

## IN SEARCH OF GREEN PASTURES: *The onward immigration of Somali-Swedes to Britain*

### Abstract

The focus of this paper is on how transnational relations of Somali-Swedes shapes their onward immigration to the United Kingdom and intervenes in their educational and labour market career. The data for the study was collected using ethnographic interview methods in multiple locations: Stockholm, London and Birmingham and analysed using the concept of imagination as a social practice. The results of this study show that onward immigration of Somali-Swedes has multiple agendas, and more importantly it is contingent on the political, cultural and economic structure of opportunities of category embedded in the transnational spaces.

### Keywords

Transnationalism • immigration • integration • education • labour market

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## 1 Introduction

There exists a critical mass of Swedish and international studies that examine the marginalisation of immigrants and their descendants in different host societies. In these studies, the inclusion or exclusion of immigrants and their descendants is examined in relation to a specific structure of opportunity in a nation-state. Generally, these studies identify and explain the exclusion of immigrants as a consequence of a number of factors or combination of factors such as the climate of reception of immigrants and a variety of deficits identified as “afflicting” and thus resulting in disadvantaged immigrants and their descendants in the labour market in different host societies (Osman 2006; Fangen 2006; Zimmermann & Zetter 2011). Consequently, the exclusion of immigrants and their descendants in these studies are often attributed to either the institutions of the different host societies or are attributed to individual factors (see Zimmermann & Zetter 2011, for an international perspective).

This, article, however, identifies (apart from the factors identified above) the decisions made by immigrants and their descendants, social practices is “affected by their transnational relations Cheran 2006; Glick Schiller 2004; Melander 2009; Olsson *et al.* 2006; Poros 2001. The transnational network (relation) in this paper is defined as those people with whom migrants transact and associate with and who are located in multiple countries. These can be acquaintances, friends, family members, etc. (Mazzucato 2008). In this context, I am particularly interested in how individuals, agencies and actions are structured by their transnational relations.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to describe and analyse how Somali-Swedes’ transnational relations “shape” their onward

immigration to the United Kingdom; how does the network intervene in the choices they make vis à vis their educational and labour market career. However, I would like to emphasise from the onset that this study is not a study of “Somalis as an ethnic group” – or a classical study of an “ethnic group”, nor is it a study that aims to examine the character or quality of the Somali transnational relations/network, etc. Rather, the focus of this paper is the discourse of the structure of opportunities in the transnational relationships from the perspective of Somali-Swedes. Discourse in this paper simply denotes how individuals talk about a phenomenon, in the case of this study, the onward immigration to Britain. This, however, does not mean that the discourse circulating within the networks of these individuals reflect the social reality on the ground, nor do all Somali immigrants and their descendants activate or show interest in maintaining or even soliciting help from their transnational network(s) in this process. In fact, as will be evident later, some perceive their “ethnic” network as irrelevant in accessing the local structure of opportunity. However, this does not mean that they do not engage in other forms of transnational sociality.

This study is based on ethnographic interviews with naturalised Somali-Swedes in Stockholm, London and Birmingham. In both London and Birmingham, I interviewed naturalised Somali-Swedes who came to Sweden as young men and women with their parents. In Stockholm, the majority of the students I interviewed came to Sweden when they were approximately 2–3 years of age, and are in their final year of secondary education. All the individuals I interviewed in Britain and Sweden either had refugee backgrounds

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or came to Sweden through family reunion. The interviews with the students in Stockholm were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. By contrast, none of the individuals that I interviewed in Britain wanted the interview to be digitally recorded.

The interviews in London and Birmingham primarily focused on their motivation to immigrate to the UK, their transnational relationships, the intensity of their contact prior to their onward immigration to Britain, how they used their network to settle in the UK, and how they perceived their educational and labour market career in Britain. On the other hand, the interviews in Sweden primarily focused on their transnational relationships, the intensity of their contact, educational background of their parents, choices of subject/career, and future plans in terms of tertiary education and labour market.

The choice to interview these two categories of Somali-Swedes (those who have immigrated to Britain and those who have not) was intended to delineate not only the similarities, but also the differences in how Somali-Swedes responded to the interviews, perceived the transnational structure of opportunities that can be accessed owing to their transnational relationships. Namely, the similarities or differences in creating opportunities among those who have immigrated to Britain and those who have not. This cross checking or "triangulation of data" from different categories of Somali-Swedes strengthen the soundness of analysis and the findings of this study. However, it is critical to stress that I did not interview Somali-Swedes who have dropped out of the educational system or are unemployed in Britain or Sweden, which no doubt would have affected the results of this study.

