

## “SAMIRA DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANY MORE”: *Somali-Swedes' mobility as transnational practice*

### Abstract

This article explores transnational experiences within a group of Somali-Swedes, particularly how parents' transnational practices are transferred to their children and how a transnational social space, built on close relationships on a global scale, is constructed. The readiness to relocate between countries and the implications for the children is illuminated. The onward migration to Egypt is highlighted as an example. According to research on Somalis in diaspora, they explain their propensity to move by claiming to be nomads, but this article indicates that it is also about their desire for better opportunities in combination with the cultural and economic marginalisation experienced in the West.

### Keywords

Somali-Swedish children • transnational generation • nomadic heritage • onward migration • Egypt

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## 1. Introduction

In June, just before the school year ends, someone tells me that Samira,<sup>1</sup> in grade 7, will not be present on the last school day. Samira's school is a Muslim-profiled independent school<sup>2</sup> where roughly 80% of the students are of Somali origin (either born in Somalia or with at least one parent born there), as is Samira. She is moving to Cairo with her mother and siblings. When the new school year starts in August, other students have also left. Some have relocated to other schools in their neighbourhoods or other parts of Sweden, but some have moved abroad. The start of the school year also means that new students arrive, of whom some are returning to Sweden after having spent several years abroad.

I noticed this mobility pattern among the students at the beginning of my ethnographical fieldwork in Samira's school. At the same time, I became part-time employed in the administration department at the school, and from that position I could hear rumours about families planning to move abroad or planning to return to Sweden — sometimes these rumours turned out true.

Having settled in Sweden, some for almost two decades, and being Swedish citizens does not seem to preclude the Somali-Swedes<sup>3</sup> from having many deep contacts with former countrymen around the world, which firmly places them under the definition of transnationalism (Kusow & Bjork 2007). Often-mentioned examples of their transnational practices are remittances and a propensity to move, which encompasses both travelling abroad to visit family and friends and onward migration to other countries (Al Sharmani 2007; Horst 2006; Johnsdotter 2007a; Kusow & Bjork 2007; Lindley 2010).

The focus in this article is on mobility, and the onward migration to Egypt from Sweden is highlighted as an example of a transnational practice among the Somali-Swedes studied.

Particular attention is given to exploring how adults transfer their transnational practices to their children, how the young generation acts and reacts to their parents' transnational practices and how they perceive being transnational. The aim is not to discuss the extent or the intensity of travels and onward migration, but rather to take a closer look at Somali-Swedes mobility, how and why it occurs and its implications for the children's senses of belonging within a transnational discourse.

The data in this article are drawn from a larger study concerning how girls of Somali origin who are students at a Swedish Muslim-profiled independent school describe their current lives in Swedish and transnational contexts.

## 2. Children and transnationalism

During the past two decades, transnational studies have become increasingly common within migration research. A transnational approach to migration highlights the ties that many of today's migrants continue to maintain with their countries of origin after migration, but it also enables a deepened analysis of various transnational practices (Basch, Glick-Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 1994; Faist, Fauseer & Reisenauer 2013; Levitt & Waters 2002; Orellana

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et al 2001; Vertovec 2009). However, although transnational studies on the migrants themselves are quite extensive, similar research on the migrants' children has been relatively scarce; perhaps it has been taken more or less for granted that transnationalism and transnational practices only involve those who actually migrate (Vertovec 2009). Most research on migrants' children has looked at integration and at different patterns of assimilation and segregation (Levitt & Waters 2002; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). There is, however, a growing body of research claiming that transnational practices may very well be reproduced in future generations, especially given today's globalised world (Haikkola 2011; Levitt & Waters 2002; Olsson & Farahani 2012; Smith 2006). Second-generation migrants are sometimes referred to as the "transnational generation" to encompass youth in the country of settlement and the country of origin (Fouon & Glick Schiller 2002; Levitt & Waters 2002), and the question is not whether transnational practices are transferred between generations but to what extent and why (Levitt & Waters 2002). The children may not speak their parents' mother tongues well or want to move to their countries of origin, but this does not mean that they will not engage in transnational practices (Giorgas 2008; Smith 2002). At the same time, children growing up under these circumstances are influenced by the majority society where they currently live, which makes their transnationalism more than a continuation of their parents (Haikkola 2011; Levitt 2009). Their engagement in transnational practices may also change over time and vary between groups and cultures (Levitt 2009).

