Shades of Sudan: Navigating Sudanese Racial Identity in a Multicultural Context

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Abstract

Sudanese racial identity is complex and multifaceted, particularly when studied in connection to migration. While previous literature has explored the manifestation of Sudanese racial identity in different migratory contexts, it has not explored it in the context of the UAE. This is an important context to address given the history of the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE and the uniqueness of the UAE as a migrant-receiving country that mirrors the intersection between Arab and African races present within the ancestry of Sudanese people. To fill this gap in literature, first-generation migrants in the UAE were interviewed as part of a study that examined the impact of migration to the UAE on ascribed and self-identified racial identity, the former referring to the identity people attribute to an individual and the latter referring to the identity that the individual chooses for themselves. The study showed that the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE can influence their ascribed and self-identified racial identities in various ways, such as making them more likely to experience negative treatment as a result of ascribed identity, allowing them to more fully express their self-identities, and causing shifts in how they choose to self-identify.

Keywords: *migration, race, ascribed identity, self-identification, gender*

I. Introduction

Over the centuries, Sudan has been torn between two racial identities—Arab on the one hand and African on the other. This is the result of the racial ambiguity that characterizes most of the Sudanese population. Although known to be predominantly dark-skinned, many Sudanese people are of mixed Arab/African heritage resulting from a history of intermarriage between Arab migrants and the indigenous African tribes of Sudan (Abubakr, 2021). Coming from both Arab and African ancestry, however, does not necessarily mean that Sudanese people choose to racially identify as both Arab and African or, in other words, as Afro-Arab. Rather, many Sudanese people reject their "Africanness" and choose to identify as Arab, while others reject their "Arabness" and choose to identify as African. Moreover, some do not reject their Africanness or Arabness but simply distance themselves from both for various reasons (Ahmad, 2011). In short, the racial identity of Sudanese people is a nuanced and multifaceted concept, and this complexity needs to be unpacked in order to form a more complete understanding of what it means to be Sudanese.

In addition, given what extensive research has revealed about the impact of migration on identity, it is possible that migration is capable of shaping and transforming the racial identity of Sudanese people, which makes exploring the connection between Sudanese people's migration journeys and their racial identity valuable. Specifically, many Sudanese people have been migrating to the UAE over the past six decades, and a large number of them have played an important role in the early stages of the development and modernization of the UAE (Abdelkader, 2020). In addition, the UAE is itself a place that combines both Arab and African identities; there is a significant population of both Arabs and Africans in the UAE (Digital Gravity, 2022). Therefore, exploring the ways in which the Sudanese national, who brings both Arab and African roots, navigates their racial identity in the UAE is a valuable way to unpack the complexity that is present in the mixed Arab/African ancestry of Sudanese people. Moreover, while previous research has explored the connection between identity and migration, both within Sudanese society and outside of it, little to no research has explored the intersection between Sudanese racial identity and migration in the unique majority-migrant context of the UAE. To fill this gap in literature and address all the aforementioned aspects, my research ex-

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plored the self-identified and ascribed racial identities of Sudanese migrants before and after their migration to the UAE. Furthermore, because Sudanese society and culture are significantly gendered, the ascribed and self-identified racial identities of Sudanese migrants in the UAE were explored through a gendered lens. In short, my research addressed the following question: how can the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE influence their self-identified and ascribed racial identities, and how does this vary by gender?

I conducted interviews with nine first-generation Sudanese migrants in the UAE surrounding their experiences with self-identified and ascribed racial identity before and after migration to the UAE in relation to their interactions with others, the forms of treatment they received, and other aspects of their time in UAE and Sudan. Throughout the interviews, participants discussed shifts in the nature of their self-identified and ascribed racial identities, as well as the ways those identities were expressed and the behaviors they perpetuated. Overall, the interviews revealed that the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE can influence their ascribed and self-identified racial identities in various ways, such as by making them more likely to experience racist treatment as a result of ascribed identity, allowing those who identify as Afro-Arab to more fully express their self-identities, and causing shifts in self-identification by making them feel more Arab or more African at different points in time after migration. Shifts in ascribed and self-identified racial identity can vary by gender. Sudanese men are more likely than women to experience racist treatment as a result of ascribed identity after migration, and Sudanese women who identify as African or Afro-Arab express their Africanness through physical appearance more often than men after migrating to the UAE. Through these and other findings, my study contributes to previous research around the impact of migration on identity, expands on existing theory on the fluidity and complexity of racial identity, and builds an understanding of how other racially ambiguous communities experience racial identity in a migration context.

This paper first offers a general background on the research question by exploring the history of Sudan's mixed Arab/African ancestry, the migration patterns of Sudanese people to the GCC and the UAE in particular, and the racial structures and hierarchies present within UAE society. It then presents a detailed literature review that provides a more theoretical understanding of the research question by discussing existing theory on racial identity, the connection between identity and migration, the perceptions of racial identity in Sudanese society, and the manifestations of racial identity among Sudanese migrants in different parts of the world. In terms of theory on racial identity, this paper draws on literature that examines the fluidity of racial self-identification, the characteristics of self-identified and ascribed racial identity, and the complexities associated with having multiple racial identities. Following this is a methodology section that details the design of the study, a discussion section of the results of the study, and a conclusion section discussing the implications, contributions, and limitations of the study.

II. Background

I. The history of Sudan's mixed Arab/African ancestry

Firstly, giving historical context around Sudan's Arab/African ancestry is a way to understand the origins of race and racial identity in Sudan. The roots of Sudanese people's mixed heritage are surrounded by a long history of racial mixing that can be traced to the 13th century (Sharkey, 2008). During ancient Nubia (historically a part of Sudan), Nubians were known to be less developed than the Egyptians and of mixed race, although they were predominantly dark-skinned. However, their association with the Egyptians, who were viewed as a superior race at the time, elevated the Nubians above the "the inert mass of the black races of Africa" – in other words, they were viewed as superior to other Africans at the time (Kendall, n.d.). Centuries later, Egyptians and people from the Arabian peninsula were constantly migrating to Sudan and marrying into the indigenous Black tribes of the country over the course of centuries, shaping the mixed Arab/African roots seen in Sudanese people today (Sharkey, 2008). Eventually, this mixed ancestry became characterized by the "Arabization" of Sudanese society and Arab supremacy, which led to discrimination against dark-skinned or more "African" members of Sudanese society (Sharkey, 2008).

With regard to the Arabization (also known as *ta'rib*) of Sudanese society, this process began with the rise of the Islamic era. When the Christian Nubia kingdoms of Sudan fell in the 14th century, Islam spread rapidly, resulting in many Muslims in northern Sudan learning Arabic through the Quran. In this manner, the Arabization of Sudanese society occurred alongside the Islamization of Sudanese society, connecting the Arab identity to being Muslim (Sharkey, 2008). This combined Islamization/Arabization process continued unofficially during Sudan's colonial era as a result of Egyptian rule in the beginning of the 19th century and, eventually, joint Egyptian/British rule at the end of the

19th century. When Sudan became independent in 1956, *ta'rib* ceased to be an unofficial process and became a government policy that led to the acquisition of Arabic as the country's main language and a deep internalization of Arab identity in many Sudanese people (Sharkey, 2008). Connecting this to the research question at hand, it is possible that the racial identities of participants will be influenced by the Arabization process that Sudanese society underwent, leading them to adopt an Arab identity.

Another characteristic of Sudan's mixed ancestry is the development of Arab supremacy. This is because as *ta'rib* spread throughout Sudan, so did the idea that an Arab identity was culturally and racially superior to an African identity (Idris, 2005). Such ideologies led to Arabized Sudanese communities holding more privileged cultural, political, and economic positions in society compared to non-Arabized communities (Nasr, 2014). This is due to the fact that members of the South Sudanese community came from a long history of slave trade in Sudan, leading to a strong association between slavery and being dark-skinned or more "African" and, as a result, the rise of racist attitudes towards South Sudanese people and other non-Arabized people in Sudan. These attitudes manifested through referring to dark-skinned Sudanese people as *abeed* (the Arabic word for slaves), associating beauty with being light-skinned and ugliness with being dark-skinned, and connecting being a 'true Sudanese' with Arabized Sudanese people (Abubakr, 2021). It is therefore possible that, because of the culture of Arab supremacy in Sudanese society, some Sudanese migrants might feel pressured to adopt an Arab identity regardless of whether it aligns with their actual racial self-identification due to fear of being rejected by society or being discriminated against. Moreover, it might be the case that Sudanese migrants who are more dark-skinned are more likely to identify as African and that those who are light-skinned are more likely to identify as Arab.

II. Sudanese migration to the UAE and the Gulf

Secondly, exploring Sudanese migration patterns to the Gulf and, more specifically, the UAE is a way to understand the significance of placing the experiences of Sudanese people within the context of the UAE. The contemporary emigration of Sudanese people has been the result of the lack of employment and political unrest in Sudan, as well as the availability of better work conditions abroad (Hamid, 2022). In the 1990s, Sudanese migrants traveled mainly to neighboring countries, but many also went to developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Integral Human Development, n.d.). In 2016, the total number of Sudanese people living outside of Sudan was 4.5 million, 51 percent of whom were living in neighboring countries and 49 percent in highly developed countries. Of those living in Arab countries, 5-10% work in high-skilled jobs and a significant proportion are students (Integral Human Development, n.d.). In the Gulf, Sudanese migrants are predominantly professionals and highly skilled workers. A study conducted in 2014 showed that 42 percent of Sudanese migrants in the Gulf are doctors, engineers, pharmacists, professors, and other professionals, which is supported by the fact that 75 percent of Sudanese people working abroad hold a university degree and higher (Nour, 2019). Looking specifically at the UAE, an estimated 100,000 Sudanese citizens and 5,000 foreign citizens of Sudanese origin currently live in the country, many of whom are expatriates working in professional fields (Abdelkader, 2020).

