

# Social Identity Management and Integration Amongst Indigenous African Refugee Minorities in Norway: The Case of Kvæfjord Kommune.



Ocean Marambanyika

Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences  
for the Master of Philosophy Degree in Indigenous Studies  
University of Tromsø, Norway, June 2008

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## **Acknowledgements/Foreword**

Production of this piece of work would not have been achieved without the cherished support of various institutions and individuals. The Sami Centers` financial contribution for the fieldwork is highly appreciated as it went a long way in making this publication a reality. I would like to give special appreciation to the concrete and overwhelming support before, during and after the fieldwork which I received from Dulo Dizdarevic who is the leader of the Borkenes Refugee Camp and the entire staff of the camp administration. A central acknowledgement also goes to my supervisor, Professor Asle Høgmo for the unparalleled dedication and supervision he proffered throughout the writing process. Departmental and University staff members like Rachel Issa Djessa, Prof Bjørg Evjen, Line Vråberg, and Hildegunn Bruland helped me a lot in my academic processes and I regardly offer them gratitude for their assistance. The staff of the Kvæfjord Kommune Refugee section also deserves special salute for proffering their thoughts and time during my research. My classmates Workabeba Bekele, Kagisano Molapisi, Sandra Carolina Rojas, George Jawali, Kwame Boamah, Sontosh Tripura, Fant Elijah, Auslag, Rafiq Islam, Thuy Nguyen, and Tijana provided valid academic propositions in thesis seminars that helped shape the outcome of the final product.

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I appreciate the multiplicity of support proffered by the various individual and institutional establishments mentioned above. However the probable shortcomings that might be inherent in this publication are my sore responsibilities and are in no way outcomes caused by those who supported and commented on the document. Progressive challenges to the propositions advanced in this publication are wholly welcome since they will inculcate and invigorate further debates and re-awakening on the issues under study.

Thank You,

Ocean Marambanyika, Tromsø, Norway, May 2008.

## **Preface**

The global development arena has been agitated by retrogressive forces that endanger the well being of minor minorities in the global space. As a corollary, the institutional, individual and academic establishments of the universe have seen sense in invigorating their energies in an endeavor to put forth minority and indigenous issues into the central fiscus of the development paradigms. The authorship of this publication has been precipitated by such minded global forces and rapid understandings of the salience of minority and indigenous issues. My specific edge to embark on such a theme on exiled indigenous refugee minorities in Norway has been necessitated by the conviction that an insider`s perspective on refugee issues might unearth enormous untapped understandings on the subject matter. Having been part of the refugee and immigrant system in Norway, I was driven by my daily lived experiences in the system to have a quest to write this publication. Having been an observing participant during my tenure as part of the refugee family in Norway, my re-entrance into the global academic arena through joining the University of Tromsø moved me to being participant observer of refugee experiences. Thus my double experiences as a participant observer and later as an observing participant gave me the quest to value the probable significance that my insider`s perspective might avail to the outer world and the institutional and academic circles. This publication is thus partly premised on the on-going and rising global push to engender the social, political and economic rights of minorities into the practical and progressive development discourses.

***About the Author,***

Ocean Marambanyika is an upcoming development expert devoted to issues of general global developmental and people-driven participatory human development issues. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Development Studies and History from the Midlands State University. He is an Associate Member of the Africa-wide renowned Institute Of Bankers in Zimbabwe (IOBZ). He is thus a Banker who holds a Diploma in Banking from the IOBZ institute. Ocean is also a Human Resource Management expert and holds the Diploma in Human Resource Management from the Institute of Administration and Commerce in Southern Africa (IAC). The Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies Degree forms part of the critical cornerstones in the author`s quest to cement practical and advanced knowledge in this branch of developmental discourses. The author believes in a multi-disciplinary skill acquisition as part of the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century`s approach to understanding and tackling global social and development challenges and opportunities.

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## **List of Acronyms/Abbreviations**

DRC –	Democratic Republic of Congo
IAC-	Institute of Administration and Commerce of Southern Africa
IOBZ-	Institute of Bankers in Zimbabwe
ILO-	International Labour Organization
MSU-	Midlands State University
OAU-	Organization of African Unity
UDI-	Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Utlandingsdirektorat).
UNDP-	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM-	United Nations Development Fund for Women
VOP-	Voksen Opplæring (Adult Education)

## Study Area Maps

Borkenes Refugee Camp

Study

Area



Map.

source: Opplysingen 1881. Additional Labeling by Ocean Marambanyika.

**Map 1:** Borkenes Refugee Camp is located in Kvæfjord Kommune. In this map it is on position 1 and 4.

Kvæfjord Commune

Kvæfjord Commune on the Norwegian map. Map of Norway and the general position of Kvæfjord



Commune.

**Map 2:** The map of Norway. Kvæfjord Kommune is an almost dormitory commune of Harstad. In this map Kvæfjord Commune can be categorized in the Harstad surroundings. It is situated in northern Norway. The map also generally shows the geographic position of the whole of Norway in Scandinavia.

## **Abstract**

This thesis principally deals with issues of social identity management and integration amongst African refugee minorities in Norway. Employing an analytical strategy, the thesis explores varying complex and inter-related situations faced by indigenous African refugees in Norway and how these situations presents challenges in social identity management by the refugees. This piece of work specifically focuses on analyzing how the refugees in question employ social identity management variables like ethnicity, regionalism, language, religion, food, clothing, gender, music and imagined idealizations in managing their social identities. The thesis argues that different situations in the refugee`s host community and the camp environment have impacted into the refugees, dispositions to act differently depending with the objective and extricate demands of the varying situations.

Integration as a practical concept has been equally co-opted into the thesis with a design to analyse the impact of integration programmes on refugee social identity management processes. The Kvæfjord Commune, in collaboration with some civil society organizations in its municipality has fashioned some integration programmes in an endeavor to integrate the refugees into the mainstream societal functionalisms. It is nevertheless argued that the outcomes of such integrative approaches has created complex and over-lapping conditions which have multi-directionally impacted on the refugee social identity management processes.

Whilst recognizing and building on related works on ethnicity and social identity, the thesis finds a unique position by venturing into the study of a multi-nationalized inter-continental refugee camp set-up which has been minimally deliberated upon especially with regard to the social identity management arena.

**Key Words/Terms:** - Social Identity Management, Integration, African Refugee Minorities, Situation, Situational Identity, Norwegian Integration, Norwegian Refugees, Refugees, Ethnicity, Indigenous, Indigenous Africans, Assimilation, African refugees in Norway.

# SECTION 1

## CHAPTER 1

### **About The Research and Methods- An Introduction**

#### *What Is The Topic All About?*

The research is principally focused on social identity management amongst the Indigenous African Refugee Minorities in Norway. Employing multiple variables, the research is looking at the hypothesis that the African refugees manage their social identities differently depending with their backgrounds and the situations they encounter. The assumption that integration programmes have an impact on the social identity management processes of the African refugees will also be an equally salient subject of this paper.

#### **1.1: After the Project Proposal- Pondering the Fieldwork!**

After having submitted my research proposal it was approved by the department and all was set for the fieldwork. Each day that passed the excitement of having my research proposal approved was fading as time was ticking for me to do the next agenda! The fieldwork agenda! An agenda which started to be unsettling for me as I was always thinking about what should be the starting point. My project proposal clearly stipulated what I was supposed to do and I had also discussed meaningfully with my supervisor the probable challenges and how I should handle the fieldwork. I gracefully went through books on qualitative research and read most sections on fieldwork issues. Two of the books I read were one by Holiday Adrian called *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*, and the other one was by David Silverman entitled *Doing Qualitative Research*. These books boosted my moral on how I can embark on such an undertaking. I had done my undergraduate dissertation research with the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe on Gender, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in Zimbabwe. So I was not new to fieldwork challenges. The point of departure was that I was dealing with a research in a completely different context and set up. A context and set up with informants from different nationalities, informants speaking different languages, informants with a variety of religions, and above all, a setting in a European country in which I was also a stranger attempting to research on other strangers. That was contrary to my Zimbabwe research in which the informants had one religion, the same nationality, the same language and a research

setting where I belonged. Nevertheless after going through some literature such as those two books mentioned above and armed with my determination and advice from my supervisor I embarked on a journey that gave birth to this project.

### *In The Study Area before Starting the Research*

The birth to a project that is hoped to give birth to sister projects started with a journey by the Hurtigruten boat to Kvæfjord Commune via Harstad. When I jetted into Kvæfjord I was greeted by the reality of what I had to do. I had made some contacts before I went to the field area and all was set for me to start my fieldwork. I had arranged for one informant whom I knew before to be my translator. I had met this man when I stayed in Kvæfjord for almost two years prior to my research. The translator was also an informant and I thought it best to start my interviews with him and then the rest. He could speak English, French, Swahili, Lingala, Bemba, Kikongo, some little Chichewa and he was learning Norwegian. After securing my accommodation in the refugee camp and my translator in place, I started perusing my research proposal and thereafter started my interviews. At the back of my mind I was always flipping my research proposal to ask myself about what's the research problem, questions and objectives, among others. Hence an enumeration these and other issues below.

### **1.2: Problematising the Research and Research Questions**

As an African ethnic group, the African refugee minority group in Kvæfjord Commune has membership within its group that interacts with each other almost on a daily basis. In addition the refugees also interact with the individual and institutional membership of the Norwegian host community. In these interactions the minority refugees are faced with various situations in which they manage their social identities. Researches on refugees and immigrants have mostly focused on aspects of discrimination, racism and how to stem the flow of refugees and immigrants into the host states, especially in developed countries. In the process minimal focus has been put on researching the dynamics of social identity management in the lives of refugees. Fredrik Barth makes reference to the Pakistan refugees in Norway who were confronted with different contexts in which to manage their ethnic identity<sup>1</sup>. Barth's research focused largely on the Pakistanis unlike the problem presented here by an attempt to focus on social identity management of an African ethnic group with members from different nationalities. Moreover according to Thomas H. Eriksen when cultural differences regularly

makes a difference in interaction between members of groups, the social relationship has an ethnic element<sup>2</sup>. In the situation of the African refugees in Kvæfjord it can be argued that their perceived or actual cultural difference(s) from the host community has an effect in the way they interact with the host Norwegian community. The Norwegian integration programmes have been designed in ways that facilitate refugee integration into the Norwegian mainstream culture. In the process the integration programmes have somehow protected and at the same time impacted on the social identities of the refugees to be integrated.

In light of the minimal researches done on the social identity management amongst refugees and in light of the integration programmes and the impact of social differences in interactions between refugees and the host community; the research problem is thus to examine social identity management by the African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord in the different situations they find themselves facing in their life experiences.

In furtherance of the aims of this research, the following research questions shaped the way data was gathered, the methods, and most aspects pertaining to the outcomes of this research. In line with the above propositions the research questions were as follows:

How do the Indigenous African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune manage their social identities in the host community's environment as well as the refugee camp situations, and what strategies do they adopt in managing their identities in these multiple situations they encounter?

What is the impact of integration programmes like the Red Cross cross-cultural programmes; the Kvæfjord Commune integration programmes; the church programmes as well as the Norwegian-refugee farm project in the social identity management of the indigenous African refugee minorities?

What is the impact of language and religion in the social identity management of the African refugee minorities in Norway?

### **1.3: Research Objectives and Research Justification**

Commensurate with the quest to find meaning to the research problem and/or questions and also as highlighted above the principal objectives of this research can be deciphered as:

To examine how the African refugee minorities manage their social identities in the host community's environment as well as the refugee camp situations, and what strategies

they adopt in managing their social identities in the various contexts.

To examine the impact of Norwegian integration programmes like the Red Cross cross-cultural programmes; the Kvæfjord Commune integration programmes; the church programmes as well as the Norwegian-refugee farm project on social identity management by the African refugee minorities.

To examine the role of language and religion in social identity management by the African refugee minorities

The studies on social identity management have been going on for quite some time, though there are limited works directly linked to the situation of indigenous African refugees especially in Norway. Most studies in Norway have focused on the general issues of immigrants with little specific focus on African refugee social identity management. This study aims therefore to add further impetus in analyzing social identity dynamics amongst African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune which can be applicable to the general situation facing indigenous African refugees in Norway as a whole.

Moreover the significance of studying the component of social identity management has been well documented and has been recognised as inadequate by some academicians. This therefore adds as part of the justification to embark on the research on social identity management and refugee issues. Indigenous Refugee minorities have also been seen not to have been given sufficient attention in the social sectors. There is however no denial of the existence of research on these issues. Rather the inadequacy raises the need for more analysis on the issues of refugee social identities. In their article on Anthropology and the Study of Refugees, Harrell Bond and Voutira (1992) noted that “social scientists have generally neglected refugee studies and research; and no department of refugees existed in any university or other higher education institution”<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand Lillich (1984) commented that “the presence of floating groups of oppressed and miserable persons presents the international community today with one of its greatest challenges”<sup>4</sup>, to which Bond and Voutira responded by noting that “---encoded in the label “refugee” are the images of dependency, helplessness and misery”<sup>5</sup>. It can be noted here that the interest in studying African refugee social identity management is also inspired by some misconceptions about refugees. Bond and Voutira correctly points to the neglect on the study of refugee issues to adequate levels. Though Bond and Voutira`s views about the neglect reflected the thinking



and situation of the early 1990s, it can be noted that some aspects like social identity management by refugees have not been fully explored. Research on this area is promising, but it needs a push. Hence the justification to focus on this area in this study and fuse it with the component of the often neglected aspect of social identity management by African refugees in Norway. Liisa Malkki (1990) in her ethnography of the refugee camp situation in Tanzania found that conditions were favourable to the formation of a particular type of historical and political consciousness among the refugees in that camp<sup>6</sup>. Such kind of works will be juxtaposed with the way the African refugees in Kvæfjord commune manage their social identities in different situations they encounter.

#### **1.4: Research Setting and Methods**

The area studied is located in Kvæfjord commune in Northern Norway. The commune is host to a sizeable number of indigenous African refugees in and outside the Borkenes refugee camp located in the commune. These indigenous African refugees have different religious backgrounds and most of them are mainly Christians and Muslims. Various nationalities are represented in this pool of refugees with some refugees from Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, DR Congo, Congo Brazzaville, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Angola, Ivory Coast, Niger, Uganda, and so forth. As can be noted most of these refugee producing countries are currently faced with conflicts on a large scale, small scale or inter-state basis.

In terms of languages most of them speak English at various levels for basic communication but not as their home country's official language except for those from Anglo-phone countries. In other words most of the refugees either speak English or French. Moreover most of the refugees from east, southern and central Africa share the Bantu origin identity unlike those from West Africa and other regions, a fact that might have influence on identity relations amongst the refugees themselves.

Some refugees go to Adult Schools, others are working, and others are waiting for the finalization of their request to stay in Norway, whilst others are still struggling to adjust into the Norwegian society. Some members of the Norwegian community, like in most states the world over, have been sceptical of foreign refugees in their country and thus the Us/Them dichotomy shapes some relations with the refugees, whilst on the other hand some Norwegians are liberal on refugee issues. All these factors have influence in how the ethnic

refugee minorities manage their identity in order to suit particular circumstantial demands. Nevertheless the exact impact of these factors in social identity management had yet to be fully investigated and analysed, which this research will attempt to do.

This is briefly the setting of the area studied. The qualitative methods employed were influenced by the research setting as well as research objectives. As will be discussed in the methodology section, the sensitivity of “identity talk” in the refugee circles influenced the methodology for data collection and the manner in which informants were chosen as well as the questioning format. Considering the objectives which the research sought to learn, qualitative methodology was suitable for this type of study. Moreover related researchers on identity management and immigrants have usefully employed qualitative methods to come up with some findings in this area. As such based on the tested and established relevance of qualitative methods, this research found it unproblematic to employ this tool in the quest to analyse what the research sought to learn.

### **1.5: The Methods and Methodological Tools**

Interviews, Participant Observation, Focus Group Discussions and published documents were the principal methodological tools used in the data collection.

Interviews were carried out both as face to face and via the telephone. This technique provided the fruitful information on the lived experiences of the African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune. In the interviews the floor was open and informants could air their thoughts freely. To maintain relevant focus, the way questions were asked was loosely and tactically guided in order to leave room for the informant to raise up issues that a researcher might overlook. It was preferred to apply the open ended approach in questioning. For instance in investigating the element of the supposed creation of the `imagined African nation in Norway` within the refugee’s minds, a question like “ can you explain if you feel more like African or Congolese here in Norway?” was asked. This format gave room to obtain insights beyond this question only, but also to other variables which this research sought to investigate. Interview sessions were carried out in any (legal) place which the informants felt comfortable with. Places like their respective rooms in the camp, the researcher’s room, the coffee shop, the church and the sitting place outside the camp were commonly used.

Interviews thus provided an invaluable insight into the nature of refugee social identity management. Thus Julie Cruikshank (1993) in her article “The Politics of Ethnography in the Canadian North” noted that an ultimate value of oral tradition (interviews) is the ability that the listener could benefit directly from the narrator’s experiences<sup>7</sup>. The interviews were complimented with the other tools like participant observation to bridge the gaps that might have been inherent in gathering data through this approach.

Participant observation was of necessity to observe large group behaviours on social identity managements. Information obtained through oral interviews was put to test when I was observing whether the refugees were really behaving in the way they said during the interviews. In most cases there was little variance. Thus on the larger part of it the outdoor and interactional behaviours exhibited managed social identities to suit different situations. I attended various social functions like prayer meetings, parties, sport events and so forth to observe how the African refugee managed their social identities within and outside their group. Interestingly the social identities were complexly managed as will be deliberated in data presentation sections of the thesis. When observing informants in places like a church for instance notes were put down on paper. There was no suspicion as to why I would be writing on paper since many people in the church would be writing down biblical verses being preached. In the process I was writing down both verses and research notes. In some situations like in unexpected conversations leading to my research questions, observation notes would be jotted down some minutes later as to avoid interrupting the flow of observing and conversing. Observation was thus a pivotal technique in the qualitative approach. Thus Emersen and Fretz (1995) in their publication entitled “Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes” highlighted that ethnographers collect materials relevant to member’s meanings by focusing not on decontextualised talk but on naturally occurring, *situated interaction* in which local meanings are created and sustained<sup>8</sup>. On a similar note in their publication entitled “Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry”, Pelto and Pelto (1978) postulated that specification of operations enhances control of extraneous variables, increases the precision of basic measurements (or other types of observations), and provides the framework of information that permits the researcher to retrace his or her steps mentally in order to understand both predicted and unpredicted results<sup>9</sup>. Thus the observation as an operational tool is pivotal in qualitative research. Observations unveil insights into symbolic actions which might otherwise be elusive to unearth through oral interviews. Thus Trond Thuen

(1995) in his article entitled “Symbolic action and Redressive Reaction” wrote about how the Sami indigenous people used symbolic action in attracting the media during the Alta Affair when the indigenous group demonstrated against a dam project in their reindeer farming area. Trond Thuen thus wrote that in order to convey a political message, symbolic action should consist of events to the effect that each day offers a new step in the development of the case<sup>10</sup> ; a scenario that might be applicable to the symbolic actions of the African refugee group under study. Merged with the participant observation methods, was the method of Focus Group Discussion method which is closely related to the interview method above.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were useful in providing a platform where the informants will cross check each other on their views. In some cases I would give them some platform to correct and argue with each other. In all the processes I was taking down notes. I opted for Small Focus Group Discussion to make the informants highlight their views in the company of colleagues they felt comfortable with. Ocean Marambanyika (2004) cited elsewhere the significance of the interview and FGDs in his research entitled “The Dynamics Between Human Rights and HIV/AIDS: The Case of Zimbabwean Women”. He cited that “by using FGDs, it will assist in getting a feel of wider perceptions of the communities on a number of HIV and AIDS issues as they affect women and men differently and the human rights implications thereof.”<sup>11</sup> In this scenario the FGDs assisted in embracing the general social identity management mind map of the group under study.

Published data like articles, journals, scientific books and related documents constituted part of the salient methodological research tools for this work. Some of the documents were obtained from field informants like the Kvæfjord Commune and the Borkenes Refugee Camp. The documentary resources formed part of the axis of the data triangle that will also shape the theoretical frameworks and data analysis of this publication.

### ***1.5.1: Limitations of the Study and Methodological challenges***

It was found out that there was limited accessible literature published in English concerning refugee issues in Norway. An attempt to browse the websites like amazon.com for textbooks yielded little results concerning relevant English literature about refugees in Norway. And further attempts to check books from Kvæfjord Community library published in English concerning refugees also proved challenging. Nevertheless my limited understanding of the

Norwegian language helped me to sift through literature published in Norwegian. This challenge will lead to a bias of making the comparative analysis of the research findings with other places where the literature is published in English. This however is not expected to heavily affect the intended objective purpose of the research. In fact publishing this thesis work in English will be of tremendous benefit to future local and international researchers on this area.

I intended to make use of tape recording in my data gathering. It was hoped that this will provide secure information which I would synthesise after the fieldwork and decode. Nevertheless the informants were very sensitive to the idea of being tape recorded. Any attempt to tape record threatened to ground the whole research to a halt. Since some of the refugees have their applications for refugee status in Norway still being processed, they were not comfortable to be tape recorded and it also explains why they chose to be strictly anonymous.

The pre-fieldwork expectation was that I will try to use both small and large focus group discussions (FGDs). However during the field work slight changes had to be made. It was realised that in larger focus group discussion some informants were not even willing to participate and some were not at liberty to air their views. I had anticipated this kind of scenario. Since I was prepared for this eventuality I decided to make use of smaller groups of two to three people who were close friends. In this way the informants knew each other and were freer to discuss their points openly. This was very helpful as it unearthed rich information on refugee social identity management amongst the African refugee group.

The pre-fieldwork idea was to employ personal face to face and telephone interviews. This went on according to plan as a significant part of the research information was gathered through this technique.

