Shifting Spaces of Justice and the Poetics of Be-Longing

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Introduction

This paper stems from my doctoral research in which I explore the experiences of displacement and settlement as manifest in the dynamics of identity, cohesion, and be-longing among young Oromo refugees living in Toronto (Kumsa, 2004). I use hyphenated be-longing to unfreeze the fixity in conventional notions of predetermined be-longing and to emphasize the often-obscured movement and fluidity inherent in the longing in be-longing (Ilcan, 2002; Philip, 1992; Probyn, 1996). Before I delve into the research with young Oromos, however, I will provide a brief background on Oromos and the global-local processes that led to the refugeeization of the young participants. Although Oromos are dispersed throughout the world in this era of globalization, in terms of conventional geographic location, Oromos inhabit the Horn of Africa region, mainly Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. While they are minorities in Kenya and Somalia, Oromos are the largest national group constituting more than half of multinational Ethiopia's 70.5 million people. And that makes more than the entire population of Canada!

Speaking in terms of categorical identities, although Oromos constitute a numeric majority, they are reduced to a politically-dominated, economically-exploited, and culturally-degraded minority status in Ethiopia. The power elite that dominated the country for over a century came from a minority national group called Amhara. Oromos and other oppressed national groups (Eritreans, Southern Nations, and Tigrayans) joined the ranks of global anti-colonial national liberation movements of the 1960s and started armed struggle against Amhara colonialism (Jalata, 1993; Melba, 1988). Amhara domination that later took on combined forms of military dictatorship and communist state totalitarianism crumbled in 1991. Upon its demise, the liberation fronts, along with other political parties, formed the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) to chart the country's transition to democracy and justice for all (Lata, 1999). But history took its familiar yet mysterious twists and turns. Today, Eritreans are "amicably divorced" from Ethiopia, forming an independent state. Although constituting only 7% of Ethiopia's population, Tigrayans have been "empowered" to shed the skin of a

liberation front and replace Amharas in re-colonizing the remainder of Ethiopia. Despite their numerical majority, Oromos have been subtly and blatantly excluded from participating in any meaningful political process of the country.

US-led western nations supported the liberation fronts in overthrowing the communist military regime and promised a continued support in the country's transition to democracy. But they reneged on their promise and chose to empower the militarily strongest Tigrayans and to actively support them as they brutally repressed the fledgling democracy. But why support a minority regime dictatorship rather than a promising popular democracy? Robinson (1997) argues that US policy towards Ethiopia is to create a dependent, unstable, and pliant minority regime that relies on the US for its own survival. Representing less than 7% of Ethiopia's population and having no toehold of support in non-Tigre Ethiopia, the Tigrayan regime presented an ideal candidate for US support. Presenting stability and popular support, Oromos were disqualified automatically.

When conflict intensified between the Tigrayan minority regime and Oromos, the US-led West dealt Oromos a bitter-sweet deal. While, on the one hand, they denied them justice and the necessary support for democratic participation in the affairs of their own country, on the other, they facilitated the "safe departure" of their leaders out of the country and into exile (Lata, 1998; 1999). Besides providing visas to Oromo officials of the Ethiopian transitional government, Western governments also made a concerted effort in prioritizing the resettlement in the West of some Oromo liberation activists and refugees. Issuing visas to help Oromos escape the Tigrayan tyranny looks humanitarian on the surface. Strategically, however, the subtle process resulted in removing the "Oromo roadblock" from the Ethiopian political space, thus facilitating the Tigrayan move in establishing a single-ethnic, single-party minority dictatorship. Winning the political struggle but feeling deeply betrayed by the US-led West, Oromos, along with Southern Nations, have now gone back to the familiar struggle for justice and national liberation.

Some of the Oromo refugees who fled Ethiopia en mass were resettled in Canada. The young Oromos in this study came to Toronto from late 80s to late 90s as children with refugee adults, as minors reuniting with their resettled families, or as refugees in their own right. Some were born in Ethiopia and have vivid memories of "back home" where they feel they be-long. Others were born in refugee camps outside Ethiopia and only fantasize the "homeland" from what they hear from peers and adults. Their parents and other caregivers were imprisoned, exiled, disappeared, or summarily executed. This caused enormous unsettling movements and displacements. Their further displacement en

route to and within Canada is multiply layered with more settling, unsettling, and resettling experiences as more displacements and challenges awaited them. My doctoral research, then, is an exploration of the young Oromos' experiences of displacement and settlement – their sense of identity and community. I examine their experiences of negotiating displacements and the ensuing shifts in their sense of identity, cohesion, and be-longing.

The Research Background

To start by positioning myself, I disclaim the neutral observer status. The issues of justice and be-longing not only sit at the core of my intellectual curiosity, but they also form deeper longings of my mundane everyday living. An Oromo born in Ethiopia, I was a strong advocate of justice and liberation for Oromos. I spent ten years of the 1980s as a prisoner of conscience in Ethiopian dungeons while my three toddlers were left in the care of others. In 1991, I fled Ethiopia with my then teenaged children and we all came to Canada as resettled refugees. Not only were the country, the people, the culture, and the weather strange to us; we were also strangers to each other. Relating to each other as parent and children became a trying challenge. Worse still, the problem was not limited to us; it was community wide. Parents wanted our children to retain our Oromoness but life beyond the Oromo community demanded that they adapt to the wider cultures in Canada. Parents were at a loss; children were torn apart. It was in an attempt to make sense of our collective experience that I embarked on this study. Indeed, this research is as much about producing and reproducing knowledge as it is about constructing and reconstructing Self.

