the Sudanese government’s ‘Islamic Civilization Project’ (*al-mashru‘ al-hadaari al-islami*) indicate a more instrumentalist application of these concepts, and one that is designed to spotlight Sudan’s vital role in developing an ideological framework for a transnational Islam. Al-Ahmadi (2003) shows how the project “demarcates the matrix of gender relations and specifies women’s ‘space’ in society, with regulatory practices that stem from ideological constructions of ‘the Muslim Woman’ (2003, 13). A Sudanese gender discourse associating the transmission of cultural and religious values with women’s specific role as mothers of Muslim Sudanese children and promoting ‘gender complementarity’ (Boddy 1989) between obedient, stay-at-home wives and decision-maker breadwinner husbands ties into the ‘authentic Muslim woman’ discourse profiled above. Both of these gendered discourses of authenticity single out women’s responsibilities for maintaining Sudanese cultural identity, a key aspect of which is propriety. This does not mean that women are unable to use and sometimes transgress these norms by reference to the same discourse of authenticity, as recent research in Sudan shows (Hale 2003, Nageeb 2004), but it points to the participation of Muslim Arab Sudanese in a transnational discourse about the global responsibilities of Muslims.

TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGIES: CITIZENSHIP ACROSS THE SUDANESE DIASPORA

Sudanese refugees residing in the states that host (and regulate) each of the nodes of the Sudanese diaspora face vastly different conditions around citizenship, integration, and political and cultural expectations. International refugee law and the concept of state sovereignty contradict one another, and it is largely a matter of historical process whether people fleeing the same conditions will be afforded the same treatment by the different states in which they claim asylum. In Egypt, for example, the dense and long-standing historical ties between the Egyptian state and Muslim Arab groups in the northern part of what later became known as Sudan have supported a quasi-citizen status (though not the right to acquire Egyptian citizenship) for both Sudanese migrants and refugees in Egypt. When the Egyptian government withdrew most of these privileges following the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak, allegedly by Sudanese gunmen, in 1995, Sudanese consternation was so great that many individuals resisted applying for refugee status on the grounds that Sudanese were brothers, not ‘others’, and thus could never be considered refugees (Fábos 2007). In Arab gulf countries, on the other hand, despite a population that is numerically skewed towards labor migrants, including tens of thousands of Sudanese, non-citizens work on time-limited contracts and have not had the expectation – or opportunity – of integrating into Saudi, Kuwaiti, or Emirati society (Longva 2000). Resettlement countries of North America and Europe offer yet another model for legal citizenship – that is, the possibility of acquiring the nationality of the country of residence – although again there are significant differences between European welfare models like Norway and those countries oriented more towards a labor market model, such as the United States. Many Su-

danese refugees have become American, British, and Australian citizens after claiming asylum in these countries, residing for the required time period, and calling for family members to join them. It is important to note, however, that the asylum process – particularly in Europe and Australia – has recently been under attack and immigrants and refugees have both been targeted as illegitimate entrants to ‘the nation’.

MUSLIM ARAB SUDANESE IN EGYPT: ‘BROTHERHOOD’ ON THE NILE?

Egypt was the first and most obvious place for Muslim Arab Sudanese refugees to move to after the 1989 Islamist coup in Sudan. They joined established Sudanese communities in Egypt by the thousands; estimates of Sudanese populations in Egypt range from 250,000 to the exaggerated figure of 3 million often cited by the Egyptian government. By the mid-1990s, however, the preferential status of Sudanese had changed; as refugees, they were subject to the limitations of Egypt’s refugee policies – the fact, for example, that the Egyptian state included reservations to the 1951 Geneva Convention for the Protection of Refugees that barred refugee children from secondary education and effectively forbade work. Refugees in Egypt have never had access to public funds; the UNHCR, though maintaining an office in Cairo since the 1950s, was limited to meagre subsistence to a few means-tested refugees.

Refugees cannot apply for citizenship⁴ and are actively discouraged from integrating into Egyptian society by these policies; nevertheless, unofficial tolerance of non-nationals – and the unique role of Sudanese in Egyptian political ideals about a united Nile Valley – have meant that in practice many Muslim Arab Sudanese have established homes in Egypt. The presence of kin who migrated to Egypt in the 1940s has supported the settlement of Sudanese

refugees, many of whom are politically active and find the proximity to Sudan useful. At the same time, Cairo has been a convenient location from which to launch transnational strategies such as contracting marriages with non-refugees in stable situations (i.e. Sudanese in the Gulf) or with refugees who meet the fairly strict criteria for resettlement in a third country, normally the US, Canada and Australia. Many were also able to join family members in the UK through family reunification projects. My observations during my research in Cairo were of a highly mobile group of people with individual and family links to other Sudanese communities around the world.