Cheap travel and new technology are often mentioned as factors that have enabled people in the diaspora to maintain contact with former countrymen in their country of origin and in diaspora. However, the reasons for migrants to develop and maintain relationships in their countries of origin and with their former countrymen go deeper and involve motives for migration, the point in the migrants' lives when migration took place and the treatment of migrants by the receiving country (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Class, ethnicity, religion and gender have proved to be factors that influence the development of different transnational practices (Levitt & Waters 2002; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). To comprehend and correctly analyse a particular transnational practice, we need to be aware of the living conditions of migrants, including their children. Contemporary child researchers argue that childhood is not a universal condition with universal and predefined stages but should be understood as socially constructed and a product of culture, and thus something that changes over time and place (see, for example, James & James 2004). This means, briefly, that childhood may exhibit strong variations depending on what structures and factors are present in a certain childhood context and may include formal and informal rules, expectations and traditions in the society at large as well as within families (Hägglund 2006; James & James 2004; Qvortrup 2005). This may also have implications for an individual child who is raised in a transnational context and because of being mobile between different places, becomes emplaced in different "childhood constructions" with different expectations (Gardner 2012). Another key feature within modern childhood research is that children should be regarded as competent actors who possess agency (Mayall 2008; Sommer, Pramling-Samuelsson & Hundeide 2010). Being born into certain economic, political and cultural circumstances does not prevent children from being actors in a diversity of arenas (including the transnational one) and also to observe and experience things in a different way from their parents, and even have their own agendas and perspectives (Lee 2005). Gardner and Mand (2012) describe, for example, how children from transnational families in the UK failed to

share their parents' ideas of Bangladesh as home; the country rather reminded them that they were British.

Childhoods and children's agency are not only constructed in relation to the parents' origins but also in relation to the countries where they settle. Gardner (2012) asserts that children who live in a place where they are part of an ethnic minority are also placed by the wider society through markers of difference such as skin colour and clothing. In their transnational context, this suddenly changes as these markers instead signify similarity and belonging (ibid.). Let us, therefore, turn to a short description of the Somali-Swedes' situation in Sweden.

### 3. Somali-Swedes in Sweden

Most children at the Muslim-profiled school where I conducted part of my fieldwork have parents who had fled Somalia and the civil war that has raged for decades. Somali migration is typically described as conflict-caused; Somalis have left because of violence, persecution, clan-conflicts and political uncertainty, as well as because of the poverty these issues have caused (Lindley 2010). Settling in Sweden was nothing planned, a main reason was that Sweden accepted Somalis as refugees. Today, there are approximately 60,000 persons of Somali origin living in Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2013). Life has been difficult for many of them, and the Somali-Swedes are regarded as more disadvantaged and marginalised than are other migrant groups (Osman 2012). Their socio-economic conditions are often cited as an example, and their unemployment rate is highest among all migrant groups (Carlson, Magnusson & Rönqvist 2012). Poor housing conditions is another issue mentioned as an explanatory factor for the precarious situations whereby most of them find themselves in segregated, immigrant-dominated and deprived suburbs (Salat 2010).

The marginalisation of Somali-Swedes is also explained by differences in culture and religion (Mella, Palm & Bromark 2011; Salat 2010). Somalis practice Islam, a faith that strengthened after migration (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004; Berns McGown 1999) but also a faith that a considerable part of the majority population in Sweden finds difficult to reconcile with values that are considered fundamental to a modern society (Integrationsverket 2005). It is within this epistemic logic that the Somali-Swedish transnational generation is constructing their childhoods and forming their agency, thoughts on life and plans for the future.