Empirical studies on the experiences of refugees in Canada abound. Some works localize the problem of refugee settlement and focus on mental health, loss, and victimization (e.g. Beiser, 1999; Jacob, 1994; Phillion, 2001; Quallenberg, 2000; Socier et al., 2002; Young, 2001). Others externalize the focus on global and local hierarchies of structural barriers (Leddy, 1997; Moussa, 1993; Opoku-Dapaah, 1992). Such dichotomized focus forecloses the opportunity for a holistic examination of refugee experiences. Studies on the experiences of Oromo refugees range from those examining political factors in Oromo refugeeization (Abdi, 1987; Bulcha, 1989; 2002; Clay & Holcomb, 1986) to those exploring issues of identity and community among various diasporic Oromo groups (Gow, 2001; 2002; Sorenson, 1996). However, works that focus on structural factors fall short of reaching deep down and exploring the intense longings of refugee be-longing. Those exploring deeper issues

of identity and community fail to make the theoretical link between belonging and justice. I conducted this study to address this gap in knowledge.

I selected a small community-based sample of eighteen self-identified young Oromo refugees through the most effective strategy, word of mouth (snowballing). We generated rich qualitative data through conversations, story telling, evocative exercises, individual and small group reflections, participant observation, and a focus group debate. Narratives and exercises were loosely structured around the Lifeline Exercise (Nadeau, 1996) designed to tease out major life events. To provide a loose structure for weekly reflections, we divided the lifeline into five timelines including childhood memories, experiences of dislocation, life in Canada, dreams and nightmares, and hopes for the future. We met every week in four one-to-one and three small group sessions for an average of seven weeks in two rounds. This process built up to a larger focus group debate at the end of the second round of weekly sessions. Six events of participant observation were completed intermittently. Data were generated from February to May 2001 and all sessions, except events of participant observation, were both audio- and videotaped.

Before the two rounds of weekly sessions started rolling, there were two orientation meetings at which participants self-selected and formed three small groups. Those who did not feel comfortable sharing in small groups chose one-to-one sessions. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, each participant adopted a research name by which they will be identified in relation to this research. Linking the manifest group dynamics to Oromo cultural practices, I named the three groups as *Gammee* Warriors, *Walana* Moieties, and *Addooyyee* Sisters. In terms of demographic profiles, one female and four males constitute the *Gammees,* the youngest group (17, 17, 17, 19, and 21). At the time of the sessions, they were all in high school except for one in college. Two females and three males constitute the *Walanas* (17, 17, 18, 21, and 24) out of which three were in high school, one in college, and one in university. The *Addooyyees* are the most homogeneous group in that they are all female and all in graduate school except for one in university. And they are the oldest as a group (21, 23, 25, 28). In the one-to-one sessions, there were one female of 26 and three males of 17, 21, and 23. At the time of the sessions, they were all in high school except for one male in university.

Throughout the weeks, participants shared sacred stories and precious objects; they sang songs and chanted poems. They cried and laughed as they made sense of their narratives, disputed meanings, and co-theorized their personal and collective experiences. For the most part, negotiating meanings and reconstructing narratives happened throughout

the multiple sessions of the prolonged engagement as part of my broader strategies of minimizing the effects of power between the researcher and participants (Lather, 1991; Kirsch, 1999; Smith, 1999). But as I further analyzed the data, I also continued to "member check" to ensure trustworthiness. To capture the fluidity of stories and social processes, I needed an approach that would enable me to stay close to the context of group reflective interaction within which the stories were constructed for and with others in the group (Chambon, 1995; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Linde, 1993). I needed a holistic understanding of the data and the story-ing process. I needed not only the content of the stories but also the manner in which they were constructed and shared -- the complexity of the stories, the stories within stories, and the stories of the telling of stories.

For such holistic understanding of both content and process, I adopted an interpretive orientation (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973; Stiles, 1993) rooted in critically reflexive methodology (Avelsson & Sköldberg, 2001; Bourdieu, 1992; Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Myerhoff & Ruby, 1982; Turner, 1982). To enrich my interpretive repertoire, I used models of narrative analysis from various disciplines, including anthropology, literature, psychoanalysis, psychology and sociology (Cortazzi 1993). Through these hermeneutic strategies, I acquired an acute realization that making sense is incredibly complex and that our stories are deeply embodied and simultaneously embedded in larger societal discourses (Bhabha 1994; Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1979). In such symbolic construction of the world, then, making sense happens in the tension between familiarity and strangeness where the researcher Self is inalienable from the cognitive and creative activities of the research. Indeed Self itself is learned as a category of understanding in this in-between space where knowing the phenomenon and knowing the participant Other are deeply intertwined with knowing the researcher Self (Caputo, 2000; Gadamer, 1975; Schwandt, 1999). Thus, the shift in understanding the phenomenon also implied a shift in my own sense of Self simultaneously.

