



# Transnational families, remittances, *cieng* and obligation for Dinka women in Australia



Melanie Baak

School of Education, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Convenor Migration and Refugee Research Network, University of South Australia, GPO Box 2471, Adelaide, 5001 South Australia, Australia

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 2 September 2013

Received in revised form

4 August 2014

Accepted 11 August 2014

Available online 16 September 2014

### Keywords:

Cieng

Emotion

Dinka

Remittances

Obligation

Shame

Transnational families

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the narratives of a group of Dinka women living in Australia with a focus on the emotional underpinnings of remittance sending to family in Africa. The sending of remittances is shaped by the Dinka relational ontology of *cieng* which obliges those who have migrated to Australia to financially support relatives left behind in Africa. Through exploring the 'emotional content of obligation' (Clark, 1990) this paper considers how *cieng* and remittance sending can result in feelings including shame and helplessness but also in reinforcing a sense belonging. In addition, this paper argues that while there is continuity in *cieng* despite the global dispersal of Dinka people, there has been a change in the degree and type of obligation placed on people through *cieng*.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

The last born, my sister the last born, and my brother. I didn't see anyone now. How they look, how they talk, how they what ... My sister the last born, now she have five kids. And even one, I talk with them, her daughter ... Oh. I cry, cry, cry. Auntie please send me a money to go to school. You know I feel bad ... And I left the step-sister, step-brother. Oh. And even my mum, my step-mum, the big one. She's sick and she called me, oh God. She need me to give money to go and buy, she's sick with sugar and high blood pressure. Oh. It's the first one, first wife ... And I didn't even help her, so [claps hands together indicating she has nothing]. You know I feel ... Because when she die or something like that you feel like ... not good. Because she's good, I love her. She's good to us.

Nyalong

## 1. Introduction

There is increasing literature on the role of remittances from diasporic groups in OECD countries to their families, friends and

relatives in developing countries (Gentry and Mittelstaedt, 2010; Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz, 2009; Hugo, 2005; Page and Plaza, 2006; Ratha and Mohapatra, 2012; Thouez, 2005). While most research focuses on the impacts of remittances in receiving countries (Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz, 2009; Ratha and Mohapatra, 2007, 2012; Thouez, 2005), or the economics of remittance sending (Barham and Boucher, 1998; Taylor, 1999), the emotional dimensions of remittance sending have been less thoroughly explored (for some notable exceptions see Gentry and Mittelstaedt, 2010; Lindley, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Riak Akuei 2005).

This paper contributes to that discourse by considering the various emotions that underpin the sending (or not sending) of remittances with a focus on 'the emotional content of obligation' (Clark, 1990: 324). Using an ethnographic case study approach, the paper illustrates how obligations to family and kin left behind in Africa haunt the remittance sending of a group of *Jëeng* (Dinka) women who were former refugees resettled in Australia. The paper argues that the obligation felt by the women to send remittances is underset by the *Jëeng* relational ontology of *cieng*. *Cieng* is a key concept of relationality for *Jääng* that emphasises a relational ontology underpinned by a relational ethical responsibility which underscores the way in which *Jääng* exist in the world. This is explored further below.

E-mail address: [melanie.baak@unisa.edu.au](mailto:melanie.baak@unisa.edu.au).

Transnational family life both shapes and is shaped by migration and emotions (Skrbis, 2008). The narratives of the women who participated in this research, as with much of the recent literature on transnational families, emphasised the ever present emotions within and among transnational families and kin (Baldassar, 2008; Skrbis, 2008; Svasek, 2010, 2008). Svasek (2008) described that the emotional life of transmigrants is 'characterised by contradiction, as migrants are morally pulled in different directions in social networks that stretch over large distances' (216). By exploring the 'emotional content of obligation' (Clark, 1990: 324) this paper makes clear the emotional contradictions inherent in maintaining transnational ties with family and kin over vast spatial and economic distances. Through a consideration of how *cieng* underpins the obligation to send remittances to kin and family, this paper explores the varied and conflicting emotions including shame, duty, love, remorse, helplessness and belonging that shape transnational family life for *Jëeng* in Australia.

Section two of this paper contextualises the research, providing a background to the research and methodology, detailing the migratory pathways of the women and describing the relational ontology of *cieng*. The third section turns to explore the ways in which *cieng* underpins 'the emotional content of obligation' using the women's narratives to illustrate the emotions of shame, embarrassment, helplessness but also belonging. Finally, the conclusion describes that while there is continuity in *cieng* despite mass geographical movement of *Jëeng*, there has also been and continues to be changes to the ways in which *cieng* is practiced and the demands it places on people in the diaspora.