Participant observation was a mega qualitative research method in this type of field situation in which sensitivity of interviewing was the order of the day. As I had stayed in the research area before moving to Tromsø I had at least some advantage of being known to some of my informants. As such I would go with them to various activities they performed in their day to day life chores. Before the fieldwork I had planned to use this method extensively and I did exactly that since most information will be accessible in informal discussions on how the

African refugees view their situation and how they react and handle it in different scenarios. The participant observation also enabled the necessity to compare the situational social identity behaviour of the African refugee group with that of non-African groups.

### *Sampling*

The analysis enumerated here is based on the fieldwork data collected amongst the indigenous African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Kommune. Within the confines of the field work challenges, the sample can be said to be representative of the group under study. In some cases it was deliberately made a policy to include informants who made it possible to represent issues of gender, age, religion and regions. As will be noted in the chapters on data presentation and analysis the views of refugee women in relation to aspects like refugee camp management, programme participation and marriage issues were sought and their views assisted in articulating a balanced women-men perception of the situations.

I created two subsets within the sample to achieve the objective of testing the assumptions of the study. One sample was the African refugee group inside the refugee camp whilst the other sample was the refugee group outside the refugee camp which is staying inside the communities.

The interviewees were multilingual and were asked about the language they preferred to give the interview in. Since the translator could speak more than five languages, it was manageable to conduct interviews and related conversations using different languages. Nevertheless most of the informants could speak English to a communicable extent. Some of the informants preferred to mix French and English. The translator could speak English, French, Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo, Kipemba and a little bit of Chichewa. It was deliberately made a policy to be with informants who could communicate in any of these languages for the clear reason that it would have been untenable to try to interview someone with whom we could not understand each other. Nevertheless the observation technique worked irrespective of the language one spoke. To solidify further appreciation of aspects of the research topic, a brief enumeration of the background to refugee issues will be undertaken below before proceeding to deal with theoretical framework aspects of this research.

## **1.6: Historical Background to Global and Norwegian Refugee Issues**

Human migration and refugee histories date back since time immemorial. Refugee

movements, integration and identity management are areas that have shaped the natural form of human survival. The area which will be under study has a relatively new experience in terms of hosting third world refugees, less still African refugees. Norway as a country has a relatively novel experience in terms of African refugee management and integration. For example, Norway only received 223 refugees between 1960 and 1970, and it received 1,680 refugees between 1978 and 1979 alone, of which more than 1,300 were "boat people" from Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore as of 2001, most of the immigrant population was from Pakistan, Sweden, and Denmark, though new flows in 2004 largely came first from Sweden, then Russia, Denmark, and Poland.<sup>13</sup> A slightly significant inflow of African immigrants in the form of refugees into Norway started in the late 1990s but especially in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence research on indigenous African refugees in Norway is yet to be undertaken to the deepest. On the general immigration scale, the Norwegian state has passed some refugee related laws that have had and continue to have effects on social identity management by the African refugee minority group. The 1988 Immigration Act and the White Papers enacted since the 1970s all touched on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of refugee life which somehow made it inevitable to have an impact on social identities of the refugees. For instance in the White Paper of 1996-1997, the concept of integration included the obligation to participate, partly to achieve a successful multicultural society and laid heavy emphasis on measures specifically aimed at immigrants, including language training, labor market integration, and initiatives to prevent racism and xenophobia<sup>14</sup>. In summary these integration measures by the host nation have profound effects on African refugee social identities, though the extent of the effects has not been widely researched.

African refugee movements into countries like Norway are shaped in the backdrop of historical circumstances of the African continent. The demise of the cold war era political set-ups ushered in a new era of political and economic havocs and re-orientation into African countries which were relatively prosperous before then. African nations were pawns in the geo strategic cold war between the capitalist west and the communist east. Most African countries capitalized on the western divisions to obtain independence and economic benefits from both sides of the conflict. However when the cold war ended Africa became a neglected zone which was no longer considered strategic. As time passed Africa became again a rich resource base for developed nations to compete for resources and in the processes a complex web of inter-state and civil conflicts have continued to ravage the continent. The crisis of

governance has even exacerbated the political destabilization in Africa. The end result of all these complex instabilities has led to the increased production of refugees fleeing their motherland towards the western world for political safety. In the process some African refugees have landed in Norway and are faced with challenges and opportunities in integration policies as well as in identity management. When the African refugees come to Norway they are faced with the dilemmas of whether to adopt multiple identities depending with the situation and context they find themselves in. The Norwegian society is not new to different ethnic groups and minorities. In addition to the indigenous Sami and Kven people, the Norwegian state has also ethnic minorities in the form of immigrants from other developing regions like Asia, Latin America, Middle East and Eastern Europe. Publications on refugees from these regions in Norway like the Pakistanis, the Vietnamese, the Russians and so forth had been relatively more than the focus on indigenous African refugee minorities, less still on the concept of social identity. This research will seek to analyze the social identity management dynamics amongst the specific African indigenous refugee minority group in Kvæfjord commune in northern Norway. The role of some integration programmes and their impact on social identity management amongst the African refugee minorities will also be deliberated upon.

### **1.7: Key Concepts:**

It is critical to carry the reader along by defining some key concepts of this paper hereunder.

**Social Identity-** is defined by Henry Tajfel (1981) as the aspects of an individual's self concept (-ion) that derive from one's knowledge of being part of categories and groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to those memberships.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the African refugee minorities to be under study the social identities may range from group identity for the African refugees as a whole, or individual identity of each separate group member.

**Refugee-** a refugee is defined by the United Nations Refugee Convention as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the



protection of that country”<sup>16</sup>. This definition fits the category of the refugees to be the subject of this study, though the Organization of African Unity (OAU) 1969 definition will be useful to bridge loopholes in the UN definition. The OAU Convention extends its definition on refugees in Article 2.1 by highlighting that “The term "refugee" shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality”.<sup>17</sup> The OAU extension suits well some of the refugees under study. If the Norwegian state sticks only to the UN definition then most refugees might find their refugee-hood being put to doubt since some of the refugees left their countries owing to retrogressive consequences emanating from external aggressions, occupations or foreign dominations by regional or globalised international powers. Thus an approach that complements the UN/OAU definitions will qualify all the informants under study to be refugees.

**Indigenous:-** The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention no. 169 of 1989 defines indigenous people as “peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own economic, cultural, and political institutions”<sup>18</sup>. The controversy surrounding this 1989 definition might extend to the attempt to contextualize it in this project. The fragile decisions and hesitancy of the African block to initially ratify the Declaration on Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations in 2006/7 sheds some light on the controversy on indigeneity in the African context. Nevertheless it is not the purpose of this project to delve much into the controversies. In this context some of the informants fit the category of being indigenous based on the 1989 definition quoted above. This is typical of informants like the Tuareg and Batwa from Niger and Burundi respectively quoted in the analysis section. They fit the category one definition which corresponds to the 1989 definition. The other informants are typical of a combination of both category one and category two definitions. Category two definitions take all black Africans to be indigenous to their countries or regions. Another approach taken in this case is to assume that if the refugees are to romanticize Africa as one nation when they are in exile, then they become indigenous to their country called Africa.

More deliberations on this will be extrapolated on the section on idealization and imagination of Africa as a nation within a Norwegian nation.

**Integration**:- An individual or group is integrated within a society when they: are socially connected with members of a (cultural, ethnic, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities, and with relevant services and functions of state, and have linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship<sup>19</sup> (British Home Office Department). Gullestad Marianne (2002) also noted that Integration means that the immigrant participates fully, but there is no necessity to give up their national and religious characteristics.<sup>20</sup>

**Assimilation** and Segregation/Separation – These concepts are pivotal in the analysis of social identity as assimilation or segregation present situations that may impact on the social identity that will be adopted to suit the prevailing scenario. Kvernmo and Heyerdahl have commented in relation to assimilation and separation. They said when individuals want to maintain their original social/cultural identity they can separate or segregate themselves and reject the dominant culture. Assimilation is a situation whereby there is no interest in maintaining one's culture of origin and then individuals assimilate and exclusively identify with the dominant culture, rejecting their original culture<sup>21</sup>. The indigenous African refugee minorities' situation in relation this aspect will be dealt with in more detail in the section on integration and assimilation regimes.

Thus the key concepts of social identity, refugee, indigenous, integration and assimilation can be basically understood as pointed out above. Without diverging more from the core purpose of analysing the social identity management by the Africans refugees in the study area, some of these concepts will be, as already pointed out, analytically fused in the discussions throughout this paper.

### **1.8: Organisation of the Study**

Evolving from the need to address the aforementioned research aims, this paper is organised into five chapters. This section as the introductory chapter attempted to orient readers with the research area background and outlined the objectives of the research, the methods and key

concepts among others. Developing from the data outlined in chapter one, chapter two dwells more on the conceptual issues shaping the research, and thus deals with issues of theoretical framework which is merged with literature review analysis, aspects highlighted as significant by Holliday Adrian (2006) in his *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research* publication<sup>22</sup>.

The principal findings of the research which are linked to each of the main research questions outlined in the introduction are enumerated in the third and fourth chapters. The third chapter deals with the dynamics of social identity management amongst, between, and within the indigenous African refugees and their interactions. The fourth chapter drawing from data gathered from the commune officials and integrated refugees present and analyse the impact of integration programmes and actions on social identity management by the refugees under study. The paper folds by the conclusions and recommendations as outlined in the final chapter. Throughout the discussion in this paper comparative methodology which takes into cognisance comparison in terms of time, place and space will inform the unfolding of the research findings.

### **1.9: Chapter Summary**

At the centre of this study is an analytical investigation into the processes through which indigenous African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune manage their social identities in various situations they encounter in and outside the refugee camp and also depending on their traditional backgrounds. The probable hypothesised implications of the Commune's integration policies on refugee social identity management will also be a pivotal aspect of the paper. Alongside other social identity related variables like ethnicity, regionalism, clothing, food, music and gender; language and religion forms part of the piercing questions regarding their position in refugee social identity management processes. Qualitative methodological approaches encompassing the observation method, the interview methods and secondary data approaches were a cornerstone in the data collection process and the ensuing data analysis to be deliberated throughout this publication. The general inadequacy of academic and scientific devotion to the study of social identity management dynamics by the indigenous African refugee circles in Norway and Kvæfjord Commune in particular, gave part of the impetus to embark on this research project. As the paper unfolds, these and other factors will be analysed and deliberated upon.

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## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will deliberate on theoretical issues relating to social identity and situational identity management. In the process of doing so, relevant selected literature will be utilized to discuss the theoretical frameworks premised on the social identity theory and the situational theory of ethnicity. Thus the theories and literature reviews are intertwined.

#### **2.1: Theorizing Social Identity and Situational Theory of Ethnicity**

Social identity has generally been a concept debated within the framework of theories of ethnicity. As such this research work has found relevance in examining social identity management amongst the African refugee minorities within the context of the *situational theory of ethnicity* as espoused by situational/instrumental theorists on ethnicity. Various scholars have commented on the complex linkages between social identity and ethnicity. In this research ethnicity becomes a key concept in discussing the concept of social identity. Ethnicity has been defined as a category of membership; that is, an ascribed or self-ascribed device that socially locates an individual with reference to the social ascriptions of other persons<sup>1</sup>, (Don Handelman, also Cohen 1974, Thomas Hylland Eriksen 1997 and G. C. Bentley 1987). Further Hylland Eriksen (1997) notes that Ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It can thus also be defined as a social identity characterized by metaphoric or fictive kinship<sup>2</sup>. When cultural differences regularly make a difference in interaction between members of groups (Norwegians-vs.-Refugees (my emphasis)), the social relationship has an ethnic element<sup>3</sup>. Fredrik Barth (1969) in his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* specifically defines an ethnic group as “a population which has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order”<sup>4</sup>. The concept of “ethnic group” thus becomes significantly related to this research work based on the notion that the African refugee minority group to be studied can qualify under Barth’s definition of ethnic group to be an ethnic group that has a social identity to manage in different situations. This brings in the issue of one of the theories that will guide

this work, that is, the situational theory of ethnicity. Under the situational theory which is also called the instrumental theory (but here it is preferred to use the term situational theory), ethnic groups change their social identities depending with the multiple situations they encounter in their living experiences in order to achieve some social or political projects<sup>5</sup>. Similarly Eriksen notes that the `situationists`s` view deriving from the works of Barth would suggest that the boundaries of such an *ethnie* depend upon the *situation* or on the project in which the group is engaged”<sup>6</sup>, (*Situational theory*). Fredrick Barth (1994) pointed out that attention to processes of boundary maintenance quickly showed that ethnic groups and their features are produced under particular interactional, historical, economic and political circumstances: they are highly situational<sup>7</sup>. Thus this research work will be shaped by the situational theory of ethnicity in an endeavor to analyse the `highly situational interactional circumstances` as Barth puts it. The African refugee minorities in Norway are engaged in various activities amongst themselves as well as with the people of the community they live in. The extent to which they manage their social identities depending on different situations they encounter will be a central theme of analysis in this paper. This will be the essence of adopting the situational theory as a framework to examine how the African refugee minorities manage their social identities in various situations.

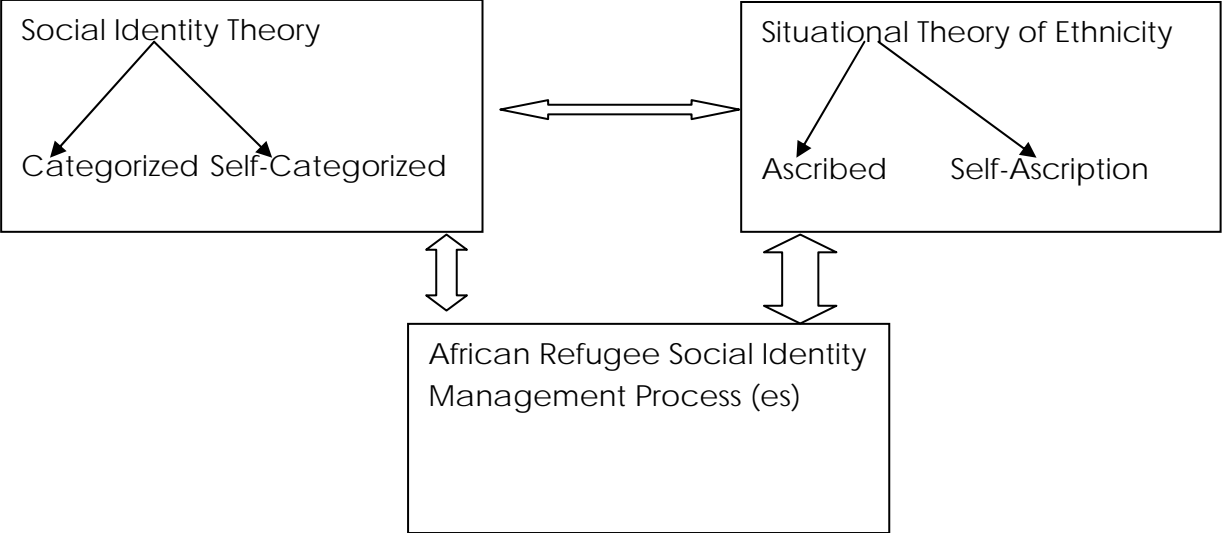


Figure 2.1: Inter-relatedness of social Identity theory and situational theory. Both theories have the elements of categorized/ascribed ethnic labels that combines with individual or group self-categorization/self-ascription which influences the way one manage his/her social identity(ies).

*Social Identity Theory*: It is necessary to delve into Tajfel's definitions of social identity at length in order to analyse the linkages in the scenarios. Tajfel (1981) defines social identities as the aspects of an individual's self-concept that derive from one's knowledge of being part of categories and groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to those memberships<sup>8</sup>. Tajfel postulates that the formation of social identities is the consequence of three social psychological processes. The first is social categorization. Under this first process, nationality, language, race or ethnicity, skin colour or any other social or physical characteristic that is meaningful in particular social contexts can be the basis for social categorization and thus the basis for the creation of social identities. The second process underlying the construction of social identities is social comparison, which Tajfel argues that social comparison inevitably follows social categorization. Once individuals are categorized, they naturally tend to compare their group(s) with others. The third process involves psychological work, both cognitive and emotional, that is prompted by what Tajfel assumes is a universal motive- to achieve a positive sense of distinctiveness. The motive can be fulfilled through feeling good about the groups into which individuals have been categorized and is activated by the discomfort that follows being categorized into devalued groups<sup>9</sup>.

Having outlined the general meanings of the social identity theory and the ethnicity (situational) theory, it can be noted that these two theories converge in noting that social identities can be produced under varying social contexts or social situations. Below a literature based deliberation on social scientific propositions on social identity and the situational theorems is undertaken.

## **2.2: Preceding and Ongoing Voices on Social Identity Management, Ethnicity and Refugee Issues.**

It is acknowledged that researches on this field have been undertaken and some researches might still be going on, just as this publication. With due respect to the preceding studies in this arena, it is pivotal to point out that most of the data has been presented by outsiders, as immigrants might perceive or see it. As a corollary the preceding presentations might have cast a blind eye on some issues that might be seen as trivial from an ethnic Norwegian's viewpoint, yet they might be realistically pertinent to the refugee minorities in Norway.

In their studies on ethnicity and identity different scholars have discussed the complexities faced by ethnic minorities in managing their social identities. Amongst these scholars are Fredrik Barth, Marcus Banks, T.H. Eriksen, C.G.Bentley, D.Handelman, John Rex, and Harald Eidheim among others. Fredrik Barth (1994) in his work “Enduring and Emerging Issues in the Analysis of Ethnicity” has highlighted that ethnic groups manage their identities at micro, median and macro situational levels. The Pakistani immigrant example given by Barth is discussed as adopting social identities that operates in various situations at these three levels<sup>10</sup>. G. Bentley (1987) has however criticized the primordialist and instrumentalist theories pointing out that they have not been tested at individual levels where identity formations mostly take place. Instead Bentley opts for what he calls the “practice theory” of ethnicity formulated by Bourdieu (1977) which states that objective conditions of existence, mediated by systems of symbolic representations, generate in different persons dispositions to act in different ways<sup>11</sup>. These theoretical propositions will thus be useful in the analysis of the social identity management of the refugees in the “objective conditions” or “situational conditions” they encounter, as Bourdieu and Barth might want to argue respectively. In support of Barth`s theory T.H. Eriksen has argued that “ there can be no doubt that the substantial social contexts of ethnicity differ enormously, and indeed that ethnic identities and ethnic organizations themselves may have highly variable importance in different societies, for different individuals and in different situations”<sup>12</sup>

It has been hypothesized that the African refugee minority in Kvæfjord Commune adopt different identities depending with the various situations they encounter. In line with this it has been found necessary to deliberate on literature on the discourses of situations and social identity management. G. Bentley highlighted that as contexts change, so do relevant identities<sup>13</sup>. Pivotal to the analysis and argument to be advanced in this paper is the notion of the situation and its corresponding relatedness to social identity management. A host of authors have highlighted the link between changes of identity as the situation changes. Otto Hieronymi (2005) pointed out that our identities evolves, changes under the impact of individual or collective, external or internal, personal factors<sup>14</sup>. And Anthony Smith(1997) noted that the paradox of ethnicity is its mutability in persistence, and its persistence through change<sup>15</sup>. Whilst on a similar note Marilyn Brewer (2001) argued that the salience of a particular situation affects social identity manipulation. Brewer points that the self is also viewed as an organized system that structures the relationships among different identities and



determines which identity is invoked at a particular time as a function of the relative salience and centrality of identities within and across social situations<sup>16</sup>. Thus as Brewer puts it different situations invokes a disposition in individuals or groups to act differently. This related line of thinking has also been outlined by other social scientists. Don Handelman (1977) argues that the other major trend which is evident in the anthropological study of ethnicity is the *situational selection* of ethnic identity. A central assumption underlying this approach is that the social structure of any complex society provides persons with multiple ways and opportunities to assign social identities to one another and that ethnicity may be one such categorized set of identities through which individuals can name another as social beings<sup>17</sup>. In her social anthropological study of foreign refugees in Tanzania, Liisa Malkki (1992) commented on the situation-identity convergence. She noted that rather than defining themselves collectively as `the Hutu refugees`, they tended to seek ways of assimilating and of *manipulating multiple identities* – identities derived or `borrowed` from the social context of the township<sup>18</sup>. And Rumbaut (1994) postulated that ethnic self awareness is heightened or blurred, respectively, depending on the degree of dissonance or consonance of the *social contexts* which are basic to identity formation<sup>19</sup>, whilst in noting the complexity of the link between situations and identity management Marilyn highlighted that in a large pluralistic society, multiple criss-crossing social identities can become a source of increasing factionalism or enhanced stability, depending on how competing identities are managed<sup>20</sup>. Though the extent of the pluralism of the Norwegian society is debatable as will be discussed in the analysis section, Marilyn`s argument can be courted in the upcoming analysis of the fieldwork findings. In relation to migrants in Europe, John Rex (1997) argued that “even though they were not engaged in nationalist projects, migrant ethnic minorities became the focus of suspicion and hostility in their countries of settlement (in Europe after 1989)<sup>21</sup>. And he goes further to say that, “those members of migrant communities who have been successful in adapting to the demands of their host societies understandably fear that, if they represent themselves as culturally different, they will be treated as inferior and denied equal rights---.”<sup>1</sup> Under this scenario the migrant community`s fear of an inferior labeling might invoke them to act situationally with the objective of being availed with equal rights. Thus social identities adopted might be concomitant with varying situational demands, a position which this paper will attempt to analyse.

In addition the international legal framework also avails some complex requirements in

identity management of the refugee minorities. For instance the Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who are not Nationals of the Country in which They Live (1985) article 5:1. Highlights that “Aliens shall enjoy, in accordance with domestic law and subject to the relevant international obligations of the State in which they are present, in particular the following rights: ( f ) The right to retain their own language, culture and tradition;”<sup>23</sup> whilst the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1950/54) Article 2. - General obligations says “Every refugee has duties to the country in which he finds himself, which require in particular that he conform to its laws and regulations as well as to measures taken for the maintenance of public order.”<sup>24</sup>. In view of this, some refugee traditional practices that might be part of their social identities maybe contrary to the laws of the host state. Hence it might be challenging for refugee minorities to publicly show their social identities as recognised under international laws if they are in conflict with domestic laws of the host state. These are some typical contradictions inherent international legal instruments, which might be manifested at the local community levels via the contradictory situational social identity management behaviours. Hence this poses some structural complexities which this paper will analytically delve in throughout the writing.

