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**‘We the Sudanese refugees’: examining how tensions  
between identity and identification play out in protests**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the specific vulnerabilities of refugees and the ways in which these vulnerabilities intersect and are exacerbated along other lines of identity, in this case nationality. It considers the difference between *identity* and *identification* and how the power of the identifying body can alter the lived reality of those being identified. A protest of Sudanese refugees against the UNHCR in 2005 is used to demonstrate the real and devastating consequences of conflicts between identity and identification, refugee-ness and refugee status. It concludes there is a need to recognise the spectrum of refugee experiences, both on an individual level but also by those with legal power and that there is positive potential in ‘fractioning’ the refugee label.

**Keywords**

Refugees, Sudan, Egypt, identity, protests

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## **1. Introduction**

From September to December 2005 Sudanese refugees in Cairo protested the categories they had been assigned by the UNHCR, and the lack of care they were receiving as a result. Using Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991, 2015) I consider how issues of identity and identification, namely of nationality<sup>i</sup> and refugee status, played out prior to, and during the protest. Intersectionality can be understood as 'an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power' (Crenshaw 2015). The term was coined to express legal invisibility through discrimination based upon both gender and race in the United States (US). However, it can be applied more broadly to understand how combinations of particular facets of an identity intersect to create specific vulnerabilities. In the situation in Cairo, the intersection of these two categories of identification – refugee status and nationality – made the Sudanese refugees vulnerable, marginalized and excluded in specific ways, and eventually drove them to protest. This protest represented both the culmination of tensions over the ways in which people – collectively and individually – were understood and categorized – by both others and themselves – and the consequences of those categories.

When examining the processes of identification, and its potential for conflict with identity, it is fundamental to examine the context and power relations between those doing the identifying and those being identified. Language and labels are used not only to signify but also to construct categories; 'to name is to make a political statement over the right of defining one's own identity or community' (Moulin and Nyers 2007, 363). Equally, to name can be to make a political statement about another category of people and their position in the world. In terms of language within this paper I have use the term 'refugee' for all the demonstrating Sudanese who were at the protest having identified themselves as individuals who had left Sudan for reasons of safety and security (cf. Al-Sharmani 2004 on Somali refugees). Within this paper I refer to 'Sudan' as it was at the time of the protest, prior to South Sudan's independence in 2011.

## **2. The protest**

### ***'The Night the Screams Never Stopped'***

*At 4:45 am the troops were lining up properly and the first circle of formations moved closer to surround the refugees. Their warm up exercise echoed in the empty city as they said: "Ho-ho- ho- masr!" and singing "Ya ahla esm fel wegoud yaa masr" meaning "To Egypt, who has the most beautiful name ever, whose name was created to be eternal, for Egypt we live...and for Egypt we die."*

*Refugees lined up and started warming up too but saying “Allah Akbar”, “La ilaha ella Allah” and “Hasbona allah wa neama al wakil”, meaning “There is no god but Allah and only him we delegate to handle our injustice.” The Christians chanted Halleluiah. The few civilian audience started cheering for the Egyptian army.*

(Anon 2006)

This is an extract from an anonymous eyewitness report covering the final moments of what had been, up until that night, a peaceful protest. The demonstration was a sit-in staged by Sudanese refugees at Mostafa Mahmoud Park, near the UNHCR buildings in Cairo. The refugees, numbering 1,800 to 2,500 on average, were protesting due to the long-standing marginalization suffered in Cairo and the lack of care, support and recognition they felt they were being afforded by the UNHCR (Sigona 2014). This lack of recognition, and corresponding support, was heightened after the suspension of individual refugee status determination (RSD) interviews by the UNHCR following the ceasefire in Sudan and subsequent signing of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2004 (Signoa 2014, 373).

On the night of the 29th December 2005, after three months of protesting, the demonstration was concluded with a display of brutal violence by the Egyptian authorities. This resulted in the deaths of at least 28 refugees, twelve of whom were children; many more were injured and detained (Moulin and Nyers 2007, 357). As illustrated in the extract above, the protesters were diverse in terms of religion; they were also diverse in terms of region of origin and ethnicity coming from over 36 different tribes and from both North and South Sudan (Schafer 2006). The protesters were mostly young men but older men, women and children were also present. Significantly, the protesters also represented different levels of formal – UNHCR given – refugee status. Individuals with blue cards (full refugee status), yellow cards (in the process of seeking asylum), closed files (asylum has been denied) and those who were yet to apply (since the beginning of the protest the UNHCR closed their offices so new arrivals of all nationalities were unable to apply for asylum) were all present in the park. Indeed, ‘all dimensions of the Sudanese refugee community were found at the demonstration’ (Schafer 2006, 10).

