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CONTENTS

BOOK REVIEWS

Working it Both Ways: Intercultural Collaboration and the Performativity of Identity.

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Abstract

This article is a dialogue between Nyadol Nyuon, a research co-participant and activist in Melbourne's Sudanese-Australian community, and Anne Harris, a lecturer in Creativity and the Arts in Victoria University's School of Education. The dialogue and commentary explores some aspects of conducting intercultural research within the education system on issues affecting African-Australian young women in Australian schools. Using an ethnocinematic research framework, and drawing on the principles of bricolage research and the radical critical pedagogy of McLaren and Giroux, this paper offers an example of arts-based methodologies that can work from within the community, sharing two sides of the same coin in a work which addresses racism in schools.

Introduction

On a wintry evening in mid-2009, Anne Harris visited Nyadol Nyuon at the Department of Justice offices in Melbourne's CBD to continue their ongoing debate about the value of intercultural collaborations. Nyadol was then working for the Department of Justice on a project investigating issues affecting the settlement of African-Australian young women. Anne and Nyadol formed a friendship through their co-creation in 2008 of *Still Waiting*, a short documentary film exploring Nyadol's experiences of the education system in Australia.[1] That film was one of six such films which comprised *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education*,[2] a creative doctoral research project which Anne Harris completed at Victoria University in 2009, and which grew out of her experiences as a secondary school teacher in Melbourne's multicultural western suburbs. This article is an edited excerpt of the direct transcript of a dialogue which began in ethnographic research but is ongoing, and

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[1] Nyadol Nyuon and Anne Harris, Co-creators of *Still Waiting,* a short film (2008. 10:14mins), in Anne Harris, *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education – website*, 2009a http://web.mac.com/amharris/ (accessed 10 March 2010).
[2] Anne Harris, *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education*, Unpublished Phd Thesis, Victoria University, 2009; Anne Harris, *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education – website,* includes the six short films made collaboratively with Sudanese-Australian young women from the Melbourne area, 2009a http://web.mac.com/amharris/ (accessed 10 March 2010).

which the co-authors believe is the strength of African-Australian research today: direct dialogue as a beginning and continuation of intercultural collaboration that is mutual, co-constructed and emergent. This is not, however, a 'getting to know you' dialogue: we attempt to identify and address some of the material conditions and methodological implications of intercultural work in our own shared community.

Throughout their filming together, Nyadol and Anne spoke of issues confronting the Sudanese Australian community in Australia, and of the complexities of the performance of identity, particularly for young women. Nyadol's understanding of these issues comes from her experience of secondary education in Australia and her advocacy work within the community. Anne's understanding of these issues comes from her experience as a teacher, her advocacy and community arts work in multiple and overlapping multicultural communities in Victoria and Central Australia, and as an immigrant from the USA. Nyadol was born and raised in refugee camps in both Ethiopia and Kenya. She arrived in Australia in 2005 and completed her Bachelor of Arts at Victoria University in 2009. She does not see herself as a victim of her refugee past; rather she believes these experiences have added value to her life.

While the six films of *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education*, focus on education, Nyadol repeatedly stressed the need for an integrated approach to the challenges being faced by the Sudanese Australian community today; that without long-term and evolving service delivery, without education which collaborates with students, parents and community leaders, without funding and support for the community to identify their own issues and the freedom to solve them independently, the Sudanese Australian community will continue to struggle with integration and remain tied unproductively to their refugee pasts. Of primary importance, in Nyadol and Anne's conversations, was the need to identify pervasive racism in Australia generally but particularly in schools, and the unique needs of African Australian young women as distinct from young men. Nyadol and Anne continue to work toward these shares goals, which embody the principles of critical pedagogy as articulated by McLaren[3], Kincheloe[4], and Giroux.[5] Collaboration,

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[3] Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, (Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD & Oxford, 2000).
[4] Joe Kincheloe, *Bricolage and the Quest for Multiple Perspectives: New Approaches to Research in Ethnic Studies,* (2009): http://freireproject.org/ articles/node%2065/Research/Bricolage.doc, (accessed 10 March 2010).

however, especially interculturally, can be challenging. This conversation explores some of these challenges and yet highlights the need to move forward together.