To capture this complexity, I developed *dispersal-affinity* as an empirically grounded conceptual framework. The process of developing it involved persistent goings back and forth between the data and the literature and engaging them in a constant dialogue. Here, dispersal signifies the disrupting of social ties and the hurling of refugee bodies into a global space. Affinity signifies refugee resistance to disruption, their intense longings to be-long, and their yearning to relocate disrupted social ties. Indeed, *dispersal-affinity* captures the simultaneous flight and search that permeates the lives of many refugees. Four paradoxical spaces interweave in *dispersal-affinity*. First, the relational space signifies the

necessary relationality of Self and Other. Second, the reflexive space signifies the inextricable link of conscious and unconscious lives. Third, the temporal space signifies the interweaving of the past and the future in the rolling present. Fourth, the glocal space signifies the intimate relationality of the global and the local.

Dispersal-affinity makes visible the complex vicissitudes of negotiating identity, cohesion, and be-longing in the lives of the young Oromos at the personal, national, and transnational levels. The overarching finding of the study indicates that identity and cohesion are simultaneous processes, neither separable from nor collapsible into each other. Further, the inherent movements in the simultaneous processes of identity and cohesion interweave to produce a sense of be-longing simultaneously. Here, *dispersal* depicts participants' movements away from spaces of experienced violence, oppression, and injustice while *affinity* depicts their movements towards spaces of anticipated healing, liberation, and justice -- their deepest longings to be-long. For the purpose and scope of this paper, I focus on these poetics of be-longing and trace them through the shifting spaces of justice. I use "poetics" not in the sense of Aristotelian dramatic criticism but in its metaphorical extensions into the performance of selfhood (Bourdieu 1977; Butler 1997; Herzfeld 1985; Turner 1982). My goal is to make visible the performances and movements of selfhood within and through social relations.

The Conceptual Quagmire

Defining the two key concepts of this paper is a daunting task as justice and be-longing mean different things to different people and their understanding has been evolving over time. The voices in the literature do not offer definitive conceptualizations. Controversy rages over their theorizing and thus divergent perspectives abound. Following the broader paradigmatic debates, however, these perspectives can be generally categorized as essentialist and constructionist.

In Aristotle's sense, justice is treating equals equally and unequals unequally in proportion to their inequality (Kamenka, 1979). Thus, in pre-modernity, inequality is viewed as natural. Since inequality is the unquestioned given, doing justice means preserving the status quo of inequality. In modernity where liberal individualism takes dominance, Rawls conceptualizes justice as a neutral instrument of maintaining order and cohesion through equality and fairness for all individuals (Fisk, 1993). In the critical alternative, Habermas rejects the neutrality of justice but maintains the focus on distributive justice (Flyvbjerg, 1998). All these views present justice as an essence, albeit an abstraction. Justice is

something to be had, something distributed equally or unequally. In constructionist perspectives, justice is viewed as historically and culturally specific construct. It is a fluid process that happens through social interaction (Kobayashi & Ray, 2000; Peak & Ray, 2001; Young, 1990). Indeed, Young theorizes justice as freedom from oppression, thus drawing it out of the legal system and bringing it into the mundane reality of everyday living. She rejects the liberal emphasis on sameness and identity for all. By so doing, she underscores both individual and group differences.

The theorizing of be-longing is similarly riddled with controversy. In pre-modernity be-longing is viewed as a natural essence determined by blood and ancestry. People are born into specific genealogical locations and they know precisely where they be-long and who they be-long with (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). As the "nation-state" became the dominant structure of organizing space in modernity, national be-longing became the dominant form of be-longing. Here also, essentialist views present authentic be-longing as predetermined -- given, natural, and final. Every person be-longs to a natural ethnic group, nation, and culture and a natural habitat, a territory, a native homeland. The national substance, the essence that makes one a member of the nation, is transmitted from generation to generation via genealogical continuity (Armstrong, 1982; Conner, 1977; Van den Berghe, 1992). Within a nation, however, modernist views reject the pre-modern hierarchy of birth and claim equal membership for all. The nation transmits the national substance equally and every individual be-longs to the nation equally. Individual means indivisible. Just like individual persons, individual nations are also indivisible. Members of a bound nation be-long together and that boundary is indivisible. Thus, "full belonging, the warm sensation that people understand not merely what you say but what you mean, can only come when you are among your own people in your native land" (Ignatieff, 1994:7).

Constructionist views dispute this essentialist fixity and argue that be-longing to any categorical identity is created within social relations and through multiple forms of othering and exclusion (Bauman, 1999; Ilcan, 2002; Philip, 1992; Probyn, 1996). Far from being a natural genealogical continuity, the nation itself is a historically constituted imagined community (Anderson, 1983). And far from being indivisible, historically, national borders have moved across nations and nations have moved across national borders. In this view, then, be-longing is a fluid process of social interaction imbibed with uncertainty and tension. Here be-longing is not linked to territory or homeland. Nor is it a final settlement. Ilcan theorizes be-longing as a constant movement between settlement, unsettlement, and resettlement. For her, be-longing is

inextricably twined with longing. Probyn (1996) depicts be-longing as the process and desire of becoming Other -- as a positive extension of Self towards Other across social space where Self meets Other and becomes Other. Ahmed (2000) disputes such ontologizing of Self and Other and the distance between them. Self is not an already formed entity moving towards an Other entity. Rather, she argues, both Self and its Other are relationally and simultaneously produced.

