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Engendering Transnational Foodways: A Case Study of Southern Sudanese Women in Brooks, Alberta

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Abstract: This article explores the experiences of Southern Sudanese refugee women in Brooks, Alberta, illustrating how "foodways" (Long 2004) impact and reflect women's conceptions of themselves as gendered, multinational citizens. When women seek out and appropriate diverse culinary traditions to create belonging within multiple circumstances, they enact agency. Women do not passively accept their fractured connections to their homeland but instead actively work to rebuild relationships within the diversity that defines their experiences in ways that garner them power, prestige and resources to improve their lives. These movements show how gender and power are entwined in the creation of transnational belonging.

Keywords: Southern Sudanese, refugees, gender, food, identity, cosmopolitanism

Résumé **:** Cet article étudie l'expérience de femmes réfugiées du Sud-Soudan établies à Brooks en Alberta, illustrant comment la culture de production des aliments (« foodways » – Long 2004) modifie et reflète les conceptions d'elles-mêmes de ces femmes en tant que citoyennes multinationales et conditionnées par leur sexe. Quand ces femmes recherchent et s'approprient diverses traditions culinaires pour créer de l'appartenance au milieu de circonstances multiples, elles mettent en œuvre de l'agentivité; les femmes n'acceptent pas passivement leurs relations fragmentées avec leur mère patrie mais s'efforcent plutôt de reconstruire des relations au milieu de la diversité qui définit leurs expériences, d'une manière qui leur procure du pouvoir, du prestige et des ressources pour améliorer leur vie. Ces mouvements montrent comment le sexe et le pouvoir sont interreliés dans la création d'une appartenance transnationale.

Mots-clés : Sud-Soudanaises, réfugiées, sexe, alimentation, identité, cosmopolitisme

For countless women across time and space, the kitchen and the food work conducted within it have represented sites of simultaneous repression and celebration. Women's work in the kitchen becomes undervalued in societies that place greater value on the financial responsibilities of a household than the nurturing (Engels 1972). In these contexts the kitchen becomes a space that limits women's social, economic and personal mobility (Devault 1991; McIntosh and Zey 1998). However, scholars have also illuminated how a significant number of women understand the kitchen as a space for the creation of identity, love and creative expression (Abarca 2006; Adapon 2008; Avakian 1997, 2005; Counihan 2005, 2008). Due to the diverse meanings contained in the kitchen, women may utilize it in ways that represent "multiple changing levels and degrees of freedom, self-awareness, subjectivity, and agency" (Abarca 2006:19). It is therefore important to acknowledge the diversity of significances women encounter when working within this space. As such, this article contributes to feminist anthropological work analyzing the ways in which women use the kitchen, specifically foodways,[1] as dynamic spaces for social, economic and personal mobility (Abarca 2006; Avakian 1997, 2005; Counihan 2005, 2008). Because of the ideological baggage that very often accompanies foodways, women who define foodways beyond their oppressive associations are embarking on everyday acts of agency (Abarca 2006).

In this article, I investigate the specific relationship between Southern Sudanese women and food. In particular, I use a case study of refugees in Brooks, Alberta, to explore how power relations are enacted within the global movement of people, products and ideas. As globalization facilitates the reconceptualization of boundaries, identities and existences, people often renegotiate their understandings of culture and tradition (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996). Global consumer society creates new markets, demands and meanings for culture (in this case, food in particular), as local practices become embedded within global structures (Ferrero 2002; Long 2004; Wilk 2006).

When people negotiate new modes of existence, "categories of power blur and create new spaces of action where the relations between the dominant and the subordinated, the self and the other, must be reconfigured" (Ferrero 2002:195). Southern Sudanese women in Brooks provide an example of these global processes as they take place within the daily foodways of women in rural Alberta.

In relation to food practices, patriarchal ideologies simultaneously define and devalue the identities of Southern Sudanese women; yet, the women assert agency by manoeuvring within these ideologies and defining themselves outside them. Their movements are facilitated by the global interaction of people, food and meaning which encompass the experiences of Southern Sudanese women in Brooks. Specifically, in this article, I will investigate how women's openness to foreign food practices and their simultaneous development of cosmopolitan consciousness demonstrates acts of agency. For these women, cosmopolitanism is an orientation; it is a readiness and competence to engage in the unfamiliar undertaken within the realm of "everyday" embodied experience (Cheah and Robbins 1998). By engaging in this orientation, women make the foreign familiar and create belonging within diverse fields of cultural meaning. Southern Sudanese women's cosmopolitan foodways are a means of empowerment because first, they represent women's challenge to the liminality of their existence and, second, they facilitate a global awareness of culture that allows women to utilize their cultural capital to gain prestige among their peers as well as new resources to manage their daily lives. In creating belonging within the diversity that defines their experiences, Southern Sudanese women in Brooks show how daily food practices are used to navigate everyday experiences of gender, ethnicity and power. Before proceeding with my analysis, I will introduce the social context that frames Southern Sudanese women's understandings of food and gender as well as how my research methods aimed to capture it.