This dialogue introduces two terms which are extended in Harris' doctoral thesis:[6] *ethnocinema* and *refugeity*. The term ethnocinema refers to an emerging methodology within ethnographic research, which moves away from both its filmic and anthropological roots and toward a process that prioritises mutuality, relationship and radical social change. Grimshaw points out that the implications of learning to work in a fully collaborative manner go far beyond the films which result, in that "the negotiation of relationships within any particular film may be taken as symbolic of the dynamics at work in modern society as a whole".[7] Characteristic of ethnocinematic films is the need for negotiated terms of the project, mutual participation in the film's creation, and consideration of the audience for such films, which Harris and Nyuon discuss in this dialogue. St Denis encourages educators and researchers to "collaborate across a multitude of differences, both within and outside our own communities,"[8] and ethnocinema, the research project *Cross-Marked*, and therefore this conversation all aim to do these things. Its strategies include what Kincheloe,[9] and Denzin and Lincoln[10] have developed from Levi-Strauss[11] as research bricolage, a "methodological diaspora" or "two-way exodus" between disciplines"[12] which mirrors emergent theoretical and practice-led frameworks, including ethnocinema.

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[5] Henry Giroux, "Cultural Studies, public pedagogy, and the responsibility of intellectuals," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 1:1 (2004): 59-79; Henry Giroux, *Cultural Studies in Dark Times: Public Pedagogy and the Challenge of Neoliberalism,* 2005a, http://www.henryagiroux.com/online_articles/Dark Times.htm (accessed 3 April 2009); Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, (2nd edition, Routledge: New York, 2005b).
[6] Harris, 2009.
[7] Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge MA, 2001): 141.
[8] Verna St. Denis, "Aboriginal Education and Anti-racist Education: Building Alliances across Cultural and Racial Identity," *Canadian Journal of Education,* 30:4 (2007): 1087.
[9] Kichenloe, 2009.
[10] Norman Denzin and Lincoln Yvonna, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. N. K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, (eds.) (3rd edition, Sage Press: Thousand Oaks, 2005): 1-32.
[11] Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Translated by J. Weightman and D. Weightman. (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1966).
[12] Kincheloe, 2009: 10.

Refugeity is a part of this methodological diaspora, which Harris[13] uses to describe 'refugee' states or conditions which, she believes, are common to all people and distinct from the static and political connotations of the term 'refugee' which can be both performatively limiting and politically inaccurate for those engaged in resettlement work. By troubling the nature of the word refugee from a fixed noun, which objectifies those whom it describes, to an adjective which offers only one descriptor of evolving and multifaceted positionalities, refugeity seeks to refocus 'refugee characteristics' as mutable, temporary and fluid. This conversation explores some of the complex possibilities inherent in repositioning those who have experienced persecution or outsider status from the overpowering and stereotyping nature of such fixed discourses. The dangers of these monological discourses can be felt – perhaps most of all – in educational contexts. Kumashiro's notion of anti-oppressive education urges us to consider a new possibility: "What if, in other words, we acknowledge that the 'problem' is not a lack of diversity, but *a resistance to diversity* (and an insistence on maintaining certain categories of privilege)?"[14] He further reminds us that if contemporary education is to create better schools and better societies, we must first recognise the degree to which we are all 'outsiders,'[15] and re-commit to teaching for social justice, a practice which must include identifying our own states of refugeity.[16]

Nyadol and Anne share a frustration at the dearth of research into Sudanese women's experiences, both at home and in the diaspora, both academic and popular, by African- and non-African researchers/writers/artists. As noted by Marlowe, much research in the area of refugee resettlement remains quantitatively and medically-oriented, wherein effects of trauma are examined in ways that privilege "Western concepts of psychopathology… as another form of cultural

[13] Harris, 2009.
[14] Kevin Kumashiro, "Queer Students of Color and Antiracist, Antiheterosexist Education: Paradoxes of Identity and Activism," in Kevin Kumashiro, ed., *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education*, (Rowman & Littlefield: Oxford, 2001):11.
[15] Kevin Kumashiro, *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice,* (Routledge: New York, 2004).
[16] For more on refugeity, see Anne Harris, "Race and Refugeity: Ethnocinema as Radical Pedagogy," *International Review of Qualitative Research,* 2:5 (2010 forthcoming).
[18] Jay Marlowe, "Conceptualising Refugee Resettlement in Contested Landscapes," *Australasian Review of African Studies,* 30:2 (2009): 130.