Much research on the transnational generation looks at children and parents who live separated by national borders. There are studies of children left behind while parents go to the United States to earn money to support their children (see, for example, Parreñas 2005, on children in the Philippines). There is research on children sent before their parents, so-called parachute kids (see, for example, Orellana et al. 2001, on South Korean children in suburban Los Angeles), and on children being "sent back" (see, for example, Smith 2006, on Mexicans in New York). This might give the impression that being transnational requires direct contact with the country of origin. This was not the case for the Somali-Swedes in my study. Although the parents were born in Somalia their children are not, and almost none of them had at the time ever visited or lived there, for obvious reasons. Still, I consider it entirely possible to be transnational and develop transnational practices without ever touching Somali soil. This implies moving the focus from a place defined in political terms, such as country of origin and country of settlement, to the relationships between people of the same origin and towards a cluster of ties and networks within

what may be looked upon as a transnational social space (Faist, Fauseer & Reisenauer 2013; Gardner 2012). Transnational social spaces are not static constructions; ties and positions within them are always dynamic, and borders are fluid in a constant interaction between familial and personal practices on the one hand and socio-cultural, economic and political realities on the other (Faist, Fauseer & Reisenauer 2013). In this context, Somalia and Somaliness may be looked upon as the least common denominators and the glue for the relationships between those involved in this study. In this connection, certain lifestyle patterns from the past play a critical role.

#### 4. Methods and description of the field

The empirical starting point in this article was ethnographic fieldwork. Most of it was carried out between 2006 and 2010, and in the article, I will draw on data from the following sources: participant observation at the school mentioned above and at a summer camp, interviews and written essays.

To get acquainted with a culture to which I do not belong (I am neither Somali nor Muslim), participant observation became an appropriate method to begin with, and I started at the Muslim-profiled school. At the time of the study, the school operated on two different premises. The students in the part of the school where I worked were between 11 and 16 years old (the number of students varied during the years but averaged just above 100), and my observations took place during their breaks and lunches. Because the premises were cramped and my desk stood next to two of the classrooms I found myself constantly surrounded by students, which gave me rich opportunities to not only observe them and their interactions but also listen to and take part in their conversations. The advantage of this type of everyday conversation is the informal tone and the spontaneous situations (Spradley 1979).

The fieldwork at the school was complemented by participant observation at a yearly summer camp in the Swedish countryside for mothers of Somali origin and their children, where I participated twice (in 2008 and 2010). The camp is hosted by a Christian folk high school and organised by some Somali associations in Sweden. Approximately 400 persons, 100 mothers and 300 children took part in these camps. Some of the participants at the camp are mothers and children who previously lived in Sweden but have moved abroad and are visiting the camp during their holidays.

The extended stay at the school and at the two summer camps made it possible to get acquainted with many families, gaining insight into the extent and types of transnational practices. Research, however, requires more than physical presence in a research area (Agar 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson 1995), which explains my semi-structured, open-ended interviews with seven men and three women. The interviews took place between 2006 and 2010. One of the interviewees is Samira. The interview with her was carried out in 2012, when she had lived in Egypt for 5 years.<sup>4</sup> Because of the distance, I wrote to Samira over e-mail and she responded, which I followed with new questions. The other interviewees were selected using the so-called snowball method (Heckathorn 1997). Those interviewed are all closely connected to the above-mentioned school since they work there, have their children at the school or are former students at the school. All of them have close friends or kin who have relocated from Sweden to Egypt. Three of the interviewees had lived in and performed part of their schooling in Egypt, and two of the men's wives and children are in Egypt while the men work in Sweden.

All interviews were conducted in Swedish, including the interview with Samira. The questions covered areas such as the informants' experiences of transnational practices, their reflections on onward migration, in particular to Egypt, and the children's involvement in transnational practices.