### **2.3: On Imagined Identities**

A wide ranging literature on the element of imagination in identity formation has been deliberated by various authorities on the subject. The phenomena of idealization of homelands by immigrants in exile are slowly gaining ground. The engendering of the element of imagination by the African refugee Diaspora in Norway in this paper is precipitated by the realization of the salience of this factor. Writing on the issue Liisa Malkki noted that there has emerged a new awareness of the global social fact that, now more than perhaps ever before, people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases- not in situ, but through memories of, and claims on, places they can or will no longer corporately inhabit<sup>25</sup>. Discussing the situation of the Burundian refugees in Tanzania Malkki went on to note that the camp refugees saw themselves as a nation in exile, and defined exile in turn as a moral trajectory of trials and tribulations that would ultimately empower them to reclaim ( or create anew) the “Homeland” in Burundi<sup>26</sup>. On a similar note Thomas Hyland Eriksen seem to support this notion of the centrality of imagining homelands or nations by ethnic minorities like refugees in exile. He highlighted that ethnic groups tend to have myths of common origin and they nearly always

have ideologies encouraging endogamy, which may nevertheless be of highly varying practical importance<sup>27</sup>. When refugees flee into foreign exiles they may be confronted with situations akin to the propositions by Malkki and Eriksen noted above. In other words the element of creating “nations within foreign nations” is gaining momentum in studies of identity management and immigrant minorities. Montserrat Guibernau (1997) noted the significance of nationalism when he postulated that the power of nationalism stems from its dual character as a political doctrine and as a source of identity for individuals living in modern societies. Nationalism stands as one of the most potent ideologies of our centuries<sup>28</sup>, added Montserrat. Thus identity formations and managements centered on the notion of nationalism and idealism warrants some attention in this study on social identity management by the African refugee minority in Norway. The analysis that will be done on this subject in the analysis section will go beyond the mere generalizations, though vital, outlines deciphered by the quoted authors in this section. Anthony Smith has also noted that “by invoking a collective name, by the use of symbolic images of community, by the generation of stereotypes of the community, men and women have been enabled to bury their sense of loneliness and insecurity---”<sup>29</sup>. Can this be the situation which relates to the lived experiences of the African refugee minority under study? The upcoming sections will endeavor to deliberate on this issue in light of the data gathered during the research process.

#### *Objective Benefits Derivative in Social Identity Management.*

Motivations behind adoption of social identities have been debated by various scholars and this work will enshrine some of the supposed arguments in the analysis of the agendas behind the social identity management strategies by the African refugee group. Refugees may, according to Crawford, as part of ethnic groups, resurgent or newly created, exist “essentially as a weapon in pursuit of collective advantage”<sup>30</sup>. Social identity management may thus be analyzed in the context of the minority groups’ attempt to achieve certain objectives. Turner et al (1987), have described the psychological motive of a member joining a group as a need among the group members to “differentiate their own groups positively from others to achieve a positive social identity”<sup>31</sup>. However this might not always be the case since some members may join a group not by choice but mere societal categorizations. Nevertheless where there is a choice associated with positiveness of the respective group this argument may hold some degree of validity. John Rex also noted that according to the situational theory ethnic bonds

might be related to specific social and political projects<sup>32</sup>. Hence the social identity management by immigrant minorities like refugees might be premised on the desire to achieve some beneficial social or political projects. The analysis in this thesis will thus try to discuss the possibility of this line of thought.

#### **2.4: Theoretical Significances and Limitations**

In as much as the social identity theory is a critical guiding tool for this paper, it should be noted that it has inherent pros and cons within it. Nevertheless the realization of the overwhelming salience of the theory's weight led to its adoption for this analysis. Commenting on the significance of the social identity theory Leonie Huddy (2001) noted that social identity is useful for several reasons. It has generated testable hypothesis that can be applied to a wide range of groups, including those linked to politics. It addresses the kinds of issues of interest to political psychologists- intergroup conflict, conformity to group norms, the effects of low group status and the condition under which it generates collective action, and the factors that promote the categorization of oneself and others into groups<sup>33</sup>. Thus the theory is relevant to the social and scientific study of the situations of ethnics and minorities like the refugees under study. Despite its up-comings the social identity theory has been criticized as carrying some shortcomings. Huddy has misgivings about this theory on a lesser extent. She noted that one of the general concerns is that the social identity theory, especially self-categorization theory, places an undue emphasis on the power of context to explain intergroup behaviour. She further notes that this emphasis on situations ignores individual differences in identification, fails to consider the power of enduring cross-cultural forces conveyed by history and culture to shape boundaries and meaning, and neglects the frequently contested nature and meaning of group membership<sup>34</sup>. Chester Insko (1992) supports Huddy by noting that neither Campbell nor Tajfel and Turner really explain why their ideas are especially appropriate for groups as opposed to individuals<sup>35</sup>. Despite the near sanity of their arguments both Huddy and Chester acknowledges that the theory is of great relevance to the social scientific studies of social groups like refugees. The African refugee group under study will be mainly viewed as an ethnic group vis-à-vis the Norwegian group, which is the host society within which the African refugee minorities operate. Thus the social identity theory's more focus on groups will be relevant for this study. The situational theory of ethnicity will

complement the social identity theory, to unravel a critical dimension in the social identity management dynamics in the African refugee group. Thus Huddy folded by noting that “we may disagree over the extent to which social identity theory holds a specific road map for political research, but we do not differ on the theory’s ultimate importance<sup>36</sup>”.

## **2.5: Summary**

Whereas the social identity theory postulates the salience of the social categorization as a process in identity formation and management; the situational theory of ethnicity similarly deciphers the centrality of situations and social categorizations in identity management processes. Thus the near marriage of these two theories makes it convenient to employ them as tools of analysis in the analysis of the social identity management and integration processes in relation to the African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune of Norway. The following sections on data analysis proceeds to an empirical level to link the theoretical propositions enumerated in this section to the practical realities unearthed during the course of the fieldwork. The shortcomings inherent in some parts of these theoretical tools cannot be denied and might raise questions in the line of argument to be advanced in this paper. Nevertheless as highlighted in this chapter, the paramount significance and relevance of these theories in the analysis of situations in social scientific research far outweighs their handicaps. Premised on the salient relevance of the theories, the analysis that follows will avail fruitful insights embedded with valuable possibilities in advancing a general understanding on social identity management and refugee minority issues.

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## **Section 2: Data Presentation and Analysis.**

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Intra- and Inter- Group Social Identity Management by the Refugees**

Is there one factor or variable that can determine the management of a social identity? Under what circumstances do social identities mix and match, or mix and repel? Does a cross-cultural collision, or rather a cross-cultural summit, of social identities react like the imagination of the convergence of South Pole and North Pole being pulled together? Some mathematicians postulate that parallel lines never meet. But can scenarios in a refugee camp warrant such questions? Indeed this chapter is set out to walk the long and treacherous path in the quest to give an insight to such complex yet intertwined questions. If there can be many variables that form part of the equation in refugee social identity management, then such matrixes of the algebra should be pondered and analysed. Analysis, indeed it needs. Principally leaning on the intra- and inter- group data dynamics unearthed during the course of the research, this chapter will employ ingredients of voices of the informants, analysis, relevant scholarly works and comparable empirical experiences to endeavour to analyse the information relating to how the indigenous African refugees in Kvæfjord Commune manage their social identities in varying social situations.

Social identity management is basically a scenario whereby the different social situations necessitate the accompanying identities that the people will adopt. In this study carried out in Kvæfjord Kommune of Norway, it was noted that the African refugees adopt different situationally based identities. The identity management structures were complex and intertwined since they perforated across and within groups. Within the African refugees themselves they managed their identities by constantly changing them to suit the environment and the people they met. Outside the African group they formed a sort of coalition in dealing separately with the host Norwegian population on the one hand and the fellow non-African

refugees on the other hand. This analysis will look at different dimensions through which the African refugees managed their social identities vis-à-vis two groups, viz, within the African group itself and in relation to the ethnic Norwegians.

The African group itself in this case comprises of any nationality from sub-Saharan Africa excluding the Arabic North Africans. This is due to the fact that the black Africans as well as the Arabic north-Africans consider each other as different though from the same continent. The other group which is the ethnic Norwegians comprises mostly of Norwegian speaking white Norwegians.

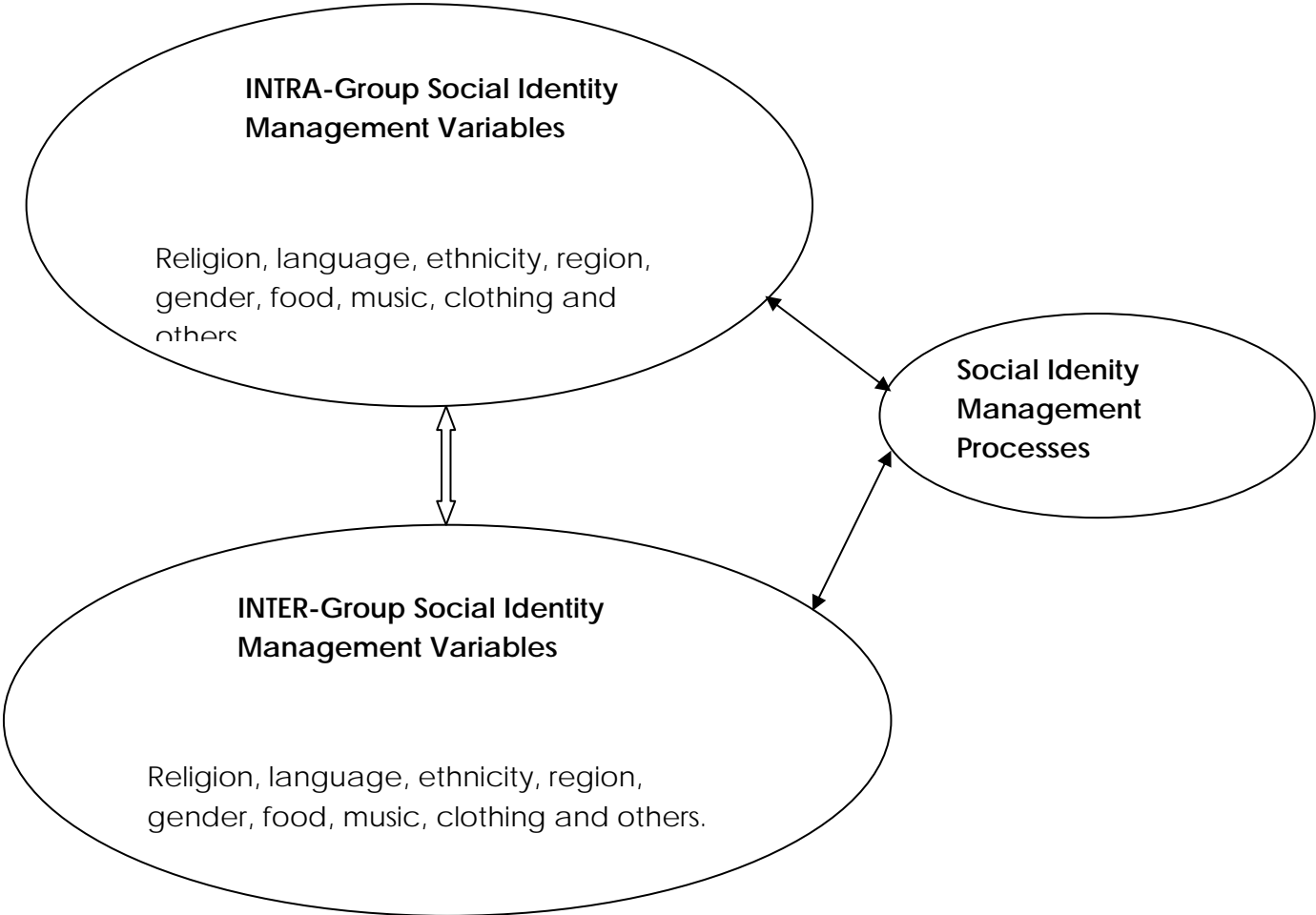


Figure 3.1- Inter and Intra-Group Social Identity Management Variables. The diagram shows the inter-linkages between Intra and inter – group social identity variables. The processes of refugee identity management are thus influenced by these factors.

### 3.1 Intra-Group Social Identity Management

A complex web of identity twists was unearthed in the intra-group interactional set ups. The intra-group social identity management was mostly taking place within the indigenous



African refugee minorities themselves. Within the African group there were many sub-groups which necessitated the refugees to adopt different identities depending on who they interacted with. The identities were expressed in a variety of ways through a variety of symbolic essences. Various tools were also employed by the refugees to determine the type of social identity to be exhibited. The exhibited identity can be being a Franco-phone, Anglo-phone, an east/southern/western or North African, a Swahili speaker, a Tutsi, a Hutu, a Bantu or a woman. Complexities arose in diversified scenarios where one can fit in different categories. For instance one can be from a Franco-phone nation and at the same time being a Bantu, and being a Swahili speaker and being an east African. In this case someone who is not a Bantu but a Franco-phone nationality from West Africa expects closer understanding from this person, in as much as an east African who is not Franco-phone but Anglo-Phone expects closer bond from this person based on the regional issue. This is a typical scenario where one individual is unconsciously switching behavioural social identities to be acceptable by the different groups within the African refugee groups.

In the following paragraphs a critical discussion will follow on the intra-group ethnic social identity management by the indigenous African refugees. Due to the complexity of identity management at this level it is undeniable that an exhaustion of the discussion of the plethora of variables might be out of reach. Nevertheless critical attempts to capture the typically salient issues of the findings will be made. This will be enriched with a comparative juxtaposition with related works from other places and from different time frames. It is hoped that this will enrich the debate and unearth the uniqueness of the social identity management behavioural pattern by the African refugee minorities in Norway. Coupled with a situation of being an African refugee in random and organized exile, the findings exhibited an unparalleled uniqueness of complex identity managements (which is a combination of identity change, identity transformation, and identity formation).

### **3.1.1 Contextualising The Regional Variable as a Social Identity Management Factor**

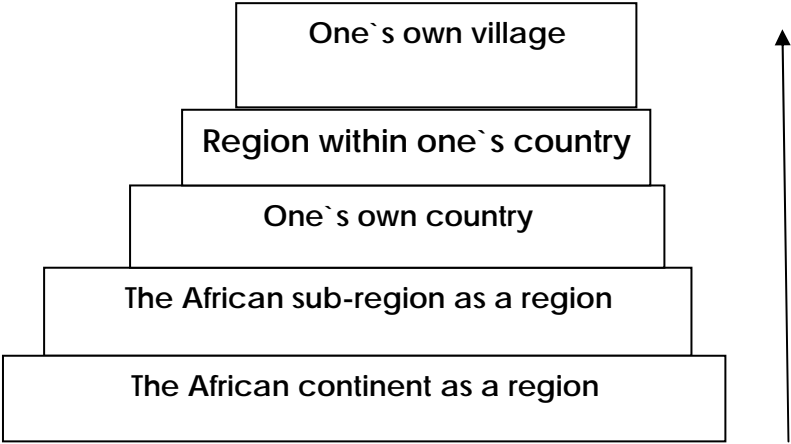
Categorizing these variables as they will be discussed is a sincere attempt to exhibit clarity of the complex and intertwined outcomes of the research. Nevertheless the categorisations into language, religion, ethnicity, region and so forth are never an attempt to de-link these variables. Instead the variables are intertwined and cross cut into each other's boundaries.

Only the need to make it clearer demands this structuring. Hence the discussion will proceed as such.

Taking into consideration the regional variable, it is exciting to note how the indigenous African refugee minorities manage their social identities in complex ways with no written rules. Some of the refugees interviewed and observed undergo these identity management processes without consciously being attached to their actions. It has become a norm to behave in the respective attitudes. In line with the theory of ethnicity and social identity theory, it can be noted that the refugees have an inherent personally and socially ascribed identity which sub-consciously manage their behavioural actions.

When a Congolese refugee, Pierre, was asked whether the regional issue affected his identity management processes, he took a brief moment of silence, and thereafter he had this to say: “what determines who I am has mostly to do with the country and region I come from”<sup>1</sup>. For Pierre the region transcended first to the east African region and later he pointed out that when he is far away in Norwegian Europe, then Africa becomes his country, his region. This is a typical complex scenario in the analysis of refugee social identity management. Hereunder we will briefly analyse Pierre’s case. Pierre’s thinking is typical of most of the views gathered and heard from the informants. At one point the informants expressed their identity in terms of the country they come from. In the intra-group scenario the African refugees identified themselves by sort of transcending pyramid of regions. The significance of which type of the region comes first was based on where the person is staying at one moment in life. The most important region when the person was in Norway for example was being from the Africa region, then one’s specific African sub-region (e.g. East or West Africa); then followed by one’s specific country as a region; and then followed by one’s region within the regions of one’s own country (e.g. east Congo, or Kinshasa region) and up to the village level. This unique situation I discovered led me to model what I will call the Initial Pyramid of Regions in Social Identity Management by Africans in Exile. I can not be specific that it applies to all Africans who are refugees or in exile but I can generalise that this new model is generalisable to most Africans in the Diaspora. Furthermore based on my findings I decided to call my pyramid “Initial” due to the need for further necessity to research more on this phenomena.

Figure 3.2: Initial pyramid of regions in intra-group social identity management by the African refugees in Norway.



Inspired by the Maslow`s hierarchy of needs, the Initial pyramid of regions in social identity management is one of the most important tools in analyzing the shift in social identity loyalties by Africans in exile.

As shown on the Pyramid when African refugees are in Norway they see themselves more as Africans than as belonging to a specific village in their home country. Their identity loyalties based on regions shifts and transforms based on the interactional situations the refugees face. In Tajfel and Turner`s social identity theory, one can have socially or personally ascribed attributes which according to the theory of Situational ethnicity, will then affect the social identities adopted based on the respective ascriptions. However the situational theory of ethnicity fails to go beyond the various regional loyalties which affect social identity management by the African refugees. Hence the need to formulate the pyramid of regions as depicted above. The African continent is taken as the most important region to submit one`s loyalty to; followed by the second, third, fourth and fifth level regions which are the African sub-regions ( east/west/southern/northern Africa); one`s own country (e.g. Burundi, Angola or Ivory Coast); specific Country region (e.g. eastern Congo or Western DRC) and the specific villages within a country`s provinces ( e.g. Eastern Goma, Mbuji Mayi or Kinshasa In the case of DRC). Thus in the oral interviews with the informants some of the sentiments expressed were as follows:

*“Here I feel being more of an African. Burundi sounds like a province when I am here” ( Robert from Burundi)<sup>2</sup>.*

*“I feel more African than Congolese because I am here in Norway. If there is no one from Congo any African becomes my family”<sup>3</sup> (Natasha from DR Congo).*

*“Here every African becomes your brother or sister. Of course I am Somali but the African element becomes stronger when I am here in Europe” (Abdul Rashid from Somalia)<sup>4</sup>.*

In comparative terms for instance other anthropologists and writers on refugee issues have equally stressed the salience of the regional variable in the lives of refugees though they were half-hearted in going beyond general significances of this variable which the pyramid has attempted to do. One of the most recognised anthropologists on refugee studies, Liisa Malkki has debated the various arguments by different scholars who argued whether crossing the borders affects the refugee’s cultural well being, outside one’s region or home place. In her article “Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things” (1995), Malkki highlights that uprooting does not entail changing the refugee’s identity and cultures<sup>5</sup>. Rather she expands her argument about the emergence of myth-co-social phenomena in her article entitled “From purity to exile: violence, memory and nationally Cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania”. Liisa Malkki points to the constructions of memory based narratives to foster a stronger ethnic identity amongst the refugees in an endeavour to create a sense of stronger belonging. This is almost similar with the African refugee scenario in Kvæfjord in that the regional hierarchies were constructed to provide a sense of identity belonging for the refugees. Some arguments on the intra-group social relations based on colour-ethnic factors sound like an issue of contention which I will try to briefly analyse below as a part of the regional variable in social identity management.

*Intra-Group Identity Management – the three African types?- sub-Saharan blacks, horn of Africans and North African Arabs?*

The decision to have a brief discussion on the “three African types was necessitated by the observations and interviews asked. In addition it was also necessitated by the beliefs that people from the horn of Africa region consider themselves different from those of sub-Saharan Africa. In the interviews gathered it was noted that this view is held towards the Somalians by the sub-Saharan black Africans in as much as the Somalis also have the view

that they are Africans of peculiar type closely aligned to the Arab world. Thus in the interviews it was noted that the Somalis express a Muslim identity which they believe other Africans don't possess. Nevertheless in their relation to Arabic refugees the Somalis were not considered as close allies but as fellows in religion but not on racial identity. The Arabic refugees from north-Africa and the Middle East were much closer to each other based on their racial identity than they were to the Somalis.

At the same time some assertions which assume that horn of Africa nationals like Ethiopians and Eriterians consider themselves as a slightly different group from the sub-Saharan Africans were found to be problematic in my observations and general conversations with the refugees on the issue. The way the Eriterians and Ethiopians managed their identities towards other Africans was one of sameness. Infact the Eriterians preferred to speak Tigrinya than Amharic when they were alone. When they were with Ethiopians they all spoke Amharic. Inside their hearts one could sense that their histories created nationalistic antagonism between the two nationals. But when they are here in Norway and specifically in the refugee area studied Eriterians and Ethiopians exhibit almost similar social identities in their day to day lives, to the extent that it is difficult to notice clear-cut overt differential variables between them. In other words the notion that horn of Africans are a different African group is problematic as this research did not notice any systematic prevalence of such a view among the horn of Africa Africans.

