

ROOTS AND ROUTES: *Migration, belonging and everyday life*

Abstract

This article is about transnational migrants, how they construct belonging to 'new' places where they have arrived, and how the feelings of belonging to their places of origin change when they go back. The theoretical part of the article outlines the relationship between migration and belonging arguing that there is a dynamic interplay between roots and routes in people's lives. The empirical point of departure is narratives about roots and routes by ethnic minorities settled in Aalborg East, an underprivileged neighbourhood in northern Denmark. One of the main findings is a gap between the national exclusion of transnational migrants marked as 'strangers' and border figures of the nation and a relatively high degree of local belonging to the neighbourhood. This is followed by an in-depth empirical analysis inspired by Alfred Schutz's distinction between the stranger and the homecomer. A somewhat paradoxical finding is that it appears to be more difficult for transnational migrants to maintain their roots in the country of origin when they go back than it was to establish new roots in the host country.

Keywords

Belonging • migration • roots and routes • ethnicity • everyday life • intersectionality

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1 Introduction

"What good are roots if you can't take them with you?"
Gertrude Stein¹

Globalization and increasing transnational migration fundamentally change the frameworks for developing identities, belonging and citizenship for ethnic minorities as well as ethnic majorities. The increasing migration challenges local and national communities and the classic model of citizenship. It is an important task for contemporary research to analyze the significance of these changes. Macro analyses of citizenship/migration regimes and analyses of globalization and multiculturalism have made important contributions to our understanding of new forms of transnational relations in terms of both gender and ethnicity, and important analyses of the relationship between citizenship, belonging and transnationalism

have been developed (Koopmanns et al. 2005; Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Lister 2006; Yuval-Davis 2007).

This article focuses primarily on a micro level analysis of the relationship between belonging, migration and everyday life. It emphasizes construction of transnational identities, feelings of belonging to (new) places, and ruptures in every day routines in connection with leaving one place and coming to a new one. Our empirical point of departure is narratives about roots and routes by ethnic minorities settled in Aalborg East, an underprivileged neighbourhood in northern Denmark.

The first theoretical part of the article outlines the relationship between migration and belonging framed within the perspective on roots and routes and aims to specify duality and interplay between transnational migration and feelings of belonging to different places. The next section contains information about Aalborg East and the gap between national exclusion and local belonging. This is followed

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by an in-depth empirical analysis inspired by Alfred Schütz's understanding of everyday life focusing on social practices and meetings of transnational migrants within the positions of strangers and homecomers.

2 Routes and roots

The relationship between migration and belonging can be discussed as the relationship between roots and routes. Sociologists and anthropologists have developed a series of concepts about shifting and overlapping identities that arise as a result of increasing transnational migration, such as hybrid cultures (Hall 1992), diaspora and creolization (Gilroy 1997), cultural intermezzos (Back 1996) and in a Nordic context "Hyphenated Danes" (Mørck 2000) or "Balancing Artists" (Prieur 2004).

Some sociologists have argued for 'dislocation' and disembedding as basic traits of contemporary societies, which are reflected in identities as well as in feelings of belonging (to nations as well as places) (Bauman 2004; Giddens 1991). British sociologist John Urry argues that mobility is the greatest challenge to society today and the greatest source of change. He advocates that a sociology of flow should replace a sociology of territories (Urry 2007). Mike Savage proposes that in contemporary societies characterized by "great speed across large distances, social life cannot be seen as firmly located in particular places with clear boundaries. Identities are therefore diasporic, mobile and transient." (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst 2005: 1).

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze states: "We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much." (1987: 15). In poetry Salman Rushdie has criticized the root metaphor: "Look under your feet. You will not find gnarled growths spouting through the soles. Roots, I sometimes think, are a conservative myth, designed to keep us in our places." (1995: 86). Similarly Liisa Malkki has criticized the way root metaphors fix human identities to places (Malkki 1992).

Ulrich Beck has criticized this dichotomization between roots and routes emphasizing that cosmopolitan society has both *roots and wings* (Beck 2006). He argues that there is a strong connection between the local and the global because issues of global concern are becoming part of everyday social relations. Beck calls attention to the need to transcend the nation-state perspective but considers it a grave misunderstanding if the alternative is 'only' to connect globalization with the global; globalization 'from within' and thus locality are also very important. "You cannot even think about globalization without referring to specific locations and places. One of the important consequences of the globalization thesis is the recovering of the concept of place" (Beck 2002: 23). Levitt and Glick Schiller make a somewhat similar argument when they maintain that the analytical lens must be broadened because migrants are often "embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social

fields, encompassing those who moved and those who stay behind" (2004: 1003).

