Why are migrant campaigns different from homeland campaigns? Understanding belonging in context among UK-Sudanese activists

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Abstract   *Migrant communities' homeland-oriented political campaigns are always related to, but often different from, the activism in which local people engage in their homeland setting. In seeking to understand the observed disparities between migrant campaigns and homeland activism, several studies have demonstrated the influence of contextual factors like political opportunity structures on homeland-oriented migrant politics. Complementing these studies are works that focus on changes to identity and belonging associated with migration and resettlement. In this article, I build on these debates by offering a combined analysis of the intersections between, and interplay of, contextual and identity-based factors. I use this analytical approach to examine the case of Sudanese political activists resident in the UK. I demonstrate how forms of belonging emerge here as part of – and not in isolation from – the strategic navigations of multiple political contexts and opportunities. In doing so, I contribute to our understanding of how belonging can be contextualized to serve as an analytical lens for understanding homeland-oriented migrant activism.*

Keywords   ACTIVISM, CONTEXTUAL FACTORS, FORMS OF BELONGING, HOMELAND ACTIVISM, IDENTITY, MIGRANT CAMPAIGNS, MIGRATION, POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES, RESETTLEMENT

When people move away from their homelands and settle elsewhere, they often engage in activism directed towards the politics of their homeland.[1] Homeland-oriented migrant[2] campaigns have, in some cases, been analysed as the transnational 'mouth-piece' of homeland campaigns (Georgiou 2003: 62; see also Adi and Lilaker 2017; Nesbitt 2004). By contrast, and what is of concern in this article, are cases where homeland-oriented migrant campaigns deliver different messages to those being delivered in homeland activism (Baser and Swain 2009; Conversi 2012; Koinova 2014). The central question in this article is how can one explain the incongruities

between migrant activism and homeland activism? In the literature, these inconsistencies are attributed to changes in both contexts and identities. In this article, I contribute to these debates by examining where and how contextual and identity-based factors intersect. This conceptual framework is brought to an analysis of the case of UK-Sudanese activism. The article asks how are the political campaigns of UK-Sudanese different to homeland campaigns in Sudan and how can those differences be explained? The findings point towards the utility of a conceptualization of belonging, which accounts for strategic negotiations of context as part of, and not separate from, processes of identity formation.

Methods

This investigation takes UK-Sudanese activism as a case study. The UK-Sudanese have formed several publicly active groups renowned for running campaigns that are incongruous with homeland activism (Abusharaf 2010; Lanz 2009). The findings of this article are based on 41 semi-structured interviews with 27 Sudan-born residents of the UK, and 70 informal interviews undertaken during 15 participant observations at public demonstration or advocacy events. All data were collected between January 2014 and October 2014. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, bar one for which I employed an Arabic translator. The participants were selected because of their prior involvement in what Laguerre (2006: 99) called 'hot and cold' homeland-oriented activism. Cold lobbying involves contacting elected officials with a view to influencing policy making, whereas hot lobbying is 'done for immediate results' and may be accompanied by mass demonstrations geared towards shaping not only policy-making but also public opinion (Laguerre 2006: 99). Initially, participants were recruited at demonstrations (hot lobbying) and advocacy events (cold lobbying). Once the initial participants were recruited, I used a snowball sampling technique in line with Redclift's (2017: 504) argument that such sampling is necessary 'in a context in which it is impossible to "map" the population from which a random sample might be taken'.

The participants were drawn from a small, politically active group within the broader Sudanese population of the UK, estimated at around 22,000 (IOM 2011: 17). The nature of migration from Sudan to the UK over the last half century has been such that the broader Sudanese population contains a higher than average proportion of refugees and exiles than other migrant groups. Approximately 3000 Sudanese people in the UK have refugee status (CARIM 2015) and most of these arrived in the late 1990s and early 2000s when the Darfur region was particularly unstable. In addition, the distribution of political power in Sudan over the last 50 years has meant that many of the earlier migrants from Sudan to the UK adopt anti-government, oppositional and/or marginalized positions (Abusharaf 1997; Ashu 2012; Di Bartolomeo et al. 2012; Fábos 2007; Wilcock 2017). During the fieldwork for this research, it became apparent that the Sudanese people living in the UK who engage in both hot and cold lobbying are almost exclusively from anti-government organizations, or at least they hold anti-government views. This campaigning population within the 22,000 Sudan-born UK population has not been numericized here. To do so would have required a

new large-N study and this was beyond the scope of this research. Anecdotally, however, several hundred of this population are members of UK-based Sudanese campaigning organizations on social media. The cold lobbying events observed during this fieldwork in Manchester, London and Birmingham tended to attract between 20 and 100 people and hot lobbying events attracted between 150 and 200. It is from this subset of UK-based Sudanese campaigners that the participants in this research were drawn.

