

THE MORE YOU LOOK THE LESS YOU SEE: *Visibility and invisibility of Sudanese migrants in Athens, Greece*

Abstract

How do undocumented migrants maintain different degrees of visibility in public space? How does public visibility affect the livelihood strategies of undocumented migrants? In this work based on participant observation among undocumented Sudanese migrants during 2011 and 2012 in Athens, Greece, I demonstrate how different degrees of public visibility offer adaptive livelihood strategies in an environment of exclusion and marginalization. Social visibility, defined as the everyday practices of seeing and being seen, is linked to the livelihood strategies of undocumented migrants, interacting in different ways to shape the strategies of Sudanese migrants within the urban spaces of Athens.

Keywords

Social visibility • undocumented migrants • livelihoods • Sudan • Greece

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1 Introduction

Social visibility is registered in multiple ways “in bodies, in clothing, in performances, in forms of commerce, in flows of money, in artefacts and buildings” (Knowles 2012: 652). Visibility may be obscured or revealed, involving “complex dynamics of seeing and being seen”, refracted through multiple prisms of surveillance, media, and visual navigation of landscapes (Knowles 2012: 653). State surveillance reveals and conceals identities, knowledge, and livelihoods, as citizens and non-citizens navigate the complex geographies of the European police area. Mediatized images of refugees and migrants arriving on European territory unsettle by contrasting “regular” versus “irregular” forms of movement in visible frames on televisions and computer screens. The everyday navigation of European cities reveals layers of visible and invisible spaces, as citizens and non-citizens gaze upon social and material architectures that are more visible than others (Knowles 2012). In contrast to the hypervisible spaces of urban architecture, state surveillance and police operations, and media images of mass migration, undocumented migrants themselves are obscured and rendered socially visible or invisible through complex hierarchies of power and racial dominance (Spicer 2008).

The link between social visibility and undocumented migration has been underexplored. To develop more sophisticated understandings of undocumented migrant livelihoods and survival strategies, we need to understand how migrants adapt to urban space through social visibility and invisibility. Beyond the mediatized images of migrants, beyond the statistics garnered through police

apprehensions and surveillance operations, and beyond the everyday gaze of urban citizens are a diverse array of processes of maintaining and regulating social visibility by undocumented migrants themselves. The everyday livelihood strategies and survival strategies of migrants are concretely related to their maintenance of social visibility within urban spaces. How do undocumented migrants maintain different degrees of visibility in public space? How does public visibility affect the livelihoods and incorporation strategies of undocumented migrants?

Research on the state and migration management has demonstrated how powerful agents produce risks and threats, generating socially visible and invisible populations (Bigo 2002). In other cases, creating invisible populations hidden from public view serves certain developmental and political ends (Hammond 2008). Discourse, both written and spoken, can divide populations into “immigrants” or “non-immigrants” in public space (Leinonen 2012). Bureaucratic, academic, and social institutions produce both visible and invisible populations in the eyes of the state (Polzer 2008). State-based practices of managing populations are bound up with emerging methods of collecting statistics, and a variety of contemporary methods in researching hidden, hard-to-reach, and marginal populations has expanded the means by which institutions can make certain populations more visible.

The ways in which asylum-seekers and refugees are excluded or included in public space are highly racialised (Spicer 2008). Brazilians in Portugal have used public visibility as a cultural instrument for

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integration and as a resource to be exchanged with Portuguese cultural and identity resources (Sardinha 2011). Research on Bosnians in Australia has shown that visible ethnic markers such as skin colour may allow refugees to remain invisible to the public, but that social inclusion is better determined by factors such as language (Colic-Peisker 2005). Similarly, Serbian Vlachs in Denmark are publically invisible through an emphasis on similarity in public but maintain difference in private spaces (Juul 2011). Non-ethnic markers of identity are also valuable tools for increasing visibility, and documents can be made into items to increase visibility, as Feldman (2008) has shown with Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip.

Marc Sommers (2001) shows how Burundian refugees in Tanzania crafted a public persona during working hours. These men hid their Burundian refugee status to “pass” as Tanzanians, to downplay their position as foreign refugees. By making invisible their refugee status in Tanzania, these men perceived they could have better access to social resources and better economic opportunities. Sommers’ work helps us understand how dominant local cultures place constraints on the ability of minority cultures to take part fully in the local urban culture. As a result, hidden identities keep minority culture hidden from the public, affecting livelihood strategies and survival strategies.