Sudanese migrants built strong relations with local Emiratis and contributed to the development of various institutions during the formation of the country in 1971 (Abdelkader, 2020). This strong relationship between the two countries has also manifested in the significant contribution that the UAE government has made to Sudan over the years in terms of humanitarian aid, financial assistance, and political support which benefited Sudan in its democratic transition and economic reform efforts (Abdelkader, 2020). Today, relations between the two countries and the contribution of Sudanese people to the UAE remain strong (Abdelkader, 2020).

Looking at general migration patterns to the UAE, the total migrant population in the country consists of 9 million people coming from over 200 countries, making up almost 90% of the total population of the UAE (UAE Moments, 2021). The migrant population in the UAE comes mainly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Iran, Egypt, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and China (UAE Moments, 2021). It is therefore very likely that the post-migration experiences of Sudanese people will involve interactions with expatriates and, as a result, an exposure to cultural diversity given the various nationalities of the expatriate population in the UAE. However, it remains to be seen whether this cultural diversity can play a role in their experiences with self-identified and ascribed racial identity.

III. Racial social structures and hierarchies in the UAE

Thirdly, discussing the social structures and hierarchies within the UAE provides a more qualitative aspect

to the quantitative information presented above, thus forming a more comprehensive understanding of UAE society that can provide important context for the post-migration experiences of the Sudanese people. Specifically, understanding these structures and hierarchies from a racial perspective is a way to understand the potential connections between racial identity and migration to the UAE. One of the main characteristics of UAE society is the rise of xenophobia and racism, particularly from an economic standpoint, as a result of the cultural diversity explored above (Mapaderun, 2016). A concept that is very closely connected to this is economic racialization, which refers to the Middle East's historical use of forced labor based on the supposed inferiority of Black people, also known as the Arab slave trade (Mapaderun, 2016). In the UAE, this manifested in the organized movement of large groups of dark-skinned people from regions like East Africa, which was justified by the Arab logic of colorism that was present in many Arab societies at the time: lighter skin was equal to higher social worth and darker skin was equal to lower social worth (Mapaderun, 2016). The fact that those employed in the slave trade were dark-skinned and the fact that it was based on the idea that Black people are inferior conveys the association between being dark-skinned and being perceived as Black or African in the UAE.

Looking more closely at racial hierarchies in the UAE, the concept of Arab racism or "Aracism", which refers to xenophobic and racist attitudes from Arabs towards other races and ethnicities, particularly Black or Indian people, is particularly relevant (Goldthorpe, 2012). One way in which Arab racism manifests in UAE society is through the use of derogatory language when referring to individuals with Black heritage; similar to the racial history of Sudanese society, the term *abed* (singular for *abeed* which is Arabic for "slaves") is used to refer to a Black person (Goldthorpe, 2012). Therefore, despite the abolition of the Arab slave trade, associating Blackness with slavery is still prevalent in the UAE society (Goldthorpe, 2012). This can be seen in what Goldthorpe (2012) believes to be a modern-day version of the UAE's history of slavery in which Black migrant workers undertake much of the low-wage work in the UAE secondary labor market, similar to the laboring roles and undesirable jobs undertaken by Black people during the Arab slave trade (Goldthorpe, 2012). Also similar to Sudan's racial history is the development of Arab supremacy in UAE society as a result of Aracism, producing a racial hierarchy associated with nationality given the fact that, among members of the local population, race is often viewed as synonymous with nationality (Goldthorpe, 2012). One such hierarchy associates certain races and, in turn, certain nationalities with employment desirability. At the top of the hierarchy are UAE nationals, followed by Western expatriates such as Australians, other Arabs such as Syrians and Egyptians, South Asian nationals such as Pakistanis and Indians and, finally, Black nationals such as Ethiopians (Goldthorpe, 2012). This conveys the role of Arab supremacy in shaping racial hierarchies in the UAE given the fact that the nationalities at the top of the hierarchy are Arab nationalities. However, despite the fact that both Emirati nationals and those of other nationalities such as Egyptians and Syrians are Arabs, Emirati nationals are a separate, higher category compared to people of other Arab nationalities, implying that the Emirati nationality is a superior category of Arabness compared to Syrian or Egyptian Arabness. This is possibly connected to what the UAE perceives to be "true" Arabness. In the UAE, determining an individual's Arab identity, which is sometimes a part of the process of determining their qualification for UAE citizenship, mainly involves looking at their Arab genealogy, i.e. the Arab tribes from which they originate (Lori and Kuzmova, 2021). In other words, great importance is placed on being able to connect one's ancestry to certain Arab tribes when determining Arab identity in the UAE, conveying the strong association between having clear Arab lineage and being ascribed an Arab identity. Therefore, the separation between Emirati Arabs and other Arab nationalities such as Syrians and Egyptians in the hierarchy could be due to the inability to "confirm" the Arabness of these nationalities by linking their ancestry to specific Arab tribes given that their Arab heritage is more complex.

Connecting this to the research question at hand, it is possible that the experiences of Sudanese migrants in the UAE with regard to their racial identity will be influenced by their skin color. Dark-skinned Sudanese migrants might be more likely than light-skinned Sudanese migrants to be ascribed an African identity in the UAE, and this ascription could result in being perceived and treated negatively. Furthermore, it is possible that many Sudanese migrants in the UAE will not be ascribed an Arab identity by Emirati nationals in the UAE due to the fact that Sudanese people's Arab ancestry is complex.

III. Literature Review

While the section above provided a general background on the research question, this section provides a more theoretical understanding of the question by giving an overview of previous literature surrounding (1) the connection between migration and identity and racial iden-

tity theory, (2) how self-identified and ascribed racial identity manifests in contemporary Sudanese society, and (3) how self-identified and ascribed racial identity manifests among Sudanese migrants around the world.

I. Identity and migration

This section explores the association between migration and identity in order to provide a theoretical framework that can highlight the potential effects of migration to the UAE on Sudanese racial identity. However, before exploring the ways in which identity and migration intersect, it is important to provide a detailed understanding of the nuances of identity and, more specifically, the nuances of racial identity, particularly in terms of ascribed and self-identified identity. In a general sense, ascribed identity refers to the identity that is attributed or assigned to a person as a way to label them as a member of a given group, while self-identified or avowed identity refers to the identity that an individual claims for themselves usually as a way to identify with a certain social group (Antony, 2016). Ascribed identity is usually a function of an individual's physical appearance, the ethnic connotations of an individual's name, or other visible aspects that people generally associate with identity, while self-identified/avowed identity is influenced by an individual's group affiliations or, more specifically, an individual's reference group (the social group or entity where an individual feels at ease and from which they draw their avowed identity) (Collier, 1997). Therefore, when an individual is assimilated into a new culture, the values and practices of that culture may begin to play a part in their self-identification (Collier, 1997). One's ascribed and self-identities sometimes align, but there are times when a misalignment occurs. (Abrams, 2020). In such cases, the individuals who are ascribed a misaligned identity may either attempt to resist that identity or succumb to it, and it is also possible that it will be internalized and become the basis for their self-identification (Brinkman and Jacobi, 2020). Moreover, if the ascribed identity has negative connotations in the migrant's host community, it could result in discriminatory behaviors toward them.

Looking specifically at racial identity, an important characteristic of racial self-identification is its fluidity (Davenport, 2020). For instance, racial self-identity can differ from the racial identity that is observed or ascribed by others to the individual, the physical characteristics of the individual, or the heritage/ancestry of the individual (Davenport, 2020). In addition, racial self-identification is fluid in the sense that it can be consistent or inconsistent depending on the steadiness and durability of an individual's attachment to their reference group, since shifts in one's reference group can result in shifts in racial self-identification (Davenport, 2020). Moreover, the fluidity of racial self-identification is evident in individuals who have more than one avowed racial identity; those who identify with two or more races are able to use the fluidity of their self-identity to their benefit. (Leong, 2015). This manifests through their ability to choose what racial identity to perform to the public, which is important in situations where one of their identities is more socially acceptable than the others. (Leong, 2015). In other words, the fluidity of racial self-identification is connected to the idea of *identity flexibility*—the ability of those with multiple racial identities to freely and easily switch between multiple racial identities at any given moment (Gaither, 2015). Furthermore, research has shown that those who identify with different racial categories may experience an "identity crisis" often associated with difficulty in choosing one of their identities over the others in situations where they are pressured by others to do so (Gaither, 2015). Other negative experiences associated with having multiple racial identities include a lack of acknowledgment and inaccurate perception of their racial identity, social exclusion and discriminatory behavior, and disapproval by family members and other members of society toward their racial self-identification (Gaither, 2015). This negative treatment, in turn, can influence how strongly those with mixed racial ancestry identify as multiracial (Norman, 2020). Connecting these theoretical understandings of racial identity to the experiences of Sudanese migrants, it is likely that Sudanese migrants who identify as Afro-Arab will experience identity flexibility in terms of being able to switch between their Arab and African identities in social situations. However, they may also report negative experiences such as a misalignment between their ascribed and avowed identities, disapproval by others in response to their racial self-identification as Arab, African, etc. For those who identify as Afro-Arab, there might be an "identity crisis" and pressure to choose one identity over the other by society.