All semi-structured interviews and field notes were recorded, transcribed and entered into qualitative data analysis software. The participants' responses were coded into contextual and identity factors – the conceptualizations of these categories and their justifications are presented below. The data presented here are extracts from semi-structured interviews and are representative of significant coded patterns found in the semi-structured, informal interviews and observations. Written consent was received from semi-structured interview participants, and those interviewed informally gave verbal consent. As such, no data from informal interviews are quoted directly, but are rather used to establish background patterns in the data. Informal interviews and participant observations therefore serve to 'interrogate' and 'contextualize' (Sánchez-Ayala 2012: 125) the in-depth interviews conducted in this study.

Migrant activism

There are two key trends in which migrant campaigns are incongruous with homeland campaigns. First, migrants are often uncompromising in their campaigning goals compared with locals (Conversi 2012; Lyons 2007; Sheffer 2013). Evidence from activist factions among Sikhs in the USA (Tatla 2012), American Basques (Sheffer 2013) and Tamils abroad (Fair 2005) demonstrates how migrants often take 'hardline' stances compared with locals (Conversi 2012). In some cases, factions within migrant communities have deployed extremist or violent politics. Adamson (2005: 32) described sections of the Kurdish, Kosovan and Tamil migrant communities as 'transnational networks of political violence'. However, the term 'uncompromising' here refers to the promulgation of more dramatic campaign goals than those being pursued in the homeland and does not necessarily denote extremism or violence. This reflects the empirical trend that most homeland-oriented migrant campaigning is neither violent nor directly violence-promoting.

Second, migrant campaigns promote the 'democratization' of homeland politics even when campaigning homelanders are not promoting it (Careja and Emmenegger 2012; Kapur 2010; Koinova 2009b; Underhill 2016). It has been argued that migrants are 'more democratic than those of their co-nationals without any type of migration experience' (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010: 123). This finding has encouraged scholars to analyse migrant activists as 'vectors of … [a] mass-level type of democratic diffusion' (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010: 122; see also Guarnizo et al. 2003).

Uncompromising and democratizing stances are common incongruences between migrant and homeland activism, but they are neither essential nor exhaustive. See, for example, Hall and Kostić (2009) for a discussion of reconciliatory attitudes among migrant and homeland communities, or Brinkerhoff (2008) on *constructive* versus

destructive engagements in homeland politics. Furthermore, the above identified incongruences do not apply to all members of the same migrant communities. Orjuela (2008) has shown how Tamils abroad reacted differently, not only to homeland actors, but to each other. In addition, as Baser (2013) argued, it is often community leaders who head migrant mobilizations and, while they may make claims to represent a broader population, they often do not. Many have asked *why* some members of the same migrant community are constructive and others destructive, or *when* do migrant activists pursue, for example, radical or moderate claims (Koinova 2009a). I focus on uncompromising and democratizing stances as incongruences often, but not always, observed between migrant and homeland campaigners. Given that the axis of difference I explore here is between migrants and homelanders, this will be the key focus area. However, as my analysis will show, this need not preclude recognizing differences within and among migrant campaigners.

Context and migrant campaigns

The key contextual explanation refers to the different political opportunity structures migrants experience compared with homelanders (Chaudhary 2016; Koopmans 2004; Kuhlmann 2010; Wayland 2004). As Waldinger (2014: 320) argues, 'once in the receiving state, migrants obtain new-found leverage, benefiting from both the wealth of the economic environment and the freedom of a polity no longer controlled by the home government.' This relative freedom is complemented by the security associated with distance. As Conversi (2012: 1359) explains, migrant activists are 'acting from a safe distance' and therefore 'do not put their safety at risk'. The freedom to express uncompromising stances gained from an exterior positionality can explain why migrants might pursue radical campaigning goals that locals have strategically renounced. A notable example of this is the increase in ethnic-nationalism among American Armenians (Sheffer 2013: 23–4).