Research on space and place has aligned visibility with social cohesion connected to the public identity of a particular place. Visibility of religious architectures, such as churches and mosques, become vital elements in negotiations over space and ethnicity depending on the specific struggles over urban space and elements of diversity in different cities (Knowles 2012; Landman & Wessels 2005). Visibility of a particular group becomes synonymous with the identity of a particular place. In Deener’s (2010) work, Latino migrants achieve differing degrees of visibility, shaping the public identity of a neighbourhood in Los Angeles where African Americans are more visible. Latino migrants’ perceived invisibility is intimately tied to specific places based on the specific histories, geographies, and relations with other groups in the area. Loic Wacquant (2008) shows how the welfare management of urban immigrant populations in the French “Red Belt” has created social discord through attempts to render populations more accessible to the state, juxtaposed with the complete absence of the state in the US black ghetto, and how the invisibility of the state has allowed structural violence and poverty to persist.

The social visibility of undocumented migrants, however, has not been empirically explored significantly within the literature. The theoretical implications of social visibility for migrant integration and their strategies to generate a secure livelihood have been less explored. This paper argues that acknowledging the role that social visibility plays in migrant livelihoods is important for understanding the micro-politics of integration and incorporation in European cities. The precarious economic positions of undocumented migrants within European cities are directly linked to social visibility, as I will argue in the following investigation of undocumented Sudanese migrants living in Athens, Greece.

2 Sudanese migration to Greece

This article traces the different degrees of collective social visibility of Sudanese migrants in Athens, Greece. Greece is a unique case because of its economic, political, and geographic location along major migration routes to Europe (Antonopoulos & Winterdyk 2006; Icduygu 2004). Sudanese migrants in Athens were selected as

respondents because of their unique position within Mediterranean histories of forced migration as well as more contemporary forms of forced displacement and mobility from Africa to the Mediterranean (Walz & Cuno 2010). Sudanese migration to Greece has a long history. The Ottoman slave trade in East Africa represents a main conduit of contact between the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, and Sudan. The trans-Saharan and Red Sea slave trades originated in Western Sudan, the Upper Nile basin, Ethiopia, and other East African regions. Toledano (1998: 7) summarizes the extensive network of routes and passages of African slaves in the Ottoman Empire, many of which parallel points of origin for contemporary refugees coming to Greece. Manumitted Sudanese slaves have been documented in Ottoman Thessaly, the contemporary Thessaloniki, pointing again to the long history of Sudanese forced migration to the East Mediterranean, which itself is an invisible history in contemporary media discourses on migration to Greece.

In the contemporary period, violence and lack of economic opportunity have stimulated migration from Africa to Greece. Sudan has been repeatedly strained by conflict which has produced significant displacements within and across national borders. Political violence as well as conflict-related economic turmoil has forced Sudanese ethnic groups towards new destinations abroad. Unable to find security or livelihoods at home, millions have been displaced to surrounding countries, whereas thousands of others have ventured further to reach Europe. Sudanese passport holders are required to obtain a visa to enter Europe, a difficult and often time-consuming process where many turn to human smugglers or forged passports to escape the violence.

Sudan is a diverse and divided society segmented into North and South. Arabs migrated in looking for resources and spreading Islam in the North, whereas those in the South follow a variety of religions, languages, and social practices sharing a memory of subjugation under Turko-Egyptian, Mahdist, British, and Arab-Islamist regimes of domination (Bariagaber 2006). The First Sudanese Civil War was waged from 1955 to 1972, where southerners demanded representation and more autonomy from the north. It ended without vanquishing the tensions which started it. The Second Sudanese Civil War began in 1983, as the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) of the south fought the central Sudanese government in the north for independence. After the rise to power of Omar al Bashir in 1989, a program of taking land and imposing strict Islamic law throughout the country inflamed the war. The war officially ended in 2005 with a peace agreement and the eventual independence of South Sudan in 2011, although fighting still takes place.

Millions of Sudanese have been displaced because of ongoing conflict throughout the north and south: almost 2.5 million are internally displaced, with another half million registered as refugees or asylum seekers (UNHCR 2013). The number of Sudanese migrants in Greece is unknown, as most are considered undocumented. Police apprehension statistics in Greece reveal few apprehensions of Sudanese, as many remain in Africa or the Middle East, or continue to other countries in Europe. Asylum applications of Sudanese migrants in Greece show few applications, suggesting that most are claiming asylum in other countries (mainly the Middle East and North Africa, including Egypt).