Background and Methodology

Sudanese History and Gender Ideology

Southern Sudanese in Canada have come from a nation marked by conflict. Since independence from Britain in 1956, Sudan has been at almost constant civil war. Most understood this war as a conflict between the majority population in the north, identifying as "Arab" and "Muslim," and the marginalized population in the south identifying as "Black African" and increasingly "Christian." There is some truth to this view but, more significantly, the war is fuelled by resistances to the concentration of wealth and power in Khartoum by the immensely impoverished peripheries who desire greater regional autonomy (Deng 2010; Johnson 2003). This war has resulted in the death of millions and the displacement of millions more both inside and outside the country.

However, large-scale changes are in the midst. The war between the North and the South officially ended in 2005 when the National Islamic Front (NIF) government and the opposing rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement, signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and ushered in a period of relative peace. The CPA encompassed stipulations for a referendum held in January of 2011. This referendum provided the conditions for Southern Sudanese to vote on their potential succession from the North. Among a 98 per cent voter turnout, 99 per cent' of Southern Sudan voted for secession (UNMIS 2011) and, as of July 9, 2011, South Sudan became the world's newest nation. This is a significant milestone in these peoples' history as it represents an opportunity for Southern Sudanese to celebrate freely their collective identity within the formation of a new nation. Furthermore, it has implications for Southern Sudanese in the diaspora because many migrants are currently reconceptualizing their transnational citizenship, specifically whether they would like to return to their home country should South Sudan continue to develop peacefully.

I would like to emphasize that it is difficult to generalize about a common "Southern Sudanese culture." The diversity of ethnic groups within South Sudan means that meanings surrounding gender and food vary from context to context. However, I am conducting my analysis with the presumption that, despite a multitude of idiosyncrasies, there are common features among groups that are relevant to discuss in the context of gender relations and food. These common features reflect how Southern Sudanese women in Brooks describe themselves and their position as gendered individuals both in their homeland and in Canada. Despite the cultural diversity within my study population, their understandings of gender and foodways are remarkably similar. Nonetheless, the analysis that I provide in this article is not meant to be exhaustive of gender relations in all Southern Sudanese societies, nor of all Southern Sudanese refugees in Canada.

That being said, similarities among Southern Sudanese notions of gender are due in large part to the Sudanese government's ideology of assimilation. Until recently, the government militarily enforced nationwide adherence (to varying degrees at different times) to the Muslim religion and Arabic language and cultural practices (Deng 2010). As such, masculinity and femininity

are generally understood in Sudan through the Muslim notions of complementarity and propriety (Edward 2007). Complementarity or "natural differences" between men and women are understood to extend themselves to separate roles and behaviours for each sex. Specifically, men/husbands occupy the public sphere and provide the family with financial support, while women occupy the domestic sphere where they look after the home and care for children. The ideological separation of men and women is reflected and enforced through the Sudanese notion of *adab* (propriety). Propriety pertains to "good manners" or "politeness" and includes conceptions of morals and morality for men and women. As a whole, the concept encompasses behaviour that upholds the virtues of the larger Sudanese society (Fábos 2001). Propriety is used in a general sense to include "the sum total of his conceptions of what one should be and have and do in order to be good in the different roles one comes to play in life" (Nordenstam 1968:74). This is an idealistic framework and is enacted and resisted in different ways throughout the country (Bernal 1994; Fábos 2008). Nonetheless, the diversity that is held with regard to the relational status of men and women still largely falls under the notion that "within the family and within society, women usually occupy a subordinate position compared to men" (Edward 2007: 83). In her analysis of both Shari'a and customary law in Sudan, Liv Tonnessen describes women's subjugation likewise: "Sudanese women have traditionally suffered from discriminatory customs and traditions, which relegate them to the status of 'lesser beings' and 'a commodity'" (2008:463). This background is relevant to the subsequent analysis showing how Southern Sudanese women redefine these gendered identities in Canada.

Methodological Background

During the summer of 2010, I conducted informal and semi-structured interviews with 17 Southern Sudanese women from varying ethnicities, religions, employment backgrounds, migration histories and household structures. I interviewed all women at least once though many women invited me back to their homes multiple times after the initial interview so I could learn more about the specifics of certain foods, meanings, or cooking techniques. As a whole, I was welcomed with open arms into the community such that I also conducted extensive participant observation outside of the more formal interview setting. As other anthropologists working with this community have recorded, direct questioning is often less productive than observation if one hopes to gain any understanding of individual motivation and meaning (Berger 2001). I returned to Brooks in January 2011, where I met with the majority of women in my study to present the contents of my proposed thesis and garner their feedback. All of the women were satisfied as well as encouraged by my observations, and suggested no changes to my findings. I use pseudonyms in place of participants' real names because the subject matter discussed in the interviews was somewhat controversial in the community; pseudonyms therefore provide anonymity to ensure participants' safety.

All of the participants in this study were born in Sudan. Their migration histories are diverse; however, they also represent a unique generation of migrants. All but one of the women ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their early forties and so spent relatively little time growing up and socializing within Sudan. When the second Sudanese civil war broke out in 1983, many of these women left their homelands to seek refuge either in camps in neighbouring Kenya or Ethiopia, or as international students in Egypt or Cuba. Therefore, almost none stayed in Sudan long enough to run their own households. Some left at such an early age they could hardly remember their homes; those who stayed in the country waited in the chaos of war for their displaced relatives to get approval for them to follow to safety. The women in this study were also relatively well established in Canada, having lived in the country from three to seventeen years. Consequently, all interviewees were fluent in English and I conducted my interviews in that language. As such, they represent a specific segment of the Sudanese community in Canada, and an important one, as they represent the largest age category of Sudanese in Canada and they are raising the first generation of Sudanese children to grow up in Canada (Statistics Canada 2006b).