But what is the relationship between the two key concepts, be-longing and justice? In empirically grounding *dispersal-affinity*, I engage this essentialist/constructionist binary and argue that the young Oromos' sense of be-longing involves both the being and becoming aspects of selfhood – however illusive the being aspect may be. The mutually exclusive binaries are untenable in the experiences of the young Oromo participants. The young persons both essentialize and construct their sense of be-longing in the tense interplay of essentialist continuities and constructionist discontinuities. For them, be-longing is a process of moving in-between being and becoming. And this constitutes a movement of selfhood in being here and now and longing for there and then. In this broad sense, then, be-longing validates the deep diasporic yearning of being here in exile and longing to be-long there back home (Bhabha, 1994; Clifford, 1997; Ilcan, 2002; Malkki, 2001). In *dispersal-affinity*, however, I move beyond this diffused yearning and signify the longing in be-longing as a longing for justice. I will briefly elucidate this a bit further.

Justice is conceptualized as *freedom* from oppression (Young, 1990) and as *healing* from the wounds of oppression (Monture-Angus, 1995). Indeed, as a relational process of dominance and subordination, oppression constitutes a form of violence -- violence initiated by the oppressor (Bourdieu, 1977; Friere, 2003). But who is the oppressor? Are the oppressed and the oppressor mutually exclusive monolithic entities? Although debate rages over unity versus multiplicity of Self, the mutual exclusivity of Self and Other is increasingly being challenged. Self and Other are viewed not only as multiple but also as intimately intertwined and simultaneously produced (Ahmed, 2000; Kristeva, 1991). In this sense, people can be both oppressors and oppressed at one and the same time. Hence, oppression and violence are also conceptualized as multifaceted and interlocking (Collins, 2000; Van Soest, 1995; Young, 1990). While Young identifies five faces of oppression, Ahmed and Kristeva argue that any form of othering and exclusion in the Self-Other encounters of the most mundane social relations constitutes violence and oppression.

Hence, *dispersal-affinity* unsettles the binary between constructionist and essentialist views of justice and be-longing. The essentialist view that

authentic be-longing comes only from one's own people is untenable in that participants have experienced warm understanding with non-Oromo Others and bitter misunderstanding with Oromos. The constructionist view that be-longing is the desire of becoming Other is also untenable in that participants experience not only desire but also intense aversion for the Other. For them, be-longing is a fiercely directional movement away from spaces of experienced violence and oppression towards spaces of anticipated healing and liberation. Whether it is depicted as healing, as liberation, or as freedom, in *dispersal-affinity*, justice signifies a process far more than just the absence of violence and oppression. Indeed, it signifies a deep relational transformation of Self and Other. In the remainder of this paper, then, I will use *dispersal-affinity* to explore the empirical interplay of justice and be-longing.

Fleeting Justice, Mobile Be-longing?

In this section I will engage the empirical material to make visible the movements of selfhood in and through social relations. I will start by sketching the broader outline of the landscape and then zoom in on one particular local site for a close-up view.

The Broader Picture

Not all participants in this study wanted to come to Canada. Those who did want to come long to be-long to Canada the beacon of hope and liberation, Canada the peaceful land of plenty. They long away from the Ethiopian violence and oppression towards the peace and freedom of Canada. However, escaping the terror of Ethiopia does not automatically translate to be-longing to Canada. "Where are you from?" people ask them even after they become Canadian citizens. Canadian nationalism is at work, sorting people into their "authentic" national camps, excluding them from Canadian be-longing. "I always tell them I am from Oromia!" says Tick. "But nobody knows Oromia!" laments Wartu. Oromia is not on the maps or atlases. In my ESL class, "I never tell them I am from Ethiopia!" says Iftu, "I show them the Oromo flag and tell them I am from Oromia." Kenasa does the same. ESL classes turn into battlegrounds for competing Ethiopian and Oromo nationalist discourses. But the Canadian mirror reflects only Ethiopia, taking away their hope of liberated Oromia. Excluded and hurt, some long back to be-long with Ethiopians. But, encounters with Ethiopians turn hostile. "I don't want to have anything to do with them!" exclaims Dinsiri, "They think they run the place here too!" A Tigrayan young man shouts at Wartu, "I'm sick and tired of

everybody saying Oromo, Oromo! Why don't you just say [you are] Ethiopians?!" Alas! Ethiopia rejects their Oromoness even in dislocation.