In analysing the empirical data of this study, I used the notions of imaginations as a social practice. Imagination as a social practice mediates not only what is possible, but also shapes the reasoning, strategies and actions of the individual embedded in the transnational space (Appadurai 1996). This imagination is not simply an abstract idea/fantasy of what is possible, but it is also concrete and tangible in terms of material condition for individuals who have transnational relationships. In the first section of the article, I will briefly describe the background immigration of Somalis to Sweden and the UK. This will be followed by a brief description of theoretical, methodology and the findings of the study.

## 2 Theoretical perspective

Transnational spaces in this article refer to transnational relations or web of ties that cut across multiple states. These ties or relations can be either formal or informal organisations, highly institutionalised or not. Faist (2006: 4) identifies four types of transnational spaces: "...small groups, particularly kinship systems; issue networks; transnational communities and transnational organisations". In addition, he points out that:

The reality of transnational social spaces made up of migrants indicates, first, that migration and re-migration may not be definite, irrevocable and irreversible decisions – transnational lives in themselves may become a strategy of survival and betterment. Also, transnational webs include relatively immobile persons and collectives. Second, even those migrants and refugees, who have settled for a considerable time outside the original country of origin, frequently entertain strong transnational links. Third, these links can be of a more informal nature, such as intra-household or family ties, or they

can be institutionalized, such as political parties entertaining branches in various countries of immigration and emigration (Faist 2006: 1).

In this paper, I am primarily concerned with small groups (kinship system). According to Faist (2000: 192): "There are three types of resources within social and symbolic ties that allow individuals to cooperate in networks, groups and organizations. One of these social and symbolic ties is kinship". My focus in this paper is on social transactions within the transnational extended family households (kinship); particularly how it reveals their everyday life, decisions and actions. Faist (2000: 194) states that "the resources embedded in social and symbolic ties have two critical functions. First and foremost, they are local assets and are often difficult to transplant in host societies". However, this is particularly true for social ties rather than symbolic ties because the latter is embodied and is not contingent upon face-to-face interaction. Nevertheless, these assets, though local can be set into motion due to immigration and escalate the transferability of relationships of obligations, reciprocity, solidarity, etc. in the transnational spaces that immigrants inhabit. In addition, kinship system can also be a unit for mobilising resources, economic or otherwise, to facilitate the socio-economic mobility of individuals or mobility of individuals which often lead to chain immigration of the members of the transnational household (Faist 2000).

Similarly, Appadurai (2006) points out that the lives of immigrants and their descendants in the transnational spaces they inhabit is characterised by constructing their histories, sense of belonging to ethnic or national "projects", etc. However, it also fuels individual members imaginations of what is possible, particularly in terms of socio-economic mobility. But the very act of immigration alters the basis of cultural reproduction. An important aspect in the process of settling in any host society by immigrants is the desire to transfer "home country culture", values, etc. to their children, as they knew it.

The ethnic (cultural reproduction) culture I would like to stress is particularly critical for the Somali speaking population due to the collapse of the Somali post-colonial state and national institutions of socialisation. Following the collapse of the Somali post-colonial state, the primary concern for Somali speaking population is not which country they prefer to seek asylum in or immigrate to, but rather which country has the most liberal asylum policy and and later to find work and raise their children. This was and still is the priority for many Somali families because of the ongoing civil war. This information is shared with the members of the network left behind. The impact of this information is evident in the ebbs and flow of Somali asylum seekers to different countries today, but also in the past. In other words, changes in asylum laws and praxis are quickly passed on to the members of the network.