Brooks is a distinctive community because, despite its relatively small size, it has a large newcomer population (2080 immigrants and 125 non-permanent residents in a population of 12,000 [Statistics Canada 2006a]). The unique demographic composition of Brooks comes from its proximity to the Lakeside Packers beef processing plant in which many of its residents work. After the 1994 multinational acquisition of Lakeside, the plant increased its production and rendering capacity such that by 1996, 2,000 new employees were hired to help staff the updated facility. However, jobs in the meatpacking industry are generally unattractive to Canadians because the work environment can be dangerous and unpleasant (Sinclair 1906; Stull and Broadway 2008). Lakeside Packers therefore looked to Canada's refugee population to staff its expansion. Since that time, approximately two thousand newcomers have made Brooks their home. Meatpacking is an attractive option for newcomers looking to stabilize

their financial base as it pays relatively high wages for unskilled work. As a result, since the mid-1990s, Brooks has turned into somewhat of a multicultural boomtown (Broadway 2007; Stull and Broadway 2004). Due to the harsh nature of work at Lakeside, most newcomers conceptualize Brooks as a temporary place to improve their financial situation and move on. Nonetheless, there is also a growing group putting down permanent roots in the community, many of whom are represented in my study. Brooks is therefore a relatively distinctive community due to its temporary nature as well as the multitude of newcomers living and working in the same space. It is important to stress that although many of the experiences of women in this community are relevant to the broader Southern Sudanese Canadian experience, findings from this group must be understood within the particular context of Brooks.

Foodways and Agency in the Literature

As I mentioned above, the kitchen has been determined by many as an oppressive space that limits women's social, ideological and economic freedom (Devault 1991; McIntosh and Zey 1998). In this section, I will investigate this notion, as well as how it is challenged in the literature, in order to productively work with and move beyond it. This discussion frames my later analysis on how Southern Sudanese women utilize transnational foodways to enact agency in their day-to-day lives.

The ideological premise behind women's negative associations with foodways stems, in part, from western ideological dualism separating masculinity and femininity within a set of binary, mutually exclusive, oppositions. This framework codes masculinity with dynamic processes of "progress," "creating," and "doing," and codes femininity with static characteristics rooted in "tradition" and "stability" (Massey 1994). Thus, the home, the kitchen, and the food work done within it are conceptualized as fixed. Work done in this space is often associated with nostalgia, traditional morality, leisure and authenticity. These qualities are not in and of themselves oppressive, yet become so when they are coded and enforced as female (Abarca 2006; Massey 1994).

Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) have aptly shown how women become responsible for the continuation of ethnic and national groups, and as such, the responsibility to sustain that perpetuation limits their agency. Women are often responsible for the continuation of ethnic groups because they "symbolize" the group, and therefore, bear the burden of representing its honour. Women are expected literally to bear the next generation of that group, as well as propagate group cultural values and traditions as "symbolic border guards." This expectation encompases reified, static understandings of gender and of culture (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989); however, nationalist and ethnic ideologies still draw on these beliefs to naturalize, and therefore, enforce the traditional gendered roles/inequalities that stall social change (Yuval-Davis 2009). In times of change (including migration), women are often either rejected as a marker of the past (Witt 2001), or controlled to preserve the values encompassed in what was left behind (Yuval-Davis 2009). This is a western ideological perspective; nonetheless, similarities exist between western gendered dualisms and Muslim notions of complementarity which, at times, place masculinity and femininity within a similar relationship (Mernissi 1987; Yazbeck-Haddad and Esposito 1998). In Sudan specifically, (Muslim) women have played an important role in the national discourse of the NIF government as "authenticating a place of 'belonging', a community of kin, a safe haven for family, a 'home'" (Tonnessen 2008:464). Caroline Faria (2010) posits that women will also play a key role in the discourse of nation building in the new South Sudan.

The first step in moving beyond an essentialized notion of gendered identity is to recognize identities, cultures and places as not static, bounded dualisms, but as existing within dynamic states of movement and intersection (Massey 1994; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). This is how I will portray Southern Sudanese women and their relationship to food and the kitchen. The participants in my study were very much aware of the ways in which foodways represented their history of gendered repression, as a space that limited their mothers and their grandmothers ideologically and physically, but also as a prevailing burden, a stress that was predominantly theirs to bear. Nonetheless, Southern Sudanese women simultaneously chose to embrace foodways as something to celebrate and manipulate for their own means. In this article, I will investigate how this is enacted by women; however, I will begin by providing a brief overview of the current anthropological literature describing how migrant women recreate foodways as spaces of power and control.

