

LANDMARKS

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ABOUT THE COVER

The cover illustration was made by Monica Pramanick (oh no moe! Illustration). Inspired by the themes in this issue, including climate, migration, and resistance, it aims to explore the complex relationship between land and identity.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Editorial Board is proud to present the sixth volume of *Landmarks: The Journal of Undergraduate Geography*. This year's volume is exceptional in that it was completed during a global pandemic. The spread of COVID-19 has resulted in lockdowns, isolation, loss, sickness, grief, and a rapidly evolving economic crisis. The pandemic has also exposed the deep structural inequalities that shape human life today. While some have had the privilege of staying in their homes or leaving crowded cities to escape to less populated regions, others have been forced to continue their jobs outside the safety of their homes because they are essential workers or because they face evictions if they fail to pay rent. Numerous contradictions such as these show us that communities are undoubtedly experiencing this pandemic in radically different ways, especially along the lines of race, class, and geography.

Although this issue was conceptualized prior to the global spread of COVID-19, it explores themes that are especially relevant in the present moment. The contributors to this issue help us think about how crises of all varieties impact communities differently, why such inequalities exist and proliferate, and how people continue to survive and resist amidst such conditions. In the following pages, you will find outstanding pieces from the department's undergraduate cohort that open up key contemporary issues. Authors explore the exploitation of migrant labour in Canada's agricultural sector, climate injustice and destruction of infrastructure in Guyana's Georgetown, the gentrification of Toronto's Little Jamaica, the systemic discrimination against Roma refugees, uranium mining in the lands of the Navajo Nation, environmental racism during and after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, life in a perpetual state of exception in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp, as well as the settler colonial logics of the white North American "tiny house" movement. The articles simultaneously discuss the ways in which communities across the world have developed and protected their own relationships with various geographies and continue to struggle for their dignity, sovereignty, and liberation.

The contributors leave us with thoughtful analyses that push us to think more deeply and critically about the many crises that existed prior to COVID-19, crises that continue to grow in varying capacities during this pandemic, and crises that will likely await us afterwards. I invite you to read this issue and ask yourself: what might a new "normal" look like? What can be learned from existing crises and what might we do differently this time? How can we reimagine our relationships with each other and with the spaces in which we live, work, and find pleasure?

The Editorial Board is grateful to the Department of Geography and Planning for their ongoing support of the journal. We want to thank the many students who submitted their papers for consideration; it was a pleasure to read your work. We are incredibly grateful to all the contributors for their hard work and the care they put into completing this issue during a remarkably difficult time. We want to thank Monica Pramanick for the beautiful cover art. I want to especially extend a heartfelt gratitude to the entire team of editors for their labour, dedication, and patience over the course of many months, and to Connie Yang for her leadership. We hope that you are in good health and are able to enjoy the sixth volume of *Landmarks*.

Sincerely,
Khalood Kibria,
Editor-in-Chief

REFUGEES' IDENTITY IN A STATE OF EXCEPTION

EXPLORING REFUGEES' NATIONALITY IN DADAAB

Keenan Krause

The continued existence of refugee camps worldwide produces liminal spaces that have distinct impacts on individuals' nationalities. Refugee camps exist as a temporary state of exception to control the influx of refugees, but their continued presence suggests a more permanent nature. An analysis of these camps demonstrates an emergence of a "hybrid sovereignty," given that international organizations jointly run these camps and the inhabitants are not classified as citizens. These camps become a space both operated within the state boundaries and outside of it. This distinct liminal space becomes uniquely situated to inform new understandings of national identity that are not restricted to land-based claims. By focusing on Dadaab, a refugee camp complex in Kenya, this paper shows how refugees challenge traditional frameworks of national identity and instead offer alternative identities that are not based on relationships to national land boundaries.

Introduction

Refugee camps create liminal spaces under the state system that shape distinct experiences and livelihoods. Agamben's (2005) seminal work on "states of exception" outlines how, during times of crisis, governments create temporary institutions that operate outside of standard laws. This theory portrays the creation of refugee camps as spaces that simultaneously exist within sovereign land and outside of its traditional political, social, and legal structures. These institutions form unusual realities for those living within the national borders of a country without the rights of citizens or permanent residents. This paper will focus on Dadaab, a refugee complex in Kenya, as one space of exception that offers crucial insights into the implications of living with an uncertain national status. Despite spending years or generations within Dadaab, refugee families in these camps rarely obtain official recognition to become members of the host country while they simultaneously grow disconnected from their presumed "home" country. Through the exceptional characteristics of these camps, inhabitants are forced to live with liminal nationalities. This liminality challenges the conventional approaches to nationality since refugees are unable to associate their identity with one sovereign nation. Supported by recent scholarship on territorializing national identity and the shifting nature of sovereignty, this paper seeks to demonstrate the need for a new understanding of nationality. As the evolving relationship between state and land impacts the nature of sovereignty, analyzing Dadaab will show that the relationship between land and its inhabitants is also changing. The unsettled communities require novel classifications that better reflect the uncharted nature of their liminal nationalities with an urgency of definition that matches the rapid growth of these groups worldwide.