"You are Black!" "You are Black!" Everything around them tells them they are Black. They project Oromo but the Canadian mirror reflects back Black. Suddenly, they find themselves in a society where skin color is a major identifying factor. Canadian racialization is at work, sorting people into "racial" categories and taking away their space of justice. Longing away from the racializing violence, parents tell them, "don't go out with those Jamaicans!" "Don't go out with those criminal drug dealers!" "Stick to your own!" But "to the White people, Black is Black… Oromo or not… we all Jamaicans," Y.B. laments. Excluded and hurt, they long to be-long with Blacks, at once embracing and resisting racialization. But Blackness is a hotly contested territory of multiple definitions. Embracing Blackness is not good enough to be accepted among their Black peers who define Blackness in their own unique ways and defend the boundaries with passion. Oromo Blackness is not Black enough. Some are seen as backward, uncivilized Africans, others as Fresh off the Boat. Blacks "don't like us; to them we are FOB refugees!" complains Qoricha. Even Gee who gains hip-hop be-longing by doing "nigger talk" and "nigger walk" and by being "bad" and being "cool" learns the hard way that be-longing is neither final nor complete. In Gee's small group, we were in utter shock when we heard that he was brutally beaten up by Black gangs and had four front teeth knocked out. Thus shifts the space of justice.

"Stick to your own!" strikes the cord harder now. Perhaps their parents were right after all! And the young Oromos long to be-long with Oromos. But despite homogenizing discourses of Oromo nationalism, they find Oromo be-longing no less contested than Canadianness or Blackness. "I felt totally alone in the whole group," says Qoricha, finding herself alienated in a crowd of Oromo peers because she did not speak the Oromo language. Yom and Y.B. bitterly resent how they were brutally excluded from an Oromo sports team in Toronto because they were not from the "right" region of Oromia. When it is not region or language, it is gender or religion. As the space of justice shifts along with the boundary of exclusion, they long to be-long with Oromo peers that are more like them in gender, region, religion, class, and linguistic typology. But, cut off from Oromos in the homeland by dislocation and by the digital divide, they seek solace in the Internet. They long to be-long in the virtual community of Oromos. But exclusionary boundaries of age, gender, class, religion, and geographic region creep into the most deterritorialized space of digital Oromia and unsettle their longings to be-long. Thus shifts the space of justice yet again as they lick their wounds and long away from the violence. Excluded even from the most taken for granted turf of

Oromoness, they find that there is no full or final be-longing anywhere. Indeed be-longing is multi-layered and constantly negotiated. So is justice.

The Close-up View

One of the most graphic movements of selfhood that emerged from the analysis is the movement of Black bodies through the institutional spaces of Toronto public schools. Since the young Oromos embrace Blackness, I focus on this local site and map out the cartographic flow of Black bodies within the city, within the schools, and within the classrooms.

Within the city, all participants experience the Toronto public schools as being segregated into Black schools and White schools. But none of them question the naturalness of this segregation. It was a given fact of life. What most participants do question, however, is the equitability of the practice of education within it. They experience segregated schools both as sites of oppression and as spaces of healing and liberation. This is suggested in the following narrative clip from the *Addooyyee* Group conversation:

AYANE: I was in [White School]. For the longest time they treated me like I didn't exist! You're going to school everyday with these people, and I swear to god they don't acknowledge your presence! Not even a nod, not a hello! I learned to run away from them. Oh I still feel it! …there were older Black students, a couple of them…. They actually smile at me in the hallway. I used to love that!! They graduated the first year and then there was nothing! …after three years, I said no more! I quit and that's what saved me. I swear I would have lost my mind if I stayed there….

> DINSIRI: Blacks go to certain schools, for example [School] is notorious for being a Black school.
> AYANE: I wanted to go to a Black school!! I wanted the experience! I've been to a White school and it's terrible! I really wanted the experience of a Black school…
> JALANE: Me too! I always wanted that but it never happened to me (laughs).
> AYANE: The bad thing is Black schools also have bad academic reputations. They say that as long as you have the grades nobody cares what school you come from. But… I don't think 90 from [a Black school] would count as much as an 80 from some other school… So I didn't want to suffer from that either.
> JALANE: I, just for a year, I would have loved to try.

DINSIRI: I know you had a negative experience… but I mean there were so many Black students in [my school]… but I didn't feel like I belonged in there… you still don't mix… I was singled out

AYANE: At least I would have liked the opportunity to try.

JALANE: Like, even seeing a lot of Black faces in the crowd; that's nice, you know.

Canadian multiculturalism upholds state intervention in support of ethnic identity retention (Castles, 1995). Embracing this policy, most participants believe that everybody belong to their respective social groups. Given the racializing Black label and ironically embracing it as a form of resistance to racialization, they deeply feel they be-long in Black schools. Those who went to predominantly White schools like Ayane and Jalane lament their experiences of alienation and "learned to run away from them," as Ayane puts it. They long to be-long in Black schools where they don not stick out. Dinsiri went to a predominantly Black school but felt she did not be-long there. She felt "singled out" even by Blacks. The space Dinsiri longs away from is the space where Ayane and Jalane long to be-long, seeking solace in "seeing a lot of Black faces in the crowd" even with "bad academic reputations." And in the following clip from the *Walana* Group conversation, Jaba, a participant who had to change high school seven times in five years, roams from school to school, becoming a school nomad in search of a just space to be-long to.

JABA: I've been switching around schools. I leave [School 1] because it's White and go to [School 2] because there are a lot of Black people in [School 2]. And what happens is you see a lot of Black people outside. But you go to grade twelve advance you don't see any Black person there.

ZEE: Yeah, that's correct!

KUWEE: Where are all the [Black] students?