Migrant women exert agency in their kitchens by minimizing or subverting its subordinating dimensions, and acknowledging and celebrating its empowering ones. However, agency can be exerted in countless ways. For example, by actively taking control of the functioning, socialization and decision-making in the kitchen, women propagate values of their choosing while also embracing the power that comes from food provision (Avakian 2005). Other women do this by conceptualizing cooking as a celebration of talent and creativity (Adapon 2008) or

a demonstration of love (Avakian 1997; Vallianatos and Raine 2008). Others utilize the kitchen as a space of trust and sociality among women (Avakian 2005; Counihan 2005). Women also may use the kitchen for economic mobility, cooking food that they later sell for profit, thereby breaking down the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres (Counihan 2008; Pilcher 2002). Some women reject cooking as a sole pillar of their identity yet still respect the food work done by others (Avakian 2005; Counihan 2008). Lastly, women may also welcome and legitimize men's food work, thus breaking down the dichotomization of gendered divisions of labour (Counihan 2008). This is by no means an exhaustive account of all of the ways in which women show agency through foodways; rather, it represents themes that emerge in the current literature. Additionally, while much of the work done on this topic revolves around the concept of the kitchen as a physical and ideological space, I will focus specifically on the food activities undertaken within it.

The strategies described above ultimately highlight reinterpretations of the relationship between women, power, food and the importance of food knowledge. Meredith Abarca (2006) expounds a rethinking of the eminence of foodways to demonstrate the wealth of intricate knowledge encompassed in everyday acts of cooking. In doing so, she confronts the values, norms and assumptions embedded in foodwork. For Abarca, a woman's *sazon* (or sensory way of knowing when food is done or what flavours it needs to be just right) "captures the finesse, the nuances, the flair of something that involves a specific chemistry between the relationship of food, its preparation, and the person preparing it, a relationship that leads to philosophical everyday observations" (2006:54). Within this account, Abarca sees cooking as a language in which women convey the histories of their lives, as such, it is a "discourse of empowerment." Abarca rejects the western hierarchy of the senses, which privileges sight and hearing over taste and smell. For Abarca, sazon is "the ability to 'seize power over one part of one's self' through the epistemology of all of our senses, which in turn helps us to regain the body as a center of knowledge" (2006: 76-77). Ultimately, Abarca shows that definitions of what constitutes knowledge need to be reconfigured in order to reveal the value, artistry and creativity within everyday work done in the kitchen.

Southern Sudanese women's foodways incorporate forms of agency that reflect their diverse cultural and personal histories which differentially enable them to internalize, reconceptualize and subvert various forms of oppression that limit them ideologically, physically and emotionally. Many of these forms of agency include strategies that I describe above; however, I will focus on one strategy in particular that women undertake to empower themselves within a situation which could be, in many ways, oppressive. Through my participant's narratives, I demonstrate how Southern Sudanese women's incorporation of diverse cultural foodways into their culinary repertoire is an act of agency because in doing so, women take on an empowering global awareness, which provides them with personal and cultural capital to improve their standing in their families and in their communities. By defining their foodways (and by extension themselves) beyond static definitions rooted in notions of the "traditional Southern Sudanese," women affirm the power encompassed in diverse forms of belonging. In order to discuss this point, I first introduce how women have come to embody openness towards transnational foodways.

Southern Sudanese Transnational Foodways

> We learn, every year, they invent new foods back home, and those that come presently, they have that so, every time they have a party, they will make it and people will be like, "hmm, new kind of food? So who cooked it?" And people go around, "who cooked this?" And they will say "so and so." Ok, they will start booking appointment with her—"can we come to your place?" So it's like learning things as you stay ... people are borrowing from different people. Like right now that there is peace in Sudan, there's a lot of Chinese coming over, there's a lot of, you know different kind of people from the world, they are coming over to Sudan to work, like some people they just, I don't know, there's a lot of people anyway coming. And people are learning new things every time. And they add that to Sudanese kind of food, so it's not pure Sudanese. [Naya]

Naya's words introduce how I wish to portray Southern Sudanese food in this article. Southern Sudanese food is less an exact set of rules and ingredients, and more a dynamic concept. "Southern Sudanese food" is something that women conjure up when they think about their homes in South Sudan, their memories and their families there; it is something that links them to a collective identity, which they use to define themselves in relation to others (Douglas 1966; Gabaccia 1998). When women create Southern Sudanese *mullah* (stews) by frying an onion in oil and adding meat (usually lamb, beef or goat), varying amounts of water and vegetables, such as okra (*molokia*[2]) or tomatoes; or, when they boil cassava and eat it with honey, they are engaging in rituals which connect

them to their families and their homes abroad. Food traditions are a concrete connection to their historic cultural identity which can be enacted daily, and thus, are a way for women to situate themselves as Southern Sudanese within their daily lives. Like all food however, Southern Sudanese food is not without influence from the global movement of people, products, technologies and ideas (Appadurai 1996). As such, Southern Sudanese food is constantly changing both inside and outside of South Sudan, as it borrows from and recreates diverse cultural foodways (Crofts 2010).