In the case of the Arabic North Africans there was a tacit recognition that this group exhibit a racially based social identity in as much as the black Africans also exhibited a social identity showing their racial realities. In general there was no systematic trend noticed to accentuate that there is really a strong thinking within these "three African types" about distinction and differentiation of their Africanity. In the case of Arabic North Africans it was noted that they consider themselves more aligned to the Middle East than the rest of Africa south of the Sahara. Thus when I heard a personal conversation about the Prayer Mosque in Tromsø, the conversers argued with each other that in Tromsø there are two mosques. They said one is led by a Somalian Sheik and another by an Arabic Sheik. In their argument, they suggested that the Arabs did not feel comfortable to be led a Somali Sheik. Though I could not verify the authenticity of this argument, it however portrays an image of the existence of some differentiated social identity perceptions within the African group. Besides the regional

complexities inherent in the regionally based social identity management processes, the linguistic variable kept on erupting as a forceful issue in both intra- and inter- group identity managements as will be discussed below and in the next chapter on integration and social identity.

### **3.1.2: The Language Variable as a Social Identity Marker**

In their paper on social identity management amongst the Mexicans in the United States, Aida Hurtado, Patricia Gurin and Timothy Peng (1994) pointed out that language alongside race, class, ethnicity, gender roles and religion is one of the most salient factors in expressing social identities<sup>6</sup>. As pointed out earlier the variables used to express and manage social identities can not be de-linked but they are rather intertwined and overlap. As such in a case of an African speaking a Bantu language it became apparent that two variables will be at play the same time. These are the regional variable and the language variable. Most east and southern African regions are Bantu speaking peoples. In the research findings it was noted that social identity was expressed in a way that constantly switched to accommodate those from the same region and speaking a Bantu language. Though in some cases the Bantu languages are not similar to the extent that understanding each other is not possible, it was noted that the Bantu identity was sometimes heralded as a prided upper class social identity. Being a Bantu refugee was therefore seen to be a unifying factor among the refugees, in as much as being a French speaker was also a strong social identity marker in the intra group situation. I will also endeavour to decipher various views of the role of language in social identity management as espoused by other scholars in the area. The analysis of language's role in inter-group social identity management will mostly focus on Norwegian language challenges amongst the refugees. This will be elaborated more in the section on integration and social identity management in the next chapter.

Discussion and analysis of the language variable can be voluminous and might demand volumes of its own. What will be undertaken here is to summarise the findings unearthed in the fieldwork and analytically and discursively intertwine the thoughts from selected scholars on the area. The refugees interviewed postulated the following views about how they try to manoeuvre the language variable to suit different situations they encounter in their day to day living in exile:

*For Pierre “ I speak more with French speakers around and when I do so I sense a strong feeling of my Congolese-Franco identity. But I also prefer to speak more with people who can speak my native language. In fact language is uniting us more in as much as it is dividing us again”<sup>7</sup>*

*And for Simon from Congo Brazzaville he had this view “French is a handicap. I like French but I am discouraged by the ignorance given to French speakers by the Norwegians. Since I don’t speak English at all I feel more comfortable to when I speak with French or Lingala speakers”<sup>8</sup>.*

My experiences in the research of the salience of language in expressing situationally based social identities were reinforced when I personally interacted and observed the social behaviour of Africans in Tromsø. I attended a birthday party for one Kenyan woman in her early thirties in Lunheim in Tromsø in January 2008. There were different guests from countries like Somalia, Gambia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Norway and Liberia, to mention but a few. All of the guests spoke good Norwegian but when they meet in such social events, they always speak English to each other and those from the same country speak their native language. Even if a Norwegian is there, they only speak Norwegian when they need her/his views and then switch back to either English or a native African language.

In another instance when I visited Zimbabwean friends in Oslo during the Christmas holiday in 2007 I found the same trend. My Zimbabwean colleagues can all speak Norwegian but when we met they only spoke in Shona (the native Zimbabwean language). There was one Norwegian in the group of about six Zimbabweans. I was not comfortable speaking in Shona because I felt the Norwegian will feel out of place and I tried to contribute to the discussions by answering in either Norwegian or English. I finally asked all of them if it was right to speak Shona when there is a language which all of us, including the Norwegian could understand. The Zimbabweans said its rare for them to speak Shona in every day scenarios since they are rarely with their fellow country mates. Hence that small gathering made them feel once again Africans and Zimbabweans. In situations when they are with Norwegians they pointed out that they speak Norwegian and forget about the Shona. One Norwegian who was in the group said she had no problems with us speaking Shona in her presence because when she is with Norwegians she do the same even if there is someone who is non-Norwegian.

The prevalence of the native African or non-Norwegian language use in strengthening the

African social identity feeling unearthed in the researches amongst the refugees in Kvæfjord commune and randomly observed in my excursions of interactions with other Africans in Norway validates the general probable applicability of the findings of my study to the Africans in Norway in general.

In their works some researchers have also commented on the language position among refugees and immigrants. In most of their works the various authorities acknowledge the vitality of the language factor in expressing strong social identity bonds based on various variables like regions, race or nationalities. In his unpublished work Asle Hogmø wrote about what he termed the Palya Blanca- the European village in Spain. Asle pointed out an incident in which he was at a shopping centre in Spain and met a Swedish shopkeeper, who upon realising that Asle and his partner were Norwegians they started to “speak in `Scandinavian`- him talking Swedish and us talking Norwegian”<sup>9</sup>. Though Asle is not a refugee but rather was a short time immigrant in Spain, it can be noted that in that particular situation, the social identity expressed shifted to being more Scandinavian. This is in tandem with the point being derived from this paper. The point of departure though is that African indigenous refugee minorities are citizens outside their continent unlike Asle who was outside his native Norway but still in his continental Europe. Thus language is a strong variable in situationally based social identity management. On a slightly similar note Egon F. Kunz (1981) in his article entitled *Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory*, commented on the linguistic salience of language among refugees. Kunz noted that “in a linguistically strange environment the refugees might find themselves excluded and isolated from human contact, and their loneliness may result in depression or even in paranoid hallucinatory reaction”<sup>10</sup>. The African refugees in kvæfjord encounter a linguistically strange environment when they come to Norway. As a safety measure to shield themselves from the strangeness, the refugees tend to adjust their social identities to align more of themselves to fellow Africans, especially those who speak a language they understand and in the same family group like the Bantu scenario pointed out earlier.

Despite the “strangeness” of the Norwegian language Africans however put a great deal in trying to learn the norsk språk (Norwegian language as the refugees jokingly dub it). In her article entitled “In Search of Community: A Quest for Well-Being among Tamil Refugees in Northern Norway”, Anne Sigfrid Grønseth (2001), also highlighted language as a crucial



factor in integration and among refugee immigrants. Sigfrid pointed out that “in addition to arranging for friendship families, the (Norwegian) community offered the refugees Norwegian language classes. To the community’s disappointment, most Tamils did not attend the classes.”<sup>11</sup>. The point here is that the Tamils prioritised their language more than the Norwegian language. Their identities seem to have been rigid in being Tamil only. In as much as the African refugee group under study prioritised their home or native languages, they went beyond the purported rigidity of the Tamils as depicted in Sigfrid’s writing. The African refugees become more aligned to a certain language depending with whom they interact with. It was found out that they make great strides to learn Norwegian. So in situations in which they are with Norwegians they try to speak the scratch Norwegian they understand mixing it with English.

Thus comparatively the African refugee scenario can be comparable to the behaviours of other groups elsewhere in Norway and beyond. African refugees are nevertheless unique in the social flexibility observed in trying to adjust the languages in varying situations. This is not an attempt to homogenise all African refugees observed as flexible super jumbos. Rather the general informal and formal observations exhumed in the field work point to this as a dominant trend. This is critical in social policy making as it might fasten the understanding on the need to proffer durable assistance to the African refugee group when the integrationists and refugee workers are doing their jobs. The language vibe as can be noted has, just like other social identity management variables such as regionalism, overlaps to encompass ethnic social categorisations. Ethnicity therefore becomes an inevitable variable in the analytical observations from the fieldwork. As such the discussion turns to a brief analytical discussion on the ethnicity variable.

It should be noted that the discussions on the variables above like the region and language are not exhaustive, in as much as the discussions on the variables to follow below will not be exhaustive due to limitations in official space availed for this kind of publication. Nevertheless the summarised analysis deciphers epicentre issues on the issues at stake. So, what about ethnicity?

### **3.1.3: The Plasticity of Ethnicity in Social Identity Management**

Ethnicity has been defined as a category of membership; that is, an ascribed or self-ascribed

device that socially locates an individual with reference to the social ascriptions of other persons. (Don Handelman, also Cohen 1974, Thomas Hylland Eriksen 1997 and G C Bentley 1987). Fredrik Barth in his introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* specifically defines an ethnic group as “a population which has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order”<sup>12</sup>. In line with these definitions, the ethnic element was found to be an active factor in social identity management within the African refugee group. When compared with the social identity expressed by the Africans in interactions with other groups like Norwegians for instance, the ethnic factor becomes almost blurred in relations amongst Africans themselves. Africans become one ethnic group when they relate themselves to Norwegians, in as much as the Norwegians become a distinct ethnic group as well. In analyzing this factor most attention was focused on observing and engaging in general talks with the refugees from Burundi, Rwanda and DR Congo. It should be noted that the observation and findings on the ethnic factor stretches a long way back to a period of more than 2 years that I have been staying in the study area which also necessitated my heightened interest to study social identity management amongst the African refugees. Speaking to a Burundian refugee named Akimasi in the year 2005, he chronicled to me how he as a Batwa indigenous Burundian lost his relatives during the tutsi-hutu fighting when he was a 6 year old. He told me that his uncle taught him how to use a machete and a gun at a tender age. Despite his initial hesitation he said he finally agreed to learn how to use the weapons after seeing many dead bodies of his relatives around him in his everyday life. Though he said he never killed anyone up to the time he fled Burundi via Tanzania, he chronicled the difficulty of the Tutsi and Hutu identity. His father was a Batwa of Hutu mixture and his mother was a Tutsi. And he himself preferred to ascribe the Batwa identity to himself rather than the Tutsi or Hutu identities. In his interaction with fellow great lakes refugees in Kvæfjord he was faced with a dilemma of which group to align with. The Tutsis considered him with suspicion and so did the Hutus. In managing his social identity he would constantly violate his conscience by being a Hutu when he is with Hutus and being a Tutsi when he was with Tutsis. When they have a general gathering of all people from Burundi and Rwanda he preferred to be there but kept a low profile in terms of talking<sup>13</sup>. In this case ethnicity provided a complex social identity management challenge for Akimasi. This is a typical complexity of how ethnicity interjects day to day social interactions within the African group. Between the Tutsi and Hutu refugees it was noted that they were more open when they were not with the other group than

otherwise. When they were together as Burundians they tried to show public unity, though in their discussions with people they talked of their mistrust based on historical roots back home. This led me to read a book by Liisa Malkki in which she studied the hutu-tutsi refugees in Tanzania. In her Book Liisa Malkki`s (2005) assertions of the tensions between the Hutus and the Tutsis in the Tanzanian refugee camp are typical of what I noticed amongst the same group when they manage their social identities in a country as far away from Burundi as Norway<sup>14</sup>. But surprisingly despite the deep rooted mistrust between these two ethnic tribes from the great lakes, their Burundi Identity superseded their individual tribal differences when they were interacting with the outside world like the Norwegians and other non-Africans. In other situations the Hutu or Tutsi identity was prized over the overall Burundiness, whilst in other situations the Burundiness superceded the other identities. It was thus a complex rumble puzzle mediated by symbolic systems of particular situations which governed which social identities to be exhibited in different set ups.

A plethora of scholars have deliberated on the concept of ethnicity and its impact on social identities or the general lives of immigrants and refugees. Thomas Hyland Eriksson commented that “---ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group and it is constituted through social contact”<sup>15</sup>. Whilst on the other hand Gerd Baumann (1999 in the publication entitled “The Multi Cultural Riddle”, noted the controversy of ethnicity by pointing out that “ ethnicity is thus (or can be) transformed from a classificatory boundary, chosen or imposed as the case may be, into a substantive and unified group heritage, identified by its supposedly unified culture---”<sup>16</sup>. Other writers also have nodded to the concept of the situational plasticity of ethnicity as espoused by Eriksen and Bauman above. Haaland 1969, noted that in Sudan a Fur can assume the ethnic identity of a Baggara<sup>17</sup> and Barth (1969) noted that in Pakistan a Pathan can be recognised as a Baluchi; whilst Kandre (1967) noted that in South-East Asia, Chinese and various migrant groups can be incorporated into the Yao ethnic group<sup>18</sup>. What is the purpose of bringing all these scholarly views into the mainstream discussion on African refugee social identity management? Indeed the points raised by these scholars supports and seasons the analysis on the subject of ethnicity as a variable that can be situationally managed as the Burundi example from my fieldwork above shows. Eriksen rightly points out that “ethnicity is --- an aspect of a relationship ---- and it is constituted through social contact”. Thus the ethnicity variable is very vital in the studies on social behaviours, especially social identity management by the

refugees as it involves inevitable human social contacts in complex situations. Thus Jukka Nyysönen in his publication “Everybody Recognised that we were not white”: Sami Identity Politics in Finland 1945-1990” (2007), noted by quoting other scholars, that “identity was the sum total of the different roles an individual has to adopt in different positions in society, such as those of family member or colleague, and was formed by encountering, or in relation to, other groups”<sup>19</sup>. And Parminder Bhachu in her article entitled “Identities Constructed and Reconstructed: Representations of Asian Women in Britain” (1993), argued that “--- ethnicity is presented as something that has fixed components and symbols and is considered to be the primary agent controlling and generating the various identities of Asians”. On a similar note the African refugees minorities in Kvæfjord Commune have ethnicity as one of the forceful elements in governing their social identity managements both within the African and outside the African group itself.

Ethnicity should therefore be taken as a serious variable on refugee social policy making and in relevant situations regarding attempts to transform the well being of African refugees in Norway in particular and probably in related set ups the world over. The ethnic element has sub-variables that influence its management. Things like culture and religion influences ethnic acceptability and behaviours amongst groups as was also noted within the African refugee group under study. What therefore can be said of religion and social identity management by the refugees in Kvæfjord commune?

### **3.1.4 :- Religion as a Social Identity Marker**

Critical in shaping the social identity management amongst the African refugee minorities was and still is the factor of religion. In the research it was noted that this variable is one of the most salient factors in terms of dealing with psychological challenges in the life of an exiled African refugee. Within the African ethnic group itself most of the refugees are Christians whilst others are Muslims. Infact most of the informants observed and interviewed were either Christians or Muslims. The religious identity expression was managed differently depending on the situation and place. During the evenings and nights most Christians were engaged in prayer meetings and openly talked of their perceived differences between the way they pray in Africa and the way Christians in Norway pray and conduct their services. In their discussions it could be felt and heard that within the African group itself they expressed an

identity of the universality of how they contact prayer meetings and events in Africa. Below is a typical statement by a Christian African refugee which helps to show this perception of the African-Western differentials:

*Brothers and sisters we are gathered here today as usual in the name of the Lord. (with the shout Amen! almost always Interjecting). It is our pleasure to be in a country that gives us space and freedom to worship in Christ`s name as we wish. But brothers and sisters I have noticed, as you might also have noticed, that in Africa we pray with loud voices and we dance and sing as we wish. But here in Norway I have noticed that when they are in church they are quite and don`t make active movements. I am happy when I am with you praying like this as we do in Africa. But when we are in the norwegian churches we should do as they do it and as time goes we can help change the situation! (loud shouts of Amen! Always interjecting in agreement.<sup>20</sup>) ( Keyvyn,from Uganda).*

This is a statement typical of the views I have met in conversations with different Africans in different cities in Norway. What has this to do with identity management? Indeed a critical analysis of this typical statement reveals that there is a shared identity within the African Christian group about the sameness of how they contact church events irrespective of being from different countries. In their talks and addresses as can be noted from above, they are unconscious to the use of the phrase “---as we do in Africa”. The use of the place “Africa” is equivalent to the name of a country, rather than a continent. As Tajfel`s social identity theory stipulates that social identity has three social psychological processes of social categorisation, social comparison and the psychological process itself, it can be noted that this was to a large extent true of the African group. When asked about whether they see themselves more as nationals of their respective countries or as Africans 12 of the 15 people asked said they saw themselves first and foremost as Africans and later as a national of their individual country. Thus for instance a Congo Brazzaville refugee said he saw himself more as an African first and later as a Congolese. Asked whether this was their kind of thinking from the time they entered Norway up to the time of the interview, most refugees ( 10 of 13 interviewed) said initially they thought they belonged to the nationalities of their respective countries. As time went on they said the social categorisation as Africans by the Norwegian host nationals led them to adjust the way they see their social race identity. They began to see themselves more as Africans first as pointed out above. Thus in line with Tajfel and Turner, the socially given identity label can become a new identity as is the case here. It should be noted however that being an African is not a new identity since the refugees interviewed were Africans. The point

of departure is that the African refugee minority group has adopted a situational based identity of strengthening the African identity more than they used to do as result of the environment which has socially ascribed that identity to them.

Being a Christian can earn you friends and fill in the void of being away from a family that one has not seen for years. A family that one does not know if they will meet again and when. A family which might be there or not there. A family which might have been consumed by a civil war, by genocide, by hunger, by a disease. A family which one hopes to be with, but the hope remains a dream! These are typical challenges confronted by the life of a refugee. Typical challenges that calls for constant vigilance. Typical challenges that necessitate the situational social identity management. The Christian identity was found to be exhibited openly always as it strengthened the social capital gained by acquiring friends and colleagues.

On the other side of the coin, the Muslim religion was seen as tacitly being difficult to go along with. Relations between Christian refugees and Muslim refugees were also influenced by the religious factor. There was no open hostility between the two faiths. Rather both groups adjusted to accommodate each other though it was found to be the norm that Muslims prefer to confide themselves more to fellows of the same belief than otherwise. Thus in as much as they were good comrades with the Christians, the Muslims adjusted their social actions to be friendly to the Christians. As said earlier the variables that affect identity management overlap to influence each other, they are not wholly isolated from each other. Thus even if some of the refugees were Muslims or Christians, they still had the common African identity that united them as one social and racial category. A complex web of identity adjustments was thus in play in most cases.

Commenting on the religious variable, Bauman observed that “a compass points north, wherever you are. Yet the bearings of religious conviction and action will change as the users themselves change positions or see them changed in their new contexts”<sup>21</sup>. Religion as an identity variable is thus a subject of the situation through which it is being executed. Other social amenities like clothing, music and food also forms part of the identity management package. These variables have considerable impacts as will be noted below.

### **3.1.5: Semiotics of Food, Clothing and Music as social Identity Markers**

Also pertinent in the analysis and unearthing of the social identity management by the African refugee group was the use and application of norms governing food, clothing and gender roles issues. These variables were found to be pertinent as social identity markers. Various informants interviewed and observed noted the significance of these factors as a way of portraying their African and respective cultural identities. An interview with a young Somali woman had this to show:

*“My religious identity and my general Somali identity is also reflected in our clothing. I have stayed in India before and I always remained myself, wearing these clothes and listening to my country’s music. I feel really good---”*<sup>22</sup>(Hodan, 28).

And a young man from DR Congo had this to say:

*“ I have my chitenge ( a traditional piece of clothes) from home in my wardrobe to always help me keep my African and Congolese identity. I also wear any descent clothes that come into fashion everywhere”*<sup>23</sup> (Pierre 32).

Whilst an old man named Simon (61) from Congo Brazaville had this to say:

*“I have no problem with the Norwegian clothing styles. It’s only that we prefer that we should wear descend clothes as we do in Africa especially for African women. But here in Norway we have to adjust to the weather conditions”*<sup>24</sup>.

These views were typical views gathered from young women between the ages of 20-35, young man of 20-35 and old age group of more than 40. The dominant age group amongst the refugee group under study is the 20-35 years old. This might be explained by the fact that this age group is one of the most active in conflicts and they bear the brunt of forced recruitment in event of wars and if its women they are in the forefront of possible rape and related war abuses.

From the quotes above it can be deciphered that clothing for example is viewed as one of the dominant identity markers by an exiled African refugee. The Somali woman noted above was adamant that despite having been to a variety of countries within Africa after fleeing the deadly conflict in her country she has not been deterred from being a Somali woman. Despite her claim to wear the Somali costumes always, it was noted that in her daily life she sometimes wears the so-called western clothes. But she always puts on her veil when she is in jeans or other clothes considered not so Somali. Hodan said she is proud of her Somali identity and that the fact that she has kept this identity through many challenges in her exile makes her stronger in expressing her identity. Her thoughts about the significance of

maintaining her social identity were also echoed by her male counterparts from DR Congo and Congo Brazzaville as noted above.

For Pierre from DR Congo a chitenge represents a clothing item that will always keep his memories of his home village. A chitenge is a sheet of clothes raped around the waist especially by women. Sometimes man can also rape it around their wastes like in the case of Pierre. This kind of dressing is common in countries like Congo Brazzaville, DR Congo and Zambia as well as parts of neighbouring Mozambique and some eastern and southern African nations. For Pierre despite having the chitenge he also wears the clothes that he sees in fashion here in Norway and elsewhere. The impression gained from further observing Pierre and Hodan showed that Pierre was more flexible than Hodan in the use of clothes as an identity marker. The element of clothes as a social identity marker was strong in Hodan. This might be explained by the fact that as a Muslim she grew up in a relatively culturally conservative culture in terms of social norms. Thus she has stuck to her Somali culture. However in one casual discussion she pointed out that her social actions here in Norway are sometimes influenced by the many Somali men whom she said have the possibility of “troubling” her if she becomes too un-Somali.