Hence, the onward immigration of naturalised Somali-Swedes to Britain should be seen in the above context, and it is driven by multiple factors that are located in the transnational spaces that they inhabit. For instance, (a) the perception and discourse of the best environment in the transnational space for cultural reproduction – raising their children and (b) the discourse of opportunities in the transnational relations. An important factor in relation with (b) is the moral imperative to support those left behind. However, it is important to stress that investing, maintaining and structuring the nature of these relationships are the prerogative of the parents in the transnational space. One of the first things, for instance, that a Somali child is taught to memorize, particularly boys, is his lineage

– the members of his extended family, etc. The activation of these relations that now transcend the national relations is, nevertheless appropriated differently by the members for different purposes (Glick Schiller 2004). This depends on the social and economic position of different families in the network. Contributions or investing in the network is furthermore contingent on the social agenda of the different heads of these families, that is, whether the person has a political ambition in the political struggles between the clans in Somalia. This game I will like to stress is being played out in the transnational space (particularly the UK) as a consequence of the disintegration of the Somali post-colonial state and the existence of a critical mass of Somalis in the UK, and historical relationships between Somalia and UK.

In addition, it is important to stress that solidarity and loyalty to the clan system in Somalia today is essential for the safety or security of those left behind and the political struggle over power in the current civil war in Somalia. However, the extended family is the primary unit for solidarity in terms of financial help, etc., of different calibre. Somalis in general, are under social pressure to contribute to the welfare of the members embedded in their transnational network. This obligation is particularly the responsibility of the eldest son/daughter. He/she is expected to coordinate support with other siblings or members of the extended family abroad for those left behind (see Hammond 2010). To disregard this obligation carries a social stigma. The person who ignores this responsibility is labeled as a nobody – dead person by the extended family. However, how the extended family is construed and how support is organised is contingent to a number of factors and conditions: the socioeconomic position of individuals and his/her agenda, the number of siblings or extended family who have immigrated.

However, in the case of many Somalis, like all immigrants from the South, the descriptions of success (real or imagined) of friends or relatives who have immigrated accentuate the desire of individuals to immigrate and re-immigrate. This imagination is furthermore intensified, facilitated and made possible by recent technological development such as the Internet, electronic media and mobile telephone. These technologies are no longer the privilege of a specific class or a monopoly by the national media outlet.

Because of the sheer multiplicity of the forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephones) and because of the rapid way in which they move through our daily life routines, electronic media provides resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project (Appadurai 1996: 4).

Appadurai further points out that:

Electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of imagination (Appadurai 1996: 4).

Furthermore, economic globalisation, specifically its consequences in terms of opportunities, inequality, etc. is also mediated by films, media, documentaries, the Internet, etc. The consequence of dissemination of images of what is possible elsewhere, inequality has become more tangible. This can lead individuals to act, or even encourage people to immigrate (ibid). Horst (2006), examining the transnational sociality of Somalis, similarly stresses that due to the exposure to different sources of information and accounts of success, people are increasingly

aware of and reflect over their lives through the prism of others who have immigrated. Hence, she stresses that the logic of immigration, its practicality and what is possible to achieve is constructed in the transnational spaces that individuals are embedded in.

Thus, the everyday life, strategies and choices that Somali-Swedes make, for instance, whether to stay in Sweden or to re-immigrate to the United Kingdom is constructed and influenced by social relations that cut across multiple nation states. However, the transnational relations, particularly, the moral imperative to support or provide services for members of the extended family is not a one-way street. Those who are left behind are also reciprocating by providing significant services for the welfare of the extended family such as taking care of elderly parents or grandparents, etc.

Nonetheless, these services can create tensions within the extended family, particularly in relation to the priority that the transnational household has to make for the welfare of the members of the extended family (Zimmermann & Zetter 2011). That is, tension arises when transnational households make decisions in terms of who is to be prioritised for financial support or assistance in the homeland or to be supported in order to immigrate to a third country. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that having a transnational network does not mean that individuals have or can access the structure of opportunities in different nation-states. However, the exclusion in the structure opportunity in a specific space might lead to re-immigration or circular immigration driven by a search for opportunities, and the network can provide its members with necessary support in this process.

### 3 Background: The Somali immigrant in UK and Sweden

The immigration of Somalis to Britain can be divided into four stages. The first stage consisted of Somali labour immigrants to Britain. They were primarily Somalis from the British Protectorate of Somaliland and were primarily employed in the British merchant navy (Kleist 2008). However, with the collapse of the Merchant Navy in the 1960s, the Somali labour immigrants joined the booming British industrial sector in the Midlands (Kleist 2008). The second stage of Somali immigration to the UK consisted mainly of family reunion of Somali labour immigrants. The third stage of Somali immigration to the UK consisted of primarily asylum seekers in the late 80s and 90s as a result of the Somali post-colonial state. Finally, the fourth stage of the immigration of Somalis to Britain consisted primarily of naturalised Somalis from a variety of EU countries immigration (Kleist 2008).