Between 2006 and 2010, all girls in grade 5 (approximately 11 years old) at the above-mentioned school wrote essays on the topic "My future", which resulted in 68 collected pieces by girls of Somali origin. The aim was to get as close as possible to their own unfettered thoughts and see whether it was possible to find transnational references in their texts with such a broad topic. Having children write about their futures may not only be a methodology to learn more about how they imagine their adulthoods but also a way to observe how they position themselves in the present (Elliott 2010; Sanders and Munford 2008; Steedman 1980). The essays were written during their Swedish lessons, and the students were informed that the task was voluntary. Over the years, only one girl did not write anything.

Data collection was to a great extent parallel with the data analysis, which is common in this type of ethnographical study (Agar 1996). The interaction between data collection and analysis opened up a process of reflexive and systematic sifting and an opportunity for testing explanations and theories from the literature on transnationalism. In the following, I will go deeper into describing mobility patterns as a transnational practice among the Somali-Swedes I met during my fieldwork: the travelling to visit extended family and onward migration. Before this I describe some cultural lifestyle patterns which the Somalis brought with them and which became prerequisites for their transnational life.

#### 5. Some prerequisites for creating and sustaining transnational practices among the Somali-Swedes

The collected empirical data revealed that the strong sense of social connectedness (Putnam 2000) among my informants as a basis for transnational practices could be explained by certain prerequisites. These are analysed under the headings "Nomadic heritage" and "Clan and family".

##### 5.1 Nomadic heritage

"A Somali never puts down deep roots", Sadia, a young woman at the summer camp, told me when I asked her why so many students at the school moved between countries. She thereby joined the ranks of all of the adults interviewed who referred to a nomadic past when asked about Somali migrants' travelling and moving between countries.

Somalis being nomads is also mentioned by scholars, as, for example, in Ioan M. Lewis' anthropological research within Somalia (2002) or Cindy Horst's research on Somalis in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya (2006). Horst describes the Somalis as having "nomadic heritage", which she explains as a propensity of "looking for greener pastures; a strong social network that entails the obligation to assist each other in surviving and risk-reduction through strategically dispersing investments in family members and activities" (Horst 2006:2). However, there are opposing voices regarding its factual accuracy. To some researchers, this perception of being nomads with a nomadic heritage is a falsification of history or at least a generalisation related to the last five decades when nomadic clans

started to dominate the country's political realm (Mukhtar 1995). Yet, the sense of being nomads and having a nomadic heritage appears so strong that it seems to have become a contemporary integrated part of the self also among my informants. Maybe the notion is useful when the propensity to leave pastures that did not turn out as green as expected needs to be justified.

Based on this, the seeming comfort with moving among Somalis in the diaspora could be explained as their maintaining a nomadic heritage, but now implementing it on a global scale. The hardships that were prerequisites for survival as nomads remain, but today's "pastures" consist of countries scattered around the world. These different places have become part of a transnational strategy whereby potential benefits of different countries are weighed against presumed disadvantages in terms of whether to stay or to migrate. Sweden is one of the countries that is put on the scale and compared. According to those interviewed and to other research (Carlson, Magnusson & Rönnqvist 2012), it is, for example, much easier to find work in England and the US than in Sweden. Sweden has, however, according to those interviewed, overall better housing conditions and maternity care; schools are also free of charge, which is also put forward as a plus — this applies especially to higher level studies. Whether the education as a whole is better in Sweden is a contested issue among my informants.

I never heard the children talking about themselves in terms of being nomads, nor did they refer to travelling and moving around, which they did write about in their essays, as being part of a nomadic heritage. This does not mean that their childhood is not affected by their parents' sense of being nomads.

If the nomadic life, as described here, puts much of its focus on different places as a basis for how transnational practices are realised, I will now describe some prerequisites for which relationships are the primary consideration — namely, clan and family.