Contextual factors also account for the democratizing agendas often found within migrant campaigns. Miall et al. (2011: 14) argued that the 'political system of the host governments, and the wider foreign policy objectives of the host government' affect migrant mobilizations. Accordingly, the host state's diplomatic relationship with the home state sets the parameters within which migrant activists can be effective. Furthermore, the activities of migrant campaigns are determined by the extent to which and the ways in which political space is afforded to them. Marini's (2013) comparative study of Ghanaian associations in the UK and Italy concludes that 'the roles migrant associations play at home are connected to the opportunities they are given to act politically in their host countries' (Marini 2013: 143). The political opportunity structure in Italy supported Ghanaians to foster associations where they could 'gain skills to manage development projects themselves' whereas similar opportunities were 'very limited in the UK' (Marini 2013: 143).

As well as navigating political opportunity structures, Demir (2015) and Orjuela (2017) demonstrated that migrant activists negotiate discursive norms. Demir (2015: 71) discusses how a group of mobilized Kurds in London were aware of the need to

make their activism 'palatable' to a British audience. They used 'translation' tactics to present their ethno-political struggle in the context of contemporary London. Elsewhere, Demir (2017: 276) refers to migrant activists as 'everyday critical discourse analysts' to describe the discursive confines in which migrant activism plays out. In Keck and Sikkink's (1998) terms, democratizing agendas in migrant campaigns have been analysed as artefacts of the 'boomeranging' tactics of migrant activists who attach their local political campaigns onto broader global issues (Lyons and Mandaville 2012).

Belonging and migrant campaigns

he above contextual factors explain how disparities between migrant campaigns vis-à-vis homeland campaigns are necessitated by the new socio-political environments in which homeland-oriented migrant activism takes place. These contextual factors, which have dominated analysis of homeland-oriented migrant activism, are complemented by identity-based analyses. There are two key approaches to analysing how migrant belonging accounts for disparities between migrant and homeland political campaigning. These reflect two sides of a broader debate on how best to understand migrant belonging – (a) as diasporic (purely homeland-oriented) or (b) as transnational (oriented towards both home and hostland).

First, some hold that wanting to belong to a homeland initiates processes of imagining it in highly symbolic ways. Lyons (2007) argues that this compulsion produces a need to imagine it as a place of continual trauma and suffering, thus easing any shame associated with migrating and remaining away. With reference to the case of Ethiopians abroad, he argues that 'characterizing the regime in the homeland as brutal provides a rationale to remaining outside of the homeland' (Lyons 2007: 533), which is why many exiled Ethiopians frame the conflict in 'categorical, uncompromising terms' (2007: 535). In addition, exclusionary hostland regimes have been shown to encourage migrants to romanticize their homeland as a bastion of former belonging (Silva 2009). Looking at the experiences of Turks in Germany, Diehl and Schnell (2006) suggested that a lack of status in the hostland can result in the animation of symbolic homeland belonging in the form of ethnically-oriented politics. Thus, ruptures in homeland belonging have been used to explain renewed nationalist or secessionist campaigns among migrants when such views are in decline among homelanders, or even against the latter's interests (Baser and Swain 2009).

Second, scholars invoking the transnational identity thesis (Schiller et al. 1992; Vertovec 2001) argue that belonging to a hostland can explain why migrant activists often promote more democratic reforms to homeland politics than homeland activists. Here, belonging is seen as a 'multi-sited embeddedness' (Horst 2017) pertaining to both the hostland and homeland (Boccagni et al. 2016; Cheran 2003; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Levitt 1998). Waldinger (2014: 327) argues that migration and resettlement often create a change in identity whereby migrants experience a form of 'cultural diffusion' (Levitt 1998) or the 'adjustment to and acceptance of the main norms, laws, patterns of behaviour, etc. that are prevailing in the countries of residence' (Sheffer 2013: 15). Ahmadov and Sasse (2016: 1) argue that 'the possibility that migrants moving to a more

democratic, more developed, and less corrupt country might adopt these norms and values and become drivers of political, economic, legal or social change in their home country is intriguing and plausible'. Thus, the experience of belonging to a 'democratic' hostland is held to be responsible for democratizing agendas in homeland-oriented migrant activism.