Although there were a handful of Somalis in Sweden in the 1960s, Somali immigration to Sweden is a relatively new phenomenon. The majority of Somali speaking population came to Sweden in the late 1980s as refugees and this process accelerated in Sweden as well as other countries with the collapse of the Somali post-colonial state (Melander 2009; Zimmermann & Zetter 2011). For a detailed analysis of the external and internal factors that contributed to or led to the collapse of the Somali post-colonial state (see Jhazbhay 2009). Somalis today constitute one of the largest asylum seekers in the world. About 245,000 Somalis applied for asylum in Europe since 1990. Approximately 1.5 million are internally displaced persons and about 700,000 are in refugee camps in Kenya (Zimmermann & Zetter 2011). Furthermore, the collapse of the Somali state has also led to the dispersion of families, friends and neighbours in many Western European and neighbouring countries and created a web

of transnational relations. Recently, the influx of Somali refugees in Kenya dramatically increased due to the drought, made worse by the civil war in southern Somalia.

Thus, the collapse of the Somali post-colonial state, the ongoing civil war in southern Somalia, the existence of major refugee camps, in Kenya and Yemen coupled with the harsh conditions in the refugee camps in these countries are the engines that drive or create a climate of mass mobility of Somalis. The conditions in these camps according to many Somalis I interviewed, is one of the reasons why they feel obliged to send money to their families and drive the ongoing ebbs and flows of Somali asylum seekers in the world today.

Although there are few studies in Sweden that specifically examine the situation of the Somali speaking population in Sweden, these studies stress that the Somali speaking population is the most disadvantaged and marginalised group in comparison with other immigrant groups in Sweden. The position of Somalis in Sweden is not different in Denmark, Norway or even England (Carlson 2006; Fangen 2006; Kleist 2008; Melander 2008, 2009; Zimmermann & Zetter 2011). There are a number of factors that are attributed to the disadvantages faced by immigrants and their descendants in different host societies as noted earlier. Nevertheless, unlike many immigrant groups (apart from probably asylum seekers from Afghanistan) Somali asylum seekers are a product of a collapsed state. It is important to point out that Somalia has had no functional government and institutions since 1990. The young men and women who were born in the mid-1980s are today in their late 20s or early 30s and are illiterate or semi illiterate. It is important to point out that this factor is not taken into account in discussing the position of Somalis in Sweden to my knowledge.

#### 4 Onward immigration to Britain as a multifaceted project

The majority of Somalis whether in Stockholm, London or Birmingham live in areas that have high concentrations of Somalis. Their neighbours, friends, etc. are Somalis. In Birmingham and London, they eat and shop in Somali owned stores and the existence of large population of Somalis in these two cities has created a relatively small group of successful entrepreneurs of different calibre. In short, irrespective of where they reside in Stockholm or Britain, they rarely leave their neighbourhoods. This is particularly true for women and older men, but also to some extent young girls as evident in the following statement.

When we go to Stockholm (the city centres my bracket), people stare at us, our clothing style is different, but in Rinkeby and Tensta we feel at home. Many look and dress like me. We are not trying to be different from the Swedes and not all Swedes dress alike – I do not understand their obsession with the hijab. Like the young Swedes, I think I have the right to dress anyway I like” (Somali student in Stockholm).

I can walk around in my “Khamis” (Arabic robe) or Maawis (Somali sarong) in Birmingham and nobody looks at me in a strange way. Probably in Rinkeby you do it now, I do not know, but not in the city center in Stockholm” (Somali student in Birmingham).

Hence, a gaze, an utterance, a piece of attire in a specific geographic locality – the city versus Rinkeby-Tensta (a residential area in Stockholm with high concentration of Somalis) in Stockholm or Birmingham – is given or ascribed different meanings by different observers. For instance, in the above statement, the student ascribes different meaning, relation and experience of different spaces:

I had one sister and two brothers in Birmingham – one of them had moved from Denmark. I had another brother in Norway – we all decided to move to the UK. You know it is easier to help each other if we are all in the same country. If our children grow up in different countries, they will have different languages and will have problems to communicate in the future with each other and have good relations. Here, they can be Somalis and can learn their language and who they are compared to Sweden or Norway” (Somali-Swede Parent in Birmingham).