## 5.2 Clan and family

The connectedness between Somalis is often explained by their origin in a clan society (Horst 2006; Johnsdotter 2007a). In a society characterised by scarce resources and weak institutions, as Somalia usually is described, clans have historically played a significant role in survival (Horst 2006).

According to Björk (2007), clans are, however, a highly charged topic and not one that most Somalis in the diaspora wish to talk about or explain. This also applied to those interviewed in this study. Clans were not mentioned in the girls' essays, either. When asked about this reluctance, the adults explained that clans belonged to the past. They explained that they wanted to protect their children from the system that had brought so much pain and caused the collapse of Somalia. They wanted their children to develop a sense of being a Somali on other parameters, and religion was often mentioned. Several referred to the Quran, which says that God gathered people from different tribes because they should learn to get along with each other. According to the headmaster, most Somali clans are represented at the school studied and although the children know which clan they belong to, they seem to not know what to do with this knowledge. The students play and pal around regardless of clan affiliation. Nor can bullying, wrangling and fighting at the school be explained by clan affiliation.

In talking to the adults, it became obvious that the importance of clan was something that divided the younger generations from the older and the Somalis in the diaspora from those still living in

Somalia. Despite the efforts to remove "clan" from the lives of the younger generation, it may still matter in some situations. I was, for example, told that for Somali-Swedes who move or travel to other countries, where other clan members already live, their clan affiliation may function as a type of welcoming. Furthermore, research from UK shows that clan identity affects settlement patterns among Somalis in London (Rutter 2006).

Whereas they were reluctant to talk about clan, it was the opposite for "family". Family was mentioned all the time, in the essays the girls wrote as well as in the interviews, and seemed to be crucial in understanding how transnational relationships are formed and retained. However, although the girls in their essays mentioned their parents and siblings — that is, the typical nuclear family according to Western standards — the family members discussed in the interviews and informal talks with adults as well as the girls included more relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and a very wide definition of cousins, and they could be scattered around the whole globe.

Among Somali migrants, family is not only defined in much broader terms than is the traditional Western family but is also a construction within which responsibility is collective (Johnsdotter 2007a, 2007b). This collective nature also includes the children. The responsibility for children belongs not only to the biological parents but also to the extended family (*ibid.*). This was also obvious in my research. One of the women interviewed, who often had one of her relatives' daughters living with her, said that this girl was, of course, her daughter also.

An example of the collective responsibility for children brought up by the media, is the so-called "dumped" children (*de dumpade barnen*) (Brinkemo 2004), that is, children who are sent to Somalia if they misbehave. During my fieldwork, I did not encounter a single child who was sent by parents alone to another country, which of course does not preclude it from happening. The adults I interviewed said that they had heard of this, above all in connection to the chaos following the outburst of the civil war, but that it was a very rare occurrence. It still happens, however, that young persons in their later teens are sent away to other countries if they misbehave or fail in their studies (see, for example, Hassan's story below). Those interviewed also put forward that in fact, the children are not dumped but live together with their extended family who feel the same strong responsibility for them as in a biological parent-child relationship. They do understand, though, that a child brought up in Sweden might have severe difficulties adjusting to Somalia, and this consciousness may imply that the traditional family logic is changing, at least in part.

## 6. Mobility – transnational familial reunions and onward migration

In spite of limitations from the above-mentioned financial hardships, every summer a considerable number of students at the school travel to meet family and kin in England, the US, Canada, Kenya, Malaysia, Egypt or wherever they live in the world. It is also common that families living in Sweden receive visitors from other countries. The annual summer camp, where I collected some of the data for this article, hosts children from countries such as England, the US, the Netherlands, Norway, Egypt and Saudi Arabia who spend the summer in Sweden. Some of them have previously lived in Sweden. This travelling during holidays is an opportunity for the children to strengthen relationships with older relatives and cousins of the same

age. Stories such as the one Soumaya told me during a lunch break were common during my time at the Muslim-profiled school:

Soumaya: My aunt will come to Sweden to see us today. She comes from Atlanta.