Looking at the intersection between identity and migration, previous research also has explored how leaving one's home can have different effects on the migrant, ranging from a feeling of loss or alienation to a feeling of belonging and peace (Bhugra, 2004). The effects of migration on identity, specifically, can manifest in the form of transformations in a migrant's ethnocultural identity (Bhugra, 2004). When people migrate, they bring their cultures with them, resulting in a process known as acculturation in which two cultures come into contact, possibly leading to the dominance of one culture (the "foreign" culture) over the other culture (the

migrant's culture). As a result, migrants' ethnocultural identities (their combined racial, cultural, and ethnic identities) change (Bhugra, 2004). Connecting this to the experiences of Sudanese migrants in the UAE, the racial identities of Sudanese migrants might shift as a result of encountering racial identities different from theirs, which is very likely due to the diversity of the UAE migrant population, so migrants who came to the UAE with an Arab identity might report identifying as African after migration due to encountering and integrating primarily into communities that identify as African. The same could occur to migrants coming to the UAE with an African identity who find themselves integrating more into Arab communities in the country. Finally, for those coming from Sudan with an Afro-Arab mixed identity, they might find that one side of their identity becomes more prominent depending on the racial identities present in the communities they most commonly interact with, and they may eventually choose to self-identify primarily as Arab or African after migration. In other words, migration can result in *shifts* in one's racial self-identification, either through positive or negative reinforcement. Migration may also affect changes in the *performance* of racial identity through the division between a migrant's "true" identity and their "false" identity, which occurs when migrants publicly emphasize certain aspects of their identity and downplay others in order to more efficiently adapt to and integrate into their host community (Jones-Correa, 2020). For instance, a migrant coming from Niger might emphasize the Muslim and African aspects of their identity as they travel to a country like Libya or Algeria, but might then downplay these aspects and emphasize others when traveling to a country in Europe, creating a division between their "true" identity and their "false" or public identity (which only includes the emphasized aspects of their identity and excludes the downplayed or hidden aspects) (Jones-Correa, 2020). This may also be the case for Sudanese migrants in the UAE. Individuals who identify as Afro-Arab, for instance, may report experiencing this division between their "true" and "false" racial identities due to possibly underplaying the Arab side of their identity and emphasizing the African side, or vice versa in order to fit into the Arab or African communities that they interact with in the UAE.

At the same time, there may be limits to how individuals are able to perform particular racial identities given their own phenotypical appearance, which might result in their being ascribed a particular racial identity. A study done on the impact of skin color on the experiences of African migrants in Australia, for instance, reveals the implicit and explicit effects of ascribed racial identity on a migrant's integration into their host community (Udah and Singh, 2019). Participants of the study mentioned that their skin color impacted different aspects of their daily lives as migrants in Australia, specifically in terms of the opportunities available to them as Black people in a predominantly white society (Udah and Singh, 2019). In terms of the acculturation and public emphasis on certain aspects of identity, a study conducted on Chinese immigrants in Canada details the connection between code-switching and identity formation, specifically cultural identity (Lo, 2007). The study showed that when migrants practice code-switching in the form of shifts in the languages they speak, they may experience changes in their cultural self-identification (Lo, 2007). In other words, the study showed that those who code-switch might experience a change in cultural self-identification, which is connected to the idea of identity flexibility among those with multiple identities discussed earlier. These cultural identities, in turn, can become internalized, leading to the migrants having different cultural identities when they code-switch (Lo, 2007). This may be the case for Sudanese migrants because although Arabic is the official language of all Arab countries, the dialect that each country speaks is different, which means that Sudanese migrants in the UAE interacting with Arab communities may practice code-switching in the form of Arabic dialects, thus possibly experiencing shifts in their racial self-identification.

Looking more closely at the impact of migration on ascribed and self-identified racial identity, an autoethnographic account on the experiences of an Eritrean refugee in South Africa in relation to racial identity conveys the effects of encountering a new community/culture on an individual's racial self-identification and the identity that is assigned to them. Throughout the account, the author discussed experiences in South Africa in which his racial self-identification was dismissed compared to his ascribed racial identity, which was viewed as more important and reflective of his "true" identity (Tewolde, 2020). On the other hand, the author recounted experiences in which his ascribed identity was also dismissed, which occurred in situations where his inability to speak the language associated with that identity revealed his "true" identity (Tewolde, 2020). In such situations, a shift occurred from being perceived as Black or Colored (referring to a person with mixed heritage in South Africa) to being ascribed an identity as a "foreigner", conveying an association between being ascribed these identities and being perceived as South African (Tewolde, 2020). Similarly, Sudanese migrants in the UAE may report a dismissal of their Arab, African, or Afro-Arab self-

identities and a focus on their ascribed identities as being their "true" racial identity. On the other hand, there may also be a reevaluation of the Arab, African, or Afro-Arab identities that are ascribed to them in cases where it is revealed that it is not their actual identity. For instance, some migrants may be perceived as African in the UAE and be expected to speak a language associated with that, in which case their inability to speak that language may lead to a reexamination of their ascribed African identity. It may also be the case that they may be ascribed an African identity and be expected to not speak Arabic, in which case it would be their *ability* to speak Arabic that affects whether the ascribed identity lasts.

II. Manifestations of racial identity in Sudan

While the above section provided a theoretical framework rooted in the ways migration can impact identity in general, this section explores literature on how racial identity manifests in Sudan, which will provide a theoretical understanding of the pre-migration experiences that participants discuss in relation to their racial identity. In regard to racial self-identification in Sudan, many members of Sudanese society identify as Afro-Arab and, as a result, have a self-identified racial identity that mirrors their mixed Arab/African ancestry.

However, there are many who do not feel the need to self-identify as Afro-Arab but instead choose to self-identify primarily as Arab or African due to their ethnic and cultural heritage being predominantly Arab or predominantly African (Ahmad, 2011). For those who identify as Arab, their decision to do so may be rooted in the association between Arabness and Islam. Because Arabs were the first Muslims and the first to spread Islam to the world, many Sudanese people perceive an Arab identity to be prestigious. For those who identify primarily as African or, more generally, Black, this can be understood in terms of the recent explosion of hip-hop culture, rap music popularity, and other aspects associated with Blackness in the West, which have made it desirable for many young Sudanese people to identify as African or Black in Sudan (Ahmad, 2011). There are also members of Sudanese society who do not fully reject an Arab or African racial identity but distance themselves from one or the other for personal, social, and political reasons (Ahmad, 2011).

In regard to ascribed racial identity in contemporary Sudanese society, this is greatly influenced by the country's history of Arabization and Arab supremacy but has become even more complex and deeply embedded into the daily lives of Sudanese people. This can be seen in the strong association Sudanese people have formed between racial identity and skin color. Over the years, Sudanese society has built a skin color hierarchy based on the ideology of Arab supremacy or, in other words, the superiority of an Arab identity and the inferiority of an African identity (Aziz, 2020). This hierarchy, in turn, influences the racial identities that are ascribed to different members of Sudanese society and, as a result, the social status that those members hold as they navigate their daily lives in Sudan (Aziz, 2020). The skin colors at the top of the hierarchy are *asfar* (yellow) and *ahmar* (red), both of which denote a light skin tone, and the lowest color on the hierarchy is *azrag* (blue) which is used interchangeably with *aswad* (black) to refer to "Africans" (such as South Sudanese people) in Sudan due to their historical connection to slavery. *Azrag*, in other words, is viewed as the color of the *abed* (slave) (Aziz, 2020). The "ideal" skin tone in Sudanese society is a shade of brown which is not too light so as to appear as "Middle-Eastern Arab" or a *halabi* (Aziz, 2020), which is a colloquial term for Sudanese who are much lighter in complexion than most of the Sudanese population. *Halabi* literally means someone who comes from *Halab* (Aleppo, Syria), but was historically used to refer to the descendants of Arab settlers in Sudan (Malik, 2008), conveying its association with Arabness or being ascribed an Arab identity. On the other hand, a Sudanese person's complexion should not be too dark so as to appear as "African" or Black (Aziz, 2020). It is important to note that Blackness and Africanness are interchangeable concepts in Sudanese society, so being labeled as Black is synonymous with being labeled as African. It is therefore possible that Sudanese migrants who are very light-skinned or very dark-skinned may experience struggles with not "fitting in" in Sudan due to not falling into the range of the "ideal" skin color in Sudanese society. Although the skin color hierarchy details a connection between skin color and ascribed racial identity, the hierarchy might also influence the self-identified racial identities of Sudanese migrants pre-migration due to the potential internalization of the Arab or African racial identities that are ascribed to them as a result of skin color. The connection between ascribed racial identity and skin color in Sudanese society also manifests in Sudanese beauty standards. Women who are lighter in skin tone and have softer hair textures, for instance, are generally viewed as a representation of "true beauty" in Sudanese society (Elhassan, 2014). Having a softer hair texture is also associated with Arabness in Sudanese society, so a woman who embodies such characteristics is often referred to as *bint 'arab* (daughter of Arabs). Meanwhile, a coarser hair texture is associated with Africanness

or the ascription of an African identity (Aziz, 2020). This may be particularly relevant in the experiences of female Sudanese migrants with ascribed identity pre-migration.