However, these internal differences appeared to fade during the protest, eclipsed by solidarity based in the shared self-identifications as: ‘We, the Sudanese refugees’ (Moulin and

Nyers 2007, 365). The intersection of these categories of identification was both a fundamental motive of the protest and a source of unity and solidarity within the group.

### **3. Identity and identification**

The demonstration represented a clash between identity and identification. La Barbera states that, 'at the crossroad between self-representation [identity] and social categorization [identification] lies the core mechanism of individual and collective identities' (2015, 2). For the Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Mostafa Mahmoud Park became the physical crossroad, the location of a prolonged disagreement between refugees and the UNHCR, a conflict between identity and identification.

#### ***Identity***

Though identity is a highly conflated term, broad and all encompassing, it is nonetheless used when navigating intricate and nuanced issues. Within the social sciences, identity is often discussed as subjective, fluid and changing, elusive and mutable (cf. Bhabha 1994). These dimensions, with their emphasis on openness and dynamism, result in the concept itself being rendered almost meaningless. Indeed, Brubaker and Cooper suggest that 'the term [identity] is richly – indeed for an analytical concept, hopelessly – ambiguous' (2000, 6). This non-essentialist understanding of identity as something 'transient, a reflection on where you are now, a fleeting moment in the biography of the self or the group, only partially connected to where you might have come from and where you might be going' (Tilley 2006, 9) may be a tempting worldview. However, it is a notion born from privilege, idealistic in its disconnect from the reality of a world shaped by lines of division, a world much closer to the essentialist understanding of identity as formed of categorical groups, to which one either belongs or not.

When trying to define 'identity', it is useful to return to the Latin root of the word: *idem* meaning 'the same' (La Barbera 2015, 9). This grounds the concept as something intrinsically comparative, rooted in the construction of divisions between 'us and them'. Identity is recognizing sameness and identifying difference, creating categories and drawing lines around them. These lines may form a sense of belonging, but that which includes must also exclude. On the other hand, one may imagine that these lines may blur, be crossed and re-crossed; categories may come to the fore and fade, overlap and intersect; we may claim multiple, fluid identities; we even may claim to recognize these complex identities in others.

Identity is primarily about the individual, self-understanding and self-representation. Self-understanding is inevitably shaped by external influences; the categories with which

individuals identify will often be socially constructed, temporally and spatially relative. However, this does not negate their importance: 'to say that a category such as race and gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world' (Crenshaw 1991, 1296). Equally, to say that borders are socially constructed is not to say that they, and the states that they contain, do not have great significance in our world, especially for those who move across them. Borders meaningfully and irrevocably formed the identities of the Sudanese refugees: borders encircled the state that gave them nationality and then, fleeing across those borders, made them refugees.

Contrary to Tilley's comment above, for much of reality, one's identity – and the way in which one is identified by various governing powers – is often directly related to where you have come from, especially if you happen to be 'going' elsewhere.

### **Identification**

Torpey argues that 'too frequently in recent academic writing, identities have been discussed in purely subjective terms, without reference to the ways in which identities are anchored in law and policy' (1998, 246). However, identity is largely subjective, whereas *identification* is what 'must become codified and institutionalized in order to become socially significant' (Torpey 1998, 246). For migrants, such as the Sudanese refugees, 'legal registration, identification documents, and laws are what, in the final analysis, determine [the migrants'] 'identity' (Noiriel 1996, 45 cited in Torpey 1998, 246). Although again, it could be argued that identification is what is being determined, if identity, as discussed above, is more internal.

Identification, then, is identity from the outside; it is prescribed, categorized, marked. La Barbera suggests that identity is 'something that individuals "do" rather than something they "have" . . . a process rather than a property' (2015, 3). In some ways then, identification is the reverse. It is when identity is crystallized and materialized: when a box has to be ticked on a census, or on a birth certificate, when a passport is issued or when an asylum claim is refused. As opposed to the internal dimension to identity, identification 'invites us to consider the agents that do the identifying', those systems and people that decide that the passport can be issued, that refugee status is denied (Brubaker and Cooper 2006, 14).