WARTU: General!

JABA: Either in grade ten, eleven, twelve but general.

KUWEE: And what does that mean?

JABA: General leads you to college, you will never go to university.

KUWEE: Oh, OK

JABA: There is advance and specialist. [But] what happens is most people are in advance in most schools like in typical schools where there's not a lot of Black people, most people are in advance, few in specialist and very few in general…. There's few general courses in [School 1]. When you go to [school 2]

there's a lot of general courses being offered. And it is, in general, a lot of Black people in the school and you be grade eleven, twelve, advance you don't see those kids. You're already segregated by that too from other Black people. So I went from there to [School 3]. And [School 3] is the same thing. There's Black people there but you don't see them in class… Then I went to [School 4] same thing. I went to [School 5] after that…. I still stick out, man! I still don't fit in!" [All these schools have a] good Black population in them. But when I went to my classes, I barely see any Black face, may be two three.

TICK: Yeah! And they sit together!! (people laugh)….

KUWEE: Doesn't that make you feel proud, though, because there is only three or four of you in a class of Whites?

JABA: No!! You're a misfit! … No, no, no! I used to think I was a misfit. The whole process of this changing school was to find a place where I could fit in!

Where he longs to be-long and heal, Jaba is yet again alienated from his Black peers by skewed structuring of the educational system. He finds that Blacks were not only segregated into Black schools but also streamed into general and basic level courses even within the Black schools. The many Blacks he meets in the hallways and playgrounds are missing in his advanced classes. He feels alienated from Blacks in the very schools where he deeply longs to be-long with them. And he finds himself yet again a misfit and wanting to move away from the alienation. While this affirms what Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine (1995) define as "color-coded streaming," Jaba takes it a further step and points out yet another layer of the injustice. He observes that more advanced courses were offered in White schools while most courses offered in Black schools were in the general stream. The veracity of this claim is a question for future research. What is important here is the experience of what Bourdieu (1977; 1998) calls institutional symbolic violence and the ensuing movement of longing and be-longing -- a longing for justice.

The spatial segregation of Black bodies within the city continues within the schools also. Discourses of racialized segregation come intertwined with discourses of multiculturalism and liberal individualism. Multiculturalism claims equal worth for all individuals and all cultures (Castles, 1995; Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994). But studies indicate that even as curriculum revisions are pursued in accordance with multicultural policies, African refugees encounter enormous problems in Canadian public schools (Hesse, 1994; Leddy, 1997; Opoku-Dapaah, 1992; Yau, 1995). In the present study also, young Oromos who start out in Toronto's multicultural schools find out that all cultures and peoples are not equal.

This is suggested in the following narrative clip from the *Gammee* Group conversation:

> LATIFA: Every school has different sections for each culture, or race or just individual groups…. Like, for instance, the first floor would be like the Blacks. That's near the gym and that's basketball and Black stuff…. And then the second floor is all Filipinos.
> KUWEE: why Filipinos?
> LATIFA: It's just that they like to sit on the floor and read… For example, if I want to go meet my friend like she will tell me where to meet and I will know exactly where in her school to meet her….
> KUWEE: So if you are Filipino you would know where to meet Filipinos.
> LATIFA: Yeah, exactly!
> KUWEE: But do Filipinos and Blacks mix, for example?
> LATIFA: No, I'm saying, it just happens. It's not done intentionally!!
> Y.B.: It happens! It just happens!!
> GEE: There is no racism; it just happens! White has White section…
> LATIFA: Yeah, if you go to the library you just see Chinese
> GEE: White people, Chinese, Indians!
> Y.B.: Chinese and Indians!
> LATIFA: Yeah Indians and Chinese are always in the libraries and computers and stuff….
> Y.B.: Black people would be always close to the doors, so they could get out of school quick, you know what I mean? (people laugh).
> LATIFA: Exits!
> Y.B.: They're close to the exits.
> EDO: Far away from the library! (people laugh)
> KUWEE: Do you think it's because they are [viewed] that way, or?
> Y.B.: They don't look at me that way!! It's just that way!
> KUWEE: So it's just the way things are?
> Y.B.: Yeah.

So people have their own groups and their own specific locations in the hierarchically organized space within the school. "There is no racism," claims Gee, "it just happens!" And group members agree. But some invisible hands do sort people but they sort them unequally. They

take people not only to who they belong with but also to where they belong. Who be-longs in the libraries, in the computer labs, and in the Gyms and hallways is all so vivid that it is rendered invisible. People don't even notice segregation. Nor do they do it intentionally, according to Latifa. It's just the way things are. Yet, this implies not the naturalness of inequality but its sociality. And people long away from the pain of the symbolic violence.

Moving into the classrooms, how do participants experience the movements of bodies there? Continuing the *Gammee* Group conversation in the clip below elucidates this:

KUWEE: How about inside the classrooms?
LATIFA: Blacks always at the back!! (people laugh)
GEE: Black people, always in the back!
LATIFA: In the classroom it's always in the back
Y.B.: That's how they sit in the bus too! (people laugh)
LATIFA: Yes, and in the bus!
GEE: It's not racist, it's not wanna be difference. It just happens!
Y.B.: You don't understand, man! ….
GEE: I sit everywhere! But mostly I sit in the back
Y.B.: That's what I mean! OK, why do you sit at the back?
GEE: There's no reason! I just sit at the back!
LATIFA: Everybody sits at the back!
Y.B.: I mean don't you think twice? Like why do I sit at the back?