While Southern Sudanese food holds significant meaning for women by invoking belonging through the enactment of tradition, the violent nature of these women's homelands and the forced nature of their migration create conflicting emotions surrounding the belonging that women feel towards Sudan (now South Sudan). For example, safety is an important caveat for how women defined home, yet South Sudan has not been able to provide them this in the past. Ajak's definition of home exemplifies this disjuncture: "The earth and everything in it is for the Lord. So yeah, anywhere can be your home, except ... if there's no peace there, no happiness, no. But if there's peace and happiness, and joy and *love*, that can be your home. You will be safe there." Also, because some women have lived in Canada for a number of years, they find themselves disconnected from some Sudanese customs and worldviews. Tensions between conflicting Sudanese and Canadian worldviews and traditions are highlighted in Sara's narrative of returning to Sudan for a visit:

> When I went back, I was there in December. Because I was away from Sudan for ten years, it was so hard for me to eat together [out of the same serving platter, the *sinea*] with everybody because I'm used to my own, to have my food in my plate. So I would just take two or three. When I saw everyone mixing their soups and everything I was like stop, I stop eating [laughs]. I was out of Sudan for 10 years, so there is a great difference. I was just like, no.

This narrative corresponds with the conflicted nature of many women's existences to the extent that they at times revealed a sense of belonging to nowhere. Southern Sudanese women's relationship to their homeland is similar to Gemignani's interpretation of refugee memory:

> Home is at once a memory and a hope.... The concept of home evolves into a symbolic analogy for the nostalgic feelings and memories of what used to be: for a land that exists only in narrations, for a home that perhaps was never there, and of which memory is impossible yet necessary. [2011:148]

As such, "home" for Southern Sudanese women is a contested space associated with conflicting memories and emotions all of which do not necessarily provide an adequate sense of belonging in the diaspora. Despite their liminal relationship to territory, Lissa Malkki (1995) warns against universalizing refugees as somehow lost or separate from culture. Malkki shows that refugees "categorize back" by subverting models of identification and creating others out of their own unique circumstances. Southern Sudanese women in Brooks do just that; they create belonging beyond South Sudan, within the transnational foodways of their everyday lives. Through incorporating multicultural foods into their culinary repertoires, Southern Sudanese women search for completeness within diversity, an act I define as agency.

When I asked Southern Sudanese women about how war had affected their relationship to food, women's responses echoed unanimously around a common theme: the war had enriched Southern Sudanese food because it had sent them outside Sudan where they learned new ideas and new things to add to their foods. Transnational connections, specifically in the form of complex migration histories and the multicultural nature of the Brooks community, have recreated Southern Sudanese women's understanding of food and the meanings it holds in their lives.

All of the women in this study except for one came from Sudan to Canada via another country, mostly Egypt, but also Kenya, Ethiopia, Libya, Malta, Italy, the United States and Cuba. Therefore, time spent in transit to Canada has had an impact on how women cook, what recipes they know, and their knowledge of Southern Sudanese food. For example, Ajak spoke to me about how her time spent in university in Egypt taught her that meals do not always need to include meat (as is common for the middle and upper classes in Sudan). She spoke of *maschi*, or stuffed vegetables (usually eggplant, tomato and sweet peppers), as an example. Egyptians taught Ajak to make maschi solely with rice and spices, but without ground beef as Southern Sudanese do. Ajak speaks of finding this dish surprisingly delicious and makes it frequently in her home in Canada. Similarly, Naya's time in Italy taught her a plethora of Italian recipes, such as lasagna and spaghetti, which were highly sought after in Brooks. Mary had learned numerous Cuban techniques for combining rice with beans, and other women regularly combined Ethiopian spices into Southern Sudanese dishes to give them an interesting "kick."

Likewise, due to the multicultural nature of Brooks and particularly of Lakeside, where 11 of the 17 participants either work or have worked in the past, women socialize with other international migrants beside whom they work in the slaughterhouse. Because Lakeside does not have a cafeteria, women bring homemade lunches to work and eat together during breaks. In doing so, women share their personal and cultural culinary worldviews. At work, women gain extensive knowledge about cooking in diverse cultures and many women are not shy about asking their friends how to cook their cultural dishes. In fact, some women ate their lunches in the manner of a potluck, where each of four women would bring one dish and the whole group would consume those dishes together. These two multicultural circumstances in particular have, thus, introduced Southern Sudanese women to new foods and new ways of cooking. Women are very eager to take these foods into their culinary repertoire and many women's knowledge about multicultural dishes was quite extensive. Flora's attitude is common:

> Whatever food I see, and if I like that food, I can just ask you, how did you make it? Do you have any recipe for it? Because I just want to learn different stuff. And ... I have friends from Ethiopia, from Somalia and sometimes at work, they bring their food and when I try it, if I like the food, I'll just ask, how did you make it? Then they will just tell me and then I can cook in my house.

Likewise, women showed a strong desire to learn about Canadian foods. Participants internalized a difference between "Canadian food" and "their own food," largely in terms of differences in "freshness" and "ease of cooking." Canadian foods were determined to include more chemicals and preservatives, but facilitated easy, quick meals, tailored to fast-paced Canadian lifestyles.[3] For example, women regularly incorporated boxed cereals, sandwiches and pre-prepared food such as chicken fingers or macaroni and cheese into their cooking. Women also utilized cake and brownie mixes for their children's birthdays, and they frequented fast food establishments such as McDonalds or KFC as well as Chinese takeout on a regular basis. Nonetheless, "Canadian food" also encompassed broader definitions depending on the person. Lettuce-based salads were regularly considered "Canadian," in addition to foods such as banana bread and potato-based dishes such as shepherd's pie and scalloped potatoes. Women learned this food knowledge from Canadian colleagues at work and from the Internet.