imperialism and psychological colonisation."[18] African women are infrequently subjects of their own research, and more rarely still are they present in the discourse in positive, empowered, or self-represented ways. Arfish identifies her own female African diasporic positionality as present, future-focussed, and eager to "work with people who respect [you] for who [you] are and respect [your] culture… working together and sharing ideas."[19] Dhanji does offer crucial data specific to Sudanese diasporic women yet, as late as December 2009, reminds us that "the government lacks sufficient knowledge about the backgrounds of Horn of Africa and Sudanese refugees,"[20] citing the need for arts-based research including that of Cassity and Gow.[21] Dhanji explores the social integration of Sudanese-Australian women, using the integration indicators of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and cites several gender-specific hurdles for Sudanese women in resettlement: literacy levels amongst women are in general lower upon arrival than their male counterparts; women often have greater difficulties accessing language classes and resources than their male counterparts; many Sudanese Australian women report additional impediments to employment and government assistance due to childcare responsibilities, culturally-informed reticence and/or fear of government agencies/officials.[22]

While Dhanji's study was based on a small sample group, the gender-specific differences in the data are indicative of the need for further research. We suggest that gender-specific research is crucial but further enhanced by the type of intercultural collaborative research which is sampled in this article and further demonstrated through the research project *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education.*[23] Albert and Grace, as far back as 2003, "encourage the

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[19] Hala Musa Arfish and Louise Olliff, "It's Difficult to Stay, and it's Hard to Leave," *Australasian Review of African Studies,* 29:1&2 (2008): 105.

[20] Surjeet Dhanji, "Welcome or Unwelcome? Integration Issues and the Resettlement of Former Refugees from the Horn of Africa and Sudan in Metropolitan Melbourne," *Australasian Review of African Studies,* 30:2 (2009): 158.

[21] Elizabeth Cassity and Greg Gow, "Making up for lost time: the experiences of Southern Sudanese young refugees in high schools – Programs & Practice," *Youth Studies Australia,* 24:3 (2005): 51-55; and Elizabeth Cassity and Greg Gow, "Shifting Space and Cultural Place: The transition experiences of African young people in Western Sydney high schools," in P. Jeffrey, ed., *AARE 2005 International Education Research Conference. Creative Dissent: Constructive Solutions*, Volume 1: (AARE: Melbourne, 2006): 1-15.

[22] Dhanji, 2009: 165-168.

[23] Harris, 2009; and Harris 2009a

building of bridges"[25] between researchers and those within the Sudanese Australian communities for purposes of accuracy in research and intercultural understanding, rather than seeking 'data' from volunteers and peripheral others. We consider this article, and this research project, one such bridge.

A note about the structure of this dialogue-based article: our conscious decision to record and transcribe a conversation was primarily in order to preserve the interactive, spontaneous and improvisational dynamics of the conversational bounce and play of different knowledges. We note the exclusivity of some academic discourses and contexts, journals included, and we recognise the need of those in privileged (published) positions to extend academic discourses into popular formats which may included otherwise-excluded others. We value the structural equity of two women sitting in a room talking, the interplay of *working it both ways.* We embrace the ways in which we agree and don't agree. We believe that critically informed intercultural conversation is a generative, mutual place to start, and that within collaboration each contributor continues to need a place to reflect, comment, revise and commit.

'The Only Real Thing': *A Dialogue*

AH: You spoke in your film[26] about the need to address racism in schools. We know we have a long way to go in many areas to guaranteeing equity for all students, especially those from refugee backgrounds. Can you imagine one singular thing that students from refugee backgrounds bring from their experiences to Australian schools which might help schools on that road of making things better?

NN: Because of the nature of how culturally and socially our lives are constructed back in Africa - we're from an oral culture, we don't write things - it would be hard to have a direct thing that we can bring here to a system that is constructed by writing and recording history in that sense.

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[25] Albert Matthew and Anna Grace, "Building bridges between academics and service providers to Sudanese refugees in Australia," *Australasian Review of African Studies,* 25:2 (2003): 99.

[26] We refer at times to 'the film', which should be understood as Nyadol's film *Still Waiting.* See Nyadol Nyuon and Anne Harris, co-creators of *Still Waiting,* a short film (2008. 10:14mins), in Anne Harris, *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education – website*, 2009a http://web.mac.com/amharris/ (accessed 10 March 2010).

But I think they bring life experiences that are very different and that could educate the approach of teachers, not only to refugee students, but to all students. These are kids that have been born in war, have grown up in war, have experienced some of the most traumatic experiences any human being can go through, but they carry themselves with so much normalness you could say they're very determined. So as challenging as a task can be, and some teachers might say to them 'no you won't be able to do that,' if they give it a try most of these young people can really overachieve.

AH: And you think that teachers are underestimating these students?