Gunnel: So you have an aunt as far away as Atlanta!

Soumaya: Yes, she is my mother's sister. She is very rich. She lives in a big house with five bedrooms.

Soumaya tells me more about her family. Her grandmother lives in Finland, with another aunt and some of her uncles. Then, she has an aunt in Canada. Many members of her father's family live in England and Somalia, and some live in Ethiopia. Soumaya tells me that her aunt from Atlanta will stay until September but they will not stay in Sweden the whole time.

Soumaya: In the summer, we'll go to Egypt. We've done that several times. We rent a big house there.

Gunnel: So you have family in Egypt?

Soumaya: No, not family, but my mother has many friends there.

These holiday visits provide an opportunity for the adults to transfer their transnational practices to their children. Although they do not take place in Somalia, these reunions nevertheless offer the possibility for parents to promote their ideas of what it means to be a Somali. An example is the summer camp with socialising but also lectures on topics like the Swedish school system and children's health as well as how to cope with difficulties in the West while maintaining the kinship and pride as Somalis. A Somali word for this sense of ethnic pride is *soomaalinimo* and implies a positive image instead of the stigmatising representations of violence, anarchy, values of self-interest and lack of commitment to family that has pervaded Somalia (Al Sharmani 2007). Within the diaspora, this *soomaalinimo* may be regarded as an aspect in the construction of a transnational generation. However, at play in this creation is that those involved may be settled in many different countries around the world and bring with them thoughts and ideas that may differ concerning how *soomaalinimo* should be interpreted and what it means to be a good Somali with high moral values, which may cause "cultural clashes". One of the girls who had spent her summer in Somalia told me about her experiences:

Everyone saw that I wasn't from there. And from Sweden I am used to say what I think and stand my ground. Play soccer and everything like that. But Mom said: Be quiet! You are a girl.

At the summer camp, young Somalis coming directly from Somalia were, for example, astonished that men and women queued in the same line for food, something that made the Somali-Swedes at the camp shake their heads in surprise.

The holidays are also, according to the adults interviewed, a way for the children to broaden their horizons and get useful experiences and valuable knowledge that may be helpful when they get older and will choose a place to live and to work — a type of transnational global strategy, whereby different places are looked upon and judged for what they offer.

Visiting family and friends abroad during holidays was also very much present in the girls' essays as something they would do as adults. Though most of the girls associated the subject "My future" with professional career and family, approximately half of the 68

essays also mentioned travelling and holidays as important. For the girls, travelling was about experiencing new places, but most of them wrote about visiting friends and family.

Another example of mobile Somali-Swedes are those who decide to leave Sweden and settle down in another country, so-called onward migration. Studies from the Netherlands, England and Egypt on the reasons for migrants of Somali origin to migrate reveal that they hope for better opportunities and a larger network in the receiving country but also have experienced disappointment and feelings of exclusion in the country they are leaving (Al Sharmani 2007; Kroner 2007; van Liempt 2011).

Most adults in my study arrived as refugees and did not choose to settle in Sweden in particular, and their onward migration is a result of more conscious strategies and better-considered decisions regarding what is best for their family and children at the present time and in the future.

This onward migration was also present in the girls' essays. Although 18 girls wrote that they want to stay in Sweden as adults, 37 plan to migrate to other countries. The US and England were most frequently mentioned; both are countries with large Somali minorities and places where many of the girls at the school have relatives and have spent holidays. Somalia was mentioned in three essays, which is understandable given the situation in the country. Some students also mentioned Muslim countries as alternatives; three essays mentioned Egypt. The girls' cited several reasons for the onward migration. Many cited work opportunities as reasons. The girls have, as I have written elsewhere, high educational and professional ambitions (Mohme 2014), but they seemed to think that these could not be realised in Sweden. Many of the children at the school experience socio-economic hardships and unemployment in their families. Their parents might have been raised in wealthy and educated families in Somalia but have been unable to regain their former statuses or living standards in Sweden. Their former countrymen settled in the US and England are, according to the adults interviewed, more successful. It is possible that this influenced the girls' dreams for the future.