The creation of categorical distinctions is often considered necessary for effective governance; those in power use discrete categories in order to ascertain who can be afforded what, who can stay and who must leave. Identification, through censuses, documentation and other material manifestations of the concept can be seen, especially to

Foucauldians, as ‘at the core of what defines “governmentality” in a modern state’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2006, 15). It is the materialization of identification that makes ‘relevant differences knowable and thus enforceable’ (Torpey 2000, 2). The powerful identifying agents, whether it is a state or an international organization with bureaucratic and administrative authority such as the UNHCR, have the mandate to assign and impose categories identification that may have profound affects on the lives of those subject to it. Such acts of identification are not intrinsically negative or positive, but through being both assigned and categorical they can become problematic, overlooking the nuances of lived experience.

#### **4. Refugee-ness and refugee status**

*4. We refuse distinguishing between Sudanese refugees according to their ethnic background and/or geographical zones.*

*6. We request the UNHCR to consider Sudanese refugees status determination as individuals not as a group.*

*9. We request the UNHCR to register Sudanese asylum seekers on arrival [sic]<sup>ii</sup>*

(Moulin and Nyers 2007, 365)

International laws and policy define who can claim the label of refugee and the privileges that (should) go with it. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who, ‘owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country’ (UNGA 1951). This definition was further expanded by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1969 to, a person who has crossed an international border ‘owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country or origin or nationality’ (OAU 1969). Egypt is a signatory to these conventions, both of which establish criteria defining who is a refugee and thus deserves the protection of host countries and international organizations. However, other than having to have crossed an international border, the stipulated criteria are subjective, disputable and at times arbitrary (Sigona 2014). As in the case of the individuals protesting in Mostafa Mahmoud Park, those who identify as

refugees may not be categorized as such by the organizations or governments to whom they are appealing for protection.

### ***Refugee-ness: Identity***

When identities are multiple, fluid, and changeable, when they are 'no longer ascribed but are instead achieved', questions of identity then become 'questions about states of mind and bodily enactment in the world' (Tilley 2006, 10). As such, being a refugee would be an identity felt and lived without requiring official verification. Liisa Malkki, writing on Hutu refugees in Tanzania, explores such an understanding of refugee identity. She speaks of the personal process of becoming a refugee, as achieving 'refugeeness': 'refugeeness entailed a process of *becoming*. It was a gradual transformation, not an automatic result of the crossing of a national border' (1995, 114). Grabska builds on this, suggesting that becoming a refugee is not achieved only 'by escaping violence and persecution and crossing an international border, but also by going through the refugee experience in the country of asylum, as part of evolving processes, relationships, networks and experiences' (Grabska 2006, 290).

This perspective of refugee-ness as a process of becoming highlights how the border, so fundamental to the official definition of a refugee, may hold less significance than other aspects of an individual's own experience and identity as a refugee. However, as recognized by the Sudanese refugees, self-identifying as a refugee may reflect personal experience of the dislocation from Sudan but it provided little in terms of security and protection in Cairo. This divergence between identity and identification, and the power dynamics at play, were felt acutely by those protesting and was at the core of the frustrations expressed through the demonstration.

### ***The Refugee Label: Identification***

In Egypt the UNHCR was in sole charge of determining the refugee status of asylum seekers. The UNHCR distinguishes categorically between migrants and refugees and suggests that 'conflating refugees and migrants can have serious consequences for the lives and security of refugees' (UNHCR 2016). They argue that blurring the terms could undermine public support for refugees and distract attention from their specific needs. The UNHCR acts upon the specific needs of refugees, and therefore requires a means of establishing who qualifies for this support. A means of establishing who is – and by extension who is not – a refugee is necessary in order to even attempt to distribute the (often limited) resources accordingly (Al-Sharmani 2004). Categorizing people enables them to be governed, for resources to be allocated, for policies to be made and implemented. However, as with any discrete category of identification, the distinction between 'refugee' and 'not refugee' has the potential to be



problematic as it condenses a spectrum of individuals' experiences and needs into binary categories.

The UNHCR is not the only institution that categorizes refugees. Different strands of the media, governments, academics, NGOs, civil society as well as individuals assess and label refugees differently. Sympathetic bodies often represent refugees one-dimensionally, identifying them as 'feminized and infantilized images of "pure" victimhood and vulnerability' (Sigona 2014, 370). This 'convenient image' of refugees as helpless and in need of aid may stem from good intentions in the media, humanitarian and academic sectors, but contributes to the silencing of refugees through the construction of an image of people without agency and voices of their own (Zetter 1991). Referring to refugees in this way creates the illusion of a homogenous category and thereby represses the plurality of refugee experience, as well as negating individual agency (Sigona 2014, 374).