NN: I think they're greatly underestimating refugee young people, and because of them the kids are beginning to underestimate themselves. I know from my experience, teachers play a great role in how I perceived myself in school, and even how high I aim to achieve in anything.

AH: Of course---

NN: My results were directly linked to the attitude of the teacher. Not the work he taught, just the attitude of the teacher. You know, is he fair? Is he respectful?

AH: We have to work toward changing policy that makes everyone change the way they're teaching, so that we can ensure that every student gets treated fairly. I find that the [African students] are quiet and they just try to get on with it, they just want to be treated like any other student, and yet they're struggling sometimes or they're bunched in and seen as refugees, and as you talked about in your film they're not seen as individuals. I keep saying to them 'go for student leadership positions' or 'come and do this or that' but they're just like 'no man, leave me alone'—

NN: I understand where they come from because for some, being different has been the cause of their suffering all their lives: being from a different religion, being from a different culture, from a different ethnic background has meant more pain for them. Being different in Kenya has meant being more discriminated against. So for them I think they just don't want to stand out, they just want to disappear into the crowd. Also they come from a culture where the sense of being an individual - of wanting to make yourself stand out - is not a very celebrated concept; you're actually encouraged not to have that. And it disadvantages them so much, because in Australia you need to work hard to stand out, otherwise you're seen somehow as an underachiever…it's not about speaking English, it's about *thinking* English. You know so many refugees have come here, they pick up the language, but they cannot still think in English, they cannot think within the cultural framework that exists here

in Australia. So yes you can speak the language but you think very much within your (Sudanese) culture parameter.

AH: But it's also about cultural capital isn't it? Because that collectivism is part of the strength of the Sudanese community. And to say 'just forget that' or that's not preferred now, or that's not important now, is a loss—

NN: It's a big loss. And it's interesting because it is both a strength and a weakness, just as much as individualism is also a very strong aspect of western culture but also a weakness.

AH: But it implies completely different behaviours.

NN: It does. And some would say that it means that when every individual in the community is happy, then *we* are happy. The fact that you have someone to support you when you give birth to your kid, it's not only good for your financial wellbeing because your family's there to assist you, but even for your psychological wellbeing. You've got people you can talk to about your stress and things like that. That family network falls apart when you come to Australia. Parents become too occupied just having to deal with settlement issues, and kids are stuck in this environment; they've got identity issues to deal with in adolescence, they've got Sudanese issues, Australian issues, it becomes really complex. Sometimes the better way to deal with it is just to lie low, which is not an answer.

AH: Is this a question about roots of identity? My story began with my birth in an orphanage where I lived until I was 6 months old. All my life roots, tribe, family has been important to me. Where do I come from? How much does that matter to who I am today? So this, for me, is a question about how much am I Australian, how much am I American? As a Sudanese woman living in the diaspora, how much does that matter to you? I love in your film how you talk about being 'too tall, too black, too something to be Australian', but when does that shift occur—

NN: -when you think you are now Australian, now Sudanese?[27]

AH: Yes and how much do they work together? I mean, for you it happens when you walk down the street and you're tall and you're dark and people see you and they ask questions or they stare. For me as soon as I open my mouth it's, 'oh, where are you from?' Interrupting me in the middle of a sentence.

NN: I've heard the question 'where are you from' so many times, I tend to confuse it. [When] I go to work meetings or consultations with other people, they ask 'where are you from?" and I think they are asking which

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[27] For a related discussion of the 'perpetual outsider' status of hybrid Australian identities and compound cultures, see Kirk Zwangobani, "From Diaspora to Multiculture: in Search of a Youthful Pan-African Identity," *Australasian Review of African Studies,* 29:1&2 (2008): 151-165.

unit I'm from in the Department of Justice, and I say, 'I'm from the Diversity Unit', and they're like, 'No, where are you *from*?'' And I have to say 'Oh, I am from Sudan.'

AH: But does that continually displace you?

NN: *It does*! It's like—you think you've got an identity -- an Australian identity -- since you now speak the language and also have the ability to negotiate your way with the different institutions, only to be displaced with a question. In some way it's almost like being a refugee again: just as you were displaced from your country by war, you now experience being displaced in a different form. You're constantly taken back and forth, you know? From that identity.

AH: Yeah, because you can forget. That you're different—

NN: Yes.

AH: And you can start to feel just Australian – well I do, after 12 years – and I sort of forget and then someone will say 'where are you from'?