I decided to try my luck in London because my sister in Canada had friends in the UK and she told me to try my luck there. In fact, she told me that as practicing Muslim, life would be much easier in the UK. In the UK, I have never felt the need to compromise my religious belief” (Somali-Swede in London).

Hence, attire can be perceived as flaunting one’s religious identity, affirmation of differences and otherness in a specific locality or social milieu. Places can be ascribed different meanings and can signify alternative way of being as evident in the above statements. This struggle over symbolic meaning over spaces, etc. and the imposition of the normative values to specific locality is essential in the creation of a deviant “group”/ subject or perception of spaces as friendly/hostile to alternative ways of being and belonging. In simple terms, the Somalis that I interviewed stressed that the policy of multiculturalism in the UK and the presence in the UK of a critical mass of Somalis is a favourable environment to raise their children to be “Somalis” compared with Sweden.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the choice to immigrate again, whether to the UK, the Middle East or the USA is made by the parents and in consultation with adult members of the extended family as implicit in the above statements and explicit in the following statements.

The moment my parents got the chance to apply for Swedish citizenship, they did not hesitate. When I finished my secondary education, we moved to London in 2001. We stayed for three months with my relatives before we got our own place” (Jamal in Birmingham).

In this context, it is important to emphasise that obtaining a Swedish passport allows Somalis to settle in any European Union country with little or no hassle. The convergence of extended family in specific space according to the parents I interviewed was perceived as essential in the socialisation of their children in their “homeland culture. However, more importantly the parents of the Somali-Swedes who relocated to the UK, the concentration of the family members in specific locality gives the members of the extended family the social support to create a sense of social security in an environment that they perceived as hostile to their traditions and lifestyle.

Furthermore, an important theme that emerged in my interviews was the perception that the concentration of the extended family in a

specific space lessens the economic burden on individual families to support members of the extended families left behind. They pointed that this made it easier to coordinate the process. However, they also stressed the social pressure and control is much more intense – “you have no place to hide” as one informant stressed. Furthermore, it also minimises the cost of onward immigration for other members of the extended family who plan to relocate to the UK. Thus, the reconstitution of the extended family in a specific space has number of functions – to ensure transmission of traditional norms, values and beliefs, social control and maximising the economic and social capital of the transnational household.

In this context, it is important to point out that this practice to support the member of the extended family was common in Somalia. It was a common practice in many Somali households to sponsor the education, etc. of the member(s) of the extended family, particularly boys. This practice was primarily used as a mechanism to raise the social capital of the well-to-do member of the extended family, but also in the long term, the cultural and social capital of the extended family. However, this opportunity and practice was not open to young and unmarried women in Somalia, and as evident below the practice seems to be transferred to the transnational spaces.

I do not think my mother can or will be willing to send me to another country. Boys have it easy. They can choose to pursue their educational and labour market outside Sweden, but “we girls” do not have the same freedom or possibilities. We have relatives everywhere and it is an advantage, but it is always the boys that are given that possibility not girls – at least this is how it works in my family.

This discrimination of girls, however, is a common practice among conservative and religious Somali families and in families with low cultural capital in Somalia. In these families, an unmarried girl can only leave her parents household when she marries. This gender aspect, however, was identified by one student and it is difficult to say how widespread this practice is among Somalis in the transnational spaces that they are embedded in based on the design of this study.

Nevertheless, the desire of the parents to instil in their children a sense of “communal we” can lead these young men and women to get involved in the homeland politics or lead them to distance themselves from the identity project of their parents (Glick Schiller 2004). The young men and women I interviewed in the UK and Sweden seem to have an instrumental view of their transnational relations. In other words, they perceived the transnational relation as an instrument to access the structure of opportunities in different countries that they have relatives in. However, engaging in building trust, reciprocity or solidarity with the transnational household is left to the parents as evident in the following statement.