3 Methodology and social visibility

This article is based on ethnographic evidence and semi-structured discussions with Sudanese refugees collected during the summer of

2011 and the spring and summer of 2012 in Athens. Field notes and interview data were obtained primarily through participant observation among a group of Sudanese men originating primarily from south and east Sudan. Participant observation involves participation in the ongoing, everyday lives and activities of respondents and recording detailed observations (DeWalt & DeWalt 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Spradley 1980). Participant observation with hard-to-reach populations such as Sudanese migrants in Athens means negotiating access to hidden or marginal locations and spending time interacting with individuals who may be criminalised by the state, raising acute ethical concerns and possible risks to both researcher and respondents. Respondents are sometimes hesitant to divulge sensitive information about their histories or daily social routines. Observing counterfeit document markets and transactions is difficult as they occur in hidden and hard-to-reach areas. I made the assumption that the hard-to-reach groups in my study are more susceptible to harm and may have inadequate means to protect themselves (Duvell, Triandafyllidou, & Vollmer 2010: 232). I laid out a clear set of ethical principles based on “confidentiality, openness, justice, doing no harm” (Black 2003: 45).

Daily field notes were taken by hand and then fuller notes were typed into a word processor on a laptop kept at my apartment. Field notes included a rich set of descriptions of events, conversations, observations, and analytical and methodological notes. I observed public and private spaces frequented by migrants. The back side of stores, cafes, private apartments and migrant hostels each served as locations where I observed and recorded the selling of counterfeit passports as well as observed negotiations between migrants. I travelled to the Turkish-Greek border and spent time in villages along the border, observing many migrants after they crossed into Greece. A number of technologies were used to record data in the field, including: paper and pen, word processor, audio recorder, laptop, tablet, cell phone, and voice-over-IP software.

The majority of my time in Athens was spent socializing daily with Sudanese men in a Sudanese hostel and café, in addition to public locations throughout Athens. All respondents were recruited through the hostel and café. Most of my evening time was spent at a clandestine Sudanese hostel in the centre of Athens, which was frequented by around 50 Sudanese men daily, with 25 or so permanently residing there. The building was owned by a Greek citizen who loaned the place at low rates to a Sudanese manager who charged 5 Euros a night to sleep in a bed. Food and drinks were served, as well as free entertainment in the form of satellite television, cards, backgammon, or chess. The location of the hostel was concealed behind a non-descript door without any sign in an area with multiple abandoned buildings. During the day, I spent my time at a secluded Sudanese café which served tea and was a forum for political discussions. The café was frequented by a regular cadre of Sudanese men with whom I discussed daily interactions with Greek society. In the hostel and the café, I met three sellers with false documents, attending business transactions with them and going through their everyday lives in the city.

In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 Sudanese migrants, which involved a detailed recording of their full migration history and experiences of Greece. Most of the interviews and observations occurred in English, which is a medium of education in Sudan, and I hired a single Sudanese Arabic-speaking interpreter to aid with the collection of migration histories. Respondents were recruited via the interpreter. Data were analysed through a continuous reading and re-reading of field notes and interviews annotated with theoretical and analytical memos.

During the period of fieldwork in the spring and summer of 2011 and 2012, there was a police crack-down on migrants in Athens, conducting daily large-scale round-ups of migrants to check documentation. Sudanese informants had gone undercover, avoiding multiple areas of the city as much as possible and spending time indoors. I was interested in how migrants manage their public visibility and began to note the ways in which people make themselves visible or invisible to the state. Observing migrants living hidden lives to escape police repression forced me to consider the ways in which migrants are adapting in Athens, and how their socioeconomic conditions are related to their mobility. The more I began to look, the less I began to see: in other words, the more I looked for signs of visible public activity, the less I saw.

Visible public activities have been severely constrained for Sudanese refugees, creating a hard-to-reach, hidden, and marginal population in the centre of Athens. Clashes with right-wing anti-immigrant groups such as Golden Dawn were occurring daily alongside police scrutiny. Repeated altercations with police were not uncommon. Those I spoke with were extremely nervous because of the overt presence of the police combined with aggressive anti-migrant groups. As an American researcher living and working alongside my Sudanese respondents, the sense of discrimination was acute, as all non-Greek citizens were targeted by right-wing nationalists, and anyone walking with police control zones was subject to intense questioning, which happened on two occasions, both while walking with migrant respondents. Two interpreters were beaten by right-wing groups in the course of fieldwork.