In my study, the adults claimed that their decisions to travel and to move were all about doing what was best for the children and that what was best for the children would also benefit the family. However, what was considered best for the children was disputed even among the Somali-Swedes interviewed, as were the consequences for the children and the families in the long run.

## 7. Onward migration to Egypt ... and back to Sweden

Whereas Samira and some of the students at the school I studied moved to Egypt, other students at the school moved to other countries — the UK was the most common. However, whereas Samira's onward migration resulted in a family being split between two countries (the mother and children moved to Egypt, and the father stayed in Sweden to work), it is more typically the whole family who migrates to England, where it is considered easier for fathers to find work.

The decision to migrate is a difficult one. Ali, one of the fathers, whose family had lived in Egypt for many years, told me:

It has to be like this. It is hard, but we Somalis are nomads, you know, and many of us in the older generation were raised without a father present. So was I. If I could find a job in Egypt, I would move there. However, it is not possible.

There are several reasons behind this onward migration to Egypt. Ali said that his wife is Muslim, and she wants the children to have the same good upbringing she had, learning Arabic and the Quran. Religion was also something that Samira brought to the fore when I asked her about the advantages of moving to Egypt:

I enjoy the sound of the adhan [the Islamic call to prayer – my comment] everyday that I am able to hear it, see the Muslim people everywhere you go, halal food everywhere and no need to ask for it. Ramadan is also very enjoyable here because it is a Muslim country.

The adults also mentioned economic reasons for moving. In Egypt, the fathers' Swedish wages are sufficient to maintain a standard of living they would not have been able to afford in Sweden, including good housing, a maid and also private lessons for the children.

A third reason for the move to Egypt was to escape the children's school failures. The schools in the suburbs, to which children are often referred, do not live up to the parents' high ambitions for their children but rather add to the children's marginalisation. In Cairo, in contrast, families can often afford to enrol their children in private schools and thereby provide them with better opportunities for continuing their studies in the West (Al Sharmani 2007). Hassan, now just over 20 years old, was sent to Egypt by his mother for his high school years. After a troublesome and unsuccessful school career in the suburb where he grew up, his mother thought that he would get a better education in Egypt. The extended family and some members of the clan provided her with financial resources, as she could not afford to pay the tuition fees for the education and the living costs for her son herself. In Cairo, Hassan lived with his older sister, who was sent from North America to look after him, and he went to an American high school. Although he had many positive experiences – Hassan mentioned for example, that the school was multicultural, with students from around the world, including some who shared his Somali background – he noted that it was not always easy:

I was far away from my family and my buddies back home. Also, the school was strict, and anyone who misbehaved could be expelled.

Not only Hassan but also Samira and Osman, who both had experience with schooling in Egypt, told of how difficult it was to comply with the school system. The subject content was different, but above all, they emphasised how difficult it was to adjust to a completely different teaching system where rote learning was the norm, where the teachers were authoritative and where quite often they felt that they were not respected. Samira also noted that it was difficult with the new languages. The language at her school was English, and she also had lessons in Arabic – two languages in which her skills, by her own report, were not very good when she arrived from Sweden.

Both Samira and Osman shared Hassan's experience of missing their friends; Osman, who had just returned to Sweden after 5 years in Egypt, said:

I would rather have stayed in Egypt. I liked it there and did not want to come to Sweden. I had a stable life and lots of friends.

Moving back to Sweden after a few years seems to be part of the transnational strategy among those who migrate to Egypt. The reasons are many but generally relate to the desire for a better

future. Higher studies are, for example, expensive in Egypt, and the quality is debatable, and after exams, it is extremely difficult to find work. Returning to Sweden after several years is not trivial, however. With regard to education, Samira will, for example, lose one or two years of school; despite her excellent high school exam grades, her exam must be validated and completed with grades in Swedish.