Constructing belonging in context

Some scholars have criticized the above approaches for their implicit passivity in that they portray belonging to a homeland or hostland as something that *happens to* migrants. They take for granted that migrant activists will reassert their identification with their homeland as part of an assumed 'ethnocommunal consciousness' arising from shared heritage (Safran 1991: 83–4). Similarly, they present the 'diffusion' of hostland norms into migrant consciousness as a natural consequence of migration and resettlement. Against this view, it has been argued extensively that belonging of any kind is non-essential and constructed (Bauböck 2010: 315; Brubaker 2017; Clifford 1994). Within this constructivist conceptualization, the notion of diasporic belonging has been re-evaluated as a 'mobilization process' (Sökefeld 2006: 265), or an identity that must be 'activated to come into existence' (Bauböck 2010: 315). Taking up this account of belonging, several scholars have asked what mobilizes an orientation to a homeland among migrants. Many studies have shown how elites can mobilize or manipulate a 'diasporic identity' for political ends (Adamson 2013; Betts and Jones 2015). Alternatively, Kleist's (2008: 320) work on Somali Danes shows that a 'diasporic identity' can be mobilized as 'a moral community' in contradistinction to political warlordism at home.

Transnational belonging has also been re-evaluated within social constructivist ontologies as migrants' wilful construction of cultural diffusion or assimilation. As Erdal and Oeppen (2013: 870) put it, increasingly, integration is being understood as a 'process of negotiation'. They argue that 'the political normative aspect of integration is strong … it can also be politically construed as a goal, an end to a process which leads to a fully integrated citizen' (Erdal and Oeppen 2013: 876). There is thus an increasing understanding that migrants (and hostland actors) can initiate so-called 'cultural diffusion' to accrue the perceived benefits of holding an 'integrated identity'.

Identity-based explanations for the differences between homeland-oriented migrant campaigning and campaigns in the homeland fail to integrate fully the above constructivist accounts of migrant belonging. Belonging per se holds no explanatory weight; mobilizing agendas and activation principles that are fundamentally embedded in and reactive to contexts must accompany it. What is missing in identity-based analyses of migrant campaigning is an account of how and why ostensibly primordial expressions of belonging are socially constructed within socio-political contexts, as well as an account of *how* and *why* practices and discourses of homeland longing, and/or cultural diffusion, are performed within political and discursive opportunity structures. In other words, how does belonging intersect with context during homeland-oriented migrant campaigning?

Sudanese activism at home and abroad

The political campaigns of Sudanese residents in the UK differ from those of Sudanese activists in Sudan in two distinct yet related ways. First, the UK-Sudanese campaigns are centred on support for the International Criminal Court's indictment of President Omar Al Bashir in ways that do not represent local activism in Sudan. This concurs with the finding that migrant activists often pursue more 'uncompromising' stances than homelanders (Conversi 2012; Lyons 2007; Sheffer 2013). The ICC indictment has been highly controversial in Sudan. Some factions within the Northern opposition parties and rebel groups initially supported the indictment, seeing it as 'welcome leverage' that 'improved their prospects of accessing power' (International Crisis Group 2009: 1; Nouwen and Werner 2010: 957). However, most opposition groups in Sudan have since objected to the indictment, claiming it is an imposition from an external agency that denies them the right to choose their own government (De Waal 2008). Many political leaders agree that justice should be part of Sudan's transition from conflict to peace, but that it should come after reconciliation rather than alongside it. Furthermore, commentators in Sudan argue that African, Arab and Sudanese judges, and not the Western-centric ICC, should lead the transitional justice processes (*Sudan Tribune* 2009). Currently, much of the Sudanese opposition sees the indictment as potentially destabilizing in an already fragile political situation.

By contrast, campaigns among the Sudanese abroad support foreign intervention (Abusharaf 2010; Mamdani 2009). As Abusharaf (2010: 74) argues, the Darfuris in the USA have 'forged strategic alliances that are deeply at odds with Darfurians at home'. Concurring with this, in the UK, I found that public protests and lobbying events supported the ICC indictments and President Al Bashir's arrest. Popular demonstration slogans included 'No fly zone in Darfur', 'Stop genocide in Darfur and Nuba Mountains' and, most commonly, 'Al Bashir to ICC' (fieldwork observations, January– October 2014). The campaign literature claimed that, 'by recognizing that genocide is happening, the United Kingdom and United Nations will be legally required to take action to protect the civilians of Sudan' ('Stand for Sudan', campaign literature, 2014). Overall, campaigns among the UK-Sudanese in 2014 attempted to trigger international commitments to intervene under the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

The second way in which Sudanese activism in the UK diverges from its homeland counterpart in is its drive for democratization, which does not reflect the campaigning agendas on the ground in Sudan. While sustainable democratization has always been part of the agenda of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and other opposition parties (Johnson 2013: 145), people in Sudan forcefully resisted the democratic reforms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and its legacy (Bereketeab 2015). Resistance is not generally motivated by a resistance to democracy in abstract, but rather emerges as a protest against the pale imitation of genuine democracy offered in corrupt elections. Such elections have served to legitimize a semi-autocratic government in Sudan and have not resulted in democratization (Bereketeab 2015: 4). In presenting substitutes for electoral democratization, campaigns in Sudan promote numerous alternative political reform movements. For example, the *Sudanese Shadow*

Cabinet aims to change the government through the renewed political engagement of the polity and adapting Sudanese politics to a multi-party system. Alternatively, *Sudanese for Change* focuses on establishing a new social contract between the government and polity. Youth-led social movement groups like *Girifna* and *Abena* have supported boycotting elections in an attempt to support a change of government through a bloodless coup.