4 Structures of exclusion in Greece

Migrants from across Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East have entered Greece via the porous land and sea borders with Turkey. Between 2008 and 2011, there were between 40,000 and 57,000 detections of migrants along the Turkish-Greek land borders at the Evros river border, a minority of whom were Sudanese (FRONTEX 2012: 17). The majority of all detections within Europe have occurred at the Evros land border, of which a 15-km patch of land is sufficient to cross between the city of Edirne in Turkey and the town of Orestiada in Greece. Aside from the land border, one has to cross along the Evros River, which can flood in winter and has fast currents in summer. The Evros River constitutes the majority of the over 200-km long border with Turkey, where Afghanis, Iranians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Somalis make up the majority of detections. The Greek state, in cooperation with the FRONTEX, the European border agency, has improved border control measures through Operation Poseidon, in an effort to restrict the entry of undocumented migrants to European territory.

The Greek economy has worsened over the past few years and there has been a surge in popular support for Golden Dawn, a far-right anti-immigrant party, as the financial crisis has deepened. Social exclusion and marginalization have become a feature of migrant survival in Greece. Through different forms of exclusion and marginalization, migrants have negotiated a tense presence between visibility and invisibility in Greek cities. Structural exclusion from social protection and human rights, daily struggles for material well-being, and interactions with the Greek state and police each feature strongly in migrant narratives of adaptation in Athens.

Previous evidence from undocumented Kurdish migrants in Greece shows that undocumented migration is a result of 1) poverty of domestic reception infrastructure and 2) deficiencies in domestic

and EU asylum policy. Undocumented migrants in Greece often remain and permanently settle, although permanent settlement depends on 1) opportunities for asylum and 2) degree of engagement in socio-economic activities during early years in the host country (Papadopoulou 2004: 167). Greece's limited opportunities for asylum and the limited opportunity to engage in economic activities during the current recession have often prevented settlement, and refugees are moving further into the EU or back to Turkey, to find settlement and work. Entering and leaving Greece require the services of a human smuggler to guide your passage by land or sea or fake documents to exit or enter by air.

The structures of exclusion in Greece include the inoperability of domestic asylum reception infrastructure and deficiencies in domestic and EU asylum policies (Papadopoulou 2004). Undocumented migrant populations become socially visible or invisible in Athens through structures of exclusion and marginalization. The mobility of Sudanese asylum-seekers and refugees in Athens is a facet of this (in)visibility. Mobility and livelihoods here are linked to the structures of exclusion which marginalize them. Social visibility is linked to transnational migration and bound up with structures of domination and inequality in Greece.

A dual process is occurring in Greece: the reversion of the Greek state from providing social welfare and social protection is coupled with a forceful resurgence of a national myth of a singular "Greek" culture and history, which fuels nationalist reassertions of the state. As the state retracts at some scales, it reasserts itself in others. To cite Leo Chavez, undocumented migrants are inserted into this double process via "racialised hierarchies of status and prestige" (Chavez 2007: 193). They are inserted into "simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion [which] underscore the schizophrenic context within which illegality exists and which undermines imagining undocumented immigrants as part of the larger society" (Chavez 2007: 193). Inclusion and exclusion, the retraction and assertion of the state, visibility and invisibility – each are parallel processes bound up through the daily lived experience of undocumented migrants in Athens.

5 Degrees of social visibility and invisibility in Athens

Clever ways of adapting to the Greek situation were necessary to avoid discrimination from the state or right-wing violent reactions. The sections below discuss the variety of forms of social visibility maintained by Sudanese respondents. Undocumented migrants devised strategies of masking their visibility as Sudanese, from staying inside, creating disguises to avoid police scrutiny, to adapting clandestine techniques of counterfeit documents. Livelihood strategies were limited by the inability to maintain a publically visible presence, and destitution, homelessness, and poverty surrounded the day-to-day lives of undocumented migrants in the city. For many of these Sudanese refugees, the only way to make a living is through working in through the invisible market of counterfeit documents. The social visibility of migrants is also a gendered process, with women often socially invisible for reasons of physical mobility in countries of origin. For example, female migrants in Sudan are restricted from moving without the consent of a male agnate and do not arrive in Athens but remain in the country of origin or migrate elsewhere.