III. Racial identity among Sudanese migrants worldwide

Having provided an understanding of how the racial identities of participants can manifest in a pre-migration context, this section explores literature on the racial identity of Sudanese migrants after their migration to different countries. This is because studying the racial experiences of Sudanese migrants in other parts of the world can help inform discussion of the post-migration racial identities of Sudanese migrants in the UAE. Looking at racial identity among Sudanese migrants, Fabos (2012) conducted a study on female Sudanese migrants in the diaspora that explores the connection between Sudanese racial identity and migration from a gendered perspective. Specifically, the study reveals that the experiences of many Sudanese women in the diaspora in connection to racial identity manifest through the pressure to conform to Arabness from Arab, non-Sudanese people in their host community. This encourages many of them to put emphasis on an Arab identity through dress, perception of beauty standards, and belief in the importance of "Islamic morality" (Fabos, 2012). For instance, one participant expressed the desire to be seen as an Arab woman as opposed to an African woman, which is something she embodies through her decision to wear the Hijab, highlighting the connection between Islam and Arabness (Fabos, 2012). Other participants in the study discussed how the racist ideologies present in their host countries encouraged them to perform an Arab identity as opposed to an African identity (Fabos, 2012). Moreover, some participants reported using skin-bleaching creams in order to be ascribed a more Arab identity as opposed to an African identity, which reveals that the connection between beauty standards in Sudanese society and ascribed racial identities can also apply to Sudanese women outside of Sudan (Fabos, 2012). However, not all of the participants in the study reported a desire to perform an Arab identity. One of the participants stated that she refuses to use skin-bleaching creams due to her rejection of the Sudanese skin colour hierarchy and associating it with social inequality in Sudanese society (Fabos, 2012). Connecting this to the racial identity experiences of female Sudanese migrants in the UAE, it is likely that they will discuss their racial identities in connection to beauty standards related to Arabness and, more specifically, will report either pressure to perform an Arab identity or a rejection of the importance placed on the embodiment of Arab identity.

Looking at the manifestation of racial identity in specific geographical contexts, studies have shown that Sudanese migrants and refugees in Egypt are constantly subjected to racist attitudes and discrimination by members of their host community, which makes navigating their daily lives difficult (Primo, 2017). Despite the fact that a significant number of Egyptian people are dark-skinned (Primo, 2017), racist comments by members of Egyptian society toward Sudanese migrants who are darker in skin tone are common. Sudanese people in the UAE have reported being at the receiving end of comments like *ya shukalata* ("hey, chocolate") as a result of their skin color when walking the streets in Egypt (Primo, 2017). On the other hand, a study on the experiences of North Sudanese migrants in Australia showed that the most common type of racism encountered by North Sudanese migrants in Australia was an implicit form of racism present in the daily interactions between them and members of Australian society (Mahdi, 2020). In these situations, this kind of racism is not a direct result of the migrants' racial identity, but rather certain stereotypes associated with that racial identity such as an inability to speak proper English. There are, however, racist attitudes toward Sudanese migrants in Australia that are based on stereotypes surrounding Sudanese people in connection to their Africanness or Blackness, such as its association with gang violence and crime (Mahdi, 2020). Connecting this to the experiences of Sudanese migrants in the UAE, it is possible that Sudanese migrants in the UAE experience racist attitudes either based on their racial identity or their identity as migrants/foreigners. However, because the foreign population of the UAE is large, it is more likely that the former will occur.

In sum, this section has explored existing literature on the topic at hand in connection to (1) general theory on racial identity and the associations between identity and migration, (2) the manifestations of racial identity in contemporary Sudanese society, and (3) the manifestations of racial identity among Sudanese migrants worldwide. Particularly, existing literature on the association between identity and migration has conveyed that integrating into a new community and culture as a migrant can greatly influence the way one perceives and performs their racial self-identity, which may occur through code-switching, emphasizing certain parts of one's racial identity and downplaying others, or experiencing complete shifts in racial self-identification. Previous literature has also conveyed the impact of integrating into a new community on the ascription of racial identity on the migrant, which can then mani-

fest through being ascribed a different identity than one's self-identity and being ascribed a racial identity on the basis of skin color, hair texture, etc. Therefore, Sudanese migrants in the UAE may be ascribed an Arab or African identity based on their physical attributes, may experience negative forms of treatment as a result of ascribed identities, and may undergo shifts in racial self-identification. In terms of manifestations of racial identity in Sudanese society, certain perceptions of racial categories in Sudan such as the skin color hierarchy may influence whether Sudanese migrants are ascribed an Arab/African identity based on their skin color pre-migration. As for the manifestations of racial identity after migration, literature on this conveys the possibility that Sudanese migrants in the UAE will experience pressure to embody a more Arab than African identity, and they may also experience negative forms of treatment such as racist behavior due to being ascribed an African identity. However, while existing literature has explored Sudanese racial identity and how it manifests among Sudanese migrants in different parts of the world, it has not explored Sudanese racial identity in the context of migration to the UAE. This is a gap that my research aims to fill by examining the ways in which migration of Sudanese people to the UAE influences their ascribed and self-identified racial identities.

IV. Research Design

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, addressing the racial identities of Sudanese migrants in the context of the UAE is a valuable way to unpack the complexity of Sudanese racial identity given (1) what research has conveyed about the importance of studying identity in connection to migration, (2) the uniqueness of the UAE as a country whose cultural diversity reflects the mixed Arab/African nature of Sudanese ancestry, and (3) the lack of literature available on the intersection of Sudanese racial identity with migration to the UAE. Specifically, my research examined the following question: how does the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE influence their self-identified and ascribed racial identities, and how does this vary by gender? A total of nine interviews, an average of 90 minutes each, were conducted with first-generation Sudanese migrants in the UAE varying by gender who were above the age of eighteen, held a Sudanese passport, and had previously lived in Sudan for a minimum of ten years.

The participants were initially recruited through personal contacts given the tight-knit nature of the Sudanese community in the UAE, and as more migrants joined the participant sample, further recruitment was conducted through snowball sampling. Potential participants were contacted through social media platforms in order to obtain their email addresses, and they were then sent an email detailing the nature of the project and the eligibility criteria, as well as a participation information sheet communicating information regarding confidentiality.

Interviews were chosen over surveys because racial identity is personal and sensitive, especially in Sudan's conservative culture where such topics are rarely discussed openly. Interviews were a way to ease the process of disclosing information about racial identity experiences by allowing participants the opportunity to recount their experiences in a conversational setting. Four of the interviews were conducted in-person and five were online. Before each interview, participants were asked screening questions about the inclusion criteria detailed above to ensure that they were eligible for participation in the study, and once their fulfillment of the criteria was confirmed, verbal or written consent was obtained based on whether the interview was conducted online or in-person.

Six of the participants were male and three were female, and their ages ranged from 19 to 21. All of the participants were from Arabized tribes in North Sudan and were middle-class citizens, although two of them had lived in countries outside of Sudan. Most of the participants (around three-fourths) lived in the capital city, Khartoum. All of the participants reported having migrated to the UAE to attend university and have lived in the UAE for a period ranging from less than one year to two years. Four of the participants study at a private, liberal arts college in Abu Dhabi, and the rest study at a private university in Sharjah. Table 1 provides an overview of demographic data across the participants, as well as their post-migration racial self-identification.

The interview questions ranged from questions surrounding their racial self-identification to questions about their ascribed identities and their general experiences within the Sudanese and UAE communities. It is important to note that although participants were asked questions about their specific area of residence in Sudan, the tribe that they come from, etc., this information was not included in the discussion section below as it could be used to identify participants due to the closeness of the Sudanese community in the UAE. To further protect their identity, pseudonyms were used for the participants. In addition, quotes included in the discussion section were edited to improve grammar for ease of understanding, but this was done without any significant changes to the ideas discussed by participants. The interviews were generally very conversational in nature, but while this made communication easier, it posed some issues such as participants going outside the scope of the interview, asking personal questions,

Table 1: *Demographic Profiles of Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Years Lived in Sudan	Years Lived in the UAE	Emirate of Residence	Racial self-identification
Ahmed	20	Male	18	2	Abu Dhabi	Afro-Arab
Sara	19	Female	18	1	Abu Dhabi	Afro-Arab
Samir	19	Male	12	Less than one year	Abu Dhabi	Afro-Arab
Amin	21	Male	19	Less than one year	Abu Dhabi	Afro-Arab
Suraya	20	Female	18	2	Sharjah	African
Muna	19	Female	18	Less than one year	Sharjah	African
Abdulrahman	20	Male	18	2	Sharjah	Afro-Arab
Mohammed	20	Male	18	2	Sharjah	Afro-Arab
Amir	20	Male	18	2	Sharjah	Afro-Arab

etc., which was largely due to my own positionality as a Sudanese person. The fact that I was Sudanese as well often overtook my position as the interviewer, leading participants to sometimes forget that an interview was taking place and view me as a Sudanese friend to whom they could ask personal questions and discuss certain topics that they would otherwise not discuss with a non-Sudanese interviewer. I navigated these issues of positionality by learning how to maintain a certain level of professionality that was not so formal as to affect the conversational nature of the interview but also not so informal as to distract from the interview questions.