Moreover, whilst this image still persists, the label of 'refugee' itself is also being 'fractioned' (Zetter 2007, 189). Terms such as 'genuine refugee', 'asylum seeker' and 'internally displaced person' have emerged in both official and popular contexts. Although this may appear to be a reaction to a greater awareness of the complexities of what constitutes 'being a refugee', Zetter suggests in reality fractioning the label refugee is a result of the difficulty, but also reluctance, to distinguish 'fairly' between 'economic migrants' and 'refugees'. He argues that increasing the number of terms results in fewer people actually achieving the label 'refugee' – both legally and in the public's gaze(s). Contrary to constructively reflecting different refugee experiences, fractioning the label of 'refugee' creates a scale of 'refugeeness' with 'refugee' the most privileged amongst many inferior statuses' (Zetter 2007, 189). Zetter takes this further, suggesting that the creation of new categories are 'deterrent measures [that] seek to prevent access to the label "refugee" and thus the protection and support it warrants' (Zetter 2007, 181).

Labelling refugees is difficult due to the implications of the label for both those who achieve it (or not) and those who are responsible for attributing the label; for support to be given at all someone has to decide who is in need, and who isn't. Not everyone who crosses a border fearing persecution is automatically a recognized refugee; and not all those denied refugee status are necessarily 'economic' or 'illegal' migrants - 'they may be refugees who simply do not fit the criteria at a particular time or for a particular reason' (FMRS 2006, 7). This comment from the American University in Cairo's *Forced Migration and Refugee Studies* report, although valid, sidesteps the issues that the UNHCR and the refugees have to face head on. Identification as a process is not inherently wrong and UNHCR funds are not

unlimited. As such, categories of identification are necessary in order to ensure that the (finite) resources are going to those who need them. Identity and identification coexist, influencing and shaping each other, and when they do not align, as during the protest, the repercussions for those involved can be severe.

## **5. Sudanese in Cairo**

Both identity and identification structure the concept of nationality. National identity relates to the emotive ideas of shared experiences, culture and history rooted in the notion of a geographically bounded nation (Anderson 1983). Identification, following Torpey, is the way in which nations govern, assigning people identity via identity documents. Identification also has a less official dimension, whereby nationality is assumed to be connected to particular racial and social traits, such as skin colour and language. Both formal and informal identification had significant affects on the Sudanese refugees living in Cairo.

Sudan is a country with a socially, ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse population; this diversity was one of the causes of the on-going civil war and eventual independence of South Sudan. The displaced Sudanese in Cairo were equally heterogeneous; moreover, within these categories there will have been individuals who were relatively more privileged or vulnerable depending on other facets of their identity, such as age or gender.

Sudanese refugees in Cairo often experienced social marginalization; individuals were categorized not only by card colour but also by skin colour, language and religion. Accounts of xenophobia and cultural clashes with Egyptians were not uncommon, especially with those from South Sudan who were more likely to be 'black of skin, Christian and culturally African as opposed to Arab' (Coker 2004, 402). Moreover, Grabska suggests that there existed internal, mutual mistrust between the 'well established Northern Sudanese community in Egypt' and those coming from South Sudan from the mid-1990s (2006, 294). However, the xenophobia present in Egyptian society, combined with the reluctance of many Sudanese to participate in Egyptian public life, meant that refugees from both North and South Sudan with Christian and Muslim affiliation experienced racism and social exclusion (Grabska 2006, 297). Consequently, the protest reflected this diversity whilst remaining united through aspects of their identities that were shared – Sudanese and refugee – and the common experience of oppression these identities caused.

Due to the political, social and historical context of the relationship between Egypt and Sudan, the intersection of these two categories of identity – being both Sudanese and refugees – resulted in their lives being precarious and vulnerable in specific ways. In 2004,

73% of people seeking asylum in Egypt were Sudanese (Grabska 2006, 288). The historic flow of people between the two countries, and long-term political unrest in Sudan, has led to the presence of an established population of Sudanese, particularly from Northern Sudan, in Cairo. Various treaties have changed over the course of the last 50 years with degrees of leniency and privilege given to the Sudanese who were historically regarded as 'brothers' by the Egyptians (Coker 2006, 297). However, following an attempted assassination of the Egyptian President in 1995 blamed on Sudanese extremists, the Wadi El-Nil Treaty of 1976, stipulating the special treatment of Sudanese in Egypt, was revoked (Moulin and Nyers 2007). The situation for Sudanese refugees in Egypt deteriorated further following the 2004 ceasefire in Sudan and the UNHCR's subsequent suspension of individual refugee status determination interviews. From September 2004, whilst the UNHCR reviewed the situation in Sudan, Sudanese asylum seekers were only able to obtain a yellow card, which gave protection from *refoulement* but was not recognition of refugee status. The resumption of individual RSD interviews was a key demand and a catalyst behind the 2005 protest (FMRS 2006, 10).