NN: Yeah, and you're like—

AH: --and I'm like, oh yeah, okay. And then of course 'how long have you been here?' 'why did you come?' – and all these personal questions--

NN: Yes!

AH: And I sort of think 'well it's actually none of your business' but I can't say that—

NN: Yeah, well for me the immediate question is 'how come you can speak English?'

AH: Right!

NN: --and I think, 'there's nothing about being Sudanese that says I can't speak English!'

AH: Right.

NN: In one way are you being told somehow that you're not Australian, by actually possess and acting out the things that are deemed Australian, example speaking English.

AH: Exactly.

NN: And questions like that make me hold back from saying even that I am an Australian. I was asked why would you want to take Australian citizenship by one man and I couldn't answer that question. And I don't think it was because I didn't have a good reason, but it's because I didn't see where in being Australian I was going to be. Of the Australian-ness that exists, what Australian was I going to be?

AH: Are those role models there yet—?

NN: They're not. For sure I don't think an African Australian identity exists yet. We probably are in the transition of establishing an African Australian identity. But I don't think that African Australian category exists in a sense. I think we have come up with a term that we presume

caters for a group of people, but it cannot be exercised. I cannot be African Australian. I have to be an African and then leave being African and be an Australian, and then be an African again. But not an African Australian in a continuous motion. Because it doesn't work like that.

AH: That's interesting. It's not a simultaneous identity, it's a moving between—

NN: It's very much a negotiated identity, which you constantly have to compromise. I've got to decide which part of being Sudanese can I not exercise right now so I can be Australian? And which part of being Australian can I not even *try* and exercise so that I can remain Sudanese? Because, as you say, my roots are important to me, the fact that I'm Sudanese is very much important to me, just as the fact that I want to be Australian is important to me.

AH: Sometimes I think the changes in my head that came from moving away are about seeing that world I came from in a different way. Not so much about becoming Australian, it's about not being American anymore in the same way that my family and friends who are still there are 'American'. They're differently American than I am now.

NN: (laughs) that's interesting – differently American. Actually I think I'm differently Sudanese to be honest. Because when I went to Sudan for the first time in 2006[28] I just felt so out of place.

AH: I feel out of place in the States.

NN: It was so disappointing. Because I couldn't believe how much I was not Sudanese. People didn't like the way I talked, didn't like the way I dressed, it was very confronting. Almost as confronting as coming to Australia. Because the only thing that was Sudanese was that I fit in with my height and my skin.

AH: But not in your head?

NN: Besides that, I wasn't Sudanese. And I'm not Australian. So who am I?

AH: I had this dawning awareness as the years went by that 'Oh, I'm kind of neither one now'. I'm kind of somewhere in this liminal space between where I see that place differently and I see this place differently

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[28] Nyadol also speaks about a trip she made to Sudan which occurred in 2006 after completing high school, and her experiences of feeling out of place. This was the first time Nyadol had ever been to Sudan, being born in the Ethiopian refugee camp 'Etang' to Nuer Sudanese parents. Nyadol raises this point to explore issues of essentialism in intercultural identities, and feelings of liminality during the ongoing process of resettlement. In addition, Nyadol identifies 'a Constructivist approach,' a paradigm which she does not seek to define or explore in depth in this article, but which she identifies as having been meaningful in her work and thinking during her studies in the Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) degree.

than Australians, and I think differently than Americans but I definitely still think differently than Australians, and I'm like 'where am I?'

NN: I tend to think like that too. Which is more from a global perspective, as hard as it is. As a human being, the most important thing is that I don't make decisions based on the fact that I'm Sudanese or Australian, but I make decisions based on the fact that they are right or wrong. That's the bottom line.

AH: I consider it a huge advantage in the current culture. Because in an increasingly globalised world, for better and for worse, that perspective means you are able to move among those things and see those things differently than people who are too entrenched in their own local view.

NN: It's like having a fluid identity—

Sites of Construction: Ethnocinema

AH: Alright. With that fluidity in mind, how important is intercultural collaboration? We all have to make change in our own communities, but we need each other too. How do these two things work together to benefit everyone?

NN: My worries about cross-cultural and intercultural collaboration are in what context are we analysing the findings? Most of the time that cultural understanding tends to be from the west. It's really hard to escape that limitation, especially if you are an academic in the west. Because you've got to write within these guidelines to make your work to the academic standard in the west. I argue for the person in the minority, of their representation in academic and media contexts–

AH: Ethnocinema is about the relationship that is formed in the collaboration, and it's also about who it's made for. Is it really possible to go and study 'the Other' anymore, and is that desirable, for any of us? Aren't we all Other in some way or another?