Y.B. questions Gee's denial of racialization. In the earlier discussion Y.B. himself insisted that it is just the way things are. Here he starts to question his own assumptions and denials. But the talk continued and the group made the link to the racial segregation in the USA. What? Segregation? The last segregated school in Ontario was closed in 1965! So let us cut out segregation. Indeed, what participants observed is not the segregation but the congregation of bodies. But why do Black bodies congregate around backseats, gyms, and main doors in today's Toronto? What makes Black bodies congregate --and congregate around Exits? Here I stress the role of Exits to signify the movement of selfhood through social relations and away from spaces of oppression. Exits signal leaving school in the here and now. But Exits also denotes a total disengagement from school and dropping out. In this sense, Exits offer a dynamic resonance with "culture of resistance" (Dei et al., 1995; Willie, 2003). Blacks gather at Exits to make their exits from schools as easy and as fast as they can. Areas around main gates and doors are spaces where they drag their feet upon entering schools and where they find it easiest to

leave when it is time to leave. Indeed, in this sense, Exits constitute spaces of resistance but resistance to what?

Dei et al. (1995) note that Black youths develop culture of resistance in response to racialization. When they are streamed into general and basic routes and see their future going nowhere, they get frustrated and develop strategies of disengagement from the schools that neither reflect nor respect their identities in the first place. Connected to racialized streaming in this sense, then, Exits surely offer an active space that facilitates their strategies of disengagement and they finally "dropout" of school. Dei et al. argue, however, that "dropout" is a label of blaming the victim and masking the processes that "push out" Black youths. Moving away from the agency/victim dichotomy, I argue that when Black youths long for Exits and back seats, they long for spaces farthest away from the violence of racialization. Exits open up into spaces of their freedom from oppression. Ironically, these spaces of anticipated liberation and justice are also spaces of further marginalization and oppression. As Dei et al. argue, channeling them into general and basic streams seriously hampers their life chances by reproducing the social status in the wider society. Other Canadian studies note that African refugees are left with unfulfilled expectations in destitution and poverty (Spigelman, 1998) and that more Blacks live in poverty because they earn less than others even for equal educational qualifications (Troczyner, 1997).

Embodied racialization manifest in such segregated distribution of bodies affirms how bodies are produced in space and how spaces produce bodies simultaneously (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1979; Gupta & Ferguson, 2001; Lefebvre, 1991; Razack, 2002). The physical distribution of Black bodies corresponds to the deeply imagined spaces that Canada carves out for Black Others in relation to its Self. Deeply imagined they may be, but these spaces place Black bodies in dire material and spiritual conditions, nonetheless. This cartography of Black bodies may be clearly read on the faces of the city and the schools. As Young (1990, p.241) argues, however, "the social structures, processes, and relationships that produce and reproduce these distributions, however, are not so visible on the surface of our cities." I will attempt to make visible these social processes in the next section since they have profound implications for social work and social justice.

Social Working in *Dispersal-Affinity*

Social justice sits at the core of social work. To create spaces of justice, social workers need a solid understanding of people's deeper longings for be-longing. Here I offer *dispersal-affinity* as a helpful conceptual

framework for both analysis and practice of social working. When I say social working, I mean to include the creative work beyond the frozen professionalized and state-institutionalized social work. I include the art of mundane everyday living as well as activism in the areas of human rights, social justice, and liberation. And I include all the active creative processes of social working as an art of transforming societies into just spaces of be-longing. Signifying social working as a Self-Other encounter, I mean to stress its necessary relationality. On these premises, then, I engage the four paradoxical spaces of *dispersal-affinity* to pull together the discussion of segregation in the above section. While these spaces are intimately interwoven and simultaneously deployed, here, for the sake of simplicity, I will freeze the fluidity and untangle the web to discuss each space separately.

The Relational Space

In the relational space, the paradox of singularity-multiplicity makes visible the necessary relationality of Self and Other. The singularity and uniqueness of each individual is visible only in the relational context of the multiplicity of the Other. Conversely, the multiplicity of the Other becomes visible only through the singularity of the individual. The boundary drawn around Self defines not only the Self as what is included within but it also defines the Other as what is left out and excluded. Whether this Self is individual or collective, there is no process of defining Self without the simultaneous process of othering the Other. Indeed, there is no Self without Other as they are mutually constitutive (Ahmed, 2000; Kristeva, 1991; Spivak, 1989). As Kristeva suggests, when we look for strangers and Others, we must look inside the Self. But, as Ahmed argues, not all strangers are othered equally as some Others are constructed as stranger than other Others. In light of this, I frame segregation as the utmost separation of Other from Self, as a process of othering and exclusion. The streaming of bodies into libraries, computer labs, or gyms or indeed into general, advanced, and specialist camps emanates from deeply imagined othering processes of how the Canadian Self defines and how it aligns the various Others in social space closer to or farther away from its Self. And this translates into how social status is distributed in the imagined Canadian national space. Exclusion hurts. Othering inflicts deep wounds in the soul. The challenge for social working is how to facilitate healing as a space of transformation in Self-Other relations, as a space of justice and be-longing.