Those who were not recognized refugees were extremely vulnerable, with no avenue for support or means of ensuring their human rights were respected. This category included those in legal limbo, waiting for their claims to be processed, those who had their file closed and those who arrived during the protest and so were unable to apply for asylum. These individuals experienced 'a higher degree of exclusion than those with refugee status and limited rights' (Grabska 2006, 296). Even those recognized as refugees had a limited ability to claim their rights: for instance, obtaining a work permit was made so difficult that many people were forced to work illegally, subjugating themselves to exploitative employers and poor conditions. In addition to employment, many individuals experienced difficulties accessing education, healthcare and housing, which they attributed to racial and social discrimination (FMRS 2006).

Those who could be identified and categorized by their physical appearance, language and culture and did not have recognized refugee status were the most structurally and socially vulnerable. However, all of the Sudanese refugees suffered; the intersection of social marginalization with the structural vulnerabilities of being a (Sudanese) refugee resulted in 'extreme frustration, marginalization and loss of dignity' (FMRS 2006, 16). Using Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, one can understand how those individuals became subject to specific discrimination, marginalization and the most 'profound invisibility' (Crenshaw 2015).

## 6. The protest

### **‘We, the Sudanese refugees’**

*1. We, the Sudanese refugees in Cairo, fear that UNHCR or the Egyptian government will impose compulsory involuntary repatriation to the South . . .*

*2. Because of racial discrimination and no protection from it, and lack of the right to work, health, and education, we can see no possibilities of our integrating into Egyptian society, even temporarily.*

*3. We believe that UNHCR is making unfair distinctions between Sudanese refugees according to their ethnic/geographical origins in Sudan.*

*5. We believe that UNHCR is obliged to consider each refugee’s prospects for the future on an individual basis.*

*12. Realizing that Sudanese refugees are faced daily with discrimination and violence and a denial of their human rights, we urge UNHCR to pursue resettlement for as many of the most vulnerable cases as possible.<sup>iii</sup>*

(FMRS 2006, 62-65)

The Sudanese refugees were protesting the way they, as individuals and as a collective, were socially and structurally marginalized through the intersection of abstract categories of identification made tangible through documents, skin colour and cultural behaviour. Through protest, the marginalization experienced as a result of these categories and the extreme frustration it caused was transformed into a socially uniting source of empowerment. During the protest the categories of identification played out through both material reality and conceptual conflict, within the wider context of the unequal power dynamics.

Protest, especially through bodily action, can be ‘a means of renegotiating unbalanced power relations between protesters and what is being protested against’ which, as with the protest in Mostafa Mahmoud Park, are often between vulnerable peoples and institutions of authority (Badcock and Johnson 2013, 322). The protest in the park was not violent, and unlike many refugee protests did not involve self-mutilation, hunger strikes or suicides (cf. Harrell-Bond 2008 and Lewis 2006); its bodily action was the appropriation and occupation of a space on a busy intersection in close proximity to the UNHCR buildings. Doing this, the

refugees made themselves and their grievances physical and visible. They harnessed the power of the categories of identification against which they were protesting and used them as a source of solidarity and collective action. The park became a bounded space, inclusive of all those who self-identified as Sudanese refugees. Access to the park was controlled by elected internal security that regulated who was allowed to enter (FMRS 2006, 19). Thus the occupation and control of a space materialized and asserted the refugees' own boundaries to the conceptual categories being contested.

As well as making themselves visible, the Sudanese also made themselves heard; they claimed the right of self-definition as 'we, the Sudanese refugees', they elected a committee, leaders who negotiated with the UNHCR, and they created pamphlets, posters and written declarations articulating their demands in the language of the 'humanitarian regime' (Harrell-Bond 2002, 78). Through these acts they 'sought to regain control over their own identities, not as migrants, not as illegal demonstrators, not as protesters, but as *Sudanese refugees*' (Moulin and Nyers 2007, 364). In doing so the Sudanese refugees defied the UNHCR's (initial) insistence that they were 'Sudanese demonstrators', unsuccessful asylum seekers, not refugees and therefore of no concern to the UNHCR (UNHCR 2005 cited in FMRS 2006, 22). The language used in articulating their requests asserted legitimacy and mimicked that used by international organizations; it represented an 'interruption of the UNHCR's monopoly over the language of protection, care and resettlement' (Moulin and Nyers 2007, 363). The refugees claimed the right to define their own community and by appropriating language as well as space, they asserted their identity as political beings. The act of protest, and the very words the Sudanese refugees used, undermined the convenient image of the refugee; no longer were they helpless supplicants but political agents demanding their rights and asserting their own forms of identity.