We find the concept of roots and routes suitable to develop in-depth understanding of the significance of migration and belonging in people's everyday lives. Our approach is that there are both roots and routes in people's lives, and we argue that moving around (voluntarily or forced) goes hand in hand with the security, continuity and creation of communities and attachment to places (see also Bauman 2004; Gustafson 2001).

This interplay is not least decisive in contemporary society where globalization, transnationalism and increased migration are challenging local and national communities (Beck 2002; Modood et al. 2006).

However, we are sceptical of Urry's flow theory and the idea of people's general dislocation and mobility as a basic condition. It does not take into account that contemporary people can also be very rooted and attached to places, and it creates a dichotomization between the global cosmopolitan and the local attachment, which by implication is constructed as conservative, deficient or even deviant (Gullestad 2006; Jørgensen 2010; Skeggs 2004).

In this article we will focus on transnational migrants and how they construct belonging to 'new' places where they have arrived as transnational migrants, and on how their feelings of belonging to 'old' places change when they go back to, primarily, their hometown or country of origin.

3 Belonging and diversity

Belonging is a contested and multidimensional concept which must be located on different analytical levels (Christensen 2009).

(a) At the *macro level* belonging refers to support for larger '*imagined*' communities, for example national or religious communities, often associated with strong feelings of community. Such communities often have a flip side – by signalling the strong 'we' they simultaneously exclude 'the others'. Imagined communities are therefore important in constructing the border between 'us and them' (Anderson 1983; Butler & Spivak 2007; Yuval-Davis 2007).

(b) At the *meso level* belonging refers to the association of social and political actors with *collective organizations*, e.g. political parties or social movements. It can be membership of collective organizations of people with similar values, ideas or common interests. The association may also take the form of construction of collective identities, for example as in the workers' or the women's movement (Castells 1998; Tilly 2002).

(c) At the *micro level* belonging refers to relations in everyday life and local communities. At this level, belonging refers to identities of individuals, social groups and is based mainly on face-to-face relations, which construct social distinctions in relation to whom you identify with. Such belongings can be reflexive and deliberate, they can be oriented towards integration in local communities, but

may also be characterized by prejudices, e.g. about class and race/ethnicity (Dench, Gavron & Young 2006; Gullestad 2006).

Our primary focus will be on the *micro level*, focusing on transnational migrants' roots and routes, their attachment to shifting places and communities and how they develop new routines in everyday life and local communities. However, we have to maintain the connection to the macro level, especially to excluding representations of 'the others', which are anchored here. For example, Danish cultural geographers Lasse Kofoed and Kirsten Simonsen point out that the construction of strangerhood varies depending on the context and works differently on the national and the local/urban level. They argue that in cities and most local communities there will always be places where you will run into *the stranger*:

Places become "meeting places" where social practices and routes, spatial meanings and narratives, as well as mobile and permanent materialities meet and form configurations that are subject to continuous transformation and negotiation. (Kofoed & Simonsen 2010: 31, our translation)

These social practices and encounters in everyday life are in focus here, and we want to analyze the belonging processes that arise from transnational migrants' routes and roots. We are looking for patterns in these processes, but are aware of the risk of essentializing and homogenizing the diversity that exists among transnational migrants, also within one nationality or ethnic group.

We therefore apply a 'super diversity' approach on ethnicity and migration studies, which advocates a nuanced take on ethnicity that considers the intersection between ethnicity and other multiple categories (Glick Schiller 2008; Vertovec 2007). Nina Glick Schiller has studied the relationship between transnationalism and migration, and she has criticized migration research for studying the field through an 'ethnic lens'. The result is a failure to examine the dynamic relationship between migrants, the places they come from and their new settlement (Glick Schiller 2008; Glick Schiller & Caglar 2009). A fundamental problem is that many ethnicity studies assume the ethnic group as a unit of analysis. Glick Schiller recommends an analytical approach which is able to analyze inter-ethnic differences among migrants. She emphasizes class differences as well as regional factors. Being inspired by the notion of intersectionality we similarly strive to move beyond the ethnic lens focusing on how the category of ethnicity intersects with other categories such as gender, class and generation (Christensen & Jensen 2011b; Phoenix 2006).