Conversely, UK-Sudanese campaigners promote electoral democratization. Most UK-Sudanese advocacy activism – in both hot and cold forms – promotes democratic electoral reforms as they appear in the CPA and its legacy policies. For example, a campaign letter to the then UK prime minister David Cameron, signed by 46 UK-Sudanese associations, stated that 'the conflicts in Sudan are rooted in part in demands for genuine transformative political reform: for a dismantling of the decades-long authoritarian system and for realization of an inclusive, democratic system.' The promotion of electoral reform, as opposed to the political changes in the campaign agendas of domestic locals in Sudan, identifies the campaigning culture of the UK-Sudanese as at odds with that of the homelanders. The Sudanese in the UK therefore exemplify the most common differences between homeland campaigns and migrant campaigns by being both more 'uncompromising' and more 'democratizing'.

Explaining uncompromising stances

The most striking explanation for why the UK-Sudanese support ICC intervention relates to context. While high on the agenda at both hot and cold lobbying events, those attending the events seldom expressed support for ICC intervention in interviews. Low levels of support for ICC intervention were expressed especially by those who had migrated from Khartoum and belonged to political parties. Shahid, an adviser to one of the main opposition parties, said he 'would like to see change being made from within Sudan because it will be more acceptable and credible to the Sudanese people'. Abbas, from another opposition party, claimed 'people are not interested in any military action, not from UK or USA. It would create a humanitarian crisis'. Malik, also part of the political opposition, was concerned that 'if you take Bashir to The Hague you will create anarchy in a country where there already is a power vacuum.'

A key reason why they attended lobbying events that called for ICC intervention was their awareness of the need to work within political opportunity structures. As Mohammed put it, the UK-Sudanese campaigners are aware that 'international advocacy always needs to be what they [the international community] want.' However, campaigning in this environment was highly strategic and complex, and did not only involve mimicking international norms or diplomatic approaches. Mahjid realized that the current diplomatic environment made foreign intervention impossible. He said, 'the UK is not going to go into another Muslim country – not after Iraq' and others argued, 'I understand that the ICC is not going to send Black Hawks to pick-up Bashir. It's just not going to happen.' Knowing that campaigning would come to nothing, they used it to achieve other, more subtle goals. As Shahid explained, 'Bashir is trying to be the centre of change and when we send a message like that, the international community

have difficulty accommodating him.' Supporting the campaign for ICC-led transitional justice was, for many UK-Sudanese campaigners, not straightforwardly about bringing about ICC intervention. They saw that intervention did not fit with UK foreign policy and appreciated the futility of such a campaign message. However, they still took the opportunity to 'send a message' that expressed the overall undesirability of the Sudanese government.

The above testimonies concur with prior research confirming the importance of political and discursive opportunity structures (Demir 2015; Koopmans 2004; Orjuela 2017). However, the navigation of opportunity structures – while valid – is an inadequate explanation for why Sudanese activists in the UK support the ICC. While most of the Khartoumian political elite among the UK-Sudanese strategically feigned their support for ICC intervention, some among the campaigning population actually did support it. These tended to be campaigners from marginal areas of Sudan, who were not necessarily involved in politics before they left, and who arrived in the UK with refugee status in the early 2000s. Among this group, many reported *becoming* anti-government since migrating. When Waleed, a refugee from Darfur who arrived in the UK in the early 2000s, was asked whether he was involved in the opposition movement before he came to the UK, he replied:

> No, because when you are there you have no idea what is happening. I'm from Darfur and you don't have any freedom to go and learn but when I came here I realized things don't have to be that way. Living is hell at the moment; there are wars everywhere. People are dying. Just everything.