MUSLIM ARAB SUDANESE IN EUROPE: SETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Settlement of Muslim Arab Sudanese in both the United Kingdom predates the series of political crises in Sudan that led to movements of this group of Sudanese as refugees. As with other groups of nationals from formerly colonized countries in Africa and elsewhere, the initial links that developed between Sudan and Britain primed pathways for visitors and migrants in later years – among them students, tourists, and professionals. Indeed, until 1991, English was the language of higher education in Sudan and schools and universities were based on the British educational system. Some of these Sudanese, who were by and large well-educated young men – established livelihoods and lives in the UK. After 1989, the pace of migration picked up as more and more Sudanese, many of whom had studied and lived in the UK previously, relocated as refugees and sought political asylum.

The number of Sudanese living in the UK and born in Sudan is estimated at 10,773 (Matters 2007) includes a percentage of minority Sudanese groups from

southern and western Sudan – the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement maintains an office in London, and the Save Darfur campaign is headquartered in the UK, for example. As Sharkey (2003) shows, during British rule in Sudan Muslim Arab Sudanese ‘natives’ were educated and integrated into the administration to further British colonial interests, and ultimately maintained connections with the largely Muslim Arab rulers of newly independent Sudan. These links have endured, and Sudanese have turned to the UK for education, training, tourism, and most recently, political asylum. Earlier arrivals were able to claim asylum and settle in communities, notably in Brighton, London, Manchester and Edinburgh. Many Sudanese were eventually able to apply for and receive British citizenship.

Sudanese refugees, as an older ‘vintage’ of refugee community appear to be economically integrated into British society. Men have obtained jobs, some in professional fields such as IT and medicine. Although there are many outstanding professional Sudanese women in exile in Britain (Al-Ahmadi 2003), married women in my experience preside over the domestic sphere and the education of children. But Sudanese talk of the strain on gender relations and family life of living in the UK. Community hearsay paints a picture of newly empowered women who seek financial independence from their husbands by claiming separate housing and child benefit payments, perhaps even seeking to divorce their husbands. More research is required to investigate whether this picture is accurate, though it is consistent with research among other refugee and migrant groups resettled in Europe and North America that points to the fractured family life and the immense strains upon refugee men related to the shift in family authority away from men (El-Solh 1993, McSpadden 1999, Naber 2005).

Second generation Sudanese youth are

subject to similar pressures of immigrant children in the UK more generally, but there are specific issues too: claimed by ‘black British’ youth, they are also subject to pressure from their families to maintain their Arab Sudanese identity. For many in the UK, this means adherence to a set of norms and values that are described by Sudanese as Muslim (Nagel 2002). A large part of this identity has to do with the maintenance of ‘authentic’ gender systems that see the roles of women and men as complementary, especially highlighting the importance of motherhood and wifehood to maintain ‘traditions’, and underscoring the virtue of obedience of women to men and of children and youth to their elders. Many Sudanese do not feel that their fellow citizens and British society as a whole share these values. Increasingly, there are community discussions about the dangers of the British educational system for Sudanese children, who are seen to be absorbing the wrong norms especially as gender roles are concerned. Different attitudes to obedience towards parents and family elders are also cause for concern. For example, Al-Ahmadi (2003, 210) notes that Sudanese in Britain expressed anxiety over British Family Laws and who had heard of children removed from families for “too severe” physical punishment.

Furthermore, Sudanese Muslim families in the UK find themselves part of a minority community which has been under tremendous social and political pressure, especially since the London Underground bombings on 7 July, 2005 but which has experienced even more difficulties as lawmakers push for measures to “control terrorism”, at least that associated with Muslims. Despite their legal and civil rights to participate in British society, Sudanese and other Muslim communities may find that their religious beliefs and community expectations are at odds with the framework of belonging expressed by the state.