The Temporal Space

In the temporal space, the paradox of continuity-discontinuity makes visible the ways in which the past is both continued and discontinued in the present. It shows how imagined pasts and anticipated futures are intimately interwoven in the rolling present. This disputes the linearity in conventional notions of time. The past and the future are deeply ingrained in the present and they are in a constant dialogue (Friedman, 1992; Bourdieu, 1977; 1998). The past comes back in multiple facets to shape anticipated futures. A psychologically and/or historically repressed past comes back in a ghostly return of the repressed. Some forgotten past is re-membered when settings are conducive. Also, a past unconsciously internalized as part of the natural world is discovered suddenly. In this light, then, the segregation in Toronto schools has its roots in the deep historical past. Canada had legally separated schools for Africans, the last of which was closed in Ontario only in 1965 (Krauter & Davis, 1978; Troczyner, 1997). And there was the segregation of Africville (Clairmont, 1999; National Film Board, 1991). Segregation may have been discontinued in its old form but it is continuing in new forms. Paradoxically, segregation continues in desegregation. Are we then prisoners of our past? Given the devastating impacts of desegregation and the recent movement of Black educators towards resegregation to heal the wounds in the Black soul, the challenge for social working is how to create the desegregation-resegregation debate into a space of justice and be-longing.

The Reflexive Space

In the reflexive space, the conscious-unconscious paradox makes visible a complex dialogue between conscious and unconscious processes in the relational constitution of Self and Other. This is where the internalized external world is split into good and bad, the good is incorporated into Self, and the bad denied and projected onto Other. But the bad also remains repressed in the unconscious Self. Here Self and Other can be individual and/or collective. Hence just as there is collective expression, there is also collective denial of the inexpressible and the embarrassing. While this is what gets played out in the encounters between Self and Other, this relational process is forgotten and Self and Other get reified as separate entities (Ahmed, 2000; Bauman, 1997; Kristeva, 1991). An encounter with an Other is an encounter with a repressed Self. In this light, the segregation in the Toronto schools is unconscious performance of the Canadian collective Self. The segregated Black represents the

othered and repressed Black in the White Canadian unconscious Self.
And, more often than not, pointing to such segregation and inequality is
an embarrassment to the equitable and inclusive Canadian conscious Self.
What is signaled is justice and equality for all but what is performed is
segregation into unequal spaces. But denial continues. This is a challenge
for social working. How can we keep alive the taboo topic of denial?
How can they turn the critically reflexive lens on themselves and on their
institutional processes even as it hurts them? Are some hurtful things
better kept in denial?

The glocal Space

In the glocal space, the global-local paradox makes visible the intimate
interweaving of global homogenization and local fragmentation inherent
in contemporary glocalizing world -- the very processes that bring the
young Oromo refugees to Toronto in the first place. The production and
expulsion of refugees is never an isolated internal and local process.
Rather, it results from the interplay of powerful local and global forces
engaged in the project of creating and maintaining nation-states through
inclusion and exclusion (Chimni, 1998; Ilcan, 2002; Moussa, 1993;
Zolberg, Shurke, & Aguayo, 1989). More often than not, the regimes that
produce refugees are regimes that are put in place by outside forces to
serve the interests of external powers (Zolberg et al, 1989). Ironically,
processes at the resettlement end of refugees are the same ones that
prompt their expulsion and flight from the homeland. The same glocal
processes structure the pace and space of refugee resettlement and
determine the texture of their experiences (Shami, 1996). In this light,
then, the segregation of Blacks in Toronto schools is a local site
intimately interwoven with the global segregation of Africa and Africans.
Thus, while global homogenizing processes that move people across
multiple national borders bring the young Oromos to Toronto, local
fragmenting processes segregate them into spaces of marginality
simultaneously. Global citizenship (Soysal, 2000) and global justice
(Moellendorf, 2002) remain sterile without their intimately interwoven
local twins. Here, the challenge for social working is how to frame the
desegregation-resegregation debate within the dynamic interplay of these
glocalizing processes.

Conclusion

Fleeting justice, mobile be-longing? Is justice then an illusion and be-
longing a fantasy? Give up on justice and be-longing, then? I have argued

that the spaces of be-longing shift with the shifting spaces of justice. But this does not mean that justice and be-longing are unachievable fantasies. What it does mean is that there is no justice or be-longing in the absolute sense, that justice and be-longing are multifaceted and fluid, and that they are achieved as fleeting spaces. I have argued that the paradoxical spaces of *dispersal-affinity* help us understand this complexity and fluidity of justice and be-longing. Indeed, to create spaces of be-longing and achieve justice in the here and now, we need to make sense of and understand the present injustice by deploying all the four paradoxical spaces simultaneously. Since Self and Other, past and future, global and local, and conscious and unconscious move together to create injustice in the present, we also need to deploy these same spaces together to achieve justice and create spaces of be-longing. And the biggest contribution of *dispersal-affinity* is to pull together the complexities of all these spaces and weave them into a framework for analysis and practice.

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