This awakening of anti-government attitudes after migration was noted among many UK-Sudanese campaigners who had come from marginal areas in Sudan such as Darfur, Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains. In fact, my research even revealed evidence of increased levels of anger towards the Sudanese government among Khartoum's political elites. SPLM-N activist Farooq reported:

> I'm astonished at the level [of anger], if you go in to social forums [on the internet] the level of opposition and the tenor of discussion is so heated and intense in a way that we don't encounter in Sudan. So, there is something. The level is so high – if you sit in a meeting in Sudan [via skype conference] and people living in Sudan comment and say 'What's wrong with you people?! What happened to you?!'

That local members of the SPLM-N asked their UK-based colleagues 'what happened to you?' implies that the latter underwent a conversion to more uncompromising anti-government stances following their migration. While the opportunity structures can explain some support for ICC intervention, it fails to account for the increased anger toward the Sudanese government and the fresh uptake of anti-government views.

When reflecting on these changes themselves, the UK-Sudanese activists consistently identified a change in perspective as responsible for the hardening of their

opposition to the Sudanese government. Waleed described how his new positionality in the UK transformed his impression of Sudan; he now realizes that 'things don't have to be that way' and that while he was living in Darfur he had 'no idea what was happening'. It is only now, after migrating, that he realizes 'there are wars everywhere' and 'living is hell'. He claims that this is what helped him decide to join an opposition political party after his arrival in the UK.

In the same way, several other activists referred to the experience of migration as epiphanic of homeland suffering. One opposition party activist claimed that

> when you are abroad you can see things better than the ones inside who are under fear. When you are away from your country you will feel this. … Sometimes important is you learn about your suffering away from your country. It changes you a lot and it changes your understanding of so many things. I know it is very sad to leave your country but still there are so many benefits from it.

Douhiba said that the experience of migrating helped her 'see things better'; it meant 'learning about your suffering'. Others spoke of a new 'clarity' or 'clear-mindedness' achieved through repositioning their orientation towards the homeland from the vantage point of the UK. As Farooq put it, 'I think it's because people become so angry [following migration] that such nonsense is taking place – people become more energetic and more impatient because they see it doesn't have to be so.'

As such, there is evidence of an intensification of opposition to the state brought about by the reimagining of home from abroad (Diehl and Schnell 2006; Lyons 2007; Silva 2009). However, when asking what has mobilized this new perspective, it appears that, for many UK-Sudanese, the 'clear-mindedness' is a constructed part a 'UK-Sudanese' identity, which helps to justify the involvement of the Sudanese abroad in Sudan's growth as a post-conflict state. In parts of Farooq's testimony, the clarity associated with being abroad justifies his and his co-migrants' role in Sudan's transitional politics:

> [When you are in Sudan] you don't break that cycle of reaching the logical conclusion that what I suffer is not the natural order of things. You need to look wider and see wider and I was always astonished at how transformative it is to come into contact with different cultures, different modes of existence. Different social and cultural morays, it brings people to the point where it actually opens their minds to new possibilities and new ways of seeing the world. So, diaspora needs to have a role in change. We as a diaspora feel that that work has to be done.

It is important to see this passage in which Farooq depicts suffering as 'not the natural order of things', due to the 'mind being opened' up through contact with 'different social and cultural morays', within the context of the statement's overall purpose. The notion of a 'transformative mind-opening' fits in with the idea that 'diaspora needs to have a role in change'. Here, as with many of the political elites among the UK-

Sudanese campaigners, the 'new perspective' is linked to the role that Sudanese people living abroad can play in homeland change.

In making use of the political opportunity afforded by residency in a new context, many Sudanese activists in the UK have identified an innovative perspective that has something fresh to offer their campaigning colleagues in Sudan. In doing so, these activists are justifying their own role in political change in the homeland. In line with Søkefeld's (2006) idea of 'mobilized' belonging, one should view the reported clarity as the active construction of a 'UK-Sudanese identity', set apart from, yet with something unique to offer to, locals. The advantages of being in a new political environment is not the only explanation for the intensification of anti-government sentiment. We should also read the reported transformative experience as an act designed to set the UK-Sudanese apart from locals, to reassert their membership in the political movements they left behind, and to carve out a role for themselves in Sudan's progression towards political change. The process of identity formation, therefore, has been strategically utilized as a political opportunity, particularly by elite political factions within the UK-Sudanese population.

Explaining 'democratizing' stances

As Chaudhary (2016), Koopmans (2004) and Waldinger (2014) argued, political and discursive opportunity structures have played a part in shaping the democratizing content of Sudanese activism in the UK. Since the activists knew that their campaigning goals needed to appeal to British policy makers and public audiences, they adjusted them accordingly. In other words, they clearly recognized the need to 'articulate [their] politics differently … and present the Sudanese case using universal language'. Their decision to promote democratization as a remedy for conflictive diversity politics was a manifestation of this awareness. However, as I show below, this only partially explains the democratizing agenda of UK-Sudanese campaigns.