The State of Exception

Dadaab offers valuable insights on how the state attempts to control refugees through a state of exception. The refugee complex consists of three distinct camps, all functioning under the same structure. The Kenyan state established these camps in 1991 to control the influx of an estimated 90,000 refugees fleeing from the Somali civil war. Now almost three decades old, the camps are home to over 200,000 refugees, over half of whom are children (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019, p. 1). Though some interpret its creation as a compassionate gesture, other scholars interpret it as an instrument of state control (Ramadan, 2013). In this framework of control, Hyndman and Mountz view refugee camps as comparable to migrant detention centres because of the shared purpose of control and exclusion (2006, p. 80). Mountz et al. (2012) argue that states design detention centres to limit the mobility of the newcomers while concurrently excluding them from the nation-state. Likewise, refugee camps act as a means of administration and the exclusion of bodies from the general public (O’Callaghan & Sturge, 2018, p. 6). States seek a means of exclusion for incoming groups because of the common belief that refugees bring tensions and instability (Hyndman & Mountz, p. 77). To prevent instability arising from the refugee crisis, states resort to an institutional structure that mirrors Agamben’s state of exception as it exists partially outside of both the nation and the state. Agamben writes about the USA PATRIOT Act as relating to a state of exception since it allowed for the indefinite detention of immigrants and non-citizens with the justification of preventing terrorism (2005, p. 3). Therefore, refugee camps are similar exceptional institutions designed for impermanence, which states leverage by operating outside of standard laws that would apply to citizens.

The refugee camp limits the mobility and growth of its inhabitants as the camp itself is suspended in impermanence. Many early rules governing Dadaab have not adapted over time. The Kenyan government created many rules in the camp’s beginning that reinforce its temporary nature, such as the regulation prohibiting the construction of any permanent structures inside the camps (BBC News, 2016). While permanence may exist in some capacity for refugees, the state’s regulations limit the basic rights required for empowerment in life—evidenced, for example, by the continued dependence on foreign organizations such as the UNHCR or CARE to provide vital resources limits the autonomy of the community (Enghoff et al., pp. 26-28). Since Dadaab’s establishment, these organizations have been vital in funding and implementing local projects focused on basic needs such as food security or healthcare (Enghoff et al., pp. 26-28). This positions international organizations as a primary care provider, a task that would have otherwise been the sole responsibility of the state. On these grounds, refugees live in precariously suspended impermanence that the state maintains without adapting to their changing needs, and forces their reliance on support from international organizations.

The state’s attempts to keep the camp as a temporary entity have not stopped the refugees from growing roots in the space they inhabit. Despite state restrictions, many refugee-run businesses in Dadaab, such as bakeries and boutiques, generate profits for the inhabitants while building community within the complex (Enghoff et al., 2010). One report estimates that approximately 5,000 shops across Dadaab generated 25 million dollars (Enghoff et al., p. 74). These widespread business ventures demonstrate a desire and an aptitude to build a permanent life. Irrespective of this economic sustainability, the Kenyan government’s policy of enforcing the refugees’ confinement to the camps limit the inhabitants within the system. Additionally, Dadaab’s residents often feel state pressure to repatriate to Somalia (O’Callaghan & Sturge, 2018, p. 3). However, this is particularly problematic for the generations of refugees born in the camps since “Younger [refugee] generations are expected to miss keenly something

they themselves have not experienced losing” (Allan, 2005, as cited in Ullah, 2014, p. 65). As a result of the restricted mobility and the pressure to leave their home, the state prohibits refugees from gaining freedom and total agency in their lives, and as an extension, individual identity rooted in Kenya.