Migrants' locations in hidden community spaces within Athens have been a source of their social invisibility. Social visibility is also a

strategy of negotiating the tense dialectic of the presence of powerful marginalizing actors to adapt to discriminatory conditions. There are different degrees of visibility with different outcomes, but with related structural causes that promote marginalization and exclusion, emanating from the economy, migration management politics and practices, and social relations within urban environments and countries of origin. This article is arguing that social visibility is related directly to structural exclusion and marginalization, with concomitant forms of adaptation through social visibility.

5.1 Street visibility

Visible patterns of public interaction mask vulnerability to violence and political oppression. While walking in the street one afternoon with two Sudanese men, Jules and Jahwad, one of them, Jules, began to breathe a little heavy (Field notes, June 2012). "Hold my arm", Jahwad said, "Hold me!" Jules stumbled a bit, and it was unclear if Jules was supporting Jahwad or Jahwad supporting Jules. Jules walked with a limp from an injury sustained as a child soldier with the SPLA. Ahead we would be passing a large contingent of police on patrol. I had not noticed them at all, but these men had. It was a familiar scene, but the men were still nervous. Jahwad slid framed glasses down across his eyes, even though he did not require them to see, to make himself look more distinguished. He preferred wearing fake designer glasses and collared shirts tucked into clean slacks. He wanted to make himself "look more European" in order to avoid any problems with the police.

The visibility of police on the street keeps undocumented migrants alert and ready to disappear down a side alley or into a café, or even a dumpster, at any moment. Remaining vigilant to the presence of police or racist groups is essential to living in Athens. Creating a persona of "Europeanness" is also critical to maintaining public visibility in Athens.

George, a middleman selling counterfeit documents in Athens, explains how he used his new European identity to conceal himself from police inspection:

One time the cops stopped me up here, in Omonia. They saw me, I saw them, but I kept walking like I was a real Athenian, but they stopped me. I pretended not to know, and I spoke Italian with them, I know a little, enough. So they yelled 'Documents, documents!' And I pulled out my [fake] Italian ID. Sometimes they even will call an Italian speaker to check if you are really Italian. But this time they didn't. They saw the hologram [the mark of a high quality fake document] and let me go. I feel like I can walk around now with no problem, but you still have to be careful. (Interview with George, 20s, July 2012)

Adapting clothing and fashion is often a strategy to mask overt visibility based on skin color on the street and avoid police scrutiny. Willen's (2007) evidence from South Tel Aviv shows how Liberian migrants completely cover their skin through long-sleeved clothing and broad hats and sunglasses so people on the street would not notice their skin colour. These "bodies in disguise" remain clothed not only in public but also at night at home. She recounts that during a wave of arrests and deportations in Israel how some West African migrants wore fine clothing, such as those you would wear to a formal occasion at night while sleeping, so that in case their homes were raided and they were deported, they would not return to Nigeria or Ghana "in the clothes of a pauper" (Willen 2007: 26). She also

cites how some women would make themselves more visible when the police knocked on the door – by stripping naked – shaming police to prevent deportation. She demonstrates how “the mass deportation campaign has stripped undocumented migrants in Tel Aviv of the possibility of experiencing the private space of home as a haven from the outside world” (Willen 2007: 26). As in Athens, the visible becomes invisible and the invisible becomes visible in a double act of refraction of violence into and out of public and private spaces.

The visibility and presence of police does not always provide protection from racist violence, as one Sudanese man explains during an outburst of racist violence he experienced (Field notes, July 2012):

They are so violent now, it's so bad! They will stab you. Before it was only at night you had to be careful, but now all the time, in the morning, at night, all the time it's so bad! The other night I had to run, they chased me. They were big men, you know big muscles, wearing black, with shaved heads; they were on motorcycles and scooters. So I saw them, you know, I learned a little Greek now, enough to know they were talking about me. 'Look there's a black!' I could hear them say. So I turned around and saw them, started to run, and they chased me on the scooters. And I ran towards the police station, I kept running. Once I got to the police I told them what was happening. But they didn't do anything! The racists even drove by on their motorbikes, and the cops just looked at them! So I kept going. At one point I jumped into a trash can to hide. ... I hid behind it, and I got so scared I jumped in, and I waited. Eventually they left.