NN: We can still have the same conversation. We can still argue the boundaries and perimeters of where it's disadvantaging to minority groups. It's still necessary to challenge the status quo.

AH: Which is what critical pedagogy does, asserting that capitalism by its nature is oppressive in education and likewise in other structures, on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, family structure, ethnic background. All of those things must at the same time be questioned.

NN: There's a value in mutual collaboration, which is respectful to the different experiences and cultures that each participant brings to the interaction. As long as one person is not dominated by another, and as long as that person's information is regarded with as much credit as the other participant is bringing in. It's important because we need to learn

from each other. Coming from an African background, I still value traditional knowledge. I criticise some of it, based on the information that I've gained from a new way of analysing life which is the western perspective and learning in schools, but it doesn't override that knowledge. To me, there is no knowledge that is superior to other knowledge.

AH: That's right—questioning the very nature of objective knowledge--

NN: That's the place I come from. I come more from a Constructivist approach…that might put us into a position where everything is relative, but at least we can acknowledge that all knowledge is knowledge. I look at the knowledge I gain from the west as useful, but it doesn't by any means make me look at the traditional understandings I have and say they're primitive or low-rated, even though that's what it is sometimes perceived to be in academic contexts.

AH: We share a community. Not just from living in Australia together, but sharing an education community, in which we both have investment. Now essentialists might say that Sudanese young women must make films about yourselves, publish your own articles about yourselves. And on one hand I believe that, and on another hand I don't. It's too essentialist to say that the 'good' film would be me doing my film about being an orphan, you doing your film about being a refugee—we're both more than that.

NN: I'm not against interaction. I'm more afraid that the approach has always been that 'we know who you are', because we have a PhD in it or I have studied this. And that approach ignores someone's ability to construct themselves and their own reality, and it's very disempowering. I think that's why a lot of services don't work. They have an approach that takes away people's responsibilities, knowledge and abilities to solve their own problems and generate their own solutions. If you take that away, what you give me just becomes aid. It doesn't really matter what kind of aid you give—

AH: But aren't there two different issues? One issue is certainly how to address the problems, concerns, celebrations within our own given communities, and then I think there's a separate issue which is about getting along, relating together, about how do we *be* together at school, or anywhere else, and that's a different thing.

NN: It's a difficult question to answer.

AH: I could say as a teacher (to my Sudanese students), 'You figure out what your own issues are and fix them yourself.' But their issues concern me because I am with them every day. My issues are their issues, their issues are my issues, because we share a place. And so on some level, I can't let go. How do I let go of them and just say, 'It's your problem'?

NN: I don't think it's a matter of letting go of them, just trying as hard as you can to maintain a mutually understanding, respectful relationship within the work that you're doing. As long as you're able as well as you can to represent their opinions as they want them to be. Yes of course the question is whether that's your own construction or their construction of themselves, the questions are always going to be there. But the interactions are needed to challenge such questions. I'm a true believer in everyone can tell their story better than anyone else can tell their stories. I can never assume that I know someone. I don't think there's a possibility that we can construct other people. There are so many variables that only they understand—and we are always observers.

AH: Yes but you also—I would challenge you on that. Because you also construct yourself—

NN: I construct myself. And when I'm called to speak for Sudanese women, I make it very clear that I'm not speaking for all Sudanese women. I'm actually speaking from my experiences. And if I can talk about Sudanese women I can only talk about what Sudanese women have told me. And sometimes that is even hard for me.

AH: Because some people might mistake that for all Sudanese.

NN: Exactly. So I'm very conscious even as a Sudanese woman, of what it is to me to be a Sudanese woman, or even *if* I am a Sudanese woman.

AH: Maybe you're not.

NN: Maybe I'm not. Exactly.

AH: Maybe you're something different, which is Sudanese Australian--

NN: Exactly. So these are questions that I challenge myself. And it becomes a really tough conversation to have, because then there are no solutions, because everything is relative.

AH: And in this vacuum of identity, of voice, it feels sometimes like our hands are tied.

NN: They are. But it doesn't mean that research doesn't need to be done. It just means we have to acknowledge that it's not only difficult but it's impossible to construct others.

AH: I understand Judith Butler's position to be that there's no constructing anyone. We are performing, and as I construct myself for you, it's completely different to how I construct myself for someone else. And it's not that I'm lying, or not being real with you. It's that there is no 'authentic' Anne, and that I change in every—

NN: In every interaction you have. To me too, I know that I change. I am indeed performing different versions of Nyadol every single time I'm with someone. And as you say that's not a lie – it's just—that actually might be the only real thing.