4 Context, data and method

The data analyzed in this article were generated during *The INTERLOC Project – Gender, Class and Ethnicity – Intersectionality and Local Citizenship*. The project examines the interplay between overall structures, discourses and policies in contemporary Danish

society on the one hand and belonging, local citizenship, everyday life and identities in relation to gender, class and ethnicity on the other (see <http://www.interloc.aau.dk> for a detailed description).

The project employs several empirical methods. The total material consists of 27 semi structured qualitative interviews (12 of these with ethnic minorities); ethnographic data from 37 meetings in two local organizations (one primarily for migrant women and one for all residents); analyses of 385 texts from local and national mass media as well as quantitative survey data. This article is based on the qualitative interviews. The informants were sampled through a combination of personal contacts, random sampling and snowballing, the latter carried out from different starting points, for instance social workers' networks in ethnic minority groups or participation in local organizations. The total sample is diverse in terms of gender, class (occupation and educational background); ethnicity; generation and private and public housing.

The interviews were conducted individually. The places for interviews were chosen by the informants and they have primarily been held in people's homes after working hours. Interviewees were asked about a wide range of themes including attachment to places and belonging, experiences of arriving in Aalborg East, everyday life in the area, feeling at home in the area, memories from other places, experiences of going back to place of origin, community and networks and similarities with and differences from other areas. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, analyzed and coded in software for qualitative data analysis (Nvivo). All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

The empirical focus is Aalborg East, a deprived residential section of Aalborg, a medium sized Danish city with approximately 125,000 inhabitants situated in the northern part of Denmark. Aalborg East has 10,000 inhabitants, and the unemployment rate is above average for the entire Aalborg area. The population is relatively young compared to the rest of Aalborg and the proportion of immigrants and descendants of immigrants is 18%, which makes Aalborg East the most multicultural area in Aalborg (Skjøtt-Larsen 2008). The neighbourhood is subject to territorial stigmatization and often constructed as an 'immigrant ghetto' even though the ethnic minority population is relatively small. Other analyses from the INTERLOC project suggest that most residents have a positive view of the area and are content to live there (Christensen & Jensen 2011a).

5 National exclusion and local belonging

Most migrants interviewed in the INTERLOC project have lived in Denmark for several years and are chiefly content to live in Aalborg East. They emphasize that they feel safe where they live and express a relatively high degree of belonging to the neighbourhood, which does not differ from the belonging expressed by ethnic Danes in the

area. The survey data about the area mentioned above indicate that most of the residents in Aalborg East find it an attractive area to live in, whereas people living outside the area find it the least attractive place in Aalborg (Skjøtt-Larsen 2008).

Ethnic minorities' positive feeling of belonging are not reflected at the national level; the reality is rather non-belonging to the national community. Two Danish-Somali women who came as refugees as children and are now in their twenties and thirties feel sad when they repeatedly encounter negative discourses about immigrants and refugees, especially Muslims, in the media. This escalated with the cartoon crisis:

"The debate about Muslims – it really hurts. They are showing heart-breaking pictures." (Nadifa)

"I have been hurt as a Muslim, for instance when we had the debate on the Muhammad cartoons. It makes me really angry." (Jasmina)

This gap between non-belonging to the national macro level and local belonging at city and local community level is also found in Lasse Kofoed and Kirsten Simonsen's analyses of Pakistanis in Copenhagen. One of their explanations is that the construction of 'the stranger' is very different at the national and at the local level. At the national level, 'the stranger' is constructed as a border figure of the nation who marks us/them and who is excluded from the national communities, whereas urban spaces and everyday lives are characterized by face-to-face meetings as well as embodied encounters, also with the stranger (Kofoed, Simonsen 2010: 233). Ove Sernhede, whose primary focus is young people, offers a slightly different explanation. According to Sernhede, excluding discourses about ethnic minorities in relation to national (imagined) communities is essential to understanding their local belonging. In a hostile national discursive context the neighbourhood may become an alternative place to feel safe and at home – a place invested with positive feelings. Such an orientation towards locality may thrive along with a strong transnational orientation (Sernhede 2006).