## 2. Contextualisation and study outline

### 2.1. Research background

This paper draws on a larger research project which explored the negotiations for belonging for six *Diäärjäng* (Dinka women/wives) across multiple categories in multiple locations through stories of whole lives. Five of these *Diäärjäng* were born in the Dinka lands of South Sudan before subsequently migrating to Australia through a variety of pathways. The sixth is me, who as a 'white' Australian woman who married a Dinka man, has, in the words of my mother-in-law, '*raan cë ye cök jət bë met wun jëen*' (started a journey to join/become a Dinka person).<sup>1</sup> The research combined three methodological approaches; ethnography and life history interviews to record the narratives of the five Dinka women from South Sudan, and autoethnography<sup>2</sup> to reflect on my own experiences of becoming a Dinka wife. The research was conducted through multiple open-ended interviews with each woman and ethnographic reflection and journaling over a twelve month period in 2009. I conducted interviews with the women in their own homes using both English and Dinka.<sup>3</sup> While I speak conversational Dinka, to ensure accurate understanding and interpretation, the women's responses in Dinka were remotely interpreted by a

qualified Dinka interpreter who listened to and interpreted the digital recordings of the interviews.

### 2.2. Journeys of the women

The five Dinka women involved in this research were all born in the Dinka lands of South Sudan. Most spent their formative years growing up against the backdrop of the first civil war in Sudan (from 1955 to 1972). Following a brief respite from the war from 1972 to 1983, war broke out once again between north and south Sudan. It was during this second period of war that the five women involved in this project fled their homes. Each woman had a different experience of flight from Sudan. These included pathways through refugee camps and rural towns in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda for 3 women, through Nairobi for another, through Khartoum in the north of Sudan and then through Cairo for yet another. All of the women were eventually resettled in Adelaide, South Australia as Special Humanitarian Entrants<sup>4</sup> sometime in the period between 2002 and 2006. The migration pathways as well as which family members the women fled their homes with frequently shaped the places and people to whom they sent remittances once they were resettled in Australia. As such, the migration pathway of each individual woman is briefly outlined below.

Nyanut<sup>5</sup> fled her home in rural South Sudan walking to Ethiopia with her sister, brother and brother-in-law. They had decided that following the war related deaths of four immediate family members it was no longer safe to stay in Sudan. Nyanut recounted 'so that's how we left our home, it was because of the war. Because of the war at home, our home went bad'.<sup>6</sup> After only a couple of years living in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, outbreak of civil war in Ethiopia displaced her again and she was forced to flee to Kenya where she then lived in Kakuma Refugee Camp for about 15 years before being resettled in Australia with her husband and children.

Achol left her home in a South Sudan town, first fleeing to a village before walking to Ethiopia to join her husband who had gone to there for training with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Like Nyanut, she stayed in Ethiopia for several years before also being displaced again as a result of the Ethiopian civil war. Achol moved around to several different locations in Uganda, Kenya and even attempted to return to South Sudan before finally staying in Nairobi, Kenya before she was resettled in Australia with her children.

Atong, at the age of approximately 16, decided that she wanted to join the SPLA after having witnessed family members murdered by the northern Sudan army. She walked to Ethiopia where she undertook military training, but was not allowed to fight on the frontline. She was also displaced from Ethiopia following the outbreak of civil war. She also sought asylum in Kakuma Refugee Camp for a number of years before transporting her family to a regional town in Kenya and finally to Nairobi before being resettled in Australia with her children.

Abuk was forced to flee her home in rural South Sudan and travel to Khartoum in the north of Sudan after her husband, an SPLA soldier, was killed, leaving her with a young family to support. She

<sup>1</sup> While there are complex ethical issues involved with conducting 'insider' research within a community, there is not scope to explore these within the contexts of this paper. For an in-depth exploration of the ethical complexities involved with this research methodology see Baak (2012).

<sup>2</sup> I utilised autoethnography to examine my own positionality in the research. Writing 'retrospective field notes' (Ellis, 1999: 675) enabled me to reflect both on my own position in the research as well as my position as a *Tiengjäng*. I utilised my self-reflexive writings about my own experiences, perceptions and interpretations and combined these with my other data sources to create a rich, multifaceted data set for analysis and theory building (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> This research project was approved by the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the women all came to Australia as refugees, as such I intentionally isolate their narratives from the more frequently researched narratives of 'economic migrants'. Although a comparison of the remittance sending of people from refugee backgrounds and 'economic migrants' is lacking from the current literature, it is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper aims to provide a counter-dialogue to the predominant understanding of the remittance sending of economic migrants.

<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the women.

<sup>6</sup> Nyanut made this statement in *Thuongjäng* (Dinka) in the interview and it was subsequently translated.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/946612>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/946612>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)