Simon was an older man in his 60s and he was also of the view that African clothing styles should be kept as a way preserving the African cultural and social identity in a turbulent refugee life. Simon was almost of the same view as Pierre. He also pointed out that he had two chitenges which he wears regularly. These, he said, will always serve as a reminder of his African identity. Simon pointed out that at around 60 he had no problem in keeping his mind awake about his dressing style in African attire. By pointing out that he had no problem with the Norwegian dressing codes, Simon was signalling that he adjust his identity by expressing it to suit the Norwegian culture.

Thus a critical examination of the aforementioned views gathered through interviews with the three informants, among others, pointed to a strong element of social identity management which is suited to accord to the prevailing situation. The informants highlighted that despite the need to have something to help them keep their African identity in exile, they were cognisant of the fact that in real terms they were no longer in Africa. Hence the need to adapt to new clothing styles whilst keeping theirs as well. The factors behind their actions were not



only influenced by the Norwegian people, but also by natural factors like new weather conditions in Norway. Most African countries have average weather temperatures of around plus 25 degrees Celsius whilst in the area under study in Kvæfjord the average weather temperature is about minus 4 degrees Celsius in winter and averaging plus 10 degrees Celsius in summer. Thus a variety of factors are at play in the African refugee social identity management.

Food was also noted to be a critical factor in social identity management. Estere from Ethiopia and Natasha from Congo gave me an insight into how food can be a variable that is constantly shifted to suit different situations whilst at the same time being utilised as an identity marker. They had this to say:

*“If I don’t find African foods, I just adjust to the Norwegian foods. When I visit some Norwegian families I eat the Norwegian dishes and I like it though their food is not a substitute for my traditional African foods. Sometimes, in fact in most cases, I eat with my hands when I prepare my own food. It’s a tradition, despite being also a reminder of my cultural roots”<sup>25</sup> (Natasha, DR Congo, 28).*

*“My African Njela (a traditional Ethiopian food) will never depart from my diet even today or tomorrow. But since i am now in a foreign country like Norway, I will try to embrace their way of doing things”<sup>26</sup>. ( Estere, Ethiopia, 33)*

Natasha and Estere echoed the same sentiments in their expression of how they manage their social identities through food stuffs as a variable of the social identity management process. They are both socially categorised as Africans by the Norwegian host society and they have become cognisance of that fact. In my interviews with them as can be noted from the quotes above, they were unconsciously referring to almost most of the things as “African”, despite the njela for instance being more Ethiopian and horn of African than entirely being for the whole of Africa. This kind of social thinking was noted to have been rooted into the constant homogenisation of the entire Africans as homogeneous Africans by the Norwegians and even by non-Norwegians who are not Africans. Yes indeed they are Africans. What shifted was the almost disappearance of reference to each individual as a citizen of his or her particular nation state. The Africans accepted this when dealing with the Norwegians, though within themselves they had the concept of African solidarity but being cognisant of where each of them originally belonged in terms of nationality. Each individual from different nation states had a specific kind of food which he or she stuck to as a socio-cultural identity reminder.

Almost entirely all the Africans conversed with, ranging from those from Sudan, DR Congo, Burundi, Nigeria, Angola, Eritrea, Niger, Liberia and many others had a specific food which they said helps them as a cultural maintainer. The cases of Natasha and Estere above are a tip of the ice bag. They represent widely held views within the African refugee minority group. Their adaptive behaviours to different foods illustrate the inherent element of situational social identity management.

Despite expressing their affection to African foods for instance, most of the informants observed noted that in situations where they are invited by Norwegian families or friends; they have no significant huddles embracing the Norwegian food. In some cases some informants jokingly highlighted that when they first came to Norway, they always prepared another African dinner after eating the Norwegian dinner. This, they said, was due to the fact that the Norwegian foods were lighter than the African dinner mainly based on fufu (thick maize/cassava porridge), njela or strong starch foods. But the notion of adjustment, also sometimes referred to as human adaptations, was found to be common. For example as Natasha and Estere pointed out respectively, “When I visit some Norwegian families I eat the Norwegian dishes---” and “---I will try to embrace their way of doing things---”; exhibits the management of a social identity based on the situation and also influenced by the inescapable force of social categorisation, as postulated by Tajfel in his social identity theory. Rex (1997) pointed out that ethnic groups change their social identities depending with the multiple situations they encounter in their living experiences in order to achieve some social or political projects. In this case the African group indeed adopt different social identities in different situations to achieve some social projects of social acceptance into the Norwegian communities and their surroundings.

It should nevertheless be noted that all the informants were not attempting to romanticise the Africans foods which they said they missed so much. One informant from Burundi named Robert, noted with agony that sometimes when he eats the Burundian banana, beans, tomato and palm oil, he is unavoidably visited by images of rebel held territories with banana plants and where palm oil is harvested. These images visualised through food, he said, sometimes brings discomfort as they remind him of his troubled past and the lost relatives who succumbed to the bloody conflict that ravaged Burundi for decades<sup>27</sup>. Hence food as a social identity marker was not always found to be consistently a romantic partner. In fact, though

few informants pointed out this element, it is a reality that might be lingering in the minds of many African refugee minorities in exile. By not highlighting the negative memories brought about by variables like food, music and so forth, it might have been a deliberate endeavour by the refugees to limit further psychological pressures bedevilling their “impurity” in exile. For the Burundian informant however he remained adamant that overallly “I like the Norwegian food because I am here but I miss Burundian food the most”. Thus in this situation of being in Norway, he, as Natasha and Estere also pointed out, has adjusted to embrace the Norwegian food, partly as a social project to cope with the new scenario. At the same time he hailed the Burundi African identity as one which he will guard via, inter alia, continuing the practice of eating Burundi relishes. Hence situationally based social identity management was found to be prevalent amongst the African refugee minorities in Norway, Kvæfjord commune. Not only do they have to manage their social identities through food types and clothing. Indeed it was noted that elements like gender roles and music played a critical role in social identity management by the African refugee group.

### **3.1.6: Engendering the Gender Dynamics in Social Identity Management.**

Of paramount significance in the social identity management processes by the African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune was the factor of transformed gender roles. For the women who stay in the Borkenes refugee camp in Kvæfjord commune, the administrative procedures availed to some women the opportunities to realise gender roles that for some of them , were pure psychological imaginations. On a similar note some men have also met realities that were utopian to them with regard to the voluntary or involuntary irresistible acceptance of roles which their African female colleagues could play. Some roles that the women were noted to be playing have boosted their self potential whilst for some they have continued in these roles as they used to do. There is no attempt here whatsoever to generalise that the African women and man had not known opportunities based on gender equity and equality. In fact the African pre-colonial history ranging from the Asante Empire in West Africa, Munhumutapa/Manyika Empires in Southern Africa and the Nama-Herero traditions in South West Africa are pregnant with crucial roles that women have always been accorded in African societies. What was discovered here was that despite the rooted traditions of some important roles played by African women in African histories, it cannot be romanticised that all Africans nations were as such. At the same time this not an attempt to seal debate on this progressive issue. It will be a welcome development to criticise my authorship on this point.

Personal observations and some interviews with some informants were enriching in this regard. It is worthy noting how the refugee camp functions when it comes to women's position in the camp. In an interview with Anne Utne, who is officer responsible for the welfare of women and children in the "flyktning mottak" (refugee camp) she gave a brief on the activities that women do in the camp:

*We have a lot of wide ranging activities for women in this mottak (refugee reception centre). Some of the activities are designed to accommodate different cultural backgrounds of the women. They range from sporting activities like aerobics, swimming, and yoga to social gatherings, outdoor travels, women shopping, and so forth. Other specifically designed things for women are a women-only friendly internet café. Besides this, women also can participate in all other activities in the refugee camp like any other refugee inhabitant in the camp<sup>28</sup>. (Ane Utne, Officer for Women and Children's Welfare, Borkenes Refugee Camp).*

*"Of interest is the willingness of women in the camp to participate in important issues like the corporation council where issues of what residence of the mottak want or do not want are discussed. The corporation council has its own budget and it's the refugees themselves who decide what and when to use the allocated funds in particular timeframes<sup>29</sup>", (Robert G Svein, Information Officer, Borkenes Refugee Camp).*

Where does social identity management and the African refugee minorities fit in this equation highlighted by the aforementioned officials. It is recognised that the factors mentioned by the two quoted refugee officers above are for all resident women in the camp irrespective of different nationalities. The point is what it means and what weight it has to be in such activities for the nationalities from the different world regions who reside in this place. For the African refugee group it deserves comment to note how such activities proffers circumstances of managing a social identity in different situations.

Participation in the corporation council represents participation in the highest decision making board for and by the refugees themselves, with some counting influence from the mottak authorities as well. For the African women being a council member represents shifting identities from leadership inside the council to a "housewife" social identity when they are back in their respective homes. This applies to married women or women staying with male partners. As one Somalian female informant noted "I have to constantly shift between being a

typical Somali household woman when I am in the mottak (refugee camp) and being an active participant in the cooperation council”<sup>30</sup>. This informant from Somalia was the President of the Refugee Cooperation Council when I did my data collection. She was very positive about the pro-women environment in the camp. She noted the demands of the need for flexibility to accommodate a Somali based female identity on the one hand, and a New Norwegian based gender equality identity. Thus the contemporary Norwegian gender customs were seen as positive to the situation of the inhabitants of the refugee camp. The women inhabitants had just to navigate through the opportunities presented by the new system and the constraints or disparities posed by their home traditions, in cases where they differed. By providing women-only activities and services the refugee camp not only uplifted the image of the female refugees in the eyes of their male counterparts. It also inculcated a sense of heightened self-worth and self-esteem for those women who came from societies that traditionally were at fault in awarding such positive avenues for them.

Empowering the refugees to decide on the utilisation of a small part of their finances was a positive issue in shifting the female-male balance of power. The cooperation council of the refugees, which in this case was led by a woman, decided through a voting system, items which the budgeted expenditure could be spend on. In these councils women were members with equal voting powers as their male counterparts. Their votes were equally decisive in deciding what to do with financial spending of this budget. I personally attended some cooperation council meetings and saw the women in the refugee camp contributing equally as man. I had attended some of these council meetings a year earlier. But when I attended a year later I found out that the women were making specimen contributions to the debates on the issues affecting the residence of the camp. The more the women attended the council meetings, the more they gained confidence in challenging their colleagues in the meetings as well as making any contributions in the meetings. My point here is that some African women earned a new identity of portraying a real African women who can stand shoulder to shoulder with their male colleagues. The newly acquired equality identity by some of the women who came from gender suppressive backgrounds initially proved a thorn in the flesh for the male colleagues from such nations. Nevertheless with the passage of time it was noted that the man grudgingly started to accept the tilting balance of power. It was not tilting power as such. Rather in some of the men’s view they saw it as tilting to their detriment.

In brief, such was the gender based social identity management. It was a crunch tacit battle ground in which some women gained more ground in asserting their demands and contributions to the society in which they lived in. In the inter-group discussion below I will take the analysis on the gender dynamics of social identity management further in relation to the views of mostly Somali vis-à-vis the Norwegian women friendly system, as the Somali men asserted. Thus hereunder the analysis will stretch into the inter-group social identity management variables- it should still be born in mind that the categorisations into inter- and intra- group do not necessarily denote a divorce of the issues under analysis. Rather, as already highlighted earlier, these issues constantly overlap and are intertwined.

### **3.2 Inter- Group Social Identity management- Vis-à-vis Norwegians**

In this section the analysis will delve on the social identity management by the refugees in their cross-group interactions with the Norwegian group. The section above mainly delved much on interactions within the African group itself. Moreso this section will analyse the religious and gender variables as they pertained to the social identity management of the refugees vis-à-vis the Norwegians. Other essential variables which I could have analysed here are the cultural and language issues. However the language variable has been analysed more in the section above in the intra-group social identity management which fused it with elements of inter-group dealings. Moreso the language issue will be expanded with an integrative dimension in the next chapter. On a similar note the cultural variable will be discussed in the next chapter when the variable will be analysed in the context of the integration programmes of the Kvæfjord Commune. Thus cultural analysis will be analysed within the contexts of assimilation and acculturation concepts. Hence the decision to analyse religion and gender components in this inter-group social identity management section. Gender and religion are some of the selected key variables in analysing the social identity management dynamics by the refugees under study as will be noted in the discursive analysis in this section.

#### **3.2.1. The Religious Context in Inter-Group Social Identity Management**

Inter-religious relations between the African refugees studied vis-à-vis the Norwegian host nationals was a mirror of the contemporary global realities regarding the religious sphere.

Those who are Christians had little difficulties mingling with the Norwegian way of doing it. Those who were Muslims thought they were somehow not tolerated, which in some cases led them to pretend as if they were Christians or were not at liberty to discuss religion. Their religious social identities were at the cross roads between the supposed egalitarian principles of a social democratic Norway and a rough global perception of what it meant to be a Muslim. Social identity management in this case became a psychological mayhem only shielded by the force of hope enshrined in the Muslim faith. An African indigenous refugee with the Islamic faith had to negotiate an acceptable public social identity in the hope of minimising the potential and perceived unwelcome dispositions from the host community and some other non-Muslims. Whether the anticipated shunning from the host community happened or not, being a Muslim was found to present relatively difficult times in gaining access to social capital and in some cases the labour market. This is not to say that there was rampant discrimination of the Muslim Africans. Not at all. For instance an investigation into the Kvæfjord commune showed that it employed about four inhabitants from the refugee camp and another kiosk employed a camp occupant also. Of these five employees, four were Africans, of which two were Somali men and one Somali woman. All the three were Muslims. The other two comprised of one Ethiopian young woman and one Iranian young man. Thus the assertion that Muslims faced relatively more challenges than non-Muslims does not translate into a blanket assertion of total negation of these followers.

In fact it was the social interactional reality which showed that it was relatively easier to get more friends from within and outside the host community if one was not a strict Muslim than otherwise. For instance a talk with Ila, an indigenous Tuareg Muslim African refugee from Niger hinted at this feeling of isolation because of his religion. Ila had this to say: “as a Muslim I feel that it’s a little bit difficult here in Norway than when one is not. I feel like its difficult to get a job or even Norwegian friends if one is Muslim”<sup>31</sup>. This view by Ila was also shared by other Muslims residing in the refugee camp. The social identity that the likes of Ila portrayed in their dealings with the Norwegians was situationally based to suit what they thought they would gain by behaving as such. Some indigenous African Muslims were not even at liberty to discuss their religion publicly. For instance one Sudanese young man from South Sudan was constantly changing statements about whether he was a Muslim or a Christian. Sometimes he would enter the mosque and sometimes he would go to the Baptist church. The Sudanese named Jimmy pointed out in an interview whilst he was sleeping in his

bed that “whether I am a Muslim or not it does not matter. What matters is for me to learn what the Norwegians want and do it so that I can find something to do”<sup>32</sup>. Asked what “something to do” meant he reluctantly pointed the need to get a job to avoid the boredom associated with being always in the camp without having a time table of what is there for tomorrow. For Jimmy his social identity was partly governed by “what Norwegians want”. He was prepared to situationally trade his Muslim identity in return for social acceptance in the labour market and the general living environment. By trading his probable religious identity it just meant being neutral about his religion or just associating himself with the views favourable to the people he was dealing with in order to gain their social acceptance. But in real terms my research did not come across anyone who truly shifted their religion from Muslim to Christianity. The shift was just a theoretical situational necessity to adopt a social identity that was perceived to be helpful in the circumstances at play. Most of the Muslims interviewed and observed were proud of their religion in as much as those who claimed to be Christians. I did not come across any other religion besides Christianity and Muslim within my research informants of indigenous African refugees. Within the Norwegian host community I came across many Norwegians in general conversations who claimed to be non-believers though generally they also believed that by virtue of their nation being a Christian kingdom, they were thus more theoretically aligned to the Christian faith.

Religion as a social identity management tool was therefore found to be influential in the inter-group relations between the indigenous African refugee minorities and the Norwegian hosts. Though religion, especially being a Muslim was found to be presenting some social identity management challenges, it should be emphasised that it was only in relation to other religions like Christianity.

Christians on other hand had a relatively better situation in terms of getting into some aspects of the Norwegian society. These aspects ranged from getting informal jobs like cutting grass, painting houses and so forth. Those who were Christian could, with relative easiness have some Norwegian friends who were vital in connecting them to even more Norwegian friends and the labour market. A closer look at these aspects through my social conversations and participant observation showed the important role played by religion in both indirect and direct ways. For instance some African refugees who were Christians were volunteering to work freely on the refurbishment of the Baptist church. They were helping in roof



refurbishment in one instance observed. As a result of that, some refugees established connections to get part time jobs as strawberry pickers, fetchers of firewood, house painters, and any other menial jobs. The public adoption of the Christian identity was thus desirable as a tool for gaining social acceptance besides being a tool of portraying the refugee's real beliefs. In other words there is no notice of an attempt to commoditise the Christian faith. It's only that being a Christian presented natural opportunities relative to being a non-Christian. In the process the Christian social identity was unconsciously or consciously reinforced vis-à-vis the otherwise misunderstood Muslim social identity. Further identity management variables like gender also played a significant role in the inter-group relations between the refugees and the Norwegian host populace as the analysis below will briefly deliberate.

### **3.2.2: "The Norwegian system is marrying our women" – Gender Dynamics in Norwegian-Refugee Interactions.**

A common assumption, which might be either feasible or unfeasible has been the advancement of the notion that women from the Third World, that is, developing countries, are far behind in terms of societal status vis-à-vis fellow women from the First World, that is, the developed countries. It is not my intention to validate or invalidate this notion, but rather it is rather a point which can be synthesized in analyzing the dynamism of the gender element in the interactional social identity management of the refugees with the Norwegian host populace. Some thoughts gathered from my informants deciphered how the actual and purported disparities in understandings of the gender roles affected the inter-group relations between the Norwegians and refugees. My refugee informants interacted with the general Norwegians in the Kvæfjord community as well as with Norwegians who were working in the Refugee camp. The refugee's social identities were managed therefore based on the demands of the system they interacted with. I have decided to highlight the above quotation from a Somali man in my general conversations with refugees in the camp. He pointed out that "the Norwegian system is marrying our women"<sup>33</sup>". This is a typical view expressed by a host of Somali informants as well as some other non-Somali Africans. The management of the Somali identities was thus torn between the supposed equity of the Somali traditions and the culture of the new state they were now staying in. The Somalis were of the view that the Norwegian state was more pro-women and for them this was contrary to the Somali system which they thought was more balanced. I will summarize one thing that the Somalis

complained of. The Somali man living in and outside the camp complained that the Norwegian system was disempowering them from controlling their women and in the process the system was upsetting the balance of power. They cited for example that when their female colleagues attend lessons at the Adult Education Center (Voksen Oppl ring), they are taught to disobey men. They thought the teachers instruct the Somali women to take over the Somali households. I got some highlights of some cases in which some Somali families in Norway collapsed because of reasons that these Somalis attributed to a Norwegian system which upsets their cultural traditions. Rashid from Somalia for instance highlighted to me that “the norwegian way of treating women is very different from our Somali way. In Somalia we ask for a hand in marriage from the parents and when we get married. It is the men who provide what the woman wants. The woman controls the domestic household things”<sup>34</sup>. Another Somali I interviewed on the issue named Subery pointed out that “the norwegian system has the potential to produce the likes of Hirsi in Netherlands. And it is unworkable”<sup>35</sup>, (Subery, Somali man aged 33). Hirsi is a Dutch-Somali Woman Activists who has been writing on Muslim issues and Gender in the Netherlands. Hirsi has faced criticism from the Muslim community for the way she has commented on some aspects of the religion. However the point here is that the views expressed by the Somali man denoted the Norwegian gender management system as incompatible with their culture. Nevertheless irrespective of the unwelcoming stance with specific references to some specificities of the Norwegian gender relations system, the Somalis had to navigate through the system and move on. This brings us to the point where the Somali refugees were found to be managing their cultural and gender role identities to suit the situation at play.

An analysis of the field events showed that the Somalis reacted differently to different situations with regard to the way the Norwegian system treated men and women. Even though the Somali men were not for the idea that empowered their women thorough the Norwegian way, they did not resist it openly in the public. Rather some would pretend to be neutral in public and they will tell their women what they expect from them when they are in private households. This was a situationally based stance to manage what they considered a new challenge brought about by the Norwegian scenario. After learning some Norwegian based rights for women and equality, some Somali women are said to have revolted against their men by seeking to be equal with them or by trying to deviate from their marriage based on Somali traditions. This was pointed out by some informants as causing fissures in some

Somali households here in Norway. The Somali women were not at liberty to discuss much about their man and what they thought of the assertion by their man that the Norwegian system was “marrying them”. During my time in the fieldwork there were some discussions within the Somali group that some women have been beaten in some places in Norway after being un-culturally critical of Somali and Muslim traditions. When I travelled to other cities in Norway I would always attempt to discuss the occurrence of such kind of events in Norway. In my discussions I have heard that it has happened a couple of times that some Somali man beat some Somali women who come out to be critical of the Somali culture. Indeed it was a complex issue in terms of how the gender based differentials between the Norwegians and this group of African refugees led to the situational adjustment by the Somalis to govern their social identity perceptions on gender. A public situation led some Somalis to avoid discussing their views on the gender relations vis-à-vis the Norwegian system. In private the Somalis would tell their women to keep note of their rightful roots. The scope of my time and writing space led me to focus mostly on the Somali group within the African refugee group. Otherwise I could have been inclusive of the whole African group which the time and space limitation proved a hindrance. Nevertheless the Somali views unravel a typical complex scenario in which African refugee minorities are faced with social identity management dilemmas. In face of these typical challenges, the African refugee minorities managed their identities to suit the demands of the varied situations they encounter.

In light of a plethora of social identity management demands the African refugees seemed to have resorted to an otherwise utopian undertaking. It might sound rather unfair to say “utopian” depending on whose viewpoint this issue is analysed. Can therefore the creation of an “imagined African nation” within Norway a viable trial in the refugee`s tribulations in identity management challenges? That is, a nation within a nation! Can Benedict Anderson`s notion of “imagined communities” provide some guide on this issue? I therefore follow this issue below based on my fieldwork and scholarly literature analysed during the course of my writing of this publication.