In the Danish context, excluding perceptions of 'the foreigners' in the public discourses is well documented (see e.g. Andreassen 2005; Schierup 1993). Peter Hervik has shown how Danish media and politics since the early 1990s have positioned immigrants and refugees as 'unwanted guests' (2004). Karen Wren has analyzed manifestations of cultural racism in Denmark. Wren locates a fundamental shift in attitudes in Denmark during the early 1980s; since then negative representations of 'the others' have prevailed (Wren 2001: 141). Wren also emphasizes that the metaphor 'the strangers' is deeply rooted in the Danish political culture.

Our interview material must be understood in this discursive context. Ethnic minority informants are critical of the negative label 'the strangers' and the stigmatizing public discourses towards Muslims. They have a low degree of belonging to the national 'Danish community', which contrasts the relatively high degree of belonging to their local neighbourhood. They experience Danish racism more as a general hostility towards 'strangers' in Denmark than as concrete everyday racism.

In the following we go deeper into the construction of local belonging among the transnational migrants in Aalborg East. We focus on how the migrants put down roots while at the same time they try to maintain roots in their places of origin.

6 Narratives on travelling

The narratives on travelling and migration show changing patterns of belonging to multiple places and social networks and there is a tension between compulsion and possibilities across the narratives. *Compulsion* to flee; to move around; to break up families; to hide; to move to new places to be able to support oneself; and finally move again due to hostility and unkind treatment in the new surroundings. *Possibilities* in relation to a large global network; family in several countries; speaking several languages; competencies to move in different cultures; and general experiences with transnational relations and networks.

Not surprisingly, many transnational migration narratives concern escape from war and danger or moving to another part of the world due to love and choice of partner. But we have also obtained more unexpected narratives about migration to Denmark. One of these was given by George, an African Christian who Googled his way to Denmark when he was looking for a specific free church that exists in Denmark, Australia and Canada. By chance, he chose Denmark and Aalborg East. Below we present three very different migration stories:

Jasmina is 25 years old, from Somalia, and has lived in Denmark almost 20 years. She was born in Somalia and raised by her grandmother, while her mother and father studied at a European university. When the parents returned to Somalia, war had broken out and the father felt obliged to become a soldier since he belonged to one of the 'top' clans. The parents divorced and the mother was now alone with Jasmina and two younger siblings. Due to the war, they fled to Denmark where they ended up in Aalborg after a couple of years in different refugee camps. The mother remarried, and Jasmina now has five siblings. Jasmina has family in Sweden, Canada and the US, and she knows many Somalis around the world. She speaks five languages and has visited several countries. Every month she sends money to her family in Somalia and has often visited there. She does not want to move back to Somalia due to the chaotic situation in the country. Jasmina feels at home in Denmark and wants to stay. Jasmina has finished high school and is about to start at the teachers' college.

Sofia is 50 years old, from Romania and has lived in Denmark for 12 years. Sofia emphasizes that she moved here because of love. Her daughter from a previous marriage in Romania also lives in Denmark. Sofia was born and raised in a middle-class family in Romania. Her father died early, and her mother

provided for Sofia and her two brothers. She grew up during the communist regime; her family was anti-communist, but not openly. Sofia did well in school and was picked by the communist youth league, which opened the door to a higher education, and Sofia studied law and later gastronomy. Sofia was very active in the Romanian labour movement, and she met her Danish husband in that context when she came to Denmark to learn about democracy after the collapse of communism. After her moving to Denmark, Sofia has attended language school and has had different jobs, most recently at a café. Because of her husband, Sofia has liked living in Denmark, but she also talks about a lack of professional recognition. Sofia has maintained strong ties to Romania. She is chairwoman of a Danish-Romanian association, she visits Romania every year and she keeps an apartment there.

George is 33 years old, from Nigeria and Googled his way to Denmark. His father was fairly wealthy and had four wives. Both parents are traders. For much of his childhood, George lived with his aunt; later with his brother. When he was 19, he moved to Togo to see something different. He learned French and became a trader of clothes and shoes. At the same time George became a Christian and started going to bible school. He Googled information about his free church community, and he applied for enrolment in England, USA and Denmark. The first reply came from Denmark, and George went to bible school in Jutland and later moved to Aalborg East. He knew nothing about the neighbourhood, but moved there because the free church is located there. Today George is married to an ethnic Danish woman. He no longer feels at home in Nigeria; he cannot keep up with events, and people from his village find him strange. For example, they do not understand why he does not have more money and a bigger car now that he lives in Europe.