If a family member rings me and tells me he wants to come to Birmingham, I have to provide him with a place to stay until he goes back or finds a place of his own. It is the convention. If I cannot provide him with a place, I either ask other distant relatives (clan members) or my friends. Once in a while you also asked to pay qaraan – a kind of dia – to help someone in the clan that is in a difficult situation at home or in Europe. These decisions and how much one has to pay is decided by elders, etc. These responsibilities force you to take any job, two if you can!” (Somali-Swede parent in Birmingham.)

Hence, the imperative to support family members in the transnational spaces, etc., and the search for advantageous structure of opportunities in the transnational spaces irrespective of the individual’s cultural capital is a hot subject among Somalis in Sweden. This is a recurring subject of conversation in all major cafes that Somalis meet in Birmingham or Stockholm. In these discussions the pros and cons to stay, immigrate to a third country or to Somalia is debated.

## 5 The Somali diasporic discourse of Sweden and Britain

In my analysis of the interview data, there was a consensus among Somali-Swedes that differences in ways of being was not welcomed in Sweden despite the Swedish rhetoric of diversity or multiculturalism compared with the UK. For instance, all the Somali students I interviewed in Stockholm stressed that as an immigrant, one is assessed differently and this assessment is not based on one’s ability or competence but is based on a subjective assessment of an immigrant’s assimilation by different institutional gatekeepers.

To succeed in Sweden you have to be better than Magnus. I chose an education with status to make that point. What I know is that I will never be accepted as Magnus – you know there is a big difference between Mohammed and Magnus in Sweden. I have relatives in many countries, I can always move to the United States, England or Canada. All my relatives in these countries have good work. Here, the relatives I have are either unemployed or work as cleaners. I do not want to become like them” (student in Stockholm).

I know it is difficult to get work in Sweden, especially as a Somali. But I will try, and will like to work in a company in Sweden before I try my luck somewhere else. If I choose to leave Sweden, my first choice will definitely be England. That is why I am taking extra courses in English” (student in Stockholm).

The above assessment is supported by several studies in Sweden that point out that there is a correlation between perceived assimilation of foreign-born immigrants and their inclusion in Sweden (Göransson 2005; Osman 2006). Göransson (2005), for instance, stressed that for immigrants to be acknowledged as full-fledged members or citizens of Swedish society, they have to be perceived by representatives of the dominant society as not being “normal immigrant” in their disposition. Therefore, I was not surprised to find out that discrimination and racism was recurring in their interviews. The students and the parents I interviewed identified discrimination and racism as a major obstacle to “succeed” in the Swedish labour market. This perception was particularly strong among Somali-Swedes who have immigrated to Britain.

In Britain you can be what you want to be if you work hard, in Sweden yes if you are “white”. Here, I can take you to any municipal office, university and company; you will see people from different countries and shades of colour and religion. Show me a workplace in Sweden like any workplace in Birmingham – in Sweden probably in cleaning branch, or in a welfare office in Rinkeby” (Somali-Swede in Birmingham).

Britain, is bigger than Sweden in terms of the population, there many companies that are owned and run by minorities. Even companies that are run by “natives” have many non-Europeans working for them at different levels. Furthermore, in England there are better opportunities for both skilled and unskilled persons unlike Sweden” (Somali-Swede in London).

They stressed that prejudice, Islamophobia and discrimination in Sweden were major factors in their decision to immigrate to Britain. A number of them strongly pointed out that Sweden is a “racist country”; not openly racist, but racist and that was the main reason they decided to immigrate to the UK. This view is shared by Somali-Swedes students I interviewed in Stockholm. However, the majority stressed they preferred Sweden to the UK, but were sceptical to pursue their labour market career in Sweden, and they have to have an alternative plan, which meant in practice to immigrate to the UK, the Middle East or Somaliland/Somalia.

The strong perception of discrimination and racism among Somali-Swedes in the UK can be partly attributed to the fact that the majority of Somali-Swedes that I interviewed in London and Birmingham came to Sweden in the late, early and mid-1990s. During this period, Sweden was undergoing an economic crisis coupled with a negative public/political discourse of immigration. Henceforth, their image of Sweden, one might argue is frozen in time, that is, Sweden of the 1990s.

The positive portrayal of the UK, however, should not be construed to mean that there is no discrimination and racism in Britain. On the contrary, they point out that in the UK racism exist. However, they stressed that there is a high tolerance of minorities in Britain than in Sweden. In other words, they noted that just like Sweden there is a glass ceiling for minorities in Britain (immigrants and their descendants), but the glass ceiling is relatively high in Britain compared with Sweden. This view of UK is similarly shared by the students I interviewed in Stockholm. In other words, there is an intersubjective understanding among Somalis and their descendants that I interviewed that UK was a country, which is characterised by a multicultural meritocracy compared with Sweden.