Another issue was that interviews were sometimes conducted in both Arabic and English, so the continuous switching between Arabic and English resulted in some disorientation and confusion in the first few interviews. However, this issue was overcome as more interviews were conducted and when I became more adept at switching between the two languages without losing sight of the main topics that need to be discussed.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded (with the participants' consent), and the recordings were transcribed using Sonix, an audio transcription software that transcribes both English and Arabic audio. The transcripts were then coded using MAXQDA using closed coding. The codes were categorized as denoting either ascribed racial identities before and after migration or self-identified racial identities before and after migration in order to make connections between the participants' experiences and the research question at hand. These connections are explored in depth in the discussion section below. Moreover, although participants varied across several demographic aspects, gender seemed to be the only factor of difference for participants' experiences with racial identity before and after migration to the UAE.

V. Discussion

Generally, participants discussed their racial identities before and after migration to the UAE in terms of the dynamics of their interactions with different groups of people, the treatment they received from others, the way they were perceived by the wider society, and other experiences during their time in Sudan and the UAE. I organize my discussion of participants' accounts of these various experiences in Sudan and the UAE in terms of how they shaped their ascribed and self-identified racial identities before and after migration. Since the research question revolves around the ways that migration to the UAE influences the ascribed and self-identified racial identities of Sudanese migrants, this section discusses participants' experiences by dividing them into two categories: (1) shifts in ascribed racial identity and (2) shifts in self-identified racial identity. In addition, because the research question aims to address how participants' experiences with racial identity vary by gender, this section will also discuss some of the observed gender-based differences in relation to shifts in ascribed and self-identified racial identity.

I. Post-migration shifts in ascribed racial identity

Participants' discussion of ascribed identity before and after migration to the UAE highlighted the impact of physical characteristics such as skin color on being perceived as Arab, African, etc. However, although physical appearance played a role in participants' ascribed racial identities in both Sudan and the UAE, the interviews revealed these ascribed identities tended to differ in the UAE compared to Sudan. In Sudan, around two-thirds of the light-skinned participants mentioned being ascribed an Arab identity as a result of their light complexion, but in the UAE, around three-fourths reported not being ascribed an Arab identity in the UAE.

Of those, around half were ascribed an African identity and the other half were not ascribed a racial identity at all but rather had their Sudanese national identity questioned. In addition, around four-fifths of the participants ascribed an African identity in the UAE said that they encountered racist treatment as a result of that ascription, which did not happen in Sudan. This occurred for both light-skinned and dark-skinned participants. Finally, the interviews revealed that four-fifths of participants that were ascribed an African or another non-Arab racial identity (three-fourths of all participants were ascribed a non-Arab racial identity in the UAE) mentioned that this often manifested in the form of their Arabness being continuously questioned and doubted by Arab members of UAE society, creating an environment where they felt pressured to prove that they are Arab.

Looking first at the idea of light-skinned participants being ascribed different identities in Sudan and the UAE, Amin – a 21-year-old migrant who lived in Sudan for the majority of his life and who identifies as Afro-Arab – described experiences with members of Sudanese society that imply the ascription of an Arab identity to him as a result of his skin tone.

> People in Sudan kind of prefer the Arab [identity] and so, in a sense, they prefer lighter skin tones.. they look at the darker complexion in a negative manner... So I guess one example of positive treatment is that they would compliment me. They would say, "your complexion is nice."

Amin highlights the connection between light skin and Arabness in Sudan and echoes what Aziz (2020) described about the presence of a skin color hierarchy in Sudan in which light and dark skin tones are associated with Arabness and Africanness, respectively. Moreover, Amin mentions that he was complimented for his light complexion, which supports Aziz's discussion of the impact of having light skin and receiving positive treatment in Sudanese society. Given the association between Arabness and light skin, as well as the association between having light skin and receiving positive treatment, Amin being complimented for his skin tone implies the ascription of an Arab identity to him in Sudan. Suraya – a 20-year-old migrant who identifies as African and only lived in Sudan until migrating to the UAE two years ago – also mentioned being ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan as a result of her light complexion.

> I am light-skinned or of lighter skin, like I'm fair-toned and a lot of my extended family is white... So for me, I got referred to as *halabia*...I think because of lighter skin, people would assume that I'm Arab.

This reveals a direct association between having a light skin tone and being ascribed an Arab identity by members of Sudanese society, which supports Amin's experience with being perceived as Arab in Sudan. This is further emphasized through Suraya's discussion of being referred to as *halabia* (female for *halabi*). As mentioned earlier, *halabi* is a term associated with Arabness/Arab identity due to being used to refer to Arab settlers in Sudan in the past (Malik, 2008). Therefore, Suraya being referred to as *halabia* in Sudan as a result of her light skin colour confirms the ascription of an Arab identity to her. This is something that other light-skinned participants ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan mentioned. Most (around three-fourths) of them, particularly those who had a complexion that was perceived as being "too light" in Sudan, reported being referred to as *halabi/halabia* by members of Sudanese society as a way to ascribe an Arab identity to them.

However, as mentioned earlier, although Amin, Suraya, and other light-skinned participants reported being ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan, this was not the case for many of them in the UAE. Specifically, half of the light-skinned participants who were ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan mentioned being ascribed an African identity in the UAE, and the other half were not ascribed a racial identity but rather had their Sudanese identity questioned. For instance, despite his ascribed Arab identity in Sudan due to being light-skinned, Ahmed – a 20-year-old migrant who identifies as Afro-Arab and only lived in Sudan before migrating to the UAE two years ago – was never ascribed an Arab identity in the UAE. Instead, he was ascribed an African/Black identity.

> I wouldn't say that anyone in the UAE would call me Arab [...] I can't imagine someone in the UAE saying, "Oh, me and you are both Arab,"... I think it's just like, "you're Black"

On the other hand, Amin reported often not being ascribed a specific racial identity in the UAE, but rather having his national (Sudanese) identity doubted by his peers due to his light skin tone.

> They would try to find loopholes ... "Have you lived your whole life in Sudan?", "What about your parents then? Are they also Sudanese?"... I think they have the idea that Sudanese people are all black, like dark-skinned.

By doubting the fact that Amin is Sudanese, his peers are communicating the assumption that all Sudanese people are dark-skinned, thus conveying the presence of a connection between Africaness and being Sudanese in their minds and, as a result, the ascription of an African identity to Sudanese people, though not to Amin. Moreover, by trying to find loopholes that would somehow reduce the authenticity of his Sudanese identity, his peers were trying to reconcile their assumptions about what a Sudanese person should look like with Amin's identity. Amin's story mirrors those of other participants whose Sudanese identities were questioned. There was continuous reference to situations in which having their Sudanese identity led to people trying to find loopholes in order to reconcile their assumptions about them with their identities. This, in turn, created an environment in which they felt pressured to prove their Sudanese identity to their peers.

In short, while the majority of light-skinned participants reported being ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan, the majority of them reported not being ascribed an Arab identity in the UAE—they were either ascribed an African identity or had their Sudanese identity questioned by their peers. The reason behind this might be understood by going back to what was discussed earlier about the racial structures and hierarchies present in UAE society, particularly in terms of what a "true" Arab identity is perceived to be. Because "true" Arabness in the UAE is focused on an individual's Arab genealogy, it is likely that skin color and other aspects commonly associated with ascribed identity do not play as important a role in determining the "authenticity" of one's Arab identity in the UAE, and because it is difficult to clearly define the Arab ancestry of Sudanese people, being light skinned as a Sudanese may not be enough for one to be ascribed an Arab identity in the UAE. However, in Sudan, ascribed racial identity is associated with skin color (Fabos, 2012), which explains why most light-skinned participants were ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan while most were not ascribed one in the UAE. With regards to being ascribed an African identity or having one's national identity questioned as a light-skinned Sudanese in the UAE, this can be understood by examining the association between race and skin color in UAE society. Although being perceived as Arab in the UAE is mainly associated with having clearly defined Arab ancestry, being ascribed an African or Black identity is mainly associated with being dark-skinned. Therefore, given that Sudanese people are known to be dark-skinned (Abubakr, 2021), being light-skinned may not be enough to remove this preexisting ascription of African identity to Sudanese people, which explains why some light-skinned participants reported being ascribed an African identity in the UAE. This also explains having one's national identity questioned as a light-skinned Sudanese—the preexisting ascription of African identity to Sudanese people will likely lead to the assumption that a Sudanese person is one that is dark-skinned rather than light-skinned.

In terms of the experiences of dark-skinned participants, many of them mentioned being ascribed an African identity both in Sudan and the UAE, but in the UAE, this ascribed identity often perpetuated racist treatment, which was not the case in Sudan. This echoes what Primo (2017) discussed about the experiences of Sudanese migrants with racist treatment in their host communities as a result of being perceived as African or Black. Muna — a 19-year-old migrant who identifies as African and only lived in Sudan until migrating to the UAE less than a year ago — mentioned often being perceived as African in Sudan, and while this involved family members being bothered by "African" aspects of her appearance such as her curly hair texture and making comments about them, these negative behaviors were less racist than those she encountered in the UAE. Specifically, she mentioned that the reactions that she would receive because of her curly hair were in the form of subtle behaviors.

> I would say passive aggression and like condescending comments. . . We were going to a wedding.. and I decided to wear my hair curly. [People would say], "you look really nice, your makeup is nice, but your hair straight would look better."