AH: So we can't even talk about ourselves at the end of the day!

NN: Right.

AH: Alright, there are two main ideas emerging here that I'm interested in: one is this ability or inability to interculturally collaborate, and this idea of ethnocinema being possibly a new way to do this. What does it have to be to be truly, mutually collaborative and ensure equity and social change?

NN: Maybe drawing up a framework with those with whom you work so before you set a project you draw your perimeters. What perspectives do you want included? What does your cultural background bring into this project, what does my educational background, my cultural background bring to this project? You are able together to construct a framework that you work with. Also, what path is it going to take, and why should it take that path? So work within a framework that you have constructed with the group, that fits this specific group, not the whole general Sudanese community—

AH: So it's not arbitrary.

NN: Yes. Collaborations are important, but more from how much you learn from each other in the interaction.

AH: Well that's the idea of ethnocinema. Because it's primarily a tool for establishing relationships; it's the relationships that will be transformative, not the project. Because, realistically, no project's going to change cultural relationships in this country, or equity issues in this country, but the relationships might.

NN: Exactly.

Working it Together: States of Refugeity

AH: Okay, so relating that to a shared sense of refugeity, my feeling is that in Australia, in the schools I'm familiar with, there's still the perception that a refugee, the noun, is a person, it's a type of person—

NN: (laughs)

AH: --it's an object. And I don't feel that this—

NN: This is what we were talking about—

AH: --is part of what—

NN: --reconstructs-

AH: Yes, reconstructs people in a static way. That the refugee experience has become the defining characteristic of a whole person, and your identity isn't allowed to move beyond this. So I've become interested in exploring notions of refugeity, which describes those moments when we all feel displaced, chased away, disenfranchised, and lost from our roots—I'm interested in thinking about refugee-ism, refugeity, as a state of being or a feeling rather than an identity.

NN: Yes--!

AH: Because I don't believe thinking about it as an identity continues to be useful.

NN: This is interesting. The thing about refugeity is that the way you're constructed mentally, the way you're constructed socially, the way you're constructed financially…depends *so much* on how you're perceived as a refugee. If you are a refugee, most likely you are low socio-economic status, most likely suffering from a traumatic event, you know, post-traumatic stress disorder, so your understanding of your psychological wellbeing has already been contextualised in a way. And socially you are expected not to interact as well with people, to be more disadvantaged in certain areas, so it is a very negative construction. And even though it is sometimes very well intended, so that we can be identified and assisted where it's needed, it means that the people who don't want to be in that category are forced to inherit that identity, even when they want to break away from it.

AH: And it also denies what you've talked about before: a survivor is seen with respect, a victim is seen with pity, and usually people are identifying refugees as victims.

NN: Victims, and that's why people constantly want to give us aid, you know! It's very disempowering if you cannot understand and incorporate someone's ability to be able to solve their own problems and manage their own issues. And just to be seen as a victim, or a refugee victim, that lack of responsibility and ability, denies you a lot. It's empowering to know that you can solve your own problems; it's empowering to know that you can deal with your own issues. Instead you're in a state where you're constantly depending.

AH: Okay, but I also want to acknowledge that this categorisation gave you something where there was genuine need. It was warranted at one time. But the problem as I see it is that it has followed you—

NN: Yes it has—

AH: --it doesn't allow you to move beyond that. So what I see, the girls that I work with, many of them are experiencing normal adolescent issues--

NN: And they always conceive of it as a refugee issue. People begin putting you into categories that don't even fit: mentally, socially, economically, and in a lot of other ways. There are people who came here as refugees and have good businesses and their kids are going to private schools. There are kids who are just going through normal adolescent issues, but because you are tied with this refugee [label], it means that you're dealt with differently. You're less likely to escape that definition.

AH: Exactly. And then it turns on you—

NN: It does.

AH: --and suddenly it's used against you. And so—my question is: if this notion of refugeity, if it becomes not a noun but an adjective, we all have had periods or moments of refugeity, or states of refugeity, to greater or lesser degrees, but still we can access those moments in ourselves, is that a useful construct, or is something that diminishes the experience of being – at one point in time – a refugee?

NN: Well what is the experience of being a refugee?

AH: I don't know.