Hybrid Sovereignty

Although Dadaab is located on Kenyan soil, the state designates it as an extraterritorial space that exists not only outside of the broader social sphere but also outside of Kenyan sovereignty. The state excludes people born inside Dadaab from the national structure that Kenyan citizens enjoy. To govern and run such a massive space, the Kenyan government partnered with the UNHCR and other international organizations and NGOs. Therefore, despite being within Kenya’s borders, Dadaab is not under Kenya’s sole authority, creating a rare form of “hybrid” sovereignty (Ramadan, 2013). Carl Schmitt famously stated that, in a strict sense, sovereignty comes from “he who decides on the state of exception” (as cited in Agamben, 2005, p. 1). Under this definition, it is the state, with its ability to make executive decisions on the questions of land and people within its boundaries, that is the *de facto* sovereign. The Kenyan government demonstrated this sovereignty in 1991 by approving the creation of the camps that make up the Dadaab complex, an act that also impacted many people within their borders. Despite the increasing role of international stakeholders, it may appear that no meaningful shift in sovereignty away from the state occurred.

However, during the 2010s, complete authority over these camps came into question when the Kenyan executive branch sought to close them down. In 2016, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta called for the closure of Dadaab because of his belief that the camps harboured terrorist groups, specifically al-Shabaab, and, therefore, became a security risk (Hujale, 2016). This was not the first time the Kenyan government attempted to close the camp, nor would it prove to be the last. Nine months following the government announcement to close the camps, the High Court of Kenya ruled against this action. Among the reasons outlined by the court was that Kenya’s signature on international agreements, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1969 Organization of Africa Unity Refugee Convention, prohibited actions associated with closing the camps (High Court of Kenya, 2017). This decision suggests that Kenya’s sovereignty over refugee camps is partially shared. The sovereignty is best described with a “hybrid” framework since new levels of authority come from international law and the role of international organizations in decisions concerning the protection of refugees. While the state exercised absolute sovereignty in the creation of Dadaab, the growing needs of the camps and the complexity of the situation led to an increasing role for international non-state actors.

While questions of sovereignty spark debates about shared authority with non-state actors, discussions also emerge about the binary logic of sovereignty. When referencing the legal dimensions of states of exception, Agamben explains that it is “a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other” (2005, p. 23). The refugee complex emerges when the sovereign state produces a space outside the confines of its domestic legal system. In the case of Dadaab, Kenya approved its construction, but it now exists outside of its sole control. Balaguera (2018) explores the recent emergence of a type of sovereignty that is not rooted exclusively in the state through an examination of the role of shelters in the journey of trans migrants. She demonstrates how they provide rights to migrants that are not provided by the state, including much-needed protection, concluding

that “to be in transit, at the limits of sovereignty, warrants considering intersecting liminal configurations of power, whose transformations impact our world at large” (Balaguera, 2018, p. 659). In line with the queer theorizing used by Balaguera, new interpretations of sovereignty challenge established frameworks of binary either/or logics (Weber, 2016). This binary logic of belonging to either one sovereign country or another is now challenged by a plural logic that illustrates alternatives. Instead of restricting existence to one state’s sovereignty, a hybrid sovereignty emerges within liminal spaces such as Dadaab’s camps and sparks questions regarding residents’ national identity.

Dadaabian

For centuries, peoples’ nationality has been linked to the sovereign of the land on which they belong (Malkki, 1992, p. 27). This national affinity is seen most clearly in the possession of a passport and citizenship. However, as seen in Dadaab’s refugees, Kenya’s lack of desire to take full responsibility and control over the camp restricts inhabitants’ access to citizenship. The government created the camps to exclude refugees from Kenyan society, and the minimal rate of Kenyan naturalization for those born in Dadaab reflects this intention (O’Callaghan & Sturge, 2018, p. 5). Dadaab’s refugees are further excluded due to their restricted mobility, reliance on informal economies for employment, and physical distance from other major Kenyan centers (O’Callaghan & Sturge, 2018, p. 6). Though some youth born in the camp travel to attend school in places like Nairobi and learn the Kenyan national anthem, they are denied local citizenship (Khawaja, 2018). Due to the state’s shared sovereignty over Dadaab and refusal to claim full responsibility for the refugees, the inhabitants rarely obtain the privileges of citizenship awarded to those living under the full sovereignty of the state.

The state strategy of controlling through exclusion problematizes common perceptions of the relationship between physical space and identity. Ullah explains that “Citizenship and nationality often have an almost monolithic hold over how people self-identify and how they are perceived in relation to others” (2014, p. 61). Therefore, residents of Dadaab, as a case study for refugee camps more broadly, offer valuable insights into what identity becomes without those influential factors from the state. The enduring presence of refugee camps in Kenya allows people to have been born and raised entirely in these stateless camps without a traditional national identity. The emergence of a “Dadaabian” identity illustrates a way of identification that exists outside of traditional frameworks that fail to apply to refugees born in Dadaab. Among the 235,000 displaced individuals living in Dadaab is Brownkey Abdullahi, whose experience demonstrates the complexity of those raised in camps since she is the daughter of two Somalians but born and raised in a refugee camp in Kenya. She explains that her “nationality is refugee. I was born in the soil of Kenya, but I do not belong to Kenya. I can’t claim that I am Somali either. That’s why I call myself ‘Dadaabian’” (Khawaja, 2018). This suggests that the state of exception creates new realities once it evolves beyond a temporary entity and into a norm.