What this reveals is that although Muna was ascribed an African identity in Sudan, this was associated with subtle racist comments and behaviors made by family members as opposed to overly racist treatment rooted in discriminatory behavior. Sara, who is also 19 (lived only in Sudan until migrating to the UAE a year ago) and identifies as Afro-Arab, mentioned that she was sometimes ascribed an African identity when she was in Sudan due to her curly texture and dark skin colour. However, similar to Muna, this manifested in the form of subtly racist comments made by people around her regarding her physical appearance. However, when she came to the UAE, her experiences with ascribed identity were overly racist. Mohammed, a 20-year-old migrant who has lived in Sudan his entire life and identifies as Afro-Arab, mentioned that in Sudan, his dark skin color led to the ascription of an African identity to him but that this did not perpetuate any racist behavior toward him due to the fact that most people in Sudan are similar to him in skin color. How-

ever, when he migrated to the UAE, he discussed how the ascription of an African identity to him because of his dark complexion led to racist treatment by people such as his Jordanian football coach, who often treated him unfairly compared to his light-skinned Arab teammates.

> I feel like he [the coach] does view me as Black… if I was an Egyptian or another Arab that has a lighter skin tone, I would be getting more playtime as opposed to my other teammates. For example, me and my Moroccan teammate, we have the same exact skill set, but the coach would pick the lighter Moroccan player over me just based on colour.

This reveals that the ascription of African identity to Mohammed in the UAE as a result of his skin colour perpetuated racist treatment toward him in the form of not being given the same opportunities as his light-skinned Arab teammate, which has racist connotations. He believes that if he was Egyptian or another Arab that has a lighter skin tone than he does, he would be treated fairly. This type of racist behavior further supports Primo's (2017) discussion about racist treatment toward different members of the Sudanese diaspora.

However, while this conveys the presence of racist treatment toward dark-skinned participants who were ascribed an African identity in the UAE, such treatment is not specific to dark-skinned Sudanese. As mentioned earlier, some light-skinned participants who were ascribed an African identity in the UAE also encountered racist behavior from others, which they did not encounter in Sudan. However, it is important to note that not experiencing such treatment in Sudan could be due to the fact that, as discussed, most light-skinned participants were ascribed an Arab identity in Sudan, which is an identity that is not targeted with racism in Sudanese society.

Ahmed, who was ascribed an African identity in the UAE, mentioned encountering racist behavior on multiple occasions despite being light-skinned.

> I was personally called a derogatory term that has to do with racial identity […] I remember also… there were two people discussing how me and my friend who was also Black do not understand common decency, and we bring our uncivilized selves to this university, so they don't blame us because we just don't know any better.

In Ahmed's case, the racist treatment he encountered manifested in the form of derogatory terms being directed at him, which echoes what Primo (2017) noted about Sudanese people in Egypt experiencing racism, as well as in the form of stereotypes associated with Black or African people, such as the idea that they are indecent and uncivilized. More broadly, Ahmed's story conveys that being ascribed an African identity as a Sudanese in the UAE, regardless of whether the individual is light-skinned or dark-skinned, can perpetuate racist treatment toward them.

In order to understand why this is the case, it is important to refer to what was discussed earlier about the way African or Black people have been perceived and treated over the course of the UAE's history. Given the history of economic racialization that was based on the supposed racial inferiority of Black people, leading to Black Africans being shipped to the UAE and forced to work in undesirable manual jobs, as well as the modern-day version of economic racialization in which more Black Africans are placed in low-wage jobs in the UAE compared to other races, it is very likely that those who are perceived as African in UAE society have negative value judgments placed on them, possibly in connection to being incapable, uncivilized, indecent, etc. Therefore, Sudanese people who are ascribed an African identity in the UAE may also have negative judgments placed on them as a result of that ascription, which is emphasized by stories like Ahmed's in which he reported being perceived as uncivilized and indecent, implying the existence of negative value judgments similar to those placed on African slaves in the past and African migrant workers employed in low-skilled jobs. As for why this racist treatment did not occur in Sudan, this is possibly due to the fact that while being perceived as African in historical Sudanese society was associated with racist and discriminatory behavior, there is nothing in the literature on racial identity in contemporary Sudanese society discussed earlier that conveys the current existence of such behavior in Sudan. Moreover, in the past such racist behavior in Sudan was directed toward those that were non-Arabized people (e.g. people from South Sudan), so even if it does exist today, it will very likely not be directed toward Arabized Sudanese people in North Sudan, which is the community that all the participants came from. With regard to why more dark-skinned than light-skinned participants encountered this racist behavior, this is very likely because, as mentioned earlier, more dark-skinned participants than light-skinned participants were ascribed an African identity in the UAE, which is understandable given the strong association between having a dark complexion and being perceived as African by members of UAE society.

Lastly, the interviews revealed that for the majority

of the participants that were ascribed a non-Arab identity (i.e. those ascribed an African or another non-Arab identity) in the UAE, this ascribed identity manifested in the form of having their "Arabness" questioned and doubted by Arabs and making them feel the need to prove that they are Arab, which they did not experience in Sudan. For instance, Sara mentioned that when she interacted with Arabs in the UAE, their ascription of an African identity to her occurred in the form of questioning her ability to speak Arabic.

> I'm still not associating myself with Arab people… it's like this huge role-play that comes into it that I'm honestly tired of, so I'm sticking to the Black community… I'm not against associating with Arabs. I just prefer not to, so I don't go into this whole cycle of, "Oh my God, you speak Arabic! How can you speak Arabic?" And I have to go all through the process of, "Oh, yeah, because it's our official language in Sudan."

The fact that constantly being questioned about whether or not she speaks Arabic leads to Sara having to constantly explain her ability to do so conveys the pressure that she feels to prove that she is Arab in such situations, which reveals an association between speaking Arabic and performing a more Arab identity. But more importantly, it reveals that Sara being ascribed an African identity by Arabs in the UAE results in situations where she has to prove a racial identity that opposes her actual self-identification, which she did not experience when she was in Sudan. Therefore, the ascription of an African or another non-Arab identity by Arabs in the UAE may lead to pressure to prove or perform a racial identity that is separate from one's self-identified identity. In terms of possible explanations for having one's Arabness questioned by Arabs in the UAE, one explanation could be the environment of Arab supremacy in the UAE associated with the superiority of Arabs and the inferiority of those of other races, particularly African or Black people. Such a sense of superiority may cause some Arabs in the UAE to ascribe an African or another non-Arab identity to others by separating those people from themselves as much as they can, such as by doubting their ability to speak Arabic, in order to remain as a separate, superior racial category.

Looking at some of the gender differences observed in the aforementioned shifts in ascribed identity, the interviews revealed that female participants who reported experiencing racist treatment as a result of ascribed African identity in the UAE linked it mainly to their hair texture, while male participants linked it mainly to their skin color. This is possibly connected to the significance of hair in the perception of women compared to the perception of men; hair is a more noticeable aspect of women's appearance compared to men. This may result in more female participants than male participants experiencing negative treatment related to hair texture. Because more focus was placed on female participants' hair texture compared to male participants, it is likely that less focus is placed on female participants' skin color compared to male participants. This, in turn, may lead to more male participants than female participants experiencing racist treatment as a result of skin color. In addition, the interviews revealed that, overall, male participants tended to experience more racist treatment compared to female participants as a result of ascribed African identity in the UAE. This may be due to the idea that male participants are more readily perceived as African than female participants. Another difference was that when interacting with Arab members of UAE society, male participants that were ascribed an African or another non-Arab racial identity felt a greater need to perform an Arab identity or prove that they are Arab after migration compared to female participants who were ascribed a non-Arab identity by Arabs. This could be connected to the differences in racial treatment experienced by male and female participants. Encountering more racist treatment might have discouraged male participants from identifying as African due to the belief that it will exacerbate the racism they encounter, and it might have also led to them feeling a greater need to perform an Arab identity with Arabs compared to female participants as a way to prevent further racist treatment.

In sum, this section has explored shifts across participants' ascribed identities as a result of migration to the UAE. These shifts manifested in the following ways: (1) most light-skinned participants were not ascribed an Arab identity in the UAE which they were ascribed in Sudan; (2) most participants ascribed an African identity in the UAE (both light-skinned and dark-skinned) experienced racist treatment, which they did not experience in Sudan; and (3) most participants that were ascribed an African or another non-Arab racial identity in the UAE mentioned that this manifested through having their "Arabness" questioned and feeling the need to prove that they are Arab, which did not happen in Sudan. In terms of gender-based differences across these findings, male participants tended to experience more racist treatment as a result of ascribed identity after migration than female participants. Moreover, while male participants mainly experienced racist treatment in the UAE in connection to their skin color, female participants mainly experienced it in connection to their

hair texture. In addition, male participants that were ascribed an African or another non-Arab racial identity felt a greater need to perform an Arab identity or prove that they are Arab when interacting with Arabs in the UAE compared to female participants.