That many migrant activists link their ideological affinity with democratization to the transformative experience of belonging to another political culture supports the 'cultural diffusion' (Levitt 1998) approach to belonging. As Abdul explained, 'there is something in us which opens us to being influenced by the models of behaviours around us – cultural appropriation … coming to Britain, it alerts you to the possibilities, the social possibilities of managing diversity through democracy.' Zahir spoke of how 'we want to reflect the British and European ethics and culture' and Karim even suggested that he came to the UK to 'copy some of the lovely social devices you have'. Malik, a founding member, attributed the key principles of his society to his experiences of British political institutions: '[The Sudanese Shadow Cabinet] is modelled on British government. … This country definitely inspired all of the shadow cabinet, and even the world of democracy.' While some Sudanese activists were critical of British politics, when making comparisons with their homeland, they mostly spoke of it in a positive light. To this extent, experiential changes associated with belonging to a different political context are made explicit in the UK-Sudanese activists' own explanations for why their campaigns tend to support the 'democratization' of Sudanese political institutions.

Nevertheless, my research findings do not support the passive 'cultural diffusion' thesis seen in the works of Waldinger (2014), Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010), and Ahmadov and Sasse (2016). Expressions of belonging to hostland cultures and value systems, when viewed in the context of their outward expressions, emerge as the active performance of constructed transnational belonging. The democratization narratives in the political campaigns of the UK-Sudanese are often not relayed within and among the activists themselves, but instead appear most strongly as forms of knowledge expressed *for* homeland actors and/or *for* international actors.

The same activists who claimed that their immersion in the political traditions of the hostland culture transformed their opinions about how to build a new Sudan, also revealed that their reading of the conflict and its solutions had, to a large extent, preceded their migration and resettlement. Farooq describes how,

> before I came here I was leaning to ideas of the left, or socialism. I was 16/17, I was fairly active. So, I had a bit of political consciousness when I came here. I also used to read a lot, I saw the world in political terms from an early age … I used to be involved in the student union.

Karim speaks of how 'my background [in Sudan] is in the trade union. I was in the labour party'. Musa, for his part, said,

> I am a political activist. I started politics when I was in university [in Sudan]. At the time I was in secondary school. … Then is the state when you are growing mentally. At that time, I was interested in sociological history, at that time we studied the history of Sudan, of Europe. This interest gradually grew.

Zahir recalled that 'I have been engaged in civil society since 1974 [when he still lived in Sudan], we were engaged in a wonderful peace association – the Republican Brothers. From that time, I am committed to changing societies.'

As these testimonies show, many of the ideas that UK-Sudanese activists self-identified as 'British' were formulated while they were still living in Sudan. For many, it was clear that their acquaintance with concepts like social contracts, electoral democratization and diversity management pre-existed their migration. In this sense, the experience of belonging to a so-called 'British' political culture is less significant than they had led us to believe in their earlier statements. What emerges as significant is their need to link their UK positionality to an affinity with democratic institutions. It has become imperative to perform, in discourse, this transformation of political attitudes and, explicitly, to link these transformations to their identities as UK-Sudanese.

The discursive act of 'cultural diffusion' performs two functions for the UK-Sudanese activists. First, it helps to justify their place in Sudan's post-conflict transition. As Douhiba put it, 'when we go to the parliament, we ask for help with democratization. To ask for everything that is great about Britain to be sent back to Sudan. That is our role.' A campaigner from the Sudanese Congress Party claimed that 'diaspora has to have a role in change. Why? Because we can learn things here and then bring them

home. Diaspora needs to have a role in change.' In the same way as diaspora activists constructed 'clear-mindedness' to show the value that UK-Sudanese could add to opposition activism, one can also see support for democratization as a practice and discourse of inclusion. What first appears as a product of belonging to a hostland, emerges is a means to belong, an attempt to belong, or even a request to belong to a homeland.

The second function of performed cultural diffusion among UK-Sudanese activists is that it brings about a sense of belonging to the UK as the place of residence. As Abdul explained, 'we want to ally with people who will be mobilized to come together. … We need to be closer to the British people and the decision makers to be an effective community.' Zakir claimed that 'we are part of this society and we have so much to give to it – we understand it and we are part of this wonderful democracy.' The 'democratizing' agenda in UK-Sudanese activism is therefore both an expression of belonging to a homeland and an attempt to belong, to form a political identity within a hostland.