Women's reasons for wanting to learn about Canadian foods had to do with wanting to satisfy the desires of their children, wanting to save time on cooking, or wanting to explore new foods, and "not be boring" as Angelina put it. In addition, women associated learning about Canadian cooking to a Canadian identity and feeling "Canadian." As such, women sought out food to create belonging within their new country.

Transnational Belonging, Cosmopolitanism, and Agency

When Southern Sudanese women appropriate global foods as their own, they create a sense of transnational belonging. In their descriptions of how various cultural foods had influenced their cooking, some women provided me with the recipes for global dishes. This sharing demonstrates an appropriation of these dishes as their own, to the extent at least that they were comfortable enough to present them to me. Transnational foods were adopted in some cases to the extent that differences between "Sudanese" and "Other" foods became unrecognizable. For example, at one of my early meetings with Mary, she served me what she called Southern Sudanese food, left over from a barbeque she had had on the weekend with some Sudanese friends. I assumed this was Southern Sudanese food since she had introduced it as such and it was incorporated into a Sudanese gathering, yet she told me the next time we met that it was actually Cuban food (she had spent most of her childhood in Cuba). Therefore, for Mary, Southern Sudanese and Cuban food blurred as both represented "food from home." There were many instances when I asked women, "do you cook Egyptian or Ethiopian foods in Canada?" (foods from their first country of migration). At first the women responded, "no, not really," but then after thinking about it, they said, "oh yes there is this, this and this." Therefore, these foods are in some ways taken up in women's knowledge and do not necessarily stand out as non-Sudanese; they encompass a broad food knowledge which, in its totality, creates belonging and familiarity.

In talking about food, women reveal their sense of familiarity and belonging to multiple nations. When I asked Ajak why she still cooked Sudanese food she explained that it was because she felt 100 per cent Sudanese. Similarly, when I asked her why she cooked Canadian food, she went on to say it was because she was also 100 per cent Canadian. She explained that:

> All the earth and all in it is for the Lord, so what's my problem going to be? Like to feel not Sudanese anymore or to feel not Canadian? No, I still feel Sudanese 100 per cent because this is where I was born and I grew up and everything, so I don't have to forget it.

> And Canada, no I can't forget it, because it's where I came and I settled down.

Nonetheless, identification goes beyond this. As Ajak explains this idea, she reveals the fluidity of her identity —the ability to define herself based on whatever circumstances arise. She continues: "but the good things, you have to love your things, whatever is local, however it looks or something. You have to love it and do something from it, try to make something from it, then other people will love that and then it will be yours." Similarly, Amna describes her identity as a symbiosis of the new and the old, the foreign and the familiar:

> We take from Canadian people or the other people, the communities, Ethiopian, Somali, and we have to tell them what we learned. Everybody, we complete each other ... I need to take the good thing from here and I need to take the good thing from back home and put it together and use it for my life. There is no difference.

I argue that the women's willingness to engage in transnational foodways and their ability to create belonging within them demonstrates a sense of cosmopolitanism. I understand cosmopolitanism as an openness to cultures and to foreignness:

> It entails ... a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. To become acquainted with more cultures is to turn into an *aficionado*.... There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a personal ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting, and reflecting. And there is cultural competence in the stricter sense of the term, a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings. [Hannerz 1996:103]

Hannerz (1996), along with others, contends that most migrants and minorities are not cosmopolitan because their relationship to transnational experiences is involuntary. Cosmopolitanism is generally described as a phenomenon unique to the privileged (largely white), upper-middle class in multiethnic settings who have access to substantial cultural and material resources. Nonetheless, there is a growing call among scholars of this topic (Beck and Sznaider 2006; Cheah and Robbins 1998; Devadason 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2010) to consider how cosmopolitan practices are accessed and encompassed by people from diverse ethnic and classed groups and so, in many instances, they develop out of unprivileged and even coerced circumstances. This group argues that it is premature to dismiss ethnic minorities and lower classes from cosmopolitanism because their engagement stems from pragmatic concerns. Rather, cosmopolitanism in the elitist world travelling sense, presupposes an authority of western experience (Appadurai 1996) and, therefore, it is necessary to take into account the socio-political histories in which cosmopolitanism emerges from and is embedded within. While acknowledging the inherent "worldly" and "unlocatedness" of the term, scholars of "actually existing" cosmopolitanism (Cheah and Robbins 1998) stress that cosmopolitanism is still located and embodied within the daily lives of diverse groups of people.

While perhaps a product of forced displacement, the descriptions of open, creative and inclusive belonging in the above narratives display this sense of cosmopolitanism. Additionally, women demonstrated cosmopolitanism when talking about food. Ajak highlights her cosmopolitan identity by talking about the similarities between foods globally: "in the whole world the foods are the same, just, kind of, recipes. You know these are the different things. But all people are using meats and vegetables, that's all! And flours and that's all! All foods, they are just kind of recipes, just kind of creating recipes, those are the different things." Many women have narratives similar to Ajak's. They revealed that despite not expecting to find certain foods or cooking implements in Canada, they did find them; however, cooks in Canada used implements to prepare slightly different dishes or cooked foods in a slightly different manner. Many women also showed complex understandings about their food and its characteristics compared to other types of foods. Amna, for example, explained to me in detail the differences between Southern Sudanese food and other cultures' food: "For our food, you know it's little bit, like, different from other people, Somali, Ethiopian. Our food is well cooked. Like, it has to be real cooked. It is not like half and half; no it has to be cooked." While Ajak and Amna are conceptualizing food in different manners (one highlighting differences in food while the other expounding its similarities), both evoke a cosmopolitan knowledge about food, about Southern Sudanese food in particular and its relation to other food globally.