II. Post-migration shifts in self-identified racial identity

Throughout the interviews, participants reported shifts in the nature of their racial self-identities after migration, as well as their expression and public performance of those identities. Specifically, some of the participants (around one-fourth) who self-identified as Afro-Arab mentioned being able to more fully experience and express their self-identities in the UAE compared to Sudan. On the other hand, some participants (around one-fifth) who identified as Afro-Arab mentioned that their self-identity shifted at different points in time after migration as a result of feeling more Arab than African or vice versa in various situations. In addition, around two-thirds of participants reported either explicitly or implicitly being encouraged to distance themselves from the "Africanness" of their self-identities when they were in Sudan, which they did not experience when they came to the UAE. Rather, their connection to their Africanness was often reinforced after migration. Lastly, most (around two-thirds) of participants reported expressing their Africanness through physical appearance more often in the UAE than in Sudan.

Looking first at the experiences of self-identified Afro-Arab participants with self-identified racial identity in Sudan and the UAE, Samir – a 19-year-old migrant who has lived the majority of his life in Sudan – discussed the disapproval that he encountered from his Sudanese friends toward his self-identification as Afro-Arab in Sudan:

> There were some people who told me that Afro-Arab is not a thing. It's non-existent. There were people in my old school who [said], "no, there's nothing like that; you're either this or you're either that."

This contradiction to Samir's self-identification as Afro-Arab by his peers in Sudan conveys the presence of a negative association in their minds with a Sudanese person identifying as Afro-Arab. One reason for the opposition to Samir's self-identification as Afro-Arab might be the fact that, as mentioned by all the participants, race and racial identity are not discussed in Sudan, which makes many Sudanese people ignorant about the complexities of racial identity. This, in turn, may lead to an opposition to the idea of racial identity itself, let alone the idea of having more than one racial identity. But more importantly, the negative perception toward Samir's Afro-Arab identity is something that might explain the lack of expression of self-identity in Sudan that other Afro-Arab participants, including Samir, reported. However, after migrating to the UAE, many of those participants mentioned being able to more fully experience and express their Afro-Arab identities. For instance, Ahmed mentioned being able to more fully express his Afro-Arab identity in the UAE by having the opportunity to simultaneously show his Arab and African sides.

> The durag that I have on right now, or the braids that I have on right now, these are, of course, very African in nature, a lot more African than Arab. So that's how I connect with my African identity. And I guess the way that I connect with my Arab identity is that I speak a lot of Arabic when I'm with my Sudanese friends, or my other Arab friends.

In this way, through being able to simultaneously show "African" and "Arab" aspects of his appearance and expression, namely wearing a durag and braids and speaking Arabic, Ahmed is able to simultaneously show the Arab and African sides of his identity in the UAE, allowing him to fully experience and express his Afro-Arab identity, which he was not able to do in Sudan. Ahmed, along with other participants with an Afro-Arab identity, also mentioned that his ability to more fully express his Afro-Arab identity in the UAE compared to Sudan was rooted in having the opportunity to experience the racial fluidity that came with having both Arab and African identities within his self-identification in the UAE, which echoes what was mentioned earlier about the fluidity of racial identity in those with multiple racial identities. As discussed, the fluidity of racial identity manifests through *identity flexibility*, which refers to the ability of people with multiple identities to choose which identities to perform to the public in different situations, allowing one to more fully express their multiracial identity. Similarly, Ahmed and other participants who identified with an Afro-Arab identity mentioned that, when they came to the UAE, they were able to more fully express that identity through taking advantage of the fluidity of their racial identity, which they did through identity flexibility. In Ahmed's case, he often experienced this flexibility through code-switching:

> Let's say I'm around my friends from West Africa. I don't know how to explain it, but I

> display a much more African than Arab perception... But then if I'm with my friends from Egypt, which is a much, much, much more Arab country, I even change my accent in Arabic, in order to match their accent.

It is interesting that Ahmed's performance of a more Arab identity to his friends from Egypt, which he perceives as a more Arab country than Sudan, often manifests in his choice of accent when speaking to them in Arabic. He changes his Arabic accent in order to match theirs, revealing that verbal expression in the form of accents, languages, etc. can act as a method by which one can alter their public racial identity by emphasizing one side of their identity over another. This is an idea that was reflected in Jones-Correa's (2020) discussion of the tendency of some migrants to emphasize certain aspects of their identity and downplay others in order to fit into their host community, as well as Lo's (2007) discussion of migrants' tendency toward code-switching as a form of social integration. Through this code-switching or, more generally, identity flexibility, Ahmed had the opportunity to experience the racial fluidity of his Afro-Arab identity in the UAE, allowing him to more fully embody his Afro-Arab identity, which he was not able to do as often in Sudan.

In order to understand why some Afro-Arab participants like Ahmed were able to more fully embody and express their self-identities in the UAE compared to Sudan, it is important to bring into the discussion what was mentioned earlier about the multicultural environment of the UAE. Given that the UAE community has a large expatriate population that includes people from Arab and African countries, participants meet and interact with those backgrounds more often in the UAE than in Sudan, a country that consists mainly of Sudanese people and has a small migrant population. With this greater likelihood of interacting with Arab and African people comes a greater likelihood of experiencing identity flexibility or, more specifically, code-switching between Arab and African identities as an Afro-Arab in the UAE compared to Sudan. This, in turn, contributes to the ability of Afro-Arab participants to experience the fluidity of their multiracial identities more fully in the UAE.

On the other hand, some Afro-Arab participants reported shifts in the nature of their self-identities in terms of identifying more with their Arab or African sides after migration. Sara, who identifies as Afro-Arab, mentioned that she felt more Arab or more African at different points in time when she migrated to the UAE due to interacting with groups of people coming from various nationalities and races, which echoes what Bhugra (2004) discussed about the impact of encountering a new culture on shifts in a migrant's ethnocultural identity. These are shifts in self-identification that she did not experience in Sudan given the small migrant population of the country that made it less likely for her to interact with different cultures.

> I feel like they made me feel more Arab than ever... music is a very important thing in Africa, and as I said, the Sudanese music is not African. It doesn't have an African essence to it... my friends are mostly African, Jamaican... And that's where I noticed we do have a lot of Arab influence. So our culture, the influence of the Arabs is more predominant.

Sara's mention of the connection between "feeling more Arab" in this situation and realizing the degree of Arab influence on Sudanese culture reveals that there is a connection between culture and racial identity. Being more aware of the Arab aspects of Sudanese culture made Sara connect more with the Arab side of her identity in certain situations after migrating to the UAE. More importantly, Sara associates connecting more with her Arab side in this situation with her interactions with the Black community as opposed to the Arab community. This could be due to the fact that (1) Sara does not often associate with Arabs in the UAE or (2) as discussed, one's Arabness can be questioned or doubted when interacting with the Arab community if one is ascribed a non-Arab identity which, as mentioned earlier, was the case with Sara. This, in turn, may make it harder for her to identify more with the Arab side of her identity when interacting with Arabs due to possibly internalizing the doubt surrounding her "Arabness". But more importantly, Sara's experience echoes what other Afro-Arab participants mentioned about the impact of migration to the UAE on connecting more with the Arab or African sides of their identity in different situations or, in other words, shifts in racial self-identification.

The interviews also showed that most participants were either implicitly or explicitly discouraged from connecting with their Africanness in Sudan, which was not the case in the UAE, and that their connection to their Africanness was often reinforced after migration. For example, Amin, who identifies as Afro-Arab, highlighted the fact that he was implicitly encouraged to distance himself from the African side of his identity in Sudan and shift more toward an Arab identity due to ideologies surrounding Africanness in Sudanese society.

> In Sudan, I felt like there was a bias against Africa, and they would try to detach them-

> selves from the African identity. . . they prefer the Arab identity. So in that sense, I think I was encouraged to stay away from the Africanness of my identity and just steer more towards the Arab identity.

Such ideologies surrounding Africanness or, more specifically, the inferiority of the African identity compared to Arab identity echoes what was discussed earlier about how Sudanese society perceived Africanness in the past. It is therefore possible that ideologies surrounding the connection between slavery and Africanness, as well as other historical perceptions around the inferiority of the African identity and the superiority of the Arab identity, still persist today (Sharkey, 2008). This explains the encouragement to detach from one's Africanness and adopt a more Arab identity in Sudan. However, Amin and the other participants discouraged from connecting with their Africanness in Sudan mentioned that this was not the case in the UAE and that, as mentioned earlier, their connection to their Africanness was often reinforced after migration. For example, Amin discussed the preference for the African side of his identity after migrating to the UAE. When asked why, Amin mentioned that he began to exclude himself from the Arab side of his identity after migration, and his Africanness became more prominent as a result.

> I didn't even try to include myself in Arab communities [. . .] I think that I kind of excluded myself from my Arab identity. . . it's not an environment I feel comfortable in. . . most of my circle is non-Arabs.

By surrounding himself with non-Arabs and distancing himself from the Arab community, Amin was also distancing himself from the Arab side of his identity, which led to the African side of his identity being emphasized. Amin's reason for excluding himself from Arabs in the UAE is rooted in what was explored earlier about having one's Arabness questioned or doubted as a result of being ascribed a non-Arab identity by Arabs and, as a result, feeling the need to prove that one is Arab.

> I think why I feel this discomfort is because I feel this pressure to be more Arab. . . So when I am interacting with Arabs, I feel that I'm not Arab enough.

Given that Amin identifies as Afro-Arab, the pressure to prove an identity that opposes his self-identification makes him uncomfortable during interactions with Arabs, leading him to exclude himself from Arabs and the Arab side of his identity after migration. In addition, while Amin mentioned often not being ascribed a specific racial identity in the UAE and instead having his national identity questioned as discussed earlier, he mentioned during the interview that he was sometimes ascribed an African identity in the UAE. This is what occurred in situations where he felt the need to prove that he was Arab, causing the African side of his self-identity to be reinforced after migration. This conveys the impact that ascribed identity can have on participants' self-identification in the UAE.