None of the children were concerned about their onward migration and seemed rather surprised when I asked about it. This is perhaps because moving is so typical that it has become a normal, although not always enjoyable, part of life – everyone knows someone who has left Sweden to move to Egypt, and everyone knows someone who has moved back to Sweden. In Cairo as well as in Sweden, they live in areas where there are already many Somalis (and Somali-Swedes). Furthermore, moving does not mean leaving the familiar because the children have often visited the place where they are moving or already know people there, such as cousins they met during holidays or school-mates and neighbours from their lives in Sweden. Furthermore, during the summers, their neighbourhood in Cairo fills up with visitors from Sweden, and even after they left, they will continue to stay in contact with their old friends in Sweden over the Internet and Skype.

## 8. Conclusions

This article has discussed mobility patterns as a transnational practice among a group of Somali-Swedes. How children of Somali-Swedish migrants act and react to their parents' transnationalism have been central to my analysis and using the term transnational generation made it possible to deliberately let children and youth be the point of departure but also to move the focus from geographical places to spaces, relationships and linkages between people of the same origin.

The transnational practices described in this article seem to have become established strategies within the group I studied and can be understood through the idea of a nomadic heritage transferred to today's globalised conditions and the situation in a forced diaspora with a desire for security and a better future. This includes the children who are socialised into these practices and an example is the essays where the girls write that they as adults will move from Sweden much for the same reasons as their parents.

However, children have agency and according to my data the transnationalism that they experience and practice is not only a continuation and a result of that of their parents. Most of them have, as described, no memories of their own from Somalia and consequently have to rely on what they are told and thus create their own imaginations. Their lived experiences in the places they inhabit as well as their transnational contacts with, for example, cousins of the same age in other parts of the world, provide opportunities and a space for negotiations that differ from those of their parents. This allows for a more complex and comprehensive understanding of how Somali-Swedish children may regard their transnationalism. Their close family relationships and their experiences in the different countries they have visited or lived in come together to interact and co-exist beyond national borders.

Moving several thousands of kilometres, as Samira and her siblings did, is more than a simple change of geographic location. The new place may imply that positions are altered with regard to factors such as class, religion, ethnicity and gender. Samira, for example, felt more at home in Cairo than in Sweden when it came to practicing

Islam, but at the same time she had a hard time getting accustomed to the Egyptian school system, which she found authoritarian. The children's positions and places in the local hierarchy are not the only changes when they visit or move to new countries; their positions in their families may alter as well, which may lead to negotiations between different social roles related to how a childhood is considered to be lived in different places, environments, families, etc., one example is how the girl I talked to experienced being a girl in Somalia. That hierarchies within families change when moving is something that research by the Turkish professor of psychology, Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) has showed. Thus, migration, globalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, welfare and improved education are all factors that influence families' relations when they move.

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## Notes

- 1 All names of persons in this article were changed to protect the anonymity and integrity of my informants.
- 2 Muslim-profiled schools are a part of the independent school system in Sweden that was launched in 1992. Independent schools are privately owned and publicly financed. Tuition and other fees are not allowed, and the schools are obliged to follow the same curriculum as the public schools. There are ten or so Muslim-profiled schools in Sweden. They host approximately 1,700 students and are primarily located in or close to immigrant-dominated areas. The Muslim faith is mostly adhered to through separate lessons for girls and boys during physical education, serving *halal* food and allowing prayer for those who want it as well as a few days off for Muslim holidays.
- 3 Most of those whom I met during my research called themselves Somalis even though they live in Sweden and are Swedish citizens. To avoid confusion with Somalis still in Somalia or with migrants of Somali origin in other countries, the term Somali-Swedes has been used throughout this article. The use of the term is not an identity ascribing category.
- 4 The data for this article are part of a larger research and the interview with Samira is one of several completing interviews that was carried out in 2012.

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