SUDANESE IN ARAB GULF COUNTRIES: MUSLIM ARAB NON-CITIZENS

While there are no reliable statistics regarding the number of Sudanese nationals residing in the wealthy oil-producing countries of the Arab Gulf, studies from the 1970s onwards point to the significance of Sudanese labour migration to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and other Gulf countries in economic and socio-cultural terms (Birks 1978, Galal al-Din 1988, Mahmoud 1992). Galal al-Din's discussion of the early waves of Sudanese labour migration concludes that the fact that the majority of them were young educated professionals had a negative impact on Sudanese national development. He also asserts that an important feature of Sudanese labour migration has been that most migrants did not travel through official channels; indeed, a key travel opportunity for Muslim Sudanese has been to capitalize upon their religious obligation to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, and to then overstay their visas while seeking employment (Galal al-Din 1988).

The highest number of Sudanese labour migrants has been in Saudi Arabia, although communities of Muslim Arab Sudanese have been established in UAE, Dubai, Bahrain and Kuwait. In none of these countries were Sudanese, or indeed, any other migrants, given the opportunity to naturalize, and a unique citizenship hierarchy developed whereby nationals of Gulf countries with significant labour opportunities have become grossly outnumbered by their non-citizen workforce. In addition to the distinction between citizens and non-citizens, with citizenship available to most Kuwaitis,⁵ the state makes a distinction between Arab and non-Arab, as well as Muslim and non-Muslim; as Longva (1997) notes, Kuwaiti Labour Law distinguishes between 'Kuwaiti laborer', 'Arab labourer' and 'foreign labourer' (1997: 55). These categories are particularly important for understanding the concept of 'foreignness' in

Kuwait as it pertains to Muslim Arab Sudanese. Longva observes that

Arabs shared a closer affinity with Kuwaitis than the rest of the expatriate population. They were included in the Kuwaitis' definition of social humanity in a way that non-Arabs, in particular the Asians, were not (1997, 56).

There is strong evidence that changes in social norms in northern Sudan are linked to ongoing transnational practices. Cultural practices, especially those to do with religious practice and gender relations have also been transformed by the comings and goings of *mughtaribeen*, as Bernal's research over the past two decades shows (Bernal 1994, Bernal 2000). Bernal asserts that Islamic revivalism in rural Sudan does not reflect a resurgence of tradition but rather the integration of a Muslim community into the capitalist world system. These "new understandings of what it means to be Muslim" (Bernal 1994) are directly related to Sudanese experiences of being migrants in the Gulf.

However, Sudanese in the Gulf have also experienced racialized prejudice. Stories abounded in the early period of Sudanese migration of immigration officials, employers, and bureaucrats using the term *abiid* (slave) to refer to Muslim Arab Sudanese, a term that they would have experienced as provocative especially as the term is still commonly used by Muslim Arab Sudanese themselves to refer to southern Sudanese minorities. This 'colour coding' is a challenge to Sudanese self-identification, especially given the cultural and religious affinities they have with respect to societies of the Arabian Gulf. Furthermore, despite the mutual acknowledgment of Arab and Muslim values, Sudanese are not afforded the rights or indeed the protection granted to nationals in Arab Gulf countries.

The high salaries, quality of life, and sense of belonging for Muslim Arab Su-

danese in these countries, however, clearly make it a risk worth taking. Over the past decades Sudanese based in the Gulf have had a major influence on Sudanese in the diaspora and at home, and Sudanese continue to seek opportunities through work or marriage to settle there. Clearly, this is at least partially to do with the familiar religious and cultural context presented by Gulf societies. While Egypt also presents a comfortably recognizable milieu, there are few employment opportunities either for urban professionals or unskilled workers.

These three national models – Egypt, drawing upon its historical entanglement with Sudan; the resettlement countries of Europe and North America with their multicultural accommodation; and the Arab Gulf states – provide Muslim Arab Sudanese with different possibilities for legal status and integration. The discourse of immigration and asylum that has developed, particularly in Europe, strongly suggests that migrants and refugees seek entry and residence to countries offering citizenship with the purpose of acquiring social and economic rights – to welfare, to employment, and to education, but also other rights – to freedom of expression, for example. A Muslim Arab Sudanese transnational field is developing that incorporates not only Sudanese diasporic networks but also the socio-cultural spaces that are connected through transnational Islam. Increasingly, a shared awareness of authenticity with regard to Islamic behaviour and practice is referenced by Sudanese in the diaspora. This notion – which I suggest is reflected powerfully in Sudanese discussions of identity – seems to revolve around a narrative of propriety.