In terms of why most participants were not encouraged to distance themselves from their Africanness in the UAE, which was the case in Sudan, it can also be understood by discussing ascribed identity. Since most participants were ascribed a non-Arab identity in the UAE, it is understandable that most participants were not discouraged from their Africanness as maintaining connection with that Africanness makes it easier for people to ascribe a non-Arab identity to them. Moreover, if the identity being ascribed to them is African and the people ascribing that identity are Arab, the idea of Arab supremacy explored earlier becomes relevant as a reason for not discouraging participants from their Africanness. This is because not discouraging participants they perceive as African from their Africanness is possibly a way for them to ensure that those participants will remain connected to their African identity and not shift toward an Arab identity, allowing them to maintain their superiority as Arabs and the idea that Africans are inferior to them. This idea of ensuring that participants will not shift toward an Arab identity is supported by what Muna, who was ascribed an African identity in the UAE, mentioned about Arabs not wanting Sudanese people that they perceive as African to identify as Arab.

> I feel like Arabs don't want us to identify with them[. . .] I feel like they have this internalized feeling that we're not part of them. . . it's still internal in them that we're not the same.

In short, not being encouraged to distance themselves from their Africanness in the UAE, which was the case in Sudan, is possibly connected to the ideology of Arab supremacy that some Arabs who ascribe an African identity to participants may want to reinforce.

Finally, when it comes to the expression of their self-identification, most participants reported that they expressed their Africanness through physical appearance more often in the UAE than in Sudan. Ahmed, for instance, indicated that his expression of the African

side of his identity through certain physical characteristics in the UAE was something that he never did in Sudan.

> Right now I'm wearing a durag with braids underneath, and I'm wearing rings, and I'm wearing a bracelet, and a necklace, and all of that. And these are things that I would never do in Sudan [. . .] my parents and my family now know that here I wear braids, and jewelry, and all of that. And they don't mind it as long as I know that I shouldn't do the same back home.

In Ahmed's case, his performance of the African side of his identity is connected to aspects like hairstyle, dress, jewelry, etc. While he incorporates these aspects into his appearance in the UAE, he did not do this in Sudan. This is reinforced by his family members, who communicate to him that he should not publicly show these aspects in Sudan. In terms of other participants who reported expressing their Africanness through physical appearance more often in the UAE than in Sudan, this was shaped by more implicit negative attitudes toward "African" parts of their physical appearance in Sudan. Muna, as mentioned earlier, often received negative comments about her curly hair texture in Sudan, which was her only way to express her African identity.

> I feel like I really used my hair as an, as like, like as a symbol of my Africaness. . . because I honestly had nothing else, it's not like I spoke Swahili or anything — I was speaking Arabic. I've noticed in a lot of my relatives that did identify as Arab were very bothered by my hair because I have a very big, coily afro.

By making negative comments about Muna's hair, members of Sudanese society were making it more difficult for her to express her African identity. Because she had no other "African" aspects to use as a reflection of her self-identity, her hair was the only representation of her Africanness. However, when she came to the UAE, Muna did not encounter any negative reactions to her hair texture, and was therefore more able to express her African identity through her physical appearance. The reason for participants not expressing their Africanness through physical appearance as often in Sudan as in the UAE is possibly connected to what was mentioned about participants being encouraged to distance themselves from their African identity in Sudan. Given that participants were discouraged from connecting with their African identity in Sudan, it is understandable that they did not express their Africanness through physical appearance as often in Sudan as they did in the UAE.

Looking at some of the observed gender-based differences related to self-identified racial identity, one observed difference was that female participants performed their "Africanness" through physical appearance in the UAE more often than male participants. The reason for this possibly lies in the fact that female participants were more discouraged from expressing their Africanness in Sudan compared to male participants given the strong association between "Arab" physical characteristics and female beauty standards in Sudanese society. This might have led to female participants feeling a greater need to express their Africanness through physical appearance after migrating to the UAE compared to male participants. Moreover, female participants performing their "Africanness" through physical characteristics after migration did so mainly through their hair, while male participants did so mainly through dress and other aspects, which is likely due to what was mentioned earlier about the greater significance of hair in women's appearance compared to men.

In sum, this section has explored the observed shifts in participants' self-identified racial identities as a result of migration to the UAE. These shifts were connected to both the nature of participants' self-identified racial identities and the expression of those identities, and they manifested in the following ways: (1) some participants who self-identified as Afro-Arab were able to more fully experience and express their self-identities in the UAE compared to Sudan; (2) some Afro-Arab participants experienced changes in self-identity through identifying more with their Arab or African sides at different points in time after migration; (3) most participants were not discouraged from connecting with their "Africanness" in the UAE and their Africanness was often reinforced after migration, which was not the case for them in Sudan; and (4) most participants expressed their Africanness through physical appearance more often in the UAE than in Sudan. In terms of gender-based variations across these shifts in self-identified racial identity, female participants expressed their Africanness through physical appearance in the UAE more often than female participants, and while this expression mainly occurred through hair for female participants, it occurred through dress and other aspects for male participants.

VI. Conclusion

The aim of my research was to explore the connection between migration to the UAE and Sudanese racial identity. Specifically, my research aimed to address the following question: how can the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE influence their ascribed and self-identified racial identities, and how does this vary by gender? The motivation behind addressing this question lies in what previous research has revealed about the importance of studying identity in connection to migration, the uniqueness of the UAE as a majority-migrant country which combines both Arab and African races, and the lack of literature available on the intersection of Sudanese racial identity with migration to the UAE.

To answer this question, interviews were conducted with nine first-generation Sudanese migrants in the UAE varying by gender, and data was collected about their experiences with ascribed and self-identified racial identity before and after migrating to the UAE through discussions about their interactions with others, the forms of treatment they received, and other aspects of their time in Sudan and the UAE. Given what participants reported in relation to these experiences, it seems that the migration of Sudanese people to the UAE can influence their ascribed and self-identified racial identities in various ways, such as by making light-skinned Sudanese people less likely to be ascribed an Arab identity, making Sudanese people generally more likely to experience racist treatment as a result of ascribed identity, allowing Sudanese people identifying as Afro-Arab to more fully express their self-identities, and even causing shifts in these identities by making them feel more Arab or more African at different points in time after migration. In terms of the ways shifts in ascribed and self-identified racial identity can vary by gender, these include Sudanese men being more likely to experience racist treatment after migration as a result of ascribed identity than Sudanese women, Sudanese men feeling a greater need than women to prove their Arabness when interacting with Arabs who ascribe a non-Arab identity to them in the UAE, and Sudanese women who identify as African or Afro-Arab expressing their Africanness through physical appearance more often than men post-migration.

Although the data collected from the interviews was enough to fully address the research question at hand, there were three main limitations of the study that, if addressed, could have enhanced its generalizability to the larger Sudanese migrant population in the UAE: (1) the high male-to-female ratio of participants, (2) the fact that all of the participants were young adults between the ages of 19 and 21, and (3) the lack of inclusion of other factors for variation such as age or social class. With regards to the disproportionate ratio of female to male participants, this could have been the reason for the gender-based differences that were observed rather than other factors related to how Sudanese men and women experience racial identity differently, thus influencing the representativeness of the gender-related findings of the study. As for the fact that all the participants were young adults, this impacts the generalizability of the findings to older members of the Sudanese migrant population in the UAE. Moreover, the fact that all of the participants were university students and have not spent many years in the UAE is another limitation to generalizability as these aspects could confine their experiences in the UAE. Lastly, although gender acts as a way to highlight the nuance of Sudanese racial identity, exploring other factors such as age, social class, etc. across which Sudanese racial identity in the UAE could vary would have further highlighted this nuance.

Looking at the implications and contributions of the study (and given that no research has been conducted on the intersection between Sudanese racial identity and migration to the UAE) my research fills the gap in the research available on Sudanese racial identity. Moreover, by exploring the different ways in which self-identified and ascribed racial identity can transform and manifest differently across various participants who come from the same country, my study has expanded on existing theory on the fluidity and complexity of racial identity. The study has also shown that migration can impact ascribed and self-identified racial identity in various ways, thus contributing to the research available on the connection between migration and identity. Finally, by understanding the ways in which the racial ambiguity of Sudanese people manifests in a migration context, my research builds an understanding of how other racially ambiguous migrant populations may experience racial identity after migration and the accommodations that should be made to help them better navigate that identity, which would ease their integration into their host communities. Specifically, my study conveys the need to direct policy-making toward reducing negative forms of treatment directed at Sudanese and other racially ambiguous migrant populations, as well as the need to educate the public on how to better integrate those migrants into various spaces and avoid personal biases and negative perceptions when interacting with them. Future research should therefore be aimed at addressing the policy aspect of racial identity in a migration context, keeping in mind the limitations discussed above in order to ensure a higher level of generalizability. Future studies conducted on Sudanese racial identity in

the UAE should possibly also consider comparing the racial identity experiences of North Sudanese migrants with the racial identity experiences of South Sudanese migrants, which would provide an even more nuanced perspective on Sudanese racial identity and, more generally, the ways in which North Sudanese and South Sudanese people are perceived and treated differently in a migration context.

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