### **3.3 On Idealization and Imaginization of Africa as a Nation within a Norwegian Nation**

When I synthesize my analysis of the social identity management dynamics by the African refugee group in Kvæfjord Commune, if not in the whole of Norway, I get embraced by the

Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities". The thoughts of my informants pointed to the overt and tacit existence of a replica of the imagination or maybe the supposition of Africa as a nation. Turner and Tajfel have noted in their definition of social identity that social categorization is a key part in identity managements and formations. If some groups, in this case, the African refugee are socially categorized in an "Otherness" manner by the host nation, then this African group will be forced to have something of a unity of communion by default of being separately categorized. The categorization might be positive or negative, and whichever way, it will create a common label that will bind members of the group together. The African group I studied faced this scenario. Part of the Norwegian community had a general thinking of perceiving the Africans as economic rather than political migrants. Even when they thought of them as political migrants, some of them had a general feeling that Africa is a continent of problems and that these problems will never end. As such the African's image was closely attached to the usual images splashed on powerful western media channels showing children with flies and malnutrition in Darfur; half-dead people with Ebola in Uganda or DR Congo, war ravaged civilians in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Somalia and many other nations, to mention just a few. In as much as this might be realistic images, what bothered the African group was the blanket assumption that there are virtually limited positives about their "nation". Most African members thus shared feelings of this negative categorization. This partly led to the "creation" of an imagined homeland in a far away Norway. Most Africans see themselves as facing a common crisis of stigmatization in exile and they react by managing their identities by being sort of "one nation". In this sense their nation is somehow the way Benedict Anderson (1990) sees it, being "an imagined political community---. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"<sup>36</sup> . Indeed this notion of imagination is strong in this exiled community. I will try to analyse this notion of idealized communities by also quoting from other scholars on the issue.

By forming an idealized African "nation", it gives the new nationalities of this new imagined country or nation a sense of belonging. In other words nationalism within the group takes its toll, the group will strive to defend its nation and share the burdens of negative labeling. In some cases refugees from various countries will share stories of how they do some social things in their respective home countries. When these social things are done in similar or

almost similar ways, the refugees will strengthen the belief that Africa is “one nation”. In this viewpoint what creates an imagined African homeland is not negative labeling by the host populace but rather the shared similarity of their home culture and socialization. Thus memories of the past and challenges of the new place become ingredients in the formation of a new African identity. Thus comparatively, Peter Kivisto (1984) in his study on immigrants noted that “--- immigrants, to the extent that they were able, constructed a meaningful society out of the old world and the new”<sup>37</sup>. The notion of imagined communities was also noted by Asle Høgmo in his unfinished article on European residence in the Spanish coast of Playa Blanca. Høgmo noted that “---we, as inhabitants of Europe, have learnt to look upon Europe as our common continent, a nation of nations in the way Benedict Anderson (1983) defines a nation: an imagined community we in time and space have constructed and go on constructing”<sup>38</sup>. In almost a similar note the African refugees have constructed an African nation within Norway. It looks like they will keep on constructing this nation and it seems certain that this nation will exist into the unforeseeable future. I will highlight some of the responses to a question I posed to my informants concerning the notion of the African identity.

I asked the question “*Do you see now your nationality as African or as that of your individual country?*” *The following responses came out:*

Rashid from Somalia, “*when we are here in Europe, everyone from Africa becomes a brother or a sister. We are one family*”<sup>39</sup>.

Pierre from DR Congo “*we are all categorized as Africans here in Norway. I don’t see myself as more of a Congolese than African here in Norway. When I was in South Africa sometime ago I identified myself more as a Congolese. When I was in DR Congo sometimes I was not talking to Burundians and Rwandese people, but here they are my best friends, my best family*”<sup>40</sup>

Simon from Congo Brazzaville, “*I feel more African than Congolese here. In Harstad African people greet me even if they don’t know me. I think they feel like we come from one country called Africa. I feel the same too.*”<sup>41</sup>

Natasha from DR Congo, “*I feel more African than Congolese here because I am in Norway. Africans are my family really*”<sup>42</sup>.

Robert from Burundi, “*I love Burundi but I identify more as African when I am here*”<sup>43</sup>

Even in my general conversations with other African refugees in and outside the refugee camp they expressed the same sentiments of a one Africa in their minds. It might sound somehow reasonable then when Seton-Watson pointed out that “all that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one”<sup>44</sup>. In this scenario the African membership in Kvæfjord behaved as if they had formed a nation. And in their minds they consider themselves as having formed one either willingly or unwillingly. The salience of these nations becomes evidently noticeable when Africans who stay in a refugee camp without any African complaint to the Directorate of Immigration that they need a transfer to another refugee camp where there are people from their countries. The UDI, though, always try to settle refugees in areas where they can have people from the same country or people who speak the same languages. But in those cases were some refugees feel like they don’t have Africans in the same refugee camp or have Africans who speak languages they cannot understand they immediately request for a transfer of refugee camp. The issues of language therefore become an intervening crucial variable in identity alliances and managements.

Social contexts and memories which are shared by the refugees are part of the critical ingredients in the formation of an African homeland in their life in exile. When the refugees narrate stories about the plight of their peoples at war or in crisis back home in Africa, they feel a strengthening of their bonds. The memories and stories being shared becomes a common ground which makes them to identify more with each other. Even for instance if a refugee from Burundi narrates a story about the Hutu-Tutsi civil wars in Burundi, he or she will share the same feelings with a Rwandese when she narrates her experiences of the Hutu-Tutsi fighting from her country. In his article entitled “The Creation and maintenance of a Social Memory of Violent Antagonism among Basque Radical Nationalists”, Sund Turimod (2004), shared his thoughts on the significance of memories and narratives in identity management. Sund noted that “narratives in their social contexts, become part of a negotiated social memory that plays an important role in affirming Basque radical nationalist’s identity”<sup>45</sup>. Even though Sund’s situation is about the Basques in the same country with a similar nationality, it however displays the importance of past memories in identity management. On a similar note King (2004) noted that memory becomes a kind of ‘manual for group membership that demands collective action later’<sup>46</sup>. Shared memories therefore become crucial in the politics of identity management. By sharing common stories, it revitalizes the memories

of home. In this case stories from different nations of Africa are molded to give a combined newly created African nation. The creation resides in its creator's imagination. Boyarin (1994) thus pointed out that "when discussing 'social' or 'collective' memory, one should never forget that these memories can only exist in individual brains"<sup>47</sup>. In other terms Boyarin hints that the individuals create their own images which they save in their heads as reference points for identifying with people who share the same imaginations with them. The power of imagination was emphasized by Richard Schechner (1993) when he said that violence imagined "is many times more intense than the violence done"<sup>48</sup>. In as much as this might relate to violence, it might be really of relevance to the African refugee's situation since their imagined African nation within Norway was born out of a variety of reasons ranging from negative or positive social stigmatization by the host society to shared memories of their otherwise bitter and sweeter past in their African parentland. The notion of Africa as one nation might sound mythical to outsiders. But to its creators it creates a safe haven for those with no families in exile. The formed nation provides a conduit for stress management, comfort and belonging. After all Giambattista Vico (1968) learnt that "the first science to be learned should be that of mythology or the interpretation of fables"<sup>49</sup>. Thus a presumed mythologisation of Africa as one nation might be mythology to the etics and realism to the emics. It provides comradeship to belong to a nation in the way that Benedict Anderson noted when he said "--- the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings"<sup>50</sup>. Indeed Anderson sounds perplexed by the notion that generations have died for the cause of an imagined nation. He is Perplexed that many sons and daughters have died for their "imagined nations". It's understandable that Anderson might be sounding perplexed because he might yet to be in a situation that warrants such imaginations as recipes for survival. Being in a refugee camp for an undefined duration might be a reasonable ground enough to create an imagined nation as long as it positively saves the purpose of positive social identity survival. And indeed the Kvæfjord commune refugees have seemed to be in a predicament that warrants such an identity management strategy to achieve what John Rex noted as objective social and political projects.

### **3.4 Summary**

African Refugee social identity management in Kvæfjord Commune is therefore a complex

mixture of intertwined social variables. Some factors that affect social identity choices penetrates through both lances of inter and intra group interactions. At intra-group level, this chapter argued that factors like language, regionalism, religion, ethnicity, gender, and the semiotics of food, music and clothing all affect social identity management by the African refugees in the area under study. These variables are willingly and unwillingly manipulated to suit the demands of various situations. Interactions between the African refugee folks is defined by the overlapping complexities posed by these variables. For instance it was noted that in one case language might act as a divider whilst in other cases it might be a connector. On a similar note religion or music or food or ethnicity might act as pullers or pushers of social bonds in the interactions of the African group in the refugee camp. Nevertheless at the end of this chapter I argued that there is one element which seemed to be a connector of the African refugee group. That element was the “imagined African nation” which the refugees have created and recreated over and over again through sharing the burden of exile and the stigmatized social categorizations by the host environment. I borrowed reasonably from scholars on imagined communities and scholars on the significance of social memories and narratives to emphasize the salience of the formation of idealized “nationhood” in the life of exiles. The romanticisation of an imagined African nation in the Diaspora has created a sense of belongingness and has offered a safe haven that has occupied the vacuum left by the absence of families and the kinship structures which are typical of the African traditional life systems.

African-Norwegian inter group relations were analysed within the context of the variables of religion and gender dynamics. The *intra*-group variables had also proved overlapping into inculcating the *inter*-group dynamics, hence the decision to limit the discussion to the gender and religious variables with regard to the social identity management in the realms of Norwegians-Africans relations. In that section I argued that religion was a factor to be reckoned with in African social identity management. Being a Christian was found to produce relatively minimized stress or demands in adopting a socially acceptable identity by the host populace. However being a non-Christian, especially a Muslim was relatively presenting a challenging identity management scenario in which Muslims had in some cases to pretend being Christian or they had to choose retiring to their houses. In the process it was minimizing the badly needed social capital needed to cope with the socio-economic basics required by the affected refugees. On the gender element, having been constrained by limitation of time and



space, I principally focused on the views of some Somali men on what they considered a “Norwegian system marrying our women”. Despite their objection to the Norwegian system which they thought was empowering their women against Somali traditions, the Somali men managed their identities to try to pretend as if they had little to matter about the Norwegian gender system. Yet in their private households they would exert pressure on their female colleagues to stick to the roots.

Having dealt with these issues I went on to highlight that the next chapter, which is a continuation of the data analysis but focusing principally on the integration regime will deal more with aspects of the host populace’s interactions with the refugee group under study. The next chapter will therefore analytically deliberate on the integration regime with special emphasis on the impact of some selected integration programmes on the social identity management dynamics by the African refugee group. Thus after discussing some selected integration programmes of the Kvæfjord Commune, the next chapter will also mingle on the integration related branches of assimilation, acculturation and multiculturalism as they relate to Norway and the social identity management situation of the refugees in question.

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## **Chapter 4**

### **Integration Programmes and Their Impact on Social Identity Management by the African Refugees**

Besides their informal contacts that shape social identity managements at both intra and inter group levels, some of the African refugee minorities in Kvæfjord Commune operate within the confines of the official integration programmes of the Commune. The integration programmes have profound effects on the social identity management processes in question. My interview and observation methods deciphered the existence of a variety of programmes availed by the Kommune in line with the national programmes of integration. It does not necessarily mean that the programmes are systematically uniform in all the communes of Norway. In fact some of the integration programmes are designed to suit the different conditions in the different municipalities. Thus Kvæfjord commune has adopted some programmes that suit its situation and some that are typical of the national level. The sameness of some of the programmes might help to give a mirror reflection of the general impact of Norwegian integration programmes on the social identity management by the African refugees. It should however be noted that the findings of this research have a closer representation of the situation in the study area.

The analytical discussion in this section will focus on some selected integration programmes of the commune and how the refugees and some of the refugee workers thought about their impacts on social identity management. A brief presentation of the commune's integration programmes followed by an immediate analytical discussion of the selected integration programmes will be undertaken. Assimilation, acculturation and multiculturalism as key concepts in integration and identity management systems will be analysed in relation to the issues under study. Thus this section will endeavor to briefly analyse the linkage between

social identity management and assimilative or acculturative models of the integration regime. The outcomes of this research are not tightly conclusive but they are rather a close representation of the link between integration programmes and social identity management in the commune.

#### **4.1 Kvæfjord Kommune Integration Programmes.**

Activities that form the package of integration programmes are not divorced from those that shape the situational social identity management in the non-formal intra and inter group interactions. Chapter 3 dealt with data analysis and findings on the intra group and inter group dynamics or on interactions *within* the African refugees themselves and interactions between the African group and other non-Africans. It should be noted that some sections of this chapter will focus mainly on those refugees who are under the official integration programmes and less on those who are in the refugee camp and are yet to be enrolled in the official programs. At the same time there is no clear cut differential between these two groups, that is those in the official integration programmes and those in the camp. The refugees in the camp use the same facilities, places of entertainment, churches/mosques and so forth as those who live outside the camp.

Refugees who live outside the camp are mostly those who came to Norway through the UNHCR from Liberia, Burundi and DR Congo among others. Also in this group outside the camp are refugees moving out of the camp as a result of the official acceptance of their refugee status by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI).

The African refugee group outside the camp does however live with some refugees from other non-African nations like Burma, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, among others. Therefore their interactions take place within this setting. This African refugee group outside the camp has access to some programmes which the other group in the camp has no official access to. During the time of the research access to things like Norwegian Language learning and work placement programmes (praksis) have been the prerogative of the refugee group outside the camp. The farm project which gives a piece of land to the refugees in the commune for farming was also a domain for those outside the refugee camp. As such their special position warrants them to be discussed separately, though their social identity management processes were found to be in tandem with those living in the camp.

Thus selected integration programmes like the farm project, the Norwegian language learning, the church, and the red cross's cultural and refugee guide services will be analyzed in relation to their impact on social identity management by the African refugee group under study.

#### **4.2 Commune Refugee Worker's Approach on Refugee Integration**

Kvæfjord Kommune has refugee workers who are called "Flyktning Konsult" (Refugee Consultants) whose main job is to work with the refugees who are resettled in the municipality. In my fieldwork I made an interview appointment with the leader of the refugee section and also with the other refugee consultant in the commune. The interview focused on what integration programmes they have for the refugees, and how they implement them. In the aftermath of the interview my data analysis was focusing on how the way these programs are implemented can have an impact on social identity management of the African group. I also went further to have some separate interviews with some of the resettled African refugees in the commune. Some interviews were done with refugees from Ivory Coast, Somalia, DR Congo and Sudan among others. General discussions based on participant observations on the impact of integration programme on the refugees was also done with nationalities from countries like DR Congo, Liberia and Somalia. The refugees expressed almost similar sentiments on the existence of the impact of integration programmes on their social identities. The sentiments were also similar to how the African refugee group inside the camp thought about and experienced in relation to the commune activities. The official view gathered from my interviews with the commune refugee consultants showed that the commune has a liberal approach on what programmes to have in the integration of the refugees. On the other hand the refugees had mixed feelings about the programs. The general feeling among the refugees was that they adjust themselves to suit different integration programmes availed to them. These programs, in the words and actions of the refugees had varied impacts on their social identities.

##### **4.2.1 "We have a Participatory Approach" – The Commune's Eye**

Conversing with the refugee consultants, both of them were in agreement that they "have a participatory approach"<sup>1</sup> in devising the integration activities for the refugees. They gave me an example of a picture on the wall of their office showing a flower in a vase getting water

from a bowl. They said the flower-bowl picture represented their approach of being open with the refugees. According to them it is thought that the sustainability and success of these programs hangs on the willingness of the refugees to accept them. Hence their assertion that they have a participatory approach. Though the programs do have an element of refugee consultations it was noted that there is a tacit carrot and stick approach which makes it indirectly difficult for refugees to express open dislike of certain issues in the programmes. For instance in order to get social benefits like monetary allowances from the commune one has to go to school for Norwegian language learning. In as much as this is not a negative undertaking, it is nevertheless an issue that might be contrary to the wishes of some of the refugees in question. Some might not be interested in going to school but rather have an interest in finding a job directly and move ahead. This idea was found to be in the thinking of some Somalian refugees though in the end they appreciated going to school since getting a job without Norwegian language competence was a logical challenge in the long run. Thus one has to adopt the grudging identities of being a school lover and a Norwegian language lover to get on with the society. Therefore the integration programs lead to unconscious social identity adjustments. Hereunder I discuss and analyze social identity management in light of some of the integration programs of the commune under study.

#### **4.3: The Red Cross Cultural and Refugee Guide Projects**

These two projects by the Red Cross in collaboration with the commune were found to have impacts on situational social identity management by the refugees. The guides allocated to the refugees inculcate a new sense of how to interact with the host Norwegian community. The cultural events in the culture house give a momentum to interact with the Norwegian publics which adds impetus to identity shifts, changes and managements. The Norwegian community in the process is also found adopting changed perception of what the refugee is all about. The media perception which largely downgrades the refugee will be put to the test when the refugees and the Norwegian interact directly on an independent platform. Refugees throw themselves in the jigsaw puzzle of situational social identity management in order to gain social acceptance by the new society or even in appreciation of the new traits from the new society.

It is useful to have a general background of what the Red Cross projects are like. In my interviews with Nina Bottolfsen and Oddny Norscott who are the refugee consultants for the

commune they outlined the importance of their activities in collaboration with the Harstad Red Cross. The Red Cross has a task to allocate a guide to each refugee in the Kvæfjord Commune. The Red Cross and the commune advertise for refugee guides in the newspaper and upon getting some volunteer guides, they allocate them a refugee to help in the integration process. The guides become like focal social contacts for the refugees. By involving the refugees in typical Norwegian lifestyles, the guiding program becomes a contributory issue in the refugee social identity management. It becomes a tool for assimilative integration which is neutralized by other programs which places emphasis on strengthening refugee traditional lifestyles. Is there a conflict of intentions then by embarking on actions tantamount to assimilation on the one hand and actions focusing on purported strengthening of refugee traditional lifestyles? Indeed from some participant conversations carried out with some of the refugees it was noted that some of the programs are viewed with mixed feelings whilst others are welcomed.

Welcoming of the programs was noticed in conversations with some of the refugees who viewed their cultural backgrounds as not radically different from the Norwegian lifestyles. Such kind of refugees adjusted their identities to adapt new lifestyles which they viewed as positive in their lives. One such informant who had a welcoming view of the guide project was an Ivorian refugee named Sering. He had been resettled in Kvæfjord for about a year after having been in the Borkenes refugee camp for about a year. So in total he had been in the Kommune for about two years. In his positive attitude to the program Sering pointed out that: “I have a refugee guide from the Red Cross. The guide invites you to some of the parties he wants you to attend. This is useful in integrating refugees in the Norwegian society. For me the guide has been very useful in the integration process”<sup>2</sup>. A critical look at Sering’s viewpoint shows the salience of the impact of integration programmes to the refugee lives. In this scenario Sering is fortunate to be in agreement with the way the Red Cross Refugee guide Program works. For Sering the program gives him a hand which he might otherwise have found it challenging to attain without the guide. In this case this kind of integration is positively viewed. Identity management in this case showed that refugees who preferred to have a refugee guide quickly flexed their identities to suit the Norwegian cultural way of doing things. At the same time they remained tightly connected to their African cultures and friends. In my informal conversations with a Liberian refugee called Luis some months before my research began he had also expressed a positive attitude towards the red cross



refugee guide program. He saw this as a way that was a confidence building measure among the refugees in terms of unlocking the opportunities inherent in mingling with the Norwegian hosts. Several general discussions I had with the refugees had a more welcoming view of the Red Cross activities in tandem with the commune. One of the most popular ongoing activities which were viewed as positively integrative by the African refugees was the cultural program done between the Borkenes refugee camp, the Commune and Red Cross. The Red Cross took a more leading role in the organization of this program.

A cultural program in which different nationalities came together to make merry and feast was found to have an impact on social identity management by the refugees. In this event the refugees from different nationalities will attend the function in different styles. Each nationality has to wear its own traditional or national costume, bring their national foods, dance or songs. Hence there will be a mixture of foods, songs, dressing and dances from nationalities like DR Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Congo Brazzaville, among others. The Red Cross caters for all the inputs required to purchase and cook the foods and sometimes in making some traditional regalia. The Norwegian populace is then invited to the feast, whereupon they eat the various foods and have a practical glimpse of the diversity and richness of the African traditions.

This had far reaching dimensions in social identity management and relations. The refugees in this case freely managed their identities to reflect their pride in Africanness. By having Norwegian collaborations in their activities and eating and appreciating the deliciousness of the African diets, it reconstructed a sense of African greatness which the refugees attain on rare occasions. The usual scenario connotes the refugees with social and political stigmatization. This stigma throws the African prideness into absolute quandary. In opportunities where the Africanness is in twilight such as at these Red Cross cultural events, it nurtures the genuine identity of African happiness. At one point I visited another refugee centre called Mandheimen Refugees Centre which is situated in Telemark District in Southern Norway. I met some African refugees who also expressed a positive attitude towards this kind of activity by the Red Cross in their area. I was trying to map out a comparative matrix of how the Africans in different refugee camps of Norway manage their social identities in light of some of these integration programmes. I did not focus much on other refugee centers but where I had opportunities to get to other refugee centers or places with African refugees I usually tried to find the linkages or dis-linkages. Overallly I noted a similarity of behavioral

trends in the refugee social identity management. It uplifted my belief in the heightened possibility that with a more rigorous, time filled research, my findings in Kvæfjord Kommune can be generalisable to the general scenario of social identity management by the African refugees in Norway.

Not only are the integration programmes of the commune aligned with the Red Cross. In fact a variety of civil society organizations are part of the ingredients in refugee management. Refugees are human beings but just like workers in any civilized or uncivilized establishment, they are managed. In addition to being managed the refugees also managed themselves, especially through social identity management. One of the most common civil society organizations involved in the integration of the African refugees and hence impacting on their social identity management was the Church.