NARRATIVES OF PROPRIETY: BELONGING IN THE SUDANESE DIASPORA

The tendency of some refugees and migrants to focus on allegedly superior moral

behaviour of their own group vis-à-vis that of the receiving society has been well-documented (Cohen 1969, Golomb 1978, Jochelson 1995, Reese 2001, Smith-Hefner 1999), and researchers have noted a strand of Muslim Arab Sudanese discourse that suggests that something similar may be happening in the Sudanese diaspora. According to my research in Egypt, Sudanese in Cairo described themselves as having superior moral conduct compared to Egyptians based on recognized Muslim and Arab cultural values. The propriety narrative that I noted in my research on the Cairo node of the Sudanese diaspora offered an ethnic identity that fit in with local conceptions of morality and was thus unthreatening to the receiving society. New research being carried out in Western contexts, however, suggests the rise of a more rigid boundary marking the difference between Sudanese propriety and the morals of Western society, often couched in terms of Muslim gender values (Archer 2003, Naber 2005). Assal, for example, describes a Sudanese mother of two living in Norway who “will not rule out the possibility of leaving to the Sudan for good to spare herself the indignity of living here to see her daughter doing what a mother cannot tolerate religiously or culturally” (2004, 138). Similarly, some Sudanese participants in research carried out in Canada described the “conflict in the behaviour of the children because the culture clashes” (Simich et al 2006, 38) as a main source of concern in their overall well-being. However, a constant reference point for Sudanese both in Western countries and in Muslim countries is the role of authentic Islamic practice, and in this regard the Sudanese discourse of propriety extends beyond ethnic or even national cultural boundaries.

A CITIZENSHIP TRADE-OFF?

Muslim Arab Sudanese in the diaspora are regulated by the states in which they reside

according to a variety of models with differing approaches to immigration, citizenship, and integration. Opportunities to carve out spaces of belonging – both in terms of social, economic, and political rights, and, broadly speaking, with regard to cultural well-being are shaped by state discourses. For example, the official standpoint of the Egyptian state towards Sudanese is that they share cultural, religious, and linguistic identity with Egyptians. That Sudanese are not seen as foreigners by either the state nor society is complicated by their lack of genuine rights compared to Egyptians. However, Sudanese in the United Kingdom, despite their historical links to Britain, their British passports, and their economic and political integration into society, are nevertheless the object of a hostile debate – echoed in other European countries – as to whether immigrants, and Muslims in particular, can ever really become British. The parameters of this discourse are defined very much in terms of national borders and identities and thus firmly within a paradigm of migration flows between ‘container states’.

Yet it is widely recognised that other identities and modes of belonging transcend national borders, such as those presented by religious orders like Anglicanism or professions like academia. Islam is a particularly interesting phenomenon, encompassing both a localised social model and a mobile world view. Indeed, migration, travel, and a global perspective are built into the spiritual architecture of the religion (Eickelman & Piscatori 1990, Mandaville 2001). And, given the heightened awareness with which Muslims are now viewed by non-Muslims in the era of the ‘global war on terror’, and personal experiences of discrimination and intolerance, it is reasonable to expect that some members of the Muslim Arab Sudanese diaspora might find familiarity, comfort, and acceptance in being a member of the transcultural Muslim faith. Wrangles over the language of the

sermon in a multi-cultural mosque aside, the discourse of authenticity that emanates from the Islamic [world] offers a transnational way of being and mode of belonging to Muslims everywhere.

However, Muslim Arab Sudanese have drawn upon their identity as Muslims to assert belonging in a number of contexts. Propriety is an inclusive notion seen by Sudanese as common to Muslims wherever they may be. To behave in accordance with ‘Muslim values’ means to belong to a transnational community of believers. The growing importance of Islam as a global identity complicates policy initiatives and expectations around local place-making and state-based citizenship, and challenges assumptions of diasporic consciousness as stemming from ethnic or national identities. Transcending the ‘container model’ implied by migration across national borders, transnational Islam as a mode of belonging harks back to the Jewish diaspora. Transcultural by definition, religious diasporas offer an alternative citizenship in a global ecumene.