To summarize, in seeking to understand what shapes migrant activism, it is important to think of migrants not only as 'vectors of cultural diffusion' (Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010: 122), but also as mobilized political performers who cultivate their own belonging, not to a generalized 'homeland' but to specific processes of political change within it. Furthermore, these yearnings to belong – ostensibly to a homeland – can also be understood as attempts to carve out a political identity in a host society. In other words, expressing an identity that has undergone cultural diffusion serves as an attempt to gain acceptance in two types of political culture – that of the hostland and that of the homeland. Again, the process of identity formation is being used to create political opportunities to belong to these two spaces.

Conclusion

In this study, I examined why political campaigns organized by migrant activists are often different from homeland ones. By situating practices and discourses of identity formation within the political and discursive opportunity structures in which campaigns take place, I incorporated both contextual and identity-based factors. In doing so, I found that where migrant and homeland political campaigns differ – as they often do – explanations based on either identity changes and/or political opportunity structures are insufficient on their own. While contextual factors are valid – and the UK-Sudanese case suggests they matter – they may be incomplete without an understanding of the contextual nature of constructed belonging. Similarly, while changes to identity shape migrant activism, it is only when viewed in conjunction with context that these changes can be fully understood. Not only is there something to be gained from understanding the interplay of belonging and context, but also some contextual explanations may be misattributed to practices and discourses of belonging and *vice versa*. What first appeared as a context driven change among UK-Sudanese was in fact identity driven, and what appeared as identity driven change was in fact context driven. In any case, identity formation was used as part of – not separate from – the strategic navigations of restrictive contexts. In the light of that, in this article I put forward the view that identity and contextual factors really must be analysed together.

Two findings emerged from the research that speak to broader debates on conceptualizations of belonging in 'diasporic' and 'transnational' politics. This research supports a performative understanding of identity as of key importance in diasporic identity formation. What emerged strongly from the UK-Sudanese case are the ways in which migrant activists are instrumental in outlining what they can bring to Sudan's political changes. These contributions took centre stage in how these migrants presented themselves as 'UK-Sudanese' and what kinds of diasporic identities they assumed. The reported 'clear-mindedness' and the lived experience of UK political institutions were two aspects of diasporic identity they actively constructed and consistently performed. As such, what one may otherwise identify as instances of naturalized homeland belonging, may be performances made with the agenda of constructing belonging to a homeland. In other words, the formation of a 'diasporic identity' can be as much a process towards homeland belonging as it can be its product.

The second finding concerns how only diasporic belonging (namely a homeland-oriented one) is insufficient to explain the form and content of homeland-oriented politics. Some aspects of homeland-oriented campaigning were intentional acts of belonging to the hostland. Even although UK-Sudanese campaigns were ostensibly directed towards Sudan, they contained discursive and performative elements that were both motivated and brought about by belonging to host societies. This points to a need to reanalyse the relationship between homeland-oriented migrant activism and transnational identities. Multi-sited belonging, as opposed to homeland-oriented belonging could offer a richer understanding of what has, until now, been referred to as 'diaspora' activism.

Overall, through looking at the identity-formation practices of migrant activists as they are embedded in political and discursive contexts, this research has shown the active role that migrant activists play in constructing their belonging to homeland politics. These identity formation practices can explain why their campaigns are often more uncompromising and more democratizing than the campaigns in the homelands themselves. This contributes to a move away from understanding migrant activism as brought about by passive experiences of homeland longing and cultural diffusion, and towards understanding migrant identity formation as part of strategies to convert exclusion into inclusion – in both home and hostland contexts.

Notes

1. See Østergaard-Nielsen (2003: 762–3) for a typology of migrant political participation. The concern of this article is with 'homeland politics', or what 'pertains to the domestic or foreign policy of the homeland' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 762).
2. The subjects of this study are referred to as 'migrant activists' as opposed to 'diaspora activists'. 'Diaspora' here, refers to an analytical approach to migrant belonging, namely one that is oriented towards a homeland. This approach can be viewed in contradistinction to 'transnational belonging', or 'multi-sited embeddedness' (Horst 2017). The term 'diaspora' is used descriptively elsewhere to signal migrant communities connected to homelands, but here I deploy it analytically as opposed to descriptively. Therefore, I only use 'diaspora' when referring to the analytical approach to belonging denoted by it.

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