In this instance, the perceived presence of police was not a deterrent from violence, only by hiding in the trash, by becoming publically invisible was this man able to escape overtly visible racist violence. Racist violence and ineffectual and sometimes violent police presence prevent undocumented migrants from arranging their livelihoods, forcing them into adaptive strategies of avoidance. In consequence, homelessness has increased, blurring the boundaries of private and public accommodation. One Sudanese man relates his story of sleeping rough (Field notes February 2012):

I sleep sometimes under the train tracks by the train station. It's where a lot of Tunisians, Libyans, and Algerians sleep. But it's not safe. The racists they go there too! They know where we sleep. But the police, they came by, maybe 4 O'clock in the morning, I don't know, it was still dark. The police came by with flashlights, and we all jumped up with our arms in the sky! But the police were calm, they said 'Stay down, it's ok, go back to sleep'. Because they know, they know there is nowhere for us to go. Where can we go? Are there places to go to eat and sleep and have a shower? Where are these places? The ones that are there are all full! My other place [inside an old truck container on the outskirts] was found. They found it, and they locked it. They shut the door with all my clothes inside, everything, and I had to start again.

This man spends his nights sleeping at different friends' houses, and his days inside cafes avoiding the heat and the streets. Avoidance of public spaces prevents migrants from attaining overt public visibility and increases their vulnerability to livelihood shocks, leading to alternative livelihood strategies. The police are often complicit with right-wing violent acts, and it is unclear whether they are providing protection from racist violence or maintaining their

visibility, even at night, to heighten the fear that nowhere is secure. There is always the potential for being checked for false documents, detained, or deported. Social visibility here is directly linked to daily strategies of securing accommodation, avoiding violent attack, and blending into the urban crowd to avoid police scrutiny.

5.2 Gender and support

In Sudan, “men exert their power and authority over women through the control of women's mobility” (Edward 2007: 83). Women cannot exit the country without their husband's or their guardian's approval (Di Bartolomeo, Jaulin, & Perrin 2012). Since women in Sudan are not permitted to move without the permission of their husband or a male agnate, discrepancies in who can move freely are increased. “The socio-political context in Sudan does not encourage the migration of women, especially when they are single” (Assal 2011: 8). Even while female migration rates are increasing primarily due to continuing conflict, men tend to move independently of the household, whereas wives and children remain in the region of origin or in refugee camps. The separation of men from women has been magnified because of the conflicts in Sudan, whereby families are split because of death or forced displacement to different areas. “Sexual and gender-based violence, forced marriages and abduction of women and children associated with inter-communal violence remain widespread” because of forced displacement and widespread lawlessness (UN Human Rights Council 2011: 18). Furthermore, polygamy is legal in Sudan under both Islamic and customary law, contributing to separation of family members, with men often leaving behind much younger wives (in Sudan roughly 25% of girls 15–19 are married).

I was only able to conduct a single interview with a Sudanese woman, and she was accompanied by her husband and children. When I asked Ahmad, a young Sudanese man, where the Sudanese women were, he just waved his arms and chuckled:

They are away somewhere. The women, they have lost their husbands, their family is scattered around the world, and they don't know how to find them. Because of the war people are displaced. ... They stay in Sudan, and then it is very difficult to find them again.

I was told many women stay behind in Sudan to migrate to Europe later through family reunification or once enough capital is raised to pay a human smuggler. Another Sudanese man, now living in Sweden, related the situation to me thus:

The women they stay. Unmarried women have no right to move in Sudan, they cannot move. So the men they come here, and maybe they find a Somali or Ethiopian woman, and many are separated from their family. The married women, sometimes they come with husbands, especially if there are children, or they die on the way. But you see, he motioned to the men sitting in the Sudanese hostel we were sitting in, “These men are separated from their families during the war. The women are disappeared somewhere maybe, they don't know where they are, they can't find them or see them even to talk to them.”

The gendered social visibility of men and women in Athens re-configures the social spaces available for support and the generation of particular, read family-focused, survival strategies. The invisibility

of women is paralleled with the hypervisibility of Sudanese men living on the street or confined inside the hostel or the café, revealing the particular gender imbalance which prefigures the degrees of social visibility within lived urban spaces.

5.3 *Adapting with invisibility: working with counterfeit documents*

This section links social visibility with livelihood strategies through an investigation of the counterfeit document market of Athens. I argue that social invisibility is forced upon migrants through state forms of immigration management as well as enforced destitution. In consequence, enforcement creates a need for social visibility through acquiring fake documents.

In response to lender pressures to implement austerity packages, Greece has reduced its budget for the social welfare of both citizens and non-citizens. Undocumented migrants feel the worst of the social effects of policies that reduce social protection. Adawallah, a Sudanese refugee who has since gone to Norway, explained to me the effects of the crisis as “out of our hands” and the perceived disconnection among Sudanese refugees that they are not the cause of the crisis, but of external forces of conflict (Field notes, February 2012).