It is obvious that Jasmina comes from a resourceful family in terms of education and money for travel. After migrating to Denmark Jasmina and her family have had better conditions and more possibilities than most Somali families. No doubt class matters in migration narratives, both in terms of possibilities to migrate and resources to learn languages and establish transnational relations. In contrast to Jasmina, who was forced to flee the war in Somalia, both Sofia and George emphasize the importance of 'free choices'. For Sofia, mobility becomes a possibility when the political regime changes, which makes it easier for Sofia to realize a transnational marriage, live in Denmark but maintain a high degree of belonging in her home country. George's 'free choices' were different; more open and in some ways more random. Religion brought him to Denmark and Aalborg East where he now feels comfortable and safe. His belonging to places is weak; his primary belonging is not geographic, a native place or family, but rooted in his religious

calling. George could have chosen other countries in Africa and Europe; he travels alone, finds jobs and learns new languages. In a way George is a cosmopolite using the world as a playground and he is free to go anywhere. However, he is not a part of a global elite. On the contrary, he had a difficult time coming to Denmark without money, and going back to Nigeria today he finds it hard to meet the expectation that he is part of a western elite with material privileges.

These selected narratives on travelling stress the importance of looking for both similarities and differences in the routes of transnational migrants. There are great differences as to why and how people migrate and we see how processes of migration are strongly related to class differences. If there are 'free choices' to migrate, the opportunity is grabbed in different ways and influenced by structural conditions (political regime, material conditions, etc.) as well as individual circumstances like choice of partner or religion.

7 The stranger and the homecomer

One dimension is travelling around; another is how to take root and how to take your roots with you. Here we find Alfred Schutz's distinction between *the stranger* and *the homecomer* useful.

The stranger is a classical sociological figure used already by Georg Simmel. According to Simmel, the stranger is a person who comes today and stays tomorrow in contrast to the wanderer, who comes one day and leaves the next. The stranger is inside and outside at the same time. This means that the position of the stranger is characterized by belonging as well as non-belonging, by proximity and distance (Kofoed & Simonsen 2010; Simmel 1998). According to Alfred Schutz, a shift occurs in the natural attitudes of everyday life for both the stranger and the homecomer, which makes it difficult to find one's place in a shared social world. Everyday life is no longer what you do every day without noticing it; the symbolic order of taken-for-grantedness has fundamentally changed (Bech-Jørgensen 1994; Schutz 1967).

One of Schutz's basic points is the differences between the stranger and the homecomer which he illustrates via Homer's story about Ulysses' return to Ithaca after 20 years.

But the homecomer's attitude differs from that of the stranger. The latter is about to join a group which is not and has never been his own. He knows that he will find himself in an unfamiliar world, differently organized than that from which he comes, full of pitfalls and hard to master. The homecomer, however, expects to return to an environment of which he always had and – so he thinks – still has intimate knowledge and which he has just to take for granted in order to find his bearings within it. The approaching stranger has to anticipate in a more or less empty way what he will find; the homecomer has just to recur to his memories in the past. So he feels; and because he feels so, he will suffer the typical shock described by Homer. (Schutz 1976: 106–107)

The shock is that the homecomer upon actual return no longer feels at home. Everyday life has changed and 'the world within reach' and 'the natural attitudes' in which bodily movement, actions and intersubjectivity are localized in time and space are no longer accessible to the homecomer (Schutz 1967).

The homecomer will long to re-establish the old intimacy, but changes in "the natural attitudes" will be experienced differently by the homecomer than by the home group. In addition, the home group have a hard time understanding the homecomer, for example the homecoming soldier who is no longer part of either the in-group or the out-group. (Schutz 1976: 118)

The two figures – the stranger and the homecomer – are both represented via the migrants in the INTERLOC project, as they have experiences from everyday life both as strangers in a new country and as homecomers when they visit their country of origin.

8 Being a stranger – coming to Denmark

"I arrived in Denmark in winter and thought it was raining coco when I stepped off the airplane."

(Baheer coming to Denmark from Sri Lanka)

Most transnational migrants explain that they came to Denmark by accident. Several informants thought they were going to Sweden, but ended up in Northern Jutland via Copenhagen. In several cases we see *serial migration* where family members migrate at different times (Phoenix 2009).² It is often mothers who are travelling alone with one or two children, but we also see children travelling alone to Denmark, because there was not enough money to travel for the whole family.