#### **4.4: Engendering the Church's Integrative Stamina**

As a presumably non-aligned civil society entity, the church was found to be one of the most powerful organs influencing the on-goings related to integration and socialization of the African flock. “Women learn knitting and cooking activities in the Baptist Church”<sup>3</sup> pointed out Nina Johansen, one of the refugee consultants in Kvæfjord commune in an interview. The church is a haven for inter-faiths denominations. In Borkenes there are around three churches, viz, the Baptist Church, The Lutheran church (Norwegian National Church) and the Salvation Army (Frelsearmen). When the refugees attend services in these churches, they do not consider themselves as Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans, Dutch or Protestants. In fact the research noted that the religious social identities are flexed to reflect the Christian faith superseding individual sub-distinctions of being either protestant or catholic, as an example. Of all the churches personally attended in my participant observations, the Baptist church attracted a lot, if not more than 90% of refugees who preferred to go to church. It was found out that this church was well suited to the element of social fluidity. This church provided translations to and from English and Norwegian languages. If a Congolese refugee for example can speak only French, he or she could do so and a fellow who understands English would translate for him or her. Some refugees could even speak and sing in Lingala, Swahili or any language and then a translation would follow. In the refugee camp, the Baptist church was sometimes dubbed “a church of the people by the people”. When I asked a group of refugees why they dub the church in this way they postulated to me that “--- of the people”

means the church is a friendly place for the refugees, whilst the phrase “---by the people” meant a church for the Norwegians but now for both the refugees and the Norwegians. Indeed the refugees expressed appreciation of the way this church provided a platform for psychological healing, social uplifting and religious continuity. In contrast, without any endeavor to diminish the significance of the other churches which I spend little time in, these other churches were found to be rigid and structured with limited room for the refugees to participate. This was typical of the Lutheran church. All sessions were strictly in Norwegian language which the refugees did not fully understand. The Salvation Army was sometimes opened for refugees to use for their own late evening prayers. In the Salvation Army the refugees could sing and dance in the church in a fashion mirroring the way they purportedly do it back in Africa, as most of the refugees pointed out, and as I observed also when I attended the sessions. One might have a little wondering on where all the churches come in on the issue of identity management.

In fact any future church programming entailing immigrants in general and refugees in particular risks a heightened possibility of going in vain, if the participatory requirement of their refugees is cold shouldered. Churches as critical components of civil society organizations, must be well versed and placed on the relevance and absolute necessity to adopt a participatory and adaptive approach to cater for a membership with increasingly fluid nationalities. Thus the need to adopt the Baptist model briefly noted above. The descriptions of the three churches above strictly relates to the Kvæfjord commune scenario only and is by no means related to the general situation of churches in Norway. For example when i started staying in Tromsø, I attended some church sessions in the Lutheran Church in which I was personally asked to read the bible in the church. I remember when the Nobel Peace laureate Professor Wangari Mathai visited Tromsø on Environmental awareness campaign in the year 2005 I was approached by the Lutheran church to be part of the “Tromsø delegation” to lead the church service. I read the bible and some scriptures that needed English reading. As an African i saw that this was a different approach from the way the same church does it in Kvæfjord commune. Thus the churches differ from place to place in the way they handle the integrative aspects of refugee or immigrant integration.

In the Kvæfjord Kommune set up, the refugees submerge their individual church identities in favor of the broader Christian identity when they are in churches. For instance some refugees from Ethiopia were strictly orthodox in our private discussions and they pointed out that when

they were in Ethiopia they could not mix in church with members who were not orthodox. But in the Baptist church in Kvæfjord they were coming for most services and mixing with all denominations as Christians, not as orthodox. The refugee life in Kvæfjord Commune was therefore noted to be a centre of social identity managements based on situations. On a similar note the church operates within the confines of the communal social variables. Factors that made the Baptist church attractive for instances are linked to the issues discussed in chapter 3, which are social identity variables like language, religion and open door approach to diversity. If the Baptist church was good in dancing only, without embracing language multiplicity, then it might have turned out to be less attractive for the refugees. Hence language becomes an increasingly paramount factor in refugee hood. The commune therefore has the language programme as part of the integration quest, which like other variables has continually affected the social identity dynamics of the refugees. The analysis therefore turns to the dynamism of host nation's language in relation to the identities of the refugees.

#### **4.5: The Mystics Of “Norwegianisation” in social identity management.**

The sudden thought of the vigorous Norwegianisation of the Sami people in the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century might strike one's mind to think that this is what my heading in this section entails. In fact the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sami Norwegianisation occurred in a platform antagonistically different from the present social and political conditions in the modern Norway. Though the end result might be the same, the way of achieving the end result when it comes to Norwegianising the African refugee has been done in a “forcefully unforceful” manner. Forceful in the sense that though the approaches used by the communes of Norway are not directly threatening, they leave those not interested in learning and speaking Norwegian with no option but to be interested in learning and speaking the language. This then becomes the unforceful part of it. Adequate knowledge of the Norwegian language was noted to be a de-facto pre-requisite for the achievement of further aspirations by the African and non-African refugees alike. When I interviewed a Somalian refugee she had this to say:

*“I have a dream to help Somali people in Norway as a nurse. They need a nurse who can understand their language. I can translate for them when they need access to health services. But this dream cannot be realized without me first learning the Norwegian language. It's a must, whether I like it or not”<sup>4</sup> (Hodan from Somali). Whilst in an informal conversation, a Sudanese informant highlighted that “I help*

*some Norwegians to cut some grass in summer just hopping that in mixing with them I might learn the language faster and open my doors to find more jobs in Norway”<sup>5</sup>. (Jimmy, Sudan).*

Pierre, a Congolese, sarcastically highlighting that “the Norwegians think English is trying to colonize them, so the way forward for a refugee here in Norway is Norwegian first and English second”<sup>6</sup>.

A critical analysis of these three informants denotes social identity management dilemma induced by the demands of the Norwegian language requirement. For the Somali lady, she would have preferred to learn being a nurse using English which she can quickly polish up and learn, but the profession of her desire can not be fully undertaken without adequate knowledge in the “norsk språk” (Norwegian language). Thus her language is grudgingly adjusted to suit the new demand of the Norway situation. Similarly for Jimmy from Sudan he has no option but to learn the Norwegian language in order for him to “open my doors” to find jobs in future. The Congolese, Pierre also expressed the same sentiments on the logical impossibility of making significant inroads in Norway without mastering workable Norwegian language learning. Even in my informal communications with the African refugees in and out of the refugee camps in Norway, I have gained a general understanding of the paramount priority all of them attach to the Norwegian language as a step forward. Thus in most cases the Africans adopt an identity that instill an internal stimulus within them which tells them that in terms of Norwegian language, they have to become Norwegian. In the research it was noted that though almost all refugees acknowledged that learning the Norwegian language is a hitch to their pre-arrival expectations, in the new set up they appreciate the need to master the language as long as it will be helpful to their social and general well being. In realization of this, the commune has the language learning programme for all refugees in its jurisdiction.

The Voksen Opplæring (VOP), the Adult Education Centre, especially for languages is one of critical ingredients applied by the Kvæfjord commune in its integration activities. As one of the most critical ingredients, it is also one of most well known institutions in refugee circles in Norway. This might decipher the success of the Norwegian regime in coordinating programming of the Norwegian language learning for the immigrants. All integrated refugees are expected to attend the language course at the VOP till they can speak Norwegian though

there are certain number of hours allocated to each learner ranging from 250 hours to 3000 hours for periods ranging up to 3 years or more if need be. The VOP is centre for multi-national interactions which further twists and enriches the refugees with flexed identity managements. One learns to accept and tolerate diversity of views, languages and nationalities in these centers. The African refugees literally transform their identities to accommodate friendships with different groups spanning beyond the African group. In my observations of the integrated African refugees I noted that most of them have, as a result of the network provided by the Language centers, gained more semi-permanent friends with other non-African nationalities. This new expanded network has sometimes been utilized as elements of social partnerships like for parties and weddings, and the networks have also been necessary for some to find jobs or accommodation in different places of Norway. Thus an accommodative social identity adoption by the African refugees emanating from the vast complex networks availed by the integrative environment ushers in an endless provision of more situations in which the refugees have to manage and make social, religious, economic and quasi-political ends to meet.

#### **4.6: “Integrative Agrarianism” – The Farm Project as a Platform for Social Identity Management**

An idealistically fascinating approach in a developed country to integrate refugees has been the farm project concept. In this arrangement the refugees are given small pieces of land alongside Norwegians. They can use these pieces of land to plant anything they want during the summer time or anytime their plants can survive. The idea is to provide an opportunity whereby the Norwegians and the refugees can meet and thereby speeding the integration of the refugees into the mainstream society. On the other side of the coin this project also enables the Norwegian community to reap an appreciation of the exotic foreign dimension of doing things. In my area of study this project had just started some months before I embarked on my research project. Though it was in its infancy the two informants I interviewed expressed enthusiasm about the project.

Hodan from Somalia noted that she got a piece of land which she looked forward to grow some African vegetables in the summer season of 2008. Sering from Ivory Coast had already tried some plants on his “farm” and he said he looked forward to it being promising in future. Not many Norwegians had bought into the project by the time of my research. The general

feeling of the Africans in Kvæfjord Commune was that they were interested in this project and viewed it positively. They envisioned it as possible provider of a pulpit to exchange a multiplicity of views and ideas and hence making it easier for them to make networks with the Norwegian people. Most of the informants observed and interviewed in informal and formal set ups placed high value in being connected with some Norwegian friends as this would be an asset in inculcating a pro-Norwegian identity in their lifestyles where necessary. It might be of real necessity to follow up on the future of such a project considering the traditional affection between Africa's agrarian based economies and the possibilities that such a project might have on Africans in exile. A possibility that might renew memories of an African home for the African refugee in a far away land such as Norway.

#### **4.7: Assimilation and Acculturative Regimes in Refugee Social Identity Management**

In cross-cultural environments identity management has become a contested domain especially with regard to the factoring in of concepts of assimilation and acculturation. These concepts are part of the integration efforts commonly found in national policies of various nation states. The debates on assimilation partly centered on whether there is positive assimilation or negative assimilation policies. In the case of the African refugee minorities under study it was noted that in some instances they are faced with situations which can be categorized as assimilative and integrative. For instance the demand for the refugees to learn and be competent in Norwegian language makes them to be partly assimilated. Before I left my native Zimbabwe, I was taking the language factor in simple terms when it comes to how powerful it can be as a tool of assimilating minorities. In Zimbabwe there are two main tribes which are the majority Shona tribe (constituting about 85% of the population) and the Ndebele tribe with about 11% of the population. The remaining figure of around 4% encompasses other groups especially the European or white Zimbabweans. A significant number of the Ndebele minority speak Shona language whilst the Shonas rarely speak Ndebele language. I used to hear the Ndebele friends saying this shows a sign that the Shona are dominating them, but I was not taking them seriously since I also belong to the majority tribe. Little did I know that indirectly my Ndebele colleagues were historically being assimilated into the Shona culture and language. When I studied the Norwegianisation of the Sami indigenous peoples of Norway, I have realized that language becomes one of the single most important factors in assimilative integration. The Shonalisation of the Ndebele minority in Zimbabwe has some parallels with the Norwegianisation of the Sami, in the sense that both

process had language as the deciding factor. Nevertheless the Sami Norwegianisation was comparatively more rigorous than the Shonalisation of the Ndebeles.

When it comes to the African refugee minorities in Norway, the same position can be applied regarding the utilization of the Norwegian language to somehow norwegianise the refugees. As discussed in most parts of this publication, language learning by the refugees is mandatory in Norway. Even if one opts not to study the language, one ceases to receive social monetary grants from the state, making it indirectly obligatory to learn the language as a tool to access most services. It should be borne in mind however that in this case the Norwegianisation of the refugee has both positive and negative faces depending on the preference of a particular refugee. Even though most refugees interviewed acknowledged the challenges of learning a new language, they however had a positive view of the post-language learning benefits to be attained as result of competence in this arena. Language is therefore a pivotal aspect for the failure or success of integrating refugees. Egon F Kunz (1981) in his article entitled “Exile and Resettlement : Refugee Theory”, pointed out that “ in a linguistically strange environment the refugees might find themselves excluded and isolated from human contact, and their loneliness may result in depression or even in paranoid hallucinatory reaction”<sup>7</sup>. By so saying Kunz appreciated the fact that without embracing the language competence of the host environment, it might become uncomfortable for the refugees in exile. A linguistically strange environment places the refugees in a somehow “out of place” position in relation to the majority host population. The African refugees in Norway for example will find themselves in the position of the “Other” if they fail to embrace some key aspects which might be considered fundamental by the Norwegian society. Thus for instance Katrine Fangen (2004) in her article entitled “Humiliation as Experienced by Somali Refugees in Norway”, noted that “ many Somalis in Norway--- have a hard time handling the “Otherness” attributed to their ethnic group by the media, by politicians and by the majority population in general”. In such cases refugee identity management becomes problematic. The dichotomies of “We” and “the other” will thus exert tremendous pressure on the ones in the minorities’ situation to conform to what might make them acceptable to the majority. Thus Egon F. Kunz highlighted that “augmentative societies are likely to exact the price of assimilation in exchange for the privilege of admitting the refugee”<sup>9</sup>. In an attempt to ward off the stigmatized version of the “Other”, some refugees find themselves opting for assimilative integration into the host state. Kunz labels augmentative societies as countries who actively support population growth



through immigration and are likely to look at the refugee as a sought after and valued immigrant who is expected to contribute to the nation's numerical growth and economic capacity<sup>10</sup>. The Norway of today, like a host of other western developed nations, might be augmentative in some integration policies but not so enthusiastic and receptive to a flood of refugees. This is typical under the new globalization regime where there is an exodus of populations from the fragile and downtrodden third world economies to the developed economies for various reasonable political, economic and religious grounds, among others.

Further scholarly arguments on assimilation and acculturation in relation to the situation of minorities and immigrants, a category which fits my study group of refugee minorities, can be noted hereunder.

J. W. Berry (1989) defines acculturation as follows: Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups<sup>11</sup>. And on a similar note Siv Kvernmo and Sonja Heyerdal (2004) in their article entitled "Ethnic Identity and Acculturation Attitudes Among Indigenous Norwegian Sami and Ethno-cultural Kven Adolescents", have quoted a definition of acculturation from various scholars as "---describing the psychological and cultural changes that occur as a result of continual contact between people belonging to different cultural or ethnic groups"<sup>12</sup>

In line with these definitions of acculturation it can be espoused that the African refugees in Kvæfjord commune have regularly been in contact with the Norwegian populace and in such a process there has been an inevitable cultural adjustments by the refugees. This also becomes part of the semi-assimilation process. Berry further notes that "assimilation is at times a phase of acculturation"<sup>13</sup>. Thus in the process of acculturation the refugees adopt different identities to suit the varying social situations. Erving Goffman(1961) defined a social situation "as an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all others who are `present`, and similarly find them accessible to him"<sup>14</sup>. This is a social situation which I have seen most of my study group informants being faced with. Most African refugees are found in a situation in which the host population adopts a quasi monitoring attitude to their behavior. This will placate the banner of socially acceptable behaviour to the host. The refugees are thus relegated to a constant

demand to monitor their behavior to suit what might be perceived as culturally acceptable norms. In the process the refugees are indirectly assimilating themselves and identity management becomes an ongoing phenomenon in such a fluid community. Thus Berry further postulates that on immigration to a new country, there can be some dramatic and sometimes overwhelming contact experiences followed by psychological reactions: differences in climate, language, work habits, religion and dress, for example, can all challenge the immigrant, and some response is required<sup>15</sup>. And indeed the African refugee has made some responses in different situations as has been enumerated throughout this work.

Acculturation however does not necessarily mean an automatic behavioral transformation. Two or more cultures can meet without significant impetus to shift either group's position in terms of cultural and social issues. Berry thus pointed out that "the process of acculturation is an uneven one and does not affect all cultural and psychological characteristics in a uniform manner"<sup>16</sup>. On an almost similar note, Asle Høgmo (2008 unpublished), in his article, "The Third Alternative", noted that, "---a change in cultural articulation does not necessarily mean cultural and ethnic assimilation"<sup>17</sup>. Thus the African refugees in Kvæfjord Commune do not necessarily shift their identities in a uniform pattern. Africans from different nationalities manage their identities in varying formulas depending on how much a certain Norwegian tradition they encounter closely mirror what their home culture offers. In case of a Muslim African refugee for example, his action adjustment pattern may be radically different from a Christian African when they are in a Norwegian religious event. The Christian African might not significantly adjust his/her behaviour since the event might be almost familiar to him, whereas a Muslim African might find it strenuous to accommodate such scenarios.

#### **4.8: Integration Ambiguities, Multiculturalism and the Fluidity of Identity Management**

Integration presents a host of empirical challenges when it comes to social identity management. The parameters of the contents and nature of integration are so fluid that its impact on identity management becomes non-linear and randomized. David B Knight (1996), in his article on "Some Theoretical Reflections on Identity, Territory, and Self-Determination", has quoted Jean Gottmann as suggesting that the basic problem for political geographers and an essential task for all geographers is to understand "the organization of space and the search for stability"<sup>18</sup>. Whilst Peter Von Bethlenfalvy in his article entitled "Refugees, Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in Europe" has pointed out that "the ability of

aliens to integrate or reintegrate depends upon the individual's material and psychological resources. These are unique for each individual---”<sup>19</sup>.

Gottmann's assertion on the problematics of organizing space and stability can be seen to be comparable to the refugee dilemma in identity management when they are faced with integration models. The refugees in Kvæfjord Commune are placed in a Pandora box with a managed space containing a plethora of situations which they have to manage. The situational management is partly a quest to achieve stability of acceptance by the host state and institutions and at the same time they will be striving to balance it by maintaining some elements of their original home culture identities. Thus though there is a general uniformity in African cultural traits, it is however of necessity to note that, as Von asserted, each individual has varied degrees of material and psychological resources. Those individuals with less psychological strength will witness their traditional cultures being easily swept aside by the host populace's cultures, whilst those rich with great psychological and personal perseverance will stretch for some time before ceding some chunks of their cultural heritages. But some integration policies are alive and awake to the dynamic challenges within which integration as a policy operates.

In her publication entitled “The Importance of Being Decent: Political Discourse on Immigration in Norway”, Anniken Hagelund (2003) analysed the position of the general immigrant in Norway. Anniken presented integration as a problematic concept in Norwegian immigration politics. She noted that “integration has been presented as a generous policy aimed at those who have already been granted residency and they have rights to maintain – within certain limits their culture, identity, and distinctiveness----”<sup>20</sup>. On this point Anniken seems to be somehow reasonable when I relate this to my study area findings. The identity management by the African refugees might be linkable to Anniken's assertion. Her assertion that they have “rights within certain limits” makes the refugees to be awake as to how they should go about it in negotiating with situations. The refugees have to be aware that they have certain limits within which to operate, hence the situation dictates how to manage their social identities. The social identities may therefore be tailored towards assimilative structures and this may be what Kunz says assimilation can be the price for acceptance of the refugees in the host societies.

Anniken further notes that in the Norwegian case integration is a many-faceted concept harboring unresolved tensions and ambiguities, it contains ideas of equality between Norwegians and immigrants, simultaneously as it provides space for a certain degree of difference and cultural pluralism. Anniken goes on to claim that Norway has indeed declared herself as being Multicultural, but in the context of immigration it has not embraced the politics of multiculturalism, understood as the idea that collective cultural groups should be granted specific rights<sup>21</sup>. This assertion raises many complexities in the analysis of the refugee identity management environment in Norway. There is a temptation here to go back to the definitions of assimilation and integration and then analyses the situation of the social identity management by the refugees in Norway with particular emphasis on the study area. Anniken gave Norwegian context traditional definitions of integration and assimilation. She quotes the following definitions,

Assimilering “ med assimilering forstås utvalget I denne forbindelse at en utlending blir mest mulig lik en nordman. En assimilert utlending vil være langt på vei lik en nordmann i sinn og skinn, han taler og tenker som nordmenn flest, han deltar i det norske samfunnsliv som nordmann, han har et ønske om å bli betraktet som nordmann og blir også i stor utstrekning det, og han betrakter Norge som sitt nye fedreland” ( The Commission understands that in this context assimilation means that a foreigner will be as equal to a Norwegian as possible. An assimilated foreigner will to a large extent be similar to a Norwegian in mind and in appearance. He appears and thinks like most Norwegians, he has a Norwegian, but not necessarily only Norwegian social circle, he participates in Norwegian social life as Norwegian, he has wish to be considered as Norwegian and will also to a large extent be so, and he conceives of Norway as his new fatherland) ( Storting Meld. Nr. 39, 1973-74: p 35-36).

Integrering, `integrering er en langt svakere form for innlemmelse i samfunnet enn assimilering, med intergring forstås utvalget det at en utlending er en anerkjent og funksjonsdyktig del av samfunnet uten nødvendigvis å bli lik samfunnsmedlemmene for øvrig---” ( integration is a much weaker form of incorporation into the society than assimilation. With integration, the commission understands that a foreigner is an acknowledged and functional part of society without necessarily becoming similar to the other members of society<sup>1</sup> (Storting Meld. Nr. 39, 1973-74: p 35-36) (ibid.pgs169-170).

Indeed these definitions provide tensions and ambiguities as Anniken noted in the above citation. Though these definitions have been modified over the years through the Norwegian White Papers, they however maintain a practical influence in official and public policy undertakings. The assimilative view pointed in the Commission`s definition exerts some assimilative pressure on the refugees. The refugees in such case are expected to fully assimilate into the Norwegian culture in most respects including “sinn og skinn” (mind and skin). This denotes a heavy emphasis on the Norwegian traditional conception of assimilative integration which was tilted to the detriment of the refugee minorities.