I propose that, when Southern Sudanese women seek out and appropriate diverse culinary traditions to create belonging within their current circumstances, they are enacting agency. This is an agentive act because it represents women's ability to actively take control over their identities. In this case, women do not passively accept their fractured connections to their homeland but instead actively work to rebuild those connections both with South Sudan, but also within diverse cultural identities that define their experiences. However, women's transnational foodways are also examples of agency because

they garner women the power, prestige and resources to improve their lives. Specifically, women's transnational foodways empower them through a global awareness of culture, an awareness that allows women to utilize their cultural capital to gain prestige among their peers as well as new resources to manage their daily lives.

Transnational Foodways as Resources and Prestige

Richard Wilk's (1999, 2006) influential work on globalization and the creation of national consciousness among local populations in Belize demonstrates how relationships between the foreign and the local interact to facilitate the awareness of group identities. Wilk contends that a national cuisine, and with it, culture, is infused with meaning through its contrast and comparison with foreign commodities. Contrasts between the old and the new, the local and the foreign, emerge with the introduction of a global consumer culture. This new transnational arena affects local Belizean perception through an increased consciousness of culture itself and, as a result, an increasing objectification of local culture. Belizeans "learned to perceive and categorize differences as 'national' and 'cultural.' They have learned that foreigners expect them to be Belizean" (Wilk 1999:247). Food is a way for Belizeans to engage in this performance of identity and with it, to showcase their ability to manoeuvre within cosmopolitan spheres of existence. People project an intelligence defined by a "mastery of self" through performances of identity such as those described by Wilk; cosmopolitan food consciousness asserts a recognition of culture and its ability to be manipulated (Hannerz 1996). This is true because "mastering the performance and the role asserts a claim to categorical equality, to knowledge and power" (Wilk 1999:247). For example, Belizeans' presentation of "authentic Belizean food" to Wilk at their dinner tables demonstrates global sophistication because it shows that Belizeans *know* that others expect them to be "Belizean."

Evidence of similar performances exist among Southern Sudanese women as participants demonstrated to me, an outsider, that they understood that they were a culturally bounded group by overwhelmingly wanting to show me their "traditional" food. They took pains to explain the significance of their foods for their community and the differences between ethnic and regional traditions. Through this self-presentation, Southern Sudanese women assert their knowledge of the significance of their specific culture and their location within a wider global system of identities.

Similarly, Southern Sudanese women's engagement in the foodways of diverse cultures also demonstrates a desire to evoke global sophistication encompassed in the knowledge and experience of cultural difference (Heldke 2008). It involves an allure of the excitement encompassed in diversity (hooks 1998), as is shown by Angelina:

> It's good to know about different [foods]. Like Canadian, I want to know Canadian cooking or Canadian food, to make a little bit. When you cook *every day* something you know, it's like you're boring right? If you get something new, it's good. So I need new things to try.

However, it also involves the allure of prestige that is contained in knowledge and participation in that diversity. When women such as Amna and Ajak discussed with me how to cook multicultural dishes, or the differences and similarities between dishes cross culturally, they were in a sense boasting. They were displaying the diversity of their skill set, which they saw as a testament to their flexibility and acceptance. In this sense, a taste for foreign food can "be seen as a consequence of the desire to know more about the world, to become more sophisticated, to acquire new forms of knowledge, and to make that knowledge material" (Wilk 1999:248).

These forms of cosmopolitan food knowledge (knowledge of self, and knowledge of other) thus evoke a sophistication that holds power in the transnational world. With an understanding of cultural capital, cosmopolitan subjects highlight this sophistication and utilize it to improve their lives, either to gain prestige in their communities or to improve their lives materially. As Liora Gvion has also shown, when displaced women:

> Welcome what they see as modern dishes and cooking methods, they are not passive recipients of novelties. Rather, women assign their own meanings and modes of consumption to novel food and use food to position themselves in their new society and develop their own ways of interpreting the world they live in. [2009:395]

Amna epitomizes the notion of tactical cosmopolitanism in her narrative in the previous section when she talks about utilizing diverse cultural traditions to create completeness in her life: "I need to take the good thing from back home and put it together and *use it for my life.*"

Southern Sudanese women who were most successfully able to integrate transnational foodways into their daily lives received prestige in their community. Indeed, women known as particularly "good cooks," whom people predominantly turned to on matters of cooking, were the ones who possessed a wide array of diverse food knowledge, both Sudanese and global. Those women who

were able to mix and interpret transnational foodways in unique and tasty ways while still presenting them as variations of Southern Sudanese were particularly valued in the community.