One example is *Nadifa*, who left Somalia alone at 17. Her parents were wealthy, and when war broke out it was imperative for the father to ensure his children a safe future and educational opportunities. The five siblings were sent to different countries; one to Canada, another to England, a third to Denmark, and the two youngest fled with the parents to Congo. *Nadifa* has positive memories of her childhood and talks about the pain of leaving the family, the travel to Denmark with other young Somalis she did not know, and about the unfamiliar surroundings she encountered in Denmark.

It was very emotional to leave my family. I was happy to get away from the war. On the other hand I was sad to leave my family and everybody I knew ... When I came to Denmark, I arrived at the airport in Copenhagen. I was not the only one – there was a group of us. We got to know each other on the plane trip from Kenya. ... I arrived in Denmark in October–November. It was really cold. I remember that I was wearing a thin skirt

and pumps. It was cold and I was freezing. Luckily they gave us jeans and all the winter clothes we needed. ... It was my first time in a country with white people. It was strange because I was only used to seeing dark people. Suddenly you're in a place where everybody is white – that's weird.

Jasmina grew up with her grandmother and fled Somalia with her mother. She talks about her first encounter with Denmark:

It was terrible. I didn't like it. It was terrifying because I had to leave my grandmother. It was cold in Denmark. I didn't understand the language ... And it was weird for me because I had never seen white people before. And the cold; the first three months I didn't really go outside. I stayed in bed and didn't want to go anywhere ... It was so cold! Oh my god ... But it became interesting; I got a bicycle and then I went to kindergarten and became friends with a Danish girl. And I learned Danish in less than three months ...

Besides the pain of leaving the family and meeting the unfamiliar in a strange country, it is interesting that the two women mention the sensed encounter with Denmark, primarily the cold and seeing 'white people'. In the narratives the encounter with embodied diversity is turned upside down in a Danish context as 'white people' become the 'marked' and racialized other.

In a similar analysis of Norwegian Somalis, Kathrine Fangen shows how some people in Somalia expect that everybody in Norway is 'totally white' and buildings made of glass. Her young Norwegian-Somali informants say that they were surprised that the whites they met were not white as paper and that all buildings weren't made of glass (Fangen 2008: 47). In an analysis of young Danish minority women, Camilla Elg also emphasizes sensed and bodily experiences as an important dimension of the encounter with the other (Elg 2005).

New social norms are another challenge for transnational migrants coming to Denmark. Almas, who is a Turkish Kurd and came to Denmark at age 14, talks about her encounter with unfamiliar norms in school. Although she and her two siblings felt welcome in a recipient class, the social practice and daily routines were new to them. For example, her younger brother kept standing up when the teacher entered the classroom.

These narratives about coming to Denmark as a child in the position of the stranger recall the pain of leaving parents and the sensed experiences and changes in the symbolic order of everyday life where the unknown is experienced as what Schutz calls an unfamiliar world. However, today the informants are able to talk about these arrival experiences with humour. The narratives about being a stranger are also narratives about internalization of everyday routines as a central part of the young people's local belonging to the every day life in the neighbourhood. They feel that they belong; they no longer live in an unfamiliar world. They have learned how to

master and they have to a high degree embodied the symbolic order of taken-for-grantedness.

9 Being a homecomer – returning to your place of origin

In her dissertation about young people from Iraqi Kurdistan Mimi Petersen analyzes refugees living in Denmark and young Kurds who have been repatriated to Kurdistan after having lived in Denmark. She concludes that it is far more difficult for the young informants who have been repatriated than it is for the refugees. Petersen shows that the young women in particular feel that the repatriation has resulted in many limitations (for instance changes in family hierarchies as well as in what is regarded as proper behaviour for both genders). At the same time the repatriated young people are constructed as strangers who “do not behave Kurdish ‘in the right way’” (Petersen 2010: 288). In a Norwegian study Fangen has shown how difficult it is for many young Norwegian-Somalis to return to Somalia. The encounter with a Somali lifestyle disrupts everyday routines and norms. For example, they miss the gender equality they grew up with in Norway and they find the conditions in Somalia ‘disgusting and vile’. They encounter what they experience as poor hygiene and sanitary conditions and find it difficult to get used to critters, insects and vermin. In addition, they feel exposed when they are in Somalia because it is so obvious that they live abroad (Fangen 2008: 64ff). Likewise, studies of the large Bangladeshi minority group in London’s East End show how well-educated Bangladeshi groups upon return to their places of origin distance themselves from, for example, food and sanitary conditions (Dench, Gavron & Young 2006).