The transnational Islamic field incorporates not only Sudanese diasporic networks but also Islamic socio-cultural sites connected to one another across space and time. Sudanese Muslims in the diaspora, and the Muslim communities and societies of which they are part, share an awareness of an Islamic authenticity although the particulars of what constitutes ‘authentic Islam’ are discussed and debated. Authentic Islam, and the accompanying notion of propriety, thus extends beyond ethnic and national boundaries – it is a transnational ideal, and the global Islamic discourse of which Muslim Arab Sudanese are part, transcends national belonging. Superimposing the Sudanese diaspora onto the transnational landscape of Islam offers us an alternative map of belonging to bordered nation-states and their exclusive citizenship policies. Mobility and travel are built-in features of this landscape though

channeled by the contemporary immigration paradigm, and Muslim Arab Sudanese membership in the Islamic *umma* promotes and supports a flexible and supra-national identity.

Lest an analysis of transnational Islam as a powerful mechanism for creating conditions of belonging for Sudanese Muslims fall into the same celebratory trap as ethnic transnationalism, however, this article cites the worrying regulatory practices that undermine the unifying ideal of transnational Islamic belonging. While there is much evidence in Europe for the second-class status of Muslims even in states that promote multicultural social ideals, the position of Sudanese Muslims in Muslim countries is also heavily regulated by the state. The official religion of states of Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates is Islam, and full membership in the state “goes through membership in the supranational Muslim community, the *umma*, just as membership in the state of Israel goes through membership in the Jewish community” (Longva 2000, 196). The position of non-national Muslims, however, is particularly ambiguous. In Egypt, for example, Muslim non-citizens are regulated separately according to their status as foreigners – even when officiated by a local sheikh, for example, their marriages must be registered at the *Shahr al-‘iqaary*, where cars and other forms of property are registered. Muslim Sudanese, like other Muslim non-nationals in Egypt, are both part of the Islamic *umma* but separated from Egyptian nationals by citizenship law. This contradiction is what makes belonging for Sudanese in the diaspora such an ambiguous proposition.

Preliminary research into Arab- and Muslim-identified Sudanese networks within this larger Sudanese diaspora has identified a ‘citizenship tradeoff’ of sorts, whereby families make decisions to divide their members between countries which offer refugee status leading to citizenship (Eu-

rope, North America and Australia) and those whose social norms and policies support more familiar gender roles but which do not offer the possibility of naturalization, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Sudanese resistance to what they consider to be unacceptable gender patterns in asylum countries despite policies which promote multi-cultural integration and full citizenship – in contrast to Middle Eastern nations – raises critical questions about the nature of citizenship and belonging. Whereas other researchers have already identified the transnational strategies developed by refugee and migrant groups for economic benefit, I posit that the choices made by families such as those in the Sudanese diaspora to diversify their civil and cultural resources is one way to maintain a Muslim Arab Sudanese point of reference.

NOTES

1. This article was first presented as part of an international research seminar entitled, “Connecting Europe and the Middle East: On migrants and simultaneity”, co-organised by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen and the Department of Cultural Encounters at Roskilde University in Denmark in September 2006. I am grateful to seminar participants, especially Lene Kofoed Rasmussen, Connie Caroe Christiansen, Riina Isolato, Nadjie Al-Ali, and Ruba Salih, for their comments. I also thank Elizabeth Bishop, Amira Abderahman and two anonymous reviewers for helpful suggestions, although the final responsibility for any mistakes and omissions remains my own.
2. The Sudanese diaspora also includes transnational movement and networks of Sudanese nationals who would not consider themselves Muslim Arabs, including Dinka, Nuer, and other South Sudanese refugees from the decades-long civil war, and more recently, refugees from Darfur, where the Muslim Arab-identified government of Sudan is implicated in ethnic cleansing.
3. Anyanya, Anyanya II, the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement, the Beja Congress, the Sudan Liberation Army, and others.

4. Like most states of the Arab Middle East, Egypt grants citizenship by way of a patrilineal conceptualization of identity drawing upon Arab and Islamic cultural practices. Northern Sudanese, regarded as fellow Arab Muslims, have been included in Egyptian policies that transcend statecraft (such as preferential residential and educational policies based on the 'brotherhood' of the two peoples of the Nile Valley), yet they are excluded from citizenship except through the practice of Sudanese women marrying Egyptian men.

5. Another category in Kuwaiti law and bureaucratic exclusion is the *bidoon al-jinsiya*, or 'those without citizenship', which refers to nearly a third of those people, largely nomadic, who trace their legal identity to Kuwait but who did not register for citizenship at the time of independence Abu-Hamad, Aziz (1995): *The Bedoons of Kuwait: "citizens without citizenship"*. Human Rights Watch, New York ; London.

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