While not everyone born in Dadaab might think of themselves as “Dadaabian,” other people have mentioned the struggle of creating a national affiliation while growing up in a state of exception. Asad Hussein, born and raised in Dadaab, acknowledged in an interview that “Dadaab is stuck in a sort of limbo—it’s between places. It’s not in Kenya, it’s not Somalia” (Wenner, 2018). If the state of exception, designed to deal with immediate crises, is not constrained by time, it produces new realities that exist outside the framework of a nation-state. This new framework suggests that, just as the binary logic of sovereignty might require further debate, modern identity also demands a new plural logic. Xeno

explains that stateless communities “exist but reside nowhere, since to be at home now requires residence in a nation-state” (1996, p. 823). This statement suggests that prominent understandings of identity include a tendency to assume an intimate connection with nationality. In this approach, identities are simplified into common homogenous experiences of those within the same nation (Xenos, 1996, p. 824). However, by using the identities of those inhabiting spaces of limbo, identities outside of the nation-state’s official recognition demand a new approach to recognize alternative affiliation.

By investigating the relationship between land and identity among displaced populations, gaps emerge concerning self-identification and official recognition. Malkki claims that “citizenship does not amount to a true nativeness” (1992, p. 36). Displaced populations in Dadaab thus provide an example of a group that exists outside of the national identity yet have equal claims, compared to a recognized citizen, to a Kenyan nationality. Their recognized identity does not always reflect the true nature of their experience and roots because contemporary identities tend to be framed around land borders. As such, the Dadaabians are a group whose identities are not fixed to an official territory. Attachment to an identity that opposes one’s own beliefs has been present in many separatist movements in places like Quebec, Canada, beginning in the 1960s or Catalonia, Spain, more recently. However, Dadaabian groups are distinct from these movements since they lack the historical justification for their land and have no issue integrating into the surrounding nation. Rather than being forced to accept a broad identity that does not reflect their self-identity, Dadaab’s refugees are forced into a narrower identity that lacks recognition. The problem concerning liminal identities lies in refugees’ inability to leave the state of exception and join a broader nationality. Since this population and their identities are fixed to this extraterritorial space, scholars must look beyond national borders as a lens of analysis regarding identity.

Conclusion

Claims to identity matter for two crucial reasons. The first involves the necessity of the right to identify. This right guarantees people basic characteristics of identity, including nationality as codified in international law. In addition to its value in providing self-autonomy and dignity, this right impacts stability and security in life. CARE interviewed a refugee father living in Dadaab who explained how his children, born in the camp, face uncertainty regarding their identity. The father was quoted saying that “Their birth certificates show they’ve never seen Somalia. They’re confused about what identity to take. They’re not Somali, not Kenyan – they’re confused” (CARE, 2016). It is evident that physical and official records impact how someone perceives their own identity and their ability to access bureaucratic processes necessary for travel or social services provided by the state. Additionally, having the wrong identity can limit opportunities for inclusion or growth in Kenya, where political patronage is prominent (Khawaja, 2018). Abdullahi understands this grim reality and explains that without proper identities, “We can’t have access to the world” (Khawaja, 2018). The second reason relates to how new identity frameworks advance understandings on a broader level, which is crucial for recognizing the people who do not fit into existing frameworks. New approaches can encourage global scholars to challenge assumptions and theories that have lost relevance in an evolving world and seek to ensure that how people see the world remains reflective, rather than generative, of real life.

Exceptional identities will pressure scholars and politicians to reflect on how they analyze and govern the communities in relation to the nation-state model. The communities living within Dadaab exist

within a distinct set of conditions that do not allow them to conform to state constructions of identity. While the experiences of each refugee are unique, analyzing the identity of Dadaab inhabitants can offer potential insights into the realities experienced by others. Broadening the framework of identities will benefit not only refugees but is also relevant to the modern identities of people who are increasingly moving across borders. To continue advancing the understanding of identity, local narratives provide indispensable insights into how realities differ from academic frameworks. Through these narratives, one can understand how someone could be stateless without citizenship, but not nationless because of their community of exceptional individuals. Thus, a more accommodating identity classification is needed for communities and nations whose memberships cross and transcend state borders.

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