Many similar experiences appear in our interviews where young informants in particular express frustration with social norms and conventions when they visit their country of origin. Jasmina now finds visiting Somalia much harder than coming to Denmark as a child.

It was difficult for me to go to Somalia as a grown woman and have to deal with the traditions there ... The girls just stayed at home and did nothing. One of my aunts has three grown daughters who are older than me. She did nothing and the three daughters stayed in the house and only cooked and washed clothes. Nothing else ... I pay for school and school uniforms for my cousins. Sometimes my mother pays for food and sends money to them. In other words, I work for my money and I think they should do the same. I couldn’t really handle that (...) They were very aggressive without being angry at each other. At least my family was. Loud and very aggressive with each other. I always felt they were fighting ... I am used to speaking a calmer and softer Somali, you might say. For example with my mother and siblings.

Almas, a Turkish Kurd, and especially her son also find it difficult to return to Turkey. Almas clearly expresses that she and her son now have roots in Denmark.

Well, I go every year. I am always there [in Turkey] for two months in the summer. But I could never stay there. I have always had plans to go back, but when I’m there for two months – after 45 days I say, I want to go home. I just can’t take it anymore. And after a week my 9 year-old son starts asking: “When can we go back home?” So even though he is having a good time down there, his roots will always be here ... I don’t think I will ever go back. I don’t like the system in Turkey, and I have no ties there. I have a lot more ties here in Denmark. I always compare myself to an adopted child; of course a mother gives birth to the child, but when it is adopted it is dependent on the family that raises it. I was born in Turkey, but adopted by Denmark.

Both Almas and Jasmina emphasize repeatedly that they have roots in Denmark. Almas uses the metaphor of an adopted child who is now mostly tied to Denmark. The same goes for her son, who she thinks will always have roots in Denmark. Both women have trouble adapting to the insider group in their families back home. Not because they are excluded, but because they cannot get used to the organization of everyday life or the social conventions in their country of origin. Although Jasmina found it difficult to come to Denmark as a stranger, she finds the position as homecomer in Somalia far more complicated.

George’s narrative about local belonging is more ambiguous than the two women’s; perhaps because he was older than them when he came to Denmark, or because he feels more rootless in terms of place attachment.

I was in Nigeria and I can’t keep up with all the things that go on. I am a foreigner in my own country. Then I go home [to Denmark] and I am a foreigner. In some ways, I have accepted it. It no longer matters because I can easily go to a new place and live there and go through the same things again. I am Nigerian ... but it’s been a long time since I lived there. This is the conflict you experience when you live abroad. How can people talk the way they do? Why are things like that ... why, why, why? ... I was born there but feel like a foreigner.

George also talks about how his countrymen in Nigeria distance themselves from him and have unrealistic expectations. They say that he no longer is one of them; he has become Danish and European. At the same time, they do not understand why he does not have higher status. How can you be poor *and* live in Europe *and* travel to Africa?

In their mind, I can’t be poor in Denmark. If you can fly from Europe, you can’t be poor. They don’t understand why I choose

to walk, they don't understand it. To me it is just OK to walk around and see the city.

George explains that many other migrants return to their home countries in Africa where they remodel big houses into recreational homes and buy big cars. He thinks it is important for them to show how rich they are. He does not feel like that; he does not need so many things.

George clearly has a harder time with roots than with routes. In the way he speaks about it he can move to any place in the world – just travel. It is more difficult for him to build new and maintain old belongings. He feels like a stranger when he is in Denmark, but he feels even more like a stranger when he returns to Nigeria. This is a position he himself maintains because he no longer copes with the daily routines, but he is also confronted with it as an inter-ethnic difference as the Nigerians distance themselves from him because he cannot and will not live up to their expectations to him as 'the rich European coming home'.

Class plays a large role in both Jasmina's and George's narratives – in Jasmina's as specific expectations to help the family maintain its class position; for George more as an expectation to acquire wealth and join a visible elite.