A health worker at a psycho-social health NGO mentioned to me that the requests for assistance come from three main areas: jobs, health, and housing (Field notes, February 2012). Migrants are competing for capital, not only social but also material. The social effects are both visible and invisible – destitution, homelessness, a proliferation of medical and psychological conditions that are easily treatable, and a re-production of migration *out of* Greece to escape the poor conditions inside. The conditions are so poor that people are smuggling themselves back to Turkey, either to reunite with family members to gain more material support, to find more job opportunities, or to procure documents or smuggling services in the smuggling market in Istanbul.

Some Sudanese respondents I met worked as middlemen within the informal and (in)visible market for counterfeit documents in Athens. Migrants needed to make themselves visible in an invisible market to make any profit at selling fake documents. The market for documents is itself structurally dependent on new migrants who are desperate for work – the inability to find regular work in Athens pushes migrants into the market for documents (as well as the criminal world of drug trafficking and street dealing) to survive. The conditions are so poor in Greece that the market in counterfeit documents remains profitable. One man reports that “people are forced to make crimes, because they have nothing to eat. For me myself, for more than six months I just lived at the public garden. Nothing here, nothing at all” (Field notes February 2012).

There is a complex informal market mechanism at work in Athens: new migrants need work and are tempted to leave the country, so they find work within invisible and informal document markets in order to find the money necessary to escape the country, while at the same time they are re-producing the means necessary for others to leave the country. New migrants come in, fill in the gap left by old migrants, and these migrants need work, so the business continues. A double reproduction is at play: the reproduction of abjectivity and unemployment among undocumented migrants is symbiotic with the re-production of markets for false documents. The migrant middlemen profit alongside their associated counterfeiters.

The state practice of requiring documents and making migrants more visible helps fuel the market. Efforts to make refugee populations more visible require documents necessary for the inspection by police on the street. Drawing on the demand for documents, professional counterfeiters supply fake passports, fake refugee acceptance letters from several EU countries, fake residence permits, even fake ‘Pink Cards’ (Greek-issued document proving you are an asylum-seeker in Greece). “White Cards”, which are in fact a piece of A4 paper, usually folded and held in the pocket, inform undocumented migrants in Greek that they need to leave Greek territory within 90 days. White Cards are issued by the police after arrest and detention. These are in less demand but are traded informally as to prevent being arrested again, which does not provide total protection – when police round-up undocumented migrants on the street, they take them into large blue buses and process their paperwork, double checking with a central database to ensure they are in the system.

In conjunction with creating hidden populations, the visibility of police improves the business of document selling. The presence of police in Athens helps fuel the demand for more documents and helps keep the supply of documents fresh for making profit. During a conversation at a Sudanese café, George, a connection man, helps me understand the market, its causes, and how to keep your work hidden:

There are no jobs now. But me, I have something, some good business that gets me money. 800 Euros worth! So I asked around to some people to see how to get some IDs. And I met some good connection guys, they said if I can sell one card for 140–150 euros, I can take 40–50 for myself. The cards are good, they have holograms on them. ... They look real, no one asks you questions then if they see that shiny material. So I go down to the market, and I see these cards, they sell for like 5–7 euros. So I figured out how it works. And the next day, the people, they’re gone! They traveled, by plane! Soon I became famous! People started calling me, asking me for service. Now I am more calm, I took some money, I am ok for now. ¼ I have this special pack, with a special area where I keep the cards and the money. So when the police stop me, I can pull out all my things [he mimes pulling out some notebooks, small papers, other documents] and nothing will be found. (George, 20s, July 2012)

George is one of three connection men I met with contacts with professional counterfeiters in other parts of Europe. Once you find a recruiter like George who needs money, the counterfeiter can get the blank cards for 5–7 Euros and then charge 140–150 for the forged cards. The counterfeiters take 100 and give 40–50 to the migrant middleman. George pockets 800 Euros, becomes well known, more visible in the market, and people get their fake documents and travel on a plane. All that has to be done is scan the passport size photos, send the photos by email to the counterfeiters, and then the IDs are sent back as fast as the next day. Swift and (in)visible service.