However, this positive portrayal of the UK goes against the realities on the ground. Somali speaking population in Britain have the highest rate of unemployment compared with any other minority groups in Britain (Zimmermann & Zetter 2011). When I pointed this fact to them – Somali-Swedes in the UK – they were quick to point out that the high rate of unemployment among the Somali speaking population in Britain consists primarily of British Somalis and Somali refugees that came in the late 1990s. In addition, they stressed that immigration to Britain is not contingent upon an evaluation of the quality of the welfare system or the quality of life in the UK. Sweden received high scores in both these areas.

## 6 Education and accessing the transnational structure of opportunity

In the theoretical perspective, I stressed that the choices made by individuals vis à vis their educational and labour market career is influenced by a number of factors including the network that they are embedded in. These networks are both local and transnational. Furthermore, I stressed that the transnational relations can intervene to shape the decisions and actions of the individual as evident in the following statements.

“I completed my secondary school in Sweden and chose to take my university education in Birmingham University because of number of reasons. First, I have a lot of relatives in the Midlands and surrounding areas. My uncles are well-educated, one is doctor and the other is an engineer. They advised me to take my university degree in the UK in medicine or engineering. They convinced me that a degree from the UK is highly valued in the whole world. As an engineer or doctor, you can work in UK, Sweden and the Middle East. But I chose law, and plan to specialise in financial law. There are not many Somalis in this field. If Somalia becomes stable, I have a very good chance to get a good position with this education anywhere” (Somali-Swedes student in Birmingham).

The educational choice of the above student, particularly, where to take his higher education was influenced by member of the extended family rather than the immediate family member. In addition, it is also evident that advice on education was not sought from anybody in the network. His parents turned to the member of the extended family who was considered knowledgeable in the field. During my interview, this student stressed that his relatives generally solicited advice on education from these two uncles. One is a successful doctor and the other is an engineer. Their legitimacy and authority in this area was furthermore strengthened by the successes of their children in their educational career.

Nonetheless, although the above student respected the advice of his uncles, he made an independent decision in terms of what discipline to study. A discipline, which he believes will give him a good position in the UK, Sweden or Somalia. This strategic and long-term thinking was particularly common among the students whose parents were active in the Somali politics (homeland politic) and reconstruction efforts and among children who have well educated relatives with good positions in the local labour market.

I moved with my family to London, I think we moved 6 months after we got the Swedish citizenship. I had then completed my secondary school. I am studying geology. I chose geology because I am planning to go back to Somaliland. In Somaliland, there is a lot of minerals and oil. My father has moved back to Somaliland but the rest of the family still live in London. My father has a high position in the government of Somaliland in the Ministry of Water and Mineral resources. The future is in Somaliland” (student in London).

The choice to pursue higher education in the UK seems to be a trend among Somali-Swedes. In simple words, Somali-Swedes are investing in higher education that is viable if they decide to return to the “homeland” or immigrate to a third country. There is a common understanding among Somali-Swedes, particularly those who pursue their higher education in the UK that an institutional capital acquired in the UK has a higher value compared to institutional capital acquired in Sweden in the transnational spaces covered by their network. Nonetheless, how widespread is this strategic thinking and which category of Somali-Swedes is embedded in choosers is difficult to say with the design of this study. But the majority of the young men and women I interviewed in Stockholm, Birmingham and London are conscious of their transnational network and the opportunities, the contacts, information, etc., that the network offers them in order to access the labour market opportunities in different countries.

On the other hand, not all descendants of immigrants are interested in immigrating to a third country or the homeland to pursue their educational or labour market career. Hence, the significance of transnational network is reduced to maintaining the relationships, by children occasionally visiting their relatives, or coordinating help for the members of the extended family left behind.

No relatives in Sweden or outside have influenced my choice of education and career. I have some relatives in England but we have little contact with them. I am Swedish, I want to build my future here and nowhere else – Sweden is the best. I have been to the US, England. Education in Sweden is free. I do not know anything about Somalia, and I do not know if I want to live there. I did not seek any advice from the student counselor in my school or any other person. I looked at the different departments and program at Stockholm University together with my mother and we decided on law” (student in Stockholm).