10 Concluding discussion

"What good are roots if you can't take them with you?" we asked with Gertrude Stein at the beginning of the article. But can you take your roots with you? And what does the process contain for transnational migrants when they – by force or voluntarily – move over large distances, arrive as strangers to new places and return as homecomers to their places of origin? What can we assume the transnational migrants will answer if they, like Stein, were asked whether they had lost their roots after living in Denmark for a number of years?

There is no doubt that the answers will be ambiguous and as emphasized it is important to distinguish between roots seen from the position as strangers coming to Denmark and roots seen from the position of homecomers returning to their place of origin. Another important distinction is between the local belonging to the everyday life in the neighbourhood in Aalborg East and belonging to Denmark and the national (imagined) community.

The point of departure for this article was the overall finding that the transnational migrants in the INTERLOC project have a high degree of local belonging to Aalborg East and the social life in the neighbourhood. Their belonging to Denmark as a nation is weak and influenced by the exclusion as 'unwanted guests', and discourses which position them as 'strangers' and border figures of the nation.

The analysis has scrutinized social practices and encounters with the complexity of everyday life. The transnational migrants have

accounted for their encounters with the unfamiliar daily routines of Denmark and Aalborg East. However, today most of them stress that they – and not least their children – belong here. They have positive feelings of belonging and a high degree of place attachment to the neighbourhood. An exception is George, the African priest, who has less positive feeling of place attachment and expresses a general 'homelessness' combined with his belonging to a religious community that is not tied to a specific location.

Most migrants have brought their roots with them in the form of social relations (some here, others dispersed around the globe), religion, lifestyle etc. Likewise, many maintain their ties with their roots in the country of origin. Like Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004) we want to emphasize that belonging is not a zero sum game where you have to decide which place or country you belong to. On the contrary it seems as if many transnational migrants are able to handle double or multiple belonging and combine new and old attachment to places with transnational ties.

The analysis indicates that one of the greatest challenges for the informants is to realize that *roots are moving and changing*. This becomes especially clear once the migrants return as homecomers to their places of origin. Across our material we find that it seems to be more difficult for migrants to maintain their roots in the country of origin when they go back there than when they are in Denmark. Many migrants talk in positive terms about their childhood, about ties to close primary persons (e.g. grandparents), to large families, to childhood, religion etc. Such memories are significant in the on-going construction of transnational identities. But the migrants are confronted with different social practices when they assume the position of homecomers. Most of them no longer feel at home in their country of origin where social conventions, gendered, classed and generational relations differ from what they are used to. They have changed themselves, the social relations have changed and so has the symbolic order of everyday life in the place they used to live. This means that their place of origin is no longer easily accessible to them. In addition, some homecoming immigrants are confronted with the positioning that 'you are no longer one of us' or with classed expectations of having acquired wealth.

It is important to emphasize that roots are not necessarily a conservative metaphor. Rather, we should see roots and routes in a dynamic interplay. People move around in a globalized world; some because they migrate to other countries. Roots are not always meant to 'keep us in our place'; they can be seen as opportunities to take roots in several places, assume varying positions and establish belonging to different places that are a central part of multiple and transnational identities.

At the same time the concepts of roots and routes are useful for moving beyond the ethnic lens and trace multiple pathways. This must be based on a non-essentializing approach that is able to grasp how migrants are simultaneously positioned in multiple categories through intersections between e.g. ethnicity, class, gender and age.

In conclusion we will argue that it is crucial that macro studies of, for instance, citizenship/migration regimes and national belonging are combined with micro studies of the complexities of belonging in everyday life and local communities. At a time when parts of Europe – not least Denmark – increasingly construct ‘the stranger’ as a border figure of the nation and as an ‘unwanted guest’, it is important that we acknowledge diversity (including internal diversity within ethnic groups) and realize that the varieties of positive feelings of local belonging in everyday life offer potential for communities, openness and empowerment that can challenge the national communities’ tendencies towards stigmatization and exclusion.

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Notes

1. Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) was an American author and critic who lived most of her life in Paris, The quote was Stein's response to a question whether she had lost her roots after having lived abroad for 40 years (Emmertsen et. al. 2005: 3).
2. Ann Phoenix has used the term serial migration in her studies of migrants from the Caribbean. Phoenix emphasises that ‘serial migration encompasses both repeat migrations and where different family members migrate at different time’ (Phoenix 2009:1).

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