Women also utilized transnational foodways to decrease the burden of cooking in their day-to-day lives (Gvion 2009). Canadian pre-prepared foods, such as those mentioned above, were used to quickly prepare dishes for their families. Time is extremely scarce for most women in Brooks, whose responsibilities extended to both inside and outside the home. Therefore, food that involves little preparation time decreases some of the burden of women's domestic duties. Clara describes the differences between Sudanese and Canadian food, and why she uses Canadian food in her daily cooking:

> A lot of people enjoy cooking, but still, they don't have the time to do it, all this. Like most of Sudanese food is started from scratch. Most of Canadian food is, like, throw everything together, all the ready food. Especially like casserole, where you have to prepare food from leftover turkey, or just get a can of cooked ham, or a can of tuna. You just open it and drain it and put the mayonnaise there, and make the sandwich, and the food is done. No, with Sudanese food, you have to start from scratch, *everything*, like onion, oil, fry, you know.

Southern Sudanese women also used foreign cooking appliances, which preserved the production of traditional Sudanese dishes by easing their preparation. Barbeques, pressure cookers, microwaves, and blenders are all commonly used items in Southern Sudanese households, and facilitate the cooking of cultural dishes. Barbeques allow large groups to congregate because, as cooking moves outdoors, the barbeque provides a cooking implement which groups can gather around; pressure cookers quicken the preparation of foods that would have otherwise taken up women's time; microwaves and rice cookers allow food to be cooked quickly and then reheated so that women do not have to cook everyday but can cook most of their meals on their days off and reheat dishes during the week. Participants thus utilized foreign foods and cooking implements to move more efficiently through their daily lives.

Conclusion

I have argued that Southern Sudanese women demonstrate agency by embracing transnational foodways and with them cosmopolitan consciousness. This openness to diverse cultures enables women to define belonging in ways that provide them with the power that comes from being able to utilize cultural capital in the global arena. In addition, women garner prestige among their peers and new techniques to manage the stresses in their daily lives. The above examples also demonstrate how transnational attitudes enact "tradition." In this sense, tradition and modernity, the foreign and the familiar can be indistinct, indicating that:

> While many women continue to challenge the ideological limitations imposed on their lives, to say that these social conditions can be completely erased, or transcended, negates the acute tension many of us feel as we struggle to negotiate (and sometimes distinguish) between our rights and our obligations, between our privileges and our responsibilities, between our desires for modernity and our grip on tradition. [Abarca 2006: 36-37]

It is interesting to note that this is a gendered perspective, as women did not understand Southern Sudanese men to embrace cosmopolitanism as wholeheartedly as they did. Women more likely than men see themselves as "Canadian" and are open to diverse culinary and cultural traditions. Discussion about foodways with women in Brooks inevitably brought up attitudes toward gender roles and change and women were understood to be more open to change than men. Ajak's description of gendered attitudes towards change is representative of the majority of women in my study:

> I'm here, I don't have to live by the way in Sudan, that we used to live. No, it's not going to work. It will affect all of us. We are already affected by the war so we should look for peace, we should look for happiness, we should look for something good. Not again just to press each other down, to fight, or to lock others. Because here, women can cook, men can cook, women can take care of children, men can take care of children, that's fine. That's not mean, if your wife goes to work and you're just taking care of the children, that's not mean, you are not stupid, no! Because what she's doing is financially—in this country, this is a big problem, financially—so what she's doing is a big part, like going to work every day. This is a really big part, you should be happy. But no, like the men—maybe I don't know, there are some—that want you to go to work, and come home from work, and cook, and clean, and have the children, and go to work too. And they're just sitting and watching T.V., turning the remote. So I don't understand. But in my opinion I think this country doesn't need that. Everything here, the system, the situation, everything will tell you that the way we used to live has to be changed.

Within a context in which the embrace of cosmopolitan identities is gendered, transnational knowledge can

be understood as representative of broader issues of gendered freedom within the family, community and state (Gvion 2009; Pilcher 2002). As I have argued elsewhere (Oleschuk 2011) transnational belonging is entwined in participants' understandings of gendered divisions of labour and of "freedom" more broadly, including freedom to express a multinational identity within a safe environment, and the power that comes from being able to choose who you would like to be. As Estelle expresses, "I want to learn Italian, Chinese, Canadian, so I can feel free." Therefore, transnational foodways are encompassed in broader negotiations of gendered identity, power and freedom that are all transformed and contested in various ways by women within the Southern Sudanese diaspora. In defining both their foodways and themselves beyond static understandings of "traditional Southern Sudanese," women affirm the power encompassed in diverse forms of belonging. This positioning highlights the freedom encompassed in creative culinary expression, as well as the politics contained in the creation of belonging.

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Notes

1 Throughout this article, I use Lucy Long's definition of "foodways" as a "network of behaviours, traditions, and beliefs concerning food, and involves all the activities surrounding a food item and its consumption, including the procurement, preservation, preparation, presentation, and performance of food" (2004:8), but I also adapt it to what I term "transnational foodways," which I use to evoke the global connections which also define food and food practices, and which are ever present in the foodways of migrant women.

2 Molokia is a green, leafy vegetable grown in Africa and the Mediterranean similar to spinach.

3 Families' increasing reliance on western highly processed foods in addition to the already high fat and salt content in Sudanese food has led many Southern Sudanese migrants to experience negative health problems such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Women understood that their reliance on these foods was having an adverse effect on their health; however, many felt that they nonetheless relied on them to save time in their extremely busy lives. Many women talked about trying to make changes to reduce their fat and salt intake, though most still relied heavily on these dishes.

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