George also desperately needs the money he makes from the document market. He is himself a poor refugee and has many contacts within the refugee community. He worked with two other connection men to help people leave Greece. After looking for work for many of the years he lived in Athens, trying his luck at smuggling himself through Patras, and living homeless for years, he decided to enter into the high-risk high-profit invisible market of counterfeit documents, and succeeded. Put another way – the constrained livelihood opportunities of undocumented migrants in Athens creates

the sufficient conditions for the market to prosper, combining visible and invisible livelihood strategies.

State-sanctioned violence combined with persistent lack of sustainable livelihood strategies leaves people desperate to escape the day-to-day poverty and racist violence, fuelling a market of counterfeit documents. How Sudanese refugees enter into the market is partially a result of their social visibility.

Working within the document market becomes a livelihood strategy, and doing good business means making yourself visible in an invisible market of documents. Visibility also means you are more vulnerable to police investigation. During my work with George, his two compatriots were arrested in a police raid of an apartment. George decided to leave the same week, using his newly acquired fake documents. He spent all the money he had. He even did some extra business to make extra cash before successfully departing Athens.

Good business within the document market means working behind closed doors, and the places where the men bought and sold were inside, in the back of cafes, in toilets and bathrooms, behind closed un-labelled doors which lead to abandoned buildings, at customers' homes and apartments, even outside down small, shadowed alleys. These hidden spaces were carved out of the de-scaled zones of Athens hit hardest by the economic crisis (for more on scaling, see Glick-Schiller & Caglar 2011).

Sudanese community centres exist which are not visible from the outside, only when you enter is the space revealed as something identified as Sudanese, with artefacts from Sudan hanging on the wall, Arabic news on the television, or types of private interaction and political debate being emphasised. Sudanese hostels exist to house transit migrants, as well as cafes and small restaurants entirely run by Sudanese entrepreneurs, but only visible to those who are informed through bonds of ethnicity, language, skin colour, or friendship. The available beds, food, and other services could be had at a cheap cost, and a variety of clothes could be bought in one of the hostels. The informal market thrived here, with several types of cheap goods available alongside middlemen selling fake documents and a passage out of Athens. Finding the right connection man and developing trust occurs in these community centres as well. Homeless men could spend their days inside in the hostels and cafes, making money here and there through petty trade or working in the document market if the proper social connections were available.

6 Conclusion

This article has shown that everyday forms of social visibility defined as the everyday practices of seeing and being seen, are linked to livelihood strategies of undocumented migrants. I argue that social visibility is a result of conscious survival strategies enacted in response to the political and economic structures, Greek society and culture, which leave little room for the other. Strategies of social visibility and invisibility are common not only to the Sudanese I worked with, but also among other African, Asian, and European migrants throughout the capitol.

Identity, gender, and markets each interact in different ways with elements of the Greek state and society to shape the social

visibility of Sudanese migrants within the urban spaces of Athens. Through clothing and documents, Sudanese migrants are able to make invisible their identity to avoid the visible public police scrutiny of migrants. Finding secure accommodation is difficult within an environment of scrutiny and violent attacks, as homelessness and public destitution of undocumented migrants has increased. The invisibility of Sudanese women re-configures spaces of livelihoods and social spaces of survival, patterning the diverse ways in which men find support and women find movement. Invisible markets in counterfeit documents allow for migrants to become visible to a discerning state, providing a link between survival, state surveillance, and social visibility.

The economic crisis coupled with the absence of reception infrastructure in Athens has meant that alternative social spaces had to be developed and social visibility had to be negotiated. The weak institutional infrastructure of the Greek state has been met with practices of social (in)visibility. The Sudanese community has developed its own pathways and livelihood strategies that lie outside the host population, lying between socially visible and invisible. Formal interaction with the Greek state was often limited to dealing with police or with racist attacks. The policy dimension of failed reception conditions in Greece has created alternative pathways to incorporation in Athens, where the Sudanese community is forced to remain on the sidelines in invisible spaces of community interaction rather than sustained and mutual ties with the Greek host population.

The project of finding a political voice in Greek society is a topic of concern to the Sudanese community, as well as all ethnic communities, in Athens. The material dilemmas of everyday life in Athens – finding food, warmth, shelter – frames the possibilities for making claims. Among all ethnic groups in Athens, there is an intense exchange of information and a cacophony of voices – through exchange of emails, letters, videos, mobile phone texts, images, printed-press, satellite television, and through the internet. However, the wider representation of the Sudanese outside the community is fraught with difficulty. The ability to mobilize individual and collective resources for their own interests is constrained by the material realities of everyday life in Athens. In consequence, the social and material issues of destitution and marginalization are left invisible and outside mediated discourse.

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