Although the above student downgrades the significance of his transnational network, it does not mean that he is not engaged in the transnational sociality. As evident above, he has contacts with his extended family in the UK, etc., visits them. In the interview, he also pointed that his mother contributed and supported her family members left behind in Somalia. Somali transnational mobility is beautifully summarised below by a student I interviewed in Stockholm:

Somalis travel and are always searching for the best opportunity. Education is free in Sweden. Many invest in education because they do not know where they will be in ten years. Parents encourage their children to get the best education they can get even if they are illiterate. Because I believe that many Somalis, at least those that I know are planning to move to another country to work. Many have started to move to the Middle East, and working there – in fact it is very popular... you know Somalis are always on the move. But I believe the majority will always keep a place in their heart for Sweden” (student in Stockholm).

Mobility as a way of life is ingrained in many Somalis self-construction – the metaphor of the nomad always searching for greener pastures. I would like to emphasise that the transnational sociality and the onward immigration of Somali-Swedes is an indication of a balancing act on the one hand to realise personal project, the demands of the nuclear family and meeting the demands of the transnational extended family. This balancing act, often leads to tensions within the nuclear family, stress, and choices that are shortsighted. Any work irrespective of the condition of employment is preferred to no work at all. My informants stress that there are possibilities for everyone irrespective of the individual's ethnic or educational background in UK compared with Sweden.

## 7 Conclusion

The results of this study, primarily, show that onward immigration of Somali-Swedes to Britain is primarily a decision made by the parents and has multiple agenda. UK is seen as the “best” environment in the transnational spaces in which they are embedded in to reproduce what I would like to identify as a frozen sense of Somaliness in time – traditions and values. Somalia is no longer the Somalia of the 1960s or early 1970s. The majority of the

parents I interviewed left Somalia before the collapse of the Somali post-colonial state.

The cultural reproduction and the complexities associated with this process is a major concern for the transnational household of Somali immigrants, particularly for the parents and the different institutions they have established in the transnational spaces. In other words, identity politics has shifted from the homeland to the transnational space. For Somali immigrants, particularly the parents, Britain and its multicultural policy that emphasises communitarianism and the existence of a critical mass of Somali immigrants and strong Somali civil society is perceived as the best space in the transnational spaces to raise children and instil in them Somali values and ethos.

The obligation support those left behind is further intensified by the collapse of the Somali-post colonial state. Thus, the labour market positions of immigrants, and stigma ascribed to a national group (in the case of this study Somalis) is the engine that drives Somali of different categories, even naturalised Swedish Somalis to immigrate to a third country. There is a general consensus among Somalis that Somalis are not given a fair chance in Sweden. Thus, the structure of opportunities in the host countries and how these are evaluated in terms of opportunity for social mobility, etc. are critical in the everyday life and choices that immigrants and their descendants are confronted with. However, the social pressure to provide financial support for the members of the extended family left behind seem to be the overriding concern among Somali-Swedes who moved to the UK. Many pointed in my formal and informal conversations with them that they had to set aside their individual project because of the “cultural” obligation to support their extended family left behind.

Furthermore, what surprised me the most was that “second generation” Somali-Swedes entertain and maintain strong transnational links. However, they saw their ships as means to meet their individual projects and to negotiate the tensions and possibilities in accessing the structure of opportunities in different countries. However, it is important to stress that not all Somali-Swedes were planning to pursue higher education or labour market career in the UK or elsewhere. They stressed that they preferred to pursue their labour market career in Sweden. A number of the students I interviewed were also preparing eventually to immigrate if they do not find work that is in par with their educational competency.

The power of imagination, I would like to emphasise, is critical in the onward immigration process. It is generally based on narratives of success that are both tangible but also stories that are shared among the extended family, friends, etc. in the transnational network. These stories of success are not always based on facts or knowledge, but generally describe and compare spaces – what the space provides in terms of opportunities. This is evident in the flow and discourse of the Somalis about the United Kingdom. I would like, however, to stress that Somalis who are successful in the UK have similar characteristics as Somalis who have “succeeded” in Sweden. Both have successfully completed their higher education in Sweden or in the UK.

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