Integration on the other hand was viewed as a weaker version of incorporation which allowed the immigrants to maintain part of their cultural traits. Nevertheless in real terms Anniken rightly notes that in the contemporary Norwegian set up integration policy has some ambiguities. In as much as it has connotations of pluralism, it however offers immigrants “--rights to maintain – within certain limits their culture, identity, and distinctiveness----”<sup>23</sup>. Thus the rights are limited to a certain limit. For instance the refugees in Kvæfjord Commune are encouraged to maintain some aspects of their culture like their home languages, but that should not be at the expense of the Norwegian language. A refugee who participates in the Norwegian National Day on May 17 is seen as more positive than the one who takes it as a non-event. A refugee who is committed to unpaid voluntary work was found to be receptive to the presumed Norwegian custom of volunteering and giving. Thus the refugees in Kvæfjord Commune are in constant situations that demand them to flex their social identities to suit the ambiguities in the demands of the integration regime. Is Norway therefore a multicultural environment?

#### ***4.8.1: Multicultural Rhythms in Identity Management?***

Being a realistically multicultural nation provides refugee minorities with positive room to maneuver between situationally based social identities without stressful demands to modify behaviour. Behavioral identities can be adjusted willingly without obligatory force, a scenario which is typical in a mono-cultural set up. Is Norway therefore a multicultural or mono-cultural state? And what are the implications on integration policies and the resultant identity management behaviors for the refugee minorities?. I quoted Anniken above when she said that Norway has indeed declared herself as being Multicultural, but in the context of immigration it has not embraced the politics of multiculturalism, understood as the idea that

collective cultural groups should be granted specific rights.<sup>24</sup> In other words Anniken is pointing out that Norway has made a theoretical declaration of being a multicultural nation without being practical on the issue. Alternatively Norway might be a multicultural state but not regarding immigration multiculturalism. Anniken might be forthcoming in her assertion which seems to be aligned to Asle Høgmø when he noted that “when immigration from the third world started, Norway was a mono-cultural society. Even though social and cultural changes have taken place during the last 40 years, --- I still believe one has to characterize Norway as to a large extent being a mono-cultural society---”<sup>25</sup> . If Norway is or might be, as Høgmø and Anniken notes, a mono-cultural society, then the implication is that refugee social identity management will be precarious. Refugees will be subjected to pressure to assimilate. After the collapse of the Soviet Union or the Cold War era other developing nations opted for the policies of the command economies, which were the mixture of both capitalistic ideologies and some remnants of socialism and communistic ideals. I can liken Norway to such a scenario when it comes to the issues of whether it’s a multi-cultural society or not. In some respects it is a multi-cultural society and in some arenas it is monolithic. It allows children of refugees to learn their mother tongues in the hope that when they go back to their home countries, it will be easy for them to re-integrate in with their communities. On the other hand she does not allow the refugee to ignore mastering the Norwegian language. Thus the nation suits both ends. It’s a question of how one perceives the situational meanings of integrating. Guido Baglioni(1964), in his article entitled “Trends in the Studies on The Socio-Cultural Integration of Immigrants”, thus noted that a variety of opinions are also found in the way of conceiving migrant integration: complete conformity to the national way of the immigration country; or cultural pluralism, which is the acceptance of the fundamental values of the host-society and at the same time preservation of the immigrant culture as far as it is not an obstacle to the socio-cultural balance of the new environment<sup>26</sup>. Thus issues of integration and multiculturalism pose a great deal of ambiguities which the refugees constantly find themselves twinkling back and forth in search of an identity concomitant with ambiguous and sometimes treacherous situations.

#### **4.9: Chapter Summary**

Maybe a jigsaw puzzle or a crystal maze might best describe the apparent complexities of the challenges presented by the notions of integration, assimilation, acculturation and multiculturalism in refugee social identity management. The inherent ambiguities and criss-

crossings in the practicality of these concepts in the Norwegian set up have presented the refugees with consumerate criss-crossings in managing their social identities. Nevertheless opportunities have also been presented by the availability of policy frameworks on integration in Norway. The fact that the Norwegian state has some integration white papers has proffered a situation in which the refugee issues can be managed. The manageability however takes place in contexts that will be consistent in the production of situations that complicates social identity management by the African refugees.

Furthermore this chapter analytically deliberated on some specific programmes that forms the integration package which influence the refugee social identity management dynamics in the refugee camp and the host society. It was noted that the Kvæfjord Commune integrative approaches had both pros and cons in their social identity management processes by the refugees. In as much as the Commune viewed their integration programmes as somehow adequate, the recipients of the programmes had mixed feelings about these programmes which in turn molded an extended effect of presenting social identity manipulations depending with the situations availed by the respective programmes. Some of these programmes included the farm project as well as the refugee guide projects, the church projects and the Red Cross cross-cultural projects. All these integration programmes and projects offshoot scenarios which in-extricably impacted on the African refugee social identity management processes. It should nevertheless be borne in mind that there is an absolute inter-marriage of variables presented in the intra/inter group social identity processes and those enumerated in the integration and assimilative dimensions. The next chapter will wrap up the analytical deliberations advanced in this thesis and it will be of utmost significance that the controversies that might be inherent in this document will be seized as legitimate opportunities and eye-openers to embark on further progressive knowledge advancement researches on refugees and social identity management. In such a process the body of knowledge on general social scientific and developmental issues will continue to expand by unimaginable proportions and hence knowledge production will remain pivotal in the practical implications on human and social development.

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## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **5.1: Data Interpretation Experiences and Personal positioning- Role as insider/Outsider researcher**

Being a researcher in one's own community poses challenges as well as opportunities. It might be more acute if the researcher's position is both insider and outsider as was closer to my case in this research. I had stayed in the study area for two years prior to the commencement of my research, thus making me an insider. Moreover being an African immigrant to Norway increased my credentials amongst my informants as part of them, a position which I was comfortable with. Nevertheless after relocating to Tromsø for almost half a year, I went back to do my research in the study area, only to find new and few old faces. To those who were familiar with me, I was an insider in contrast to those whom I had never met who regarded any questioning as part of the UDI strategy to inquire about people's national identities. This is one of the most extremely sensitive issues to raise among refugee groups in Norway. However the outsider gap was bridged by the confidence that those who knew me displayed when they collaborated in the research. In the end I was viewed more as an insider thus unlocking foraging avenues regarding the research. In his article, "How native is a native anthropologist?", Kirin Narayan (1996) noted that " a native anthropologist is assumed to be an insider who will forward an authentic point of view to the anthropological community"<sup>1</sup>. Though this is not always the case, it nevertheless increases the understanding of the issues at stake by the insider. Being totally an outsider poses challenges as Veronica Strand (2003) experienced. She noted in her article entitled "An Appropriate Question? : The Propriety of Anthropological Analysis in the Australian Political Arena", that she was an outsider trying to represent indigenous issues at a Perth Conference and this raised representational issues. Veronica said "I ran precisely into the ethical question raised at the

outset: the propriety of an outsider making representations of Aboriginal issues”<sup>2</sup>. It should however not be taken to mean that an outsider is worse off than an insider. Rather it’s only that being an insider uplifts the possibility of a heightened understanding in the analysis of informant behaviour, especially if someone is writing part of his or her lived experiences, as was partly my case as an African immigrant in Norway. In realisation of the necessity to embrace a participatory approach I was asking my translator and some informants to help me in coming up with questions which they thought could help “us” in gaining more knowledge on the social identity management issues. In the article “The Politics of Ethnography in the Canadian North”, Julie Cruickshank (1993) noted that “northerners are suggesting that if anthropologists want to work in their communities, local people should have a role in defining some of the questions for research”<sup>3</sup>. Sidsel Saugestad (1998), in her article on “Research On, With and By Indigenous Peoples”, noted that “research *with* and *by* involve questions about participation”<sup>4</sup> in contrast to Research *on*, which lacks proper community involvement in the research. By carrying my informants on board in modelling some of my sub-research questions I was attempting to embrace this notion of researching *With* and *By* the informant community as espoused by Saugestad. Thus a combination of being an insider and adopting a participatory approach bridges some of the research challenges. Epeli Hau’ofa (1982) in her article “Anthropology at Home: A South Pacific Islands Experience” postulated that when one is an insider “the more fundamental problems are those relating to the state of mind and emotion of the anthropologist and the kind of role that he has to carve out for himself within his own society.”<sup>5</sup> Despite this limitation, Epeli goes on to acknowledge that “with his intimate familiarity and long term experience of his own community the indigenous anthropologist is an excellent position to advance hypothesis for testing through research”<sup>6</sup>. It has to be categorically stated however that there are no supernatural advantages in being an insider to a research area. Rather other variables like commitment to the research objectives and to working with the community also count. Without an attempt to over-valuate the insider position, it can nevertheless be admissible that being an insider to a research locality proffers a peculiar one-step-ahead in embracing and grasping the issues at stake.

Interpreting fieldwork data can be a mammoth task if the researcher or the informants succumb to over-limits of biases. The presence of bias in research has been well written in anthropological and academic circles. Terje Brantenberg (1999), in his article entitled “Paradise Lost: Anthropological and Indigenous Knowledge”, noted that researchers see

themselves “as professional strangers, messengers, mediators and sometimes advocates—conveying our experiences to create new knowledge of others and ourselves.”<sup>7</sup>, a position which might be prone to bias as well as positivity in research. During my fieldwork I attempted to overcome the possibility of behavioural stage management by employing the participant observation technique which made it untenable for informants to behave artificially in all cases. Though some informants tried to give answers which they thought fellow informants might be interested to hear, I would sometimes try to discuss the same issues with my informants in informal conversations in order to test their consistency of position on certain issues. In most cases the informants maintained their views on how they managed their social identities and the challenges therein.

Assigning meaning to gathered information can also present a dilemma. Emerson and Shaw (1995), in the publication entitled on “Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes” have thus highlighted that “indeed to infer and present members’ meanings is perhaps one of the greatest challenges in ethnographic writing, whether in the immediacy of detailed fieldnotes or in the more public, abstract writing of final texts”.<sup>8</sup> In after-the-field writing process I would try to juxtapose views of my different informants on any subject under analysis to try to reinforce or derive meaning of the data. Encompassing scholarly and scientific arguments on various variables on social identity management was also a strategy employed in the analysis process in an endeavour to strive for validity of the data analysis.

## **5.2: Major Findings of the Study**

Complex as it might be and fluid as it proved, social identity management by the indigenous African refugee minorities heralded a multiplicity of actions mediated by the varying interactional situations which the refugees encountered. Though equally significant, the research analysis was undertaken at what can be called the micro, median and median-macro levels. The micro level analysis delved on the *intra*-group social identity management, whilst the *inter*-group social identity management analysis moved to a median refugee-host inter-relational level. What can be termed the median-macro level analysis, analysed the integration regime and its implications on refugee social identity management, with more focus on the refugee sample outside the refugee camp, as opposed, though related, to the micro level which had more emphasis on the social identity management within the African refugee group itself.

The median level analysis was fusing the social identity management processes of the refugees in and outside the refugee camp in relation to the Norwegian host community. Despite these levels of analysis, social identity management variables at the different levels were closely intertwined and overlapping from inter-group interactions to intra-group level and vice-versa.

Intra-group level social identity variables encompassed factors like language, regionalism, gender, religion, and ethnicity as well the semiotics of food, music and clothing, among others. It was noted that different situations dictated the social identities displayed in particular circumstances. Within the African group, that is, at intra-group level, a combination of variables could influence the way one behaves and portrays their social identities. My modelling of the pyramid of regions for instance denoted a scenario whereby social identities portrayed were adjusted depending on the region which one came from. The aspect of distance and space dictated the region to which one closely identified his or her social identity with. The more the distance from the home region, the more one tended to shrink the notion of regionalism. In other words when the refugees come to Norway, they started to see themselves more as Africans than being a label of their individual country identities. The informants ranked their social identities first more as African, then as more of the African sub-region they came from (e.g. East or West Africa), then as the country they came from (e.g. DR Congo) and narrowed it down to the village level. Thus the further one goes away from their home country the more they broadened the social identities they portrayed based on the regional factor. Speaking the same language and practising the same religion were noted to be more connectors and binders of social identities. Nevertheless speaking the same language but coming from different regions also presented a complex scenario in which the refugees had to adjust their social identities to accommodate both circumstances. Thus the social identity management situations were complex and intertwined. Variations in gender traditions between the Norwegian host society and the individual African countries which one came from posed a cross-roads circumstance in social identity management processes. The Somali cases outlined in the publication are a typical example of the complexities posed by the gender differentiation gaps between Norway and some of the developing countries which the refugees come from. Most Somali men distasted the notion that the Norwegian system was educating their women about equality with the men, a thing which they viewed as contrary to their traditions. However in the public they limited criticism of such a

development preferring to pressure their women in private spheres about the probable consequences of being “married to the Norwegian system”, that is, being against the Somali culture. The ethnic factor perforated across situations and hence influenced social identity management behaviours.

At both intra and inter group levels, the ethnicity variable had consequential effects on social identities exhibited. Just like the language, regional, gender and religion variables, ethnicity acted both as an overt connector and a tacit divider. Refugees coming from the same ethnic groups from Africa naturally got connected to each other and displayed the identities of their ethnic tribe when they were together. Nevertheless in consonance with the regional pyramid levels, ethnicity had levels that guided the social identity to be exhibited. Sometimes the ethnicity was portrayed more as African, sometimes as individual country ethnicity and sometimes was shifted depending on the circumstantial demands of the prevailing situation. For those who came from the same country, like the Burundi case outlined in the writing, ethnicity was a silent divider if the inter-ethnic relations in the respective home countries were antagonistic. Still, despite the divider possibility, the creation of an imagined African identity was more of an overall uniter amongst the indigenous African refugee community. The Benedict Anderson notion of imagined communities was embraced in the analysis of the prevalence of the imagination of ‘an African nation within the Norwegian nation’. Some unfavourable stereotypes of the African situation reinforced by powerful stereotypical western media gave birth to a convergence of united African identities which in turn created an African homeland within the refugee circles. Thus within the indigenous African refugee community in Kvæfjord, the equation of a sum total of the Africans in the area was enough to provide the answer of an imagined African nation in the sense that Benedict Anderson advanced. Within this unified Africanised identity there unfolded identity shifts and turns, sometimes subconscious and sometimes conscious, especially mediated by variables like religion.

A belief factor which has even shaped the contemporary international political and social relations was not an exception in influencing the inter and intra group social identity managements and relations in the studied African refugee community. Such was the factor of religion. At intra-group communication levels the religious identity portrayed was situationally adjusted to accommodate both colleagues from the same religion whilst avoiding

the temptation to undermine fellows from different religions, who were still part of the idealised “one Africa” within Norway. The fluid complexities in the variables which in turn transpired in intertwined situations inevitably made the situational social identity management by the indigenous African refugees tenacious. In relating to the host populace, the religious factor unearthed scenarios in which one’s religion lengthened or handicapped probabilities to access cross cultural social necessities as well as social capitals. In general sharing the same religious convictions or sympathies with members of the host community was more of a puller than a pusher in terms of gaining social acceptance and understanding. Generally the Norwegian populace belong to the Christian tradition, which thus made the Norwegian populace more socially receptive to refugees who were Christians. Christian refugees therefore prided their Christian identities whilst those who were Muslims sometimes preferred to be silent on their identities or overtly portrayed their religious identities in public but with a perceived assumption that it might eat into their possibilities for accessing related social gains. Together with other variables, the integration systems in the commune paraded instances which were consequential to the social identity management processes by the refugees.

Slicing into the social space of the indigenous African refugee minorities were the implications of the multi-faceted integration programmes of the commune. Ranging from the Refugee Guide arrangement to the Red Cross cultural events, the Farm community project and the church activities, the integration regime in the commune added complexities to the social identity management processes by the refugees. The refugee guides were a vehicle aiding in the integration of the refugees into the Norwegian community. The refugees had a generally positive stance towards this undertaking. To view this positively a particular refugee had to court the aspect of social identity flexibility in order to accommodate the Norwegian socialisation systems alongside the refugee’s respective home based socialisation systems. Thus the refugees were exposed to situations that tested their abilities to embrace a new culture. Their social identities were therefore managed choreographically to suit the demands of the varied environments. The cultural events orchestrated by the Red Cross, the refugee camp and the commune provided a platform for multi-national gatherings which in turn became social identity management playing grounds. In such events the mingling of various cultures presented scenarios whereby the African refugees had to portray an identity of accommodativeness whether willingly or unwillingly depending with the degree to which the

practised cultural events diverged from their respective home country's socially acceptable cultural parameters. On a similar quest to bridge the gap between the refugees and the Norwegian populace, the church acted as an active connector. The church brought together refugees and Norwegians of various religious denominations. In the process the refugee social identities were managed to suit the pluralized cultural and social environments. In some situations personal social identity attributes had to be submerged by the public platforms presented by the varying multi-cultural activities. The assertion of Norway being a multi-cultural or assimilative regime was found to be debatable though.

In as much as some social scientists have argued that Norway is ambiguous in terms of whether it is a multi- or mono-cultural state, the findings noted that the Norwegian state embraces mono-culturalism on some aspects and is multi-cultural on other aspects like the immigration arena. A historical analysis of the Norwegian refugee policy exhibits trends whereby the refugee policies have been changing from era to era through enactment of various immigration white papers and the passing of various changes in the UDI policies towards the refugee and asylum policies. In the process the refugees have been constantly sensitising their social identities to conform to the constant policy shifts. Nevertheless it seems as if the Norwegian refugee related policies are gradually being stabilised in tandem with the broader European policies.

### **5.3: Towards Policy Adjustments? – Way Forward!**

An appreciation of the constraints and opportunities inherent in the social identity management processes within the indigenous African refugee circles might usher in thunderous positive social life systems for the refugees and the host communities. A comprehensive understanding of the constraints posed by the informal and formal host community policies towards the refugees was found to be however half-hearted and lacking adequacy. The various conditions under which the refugees struggle to gain social acceptance and understanding needs to be comprehended in order to provide, where lacking, and to strengthen, where it is available, a conducive platform for these refugees to freely exercise elements of their social and cultural diversity. The various stakeholders influencing and interacting with the refugees need therefore to be cognisant of these constraints and possible areas of development.

The Kvæfjord commune integration policies need to be more inclusive in taking on board the refugees from the onset in deciding the programmes or projects they consider positive in their developmental processes. The participatory approaches to the integrative mechanisms need therefore to be refugee inclusive from the pre-integration, integration and post-integration phases. Strengthening and following up the commune's collaborative efforts with other stakeholders like the civil society, the host public and the refugee camp maybe a necessary ingredient to enhance in-depth understanding of the gaps and probable remedies in the integration regime.

On the civil society front, the respective individual entity establishments like the churches and the Red Cross might advance the interests of the refugee social life systems by grasping more of the inclusive and diversity approaches towards the refugee congregation. Churches might socially strengthen refugees who speak different languages by proffering them the opportunity to contribute in church services using the languages they understand. Within the refugee circles a host of translators are usually available to assist their fellows with language translations. The Red Cross activities might provide a boost to the already existing appreciation of its cross-cultural activities by increasing the frequency with which they engage with the refugees. This will provide consistency in social interactions, which in turn will strengthen social capital benefits derived from such arrangements. In that way the positive activities will enhance the presentation of diversified social identities rather than artificialised and stage managed identities. Situationally based social identity management amongst the refugees will most likely be a life lasting eventuality. However what matters is to have situations whereby the refugees display an identity which they are proud of, vis-à-vis pretended social identities for the sake of meeting socially acceptable benchmarks set by the host populaces.

Likewise the refugee camp can strengthen social cohesion that cut across religious, ethnic, gender, regional and language factors amongst the African refugee group. This can be executed by increasing cross cultural events and collaboration with other relevant civil society organisations like the church and the Red Cross. A more consistent approach in cross-refugee camp interactions might be beneficial to the refugees in terms sharing of experiences amongst African refugees from different refugee camps in Norway. This might even foster a stronger



“African nation” creation which is necessary for strengthening social identity belonging and psychological healing from the agony associated with diasporic solitude and loneliness.

In as much as there are inter-linkages and core-relations in social identity management variables, the activities and policies of the refugee settlement commune, the refugee camp, the church and other refugee related establishments should also nurture corporation and complementarity of their actions. Such an undertaking might herald movement and strengthening of a direction towards positive social identity management by the indigenous African refugee minority specifically in Kvæfjord Commune and generally on the Norwegian national arena.

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## Some Informants Interviewed Between July and August 2007

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Interview with Informants, Robert, from Burundi, Kvæfjord, July 2007

Interview with Informant, Natasha, DRC, Kvæfjord, July 2007

Interview with Informant, Rashid, from Somalia, Kvæfjord, July/August 2007

Interview with Informant, Simon, from Congo Brazzaville, Kvæfjord, August 2007

Interview with Informant, Akimasi, from Burundi, Kvæfjord, 2005

Interview with Informant, Kevynn, from Uganda, Kvæfjord, July 2007

Interview with Informant, Hodan, from Somalia, Kvæfjord, July/August 2007

Interview with Informant, Estere, from Ethiopia, Kvæfjord, July 2007

Interview with Informant, Anne Utne, Children and Women`s Welfare Officer for Borkenes Refugee Camp, Kvæfjord, August 2007.

Interview with Informant, Robert Svein Guttormsen, Information Officer for Borkenes Refugee Camp, Kvæfjord, August 2007.

Informal Conversation with Informant, Ila, from Niger, Kvæfjord, 2007

Interview with Informant, Jimmy, from Sudan, Kvæfjord, July/August 2007

Interview with Informant, Abdugadir, from Somalia, Kvæfjord, 2007

Interview with Informant, Subery, from Somalia, Kvæfjord, July 2007

Interview with Refugee Consultants from Kvæfjord Kommune Refugee Department, Kvæfjord, 10 August 2007.

Interview with Informant, Sering, from Ivory Coast, Kvæfjord Kommune, July/August 2007

Interview with Nina Johansen, Kvæfjord Kommune Refugee Consultant, 10 August 2007, Kvæfjord Kommune