NN: People interpret it differently. Some people think a refugee is holding onto the past and crying over the pain that has happened. Some people think being a refugee is how it has brought up their determination and their will to survive, having seen so much human suffering and yet being able to live within human society. It's different for each person. I construct my definition of being a refugee very differently from someone else who has been a refugee. I don't think of myself as disadvantaged, you know. People are shocked when I say that. I acknowledge what my refugee experience has done, and I have experienced very traumatic events that I would have liked not to have experienced. But sadly or positively, I have learned from those experiences. It might be in a painful way, but I have learned to appreciate life more, I have learned to respect life more, I have learned to appreciate people more, and I've even learned to love more. And it's something that you would completely not expect from a typical refugee experience.

AH: Why would you not expect that from a refugee experience? Because of constructs?

NN: Yeah, exactly. Because people would think a typical refugee experience is someone who is traumatised, who is sad and angry at life. I'm not angry at life. I'm not angry at my experiences, [but] I'm sad they happened.

AH: A lot of people I know from refugee backgrounds are also incredibly joyful, appreciative, see clearly and recognise things in life that many other people don't see.

NN: Yes.

AH: So can those things co-exist?

NN: Yes, I think they can.

AH: So why don't those things get talked about? Why don't those stories get told?

NN: Because we want to sell a certain image of refugee, and we want to maintain a certain image of refugee. Because it might maintain some class structures, it might maintain some social structures that exist.

AH: It's an easy category.

NN: It's a very easy category, you know, it's a snapshot. But just ask anyone, when they think of refugee what comes to their mind? Very rarely is it anything positive. And indeed there is very little that is positive about the refugee experience, especially when you're going through it. You know, I don't think anyone in Darfur right now would be celebrating that they are a refugee. It's not a celebrated experience, but it's not a life sentence either.

AH: We're talking about a time change, a change in time and place.

NN: I think that's another reason why services [and schools] so often fail to cater for the needs of migrants or former refugees, because they are stuck with one category of working with people, so all their energy and focus comes from that framework: a refugee person, traumatised, displaced, lack of identity, stateless, and I think there needs to be recognition that people change and times change. So the programs need to evolve with the society they're trying to serve, as much as the concepts do. I don't think you can still try and define someone who has come to Australia, has gone to school, has got an education, has moved on and has got kids, still define them as a refugee.

AH: Five or ten years later.

NN: It's a bit unfair.

AH: It seems to me what we're saying here is that these definitions, these identities and relationships need to be able to work both ways? To be able to evolve.

NN: Yes, exactly.

Final thoughts

Our friendship and research relationship with one another and others outside our own communities has enriched our thinking, our ways of being, and our mutual understandings of interculturality – not just for African-Australians, but for all who are migrating and working between cultures both willingly and unwillingly. While Anne's doctoral research project *Cross-Marked* emerged out of her work with Sudanese-Australian young women in secondary schools, and Nyadol's initial participation was based in a desire to assist the Sudanese-Australian communities in resettlement, we have come to see that productive qualitative (and specifically arts-based) research (and community work in general) must benefit and interrogate both parties in the research process. Ethnocinematic research projects such as *Cross-Marked* continue to push the boundaries of methodology, discourse, and ethnographic understandings of self, other and community. We are grateful to each other, and to the other co-participants in this project for their willingness

to explore these sometimes-uncomfortable and ever-changing states of refugeity, and their interrogation of their own and their collaborators' cultural understandings as we proceed together in this important work. Understanding identity as a performative positionality is not new, but intercultural dialogue and collaboration highlight the dynamic possibilities of our emergent and interconnected identities-in-construction. We encourage intercultural collaborations and suggest a model here for such work based on mutual respect for different ways of being, seeing and sharing knowledge; importantly, though, we caution 'dominant collaborators' to continue to investigate their own motivations and methodologies for analysing and working with minority group members. We urge rigorous re-evaluation of assumptions, even (especially) those that are generally accepted, those seen as catering for the needs of minorities but often only serving to reaffirm difference and disadvantage. True collaboration is necessary to reveal those places where dominance occurs, even unwittingly, so that it can challenge (and be challenged by) both dominant- and non-dominant cultural 'actors'; with collaboration, the act itself – if practiced well – will transform both collaborator-participants. In emergent intercultural collaborative methodologies – like ethnocinema - different cultural perspectives (brought together by the mutually generative work) allow collaborators to see the same things differently. Therefore, we offer this work as an invitation and a challenge to readers to engage in intercultural work because such collaborative endeavour raises questions that can only be answered by the act of participating together.

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