Moreover, the act of protest not only disrupted the existing process of identification, articulating the refugees' understanding of their identity, but it also actively created that identity. Marginalization can be understood as being characterized by 'feelings of alienation, loss of identity, and what has been termed as acculturative stress'; for many, the protest subverted these feelings (Berry *et al.* 1989, 188). As a bounded space for those who identified as Sudanese refugees, the park became the location of a 'community of care' (Moulin and Nyers 2007, 367). The performative acts of choosing to occupy a space, set up tents and a community, organize committees and kitchens created a sense of internal boundedness, a 'mutual belonging' that overrode the internal diversity (Moulin and Nyers 2007, 367). This is not to say that there was no internal diversity – and internal marginalization or discrimination (Harroll-Bond 2008) – but that at this moment the unifying

identity of being a Sudanese refugee was the most salient aspect of the protesting individuals' identities. The demonstration created both an opportunity and a physical location 'for these refugees to come together and express their group identity and shared hardships' (Schafer 2006, 4). The very existence of a community space and the feelings of solidarity and protection that came with it satisfied the isolation many refugees had experienced as a result of being dispersed through Cairo's urban neighbourhoods. To live in the makeshift camp was empowering, and even 'felt safer' (Schafer 2006, 10). The fact of its existence became a reason for individuals and families to join and to stay; 'their protest, for many, became their solution' (Schafer, 2006, 8).

The protest was motivated by a conflict between identity and identification. Over the three months of demonstration that identity was physically asserted, powerfully articulated and continually constructed through the protest's very existence. The intersection of being a Sudanese refugee and the shared experiences of alienation, discrimination and marginalization resulting from being identified as such, uniting individuals from across Sudan (Schafer 2006, 7). As one of the protest leaders said, they became a 'miniature Sudan without the war' (Schafer 2006, 7).

The end of the demonstration cannot be described in such utopian language; the refugees' vulnerability became shockingly clear. Their powerlessness in the face of the structures which they were resisting ultimately led to 'bloodshed and . . . the utter despair and hopelessness of the surviving refugees' (Harroll-Bond 2008, 234).

## **7. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the intersection of the categories of identification of being refugees from Sudan (whether officially recognized or not) created the specific, shared experience of social and structural vulnerability. The diverse group of individuals protesting were united to powerfully and collectively protest by both their intersecting identity and the shared marginalization experienced as a result of these two categories of identification.

Categories of identification are not abstract; words, labels, names and the act of attributing them can have profound effects. The process of naming does not just signify but creates; 'we deploy labels not only to describe the world but also construct it' (Zetter 2007, 173). However, the context of the people, agents, and organizations doing the identifying matters as 'a term can do no more than those who use it have the power to demand' (Crenshaw 2015). If powerful organizations – such as the UNHCR – are performing the act of identifying then the consequences can indeed be significant. However, if people with limited

power – such as Sudanese refugees – are doing the naming, then the act of identifying has equally limited effect.

As such, acts of identifying operate in the constraints of a highly hierarchical world. A world where who you are, where you are going and why can determine not only your quality of life but also your very ability to self-identify. Through resisting, the refugees unsettled the moral order, questioned the categories they were being assigned, and vocally and visibly disrupted the processes of identification. However, in the end, the power dynamics within which they were operating overrode their ability to instigate change through protest.

Ultimately, the implications of identification depend on the bodies doing the identifying. The difficulties for those bodies is to try and reconcile the complexities of lived reality, where identity is experienced as a position - fluid, changing, mutable - on a spectrum rather than a series of discrete categories which enable them to effectively govern. Perhaps, in this case, 'fractioning' the label could be turned into something positive, reflective of differing refugee experiences, rather than labels which narrow the definition and ultimately prevent access to the category 'refugee'.

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<sup>ii</sup> Three of the 13 requests taken from a pamphlet handed out during the first few weeks of the protest, see Moulin and Nyers for full list.

<sup>iii</sup> Five requests from a list of 14 submitted to the UNHCR during negotiations in December 2005 (for full list see FMRS 2006 Appendix A)

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