



Little Norway in Somalia– Understanding Complex Belongings of Transnational Somali Families

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Norwegian-Somali parents' motivation for returning to Somalia, how life has unfolded in the face of their return and how they are preparing for their future return to Norway. The article is a result of an ethnographic study of Norwegian-Somali returnees in Somalia. The analysis reveals that the desire to avoid Norwegian government surveillance of families served as an important backdrop for their return to Somalia. The motivations for returning to Somalia were also related to experiences of stigmatisation in Norway and the complexity of *belongings* to Norway and Somalia. The study suggests that parents work towards strengthening their belonging to both Somalia and Norway. The study further highlights that, by moving, the parents perceive that their children will be proud of their Somaliness and bond with family members in Somalia. To maintain a belongingness to Norway, parents actively work towards cultivating their children's Norwegianness by creating a Norwegian school, celebrating Norwegian Constitution Day and emphasising Norwegian cultural repertoires in their everyday lives.

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It is 07:40 am when I arrive at the Norwegian school in a region in Somalia. I first notice children playing ludo and jumping on a trampoline. I also observe an older ethnic Norwegian man standing by the trampoline. I greet him, and he welcomes me. Trond looks at his watch and says, 'Now is the time to ring the bell' (08:00). All the children stand in line and shake hands with Trond and say good morning. On the wall, the plan for today is written: / reading time / recess / Norwegian / social science / lunch / arts and crafts / recess / English. I catch myself looking at all the drawings, toys and books. It is a picture of the Norwegian landscape and Viking history. As I listen to the children speak, they all speak Norwegian. I think to myself that it is very strange that I am in Somalia because it feels like I am in a primary school in Norway. It feels like a day in June in Norway, and for a few moments, I forget that I am in Somalia and that it is February. Trond looks at his watch again and says it is time for recess. The children run out and sing, dance, play ball and jump on a trampoline. The children are as occupied with Markus and Martinus [Norway's most popular pop duo] here as they are in Norway. They are listening to 'Girls' by Markus and Martinus, and they seem to know all the lyrics. A student comes to me and proudly says that she is the class monitor for the week. She tells me that her job is to sweep, hand out books, hand out toys and put away the toys. Trond rings the bell, and it is time for social sciences.

Fieldnote, Somalia, 28 February 2017

This fieldnote is from an ethnographic study of Norwegian-Somalis conducted in Somalia among returnees. During the fieldwork, I was inspired by the numerous stories I heard among Norwegian-Somalis in Norway concerning Somali parents who had returned to Somalia because of fear of involvement with child welfare services (CWS). Many migrant scholars (Baldassar et al. 2014; Bryceson 2019; Skrbiš 2008) have argued that the transnational family is not a new phenomenon and that the first systematic study was conducted by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918). Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) paved the way for ideas that are now central to transnational approaches, including the view of the migration experience as stretching across national spaces. However, migrant scholars have argued that the form of the transnational family is changing through the development of accessible travel and communication (Baldassar et al. 2014). An important issue in the discussion of transnational family involves how migrants temporarily return to their country of origin. This article explores the stories of Norwegian-Somali families who have temporarily moved to Somalia, with particular emphasis on creating a sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011) in their children through parenting in Somalia. As the previous extract illustrates, I found several families who had moved with their children back to Somalia and made deliberate choices to strengthen their children's Somaliness while simultaneously cultivating and sustaining their own Norwegianness and that of their children (cf. Vassenden 2010). They did so through, for example, the construction of a Norwegian school and the reproduction of Norwegian cultural repertoires (Swidler 1986).

Research on transnational families and social work tends to highlight how transitional families' connections to their countries of origin impact child rearing in the Western countries (Salami et al. 2020). In the Nordic context, scholars have emphasised immigrants' experiences with racism and state intervention into families, particularly

through CWS, which might lead to families returning to their home countries (Johnsdotter 2015; Lidén, Bredal & Reisel 2014). Although the parents in this study experienced stigmatisation in Norway and feared being prejudged by CWS as insufficient parents, they emphasised the importance of sustaining Norwegian cultural repertoires and actively worked towards creating and reproducing them. Data for this study emerged from an ethnography study that consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews and participant observation among the first- and second-generation Norwegian-Somali returnees. In this article, the first-generation Norwegian-Somali returnees entail Somali migrants who immigrated to Norway as adults and later returned to Somalia, whereas the second generation refers to descendants of Norwegian-Somali migrants who were born or raised in Norway but now reside in Somalia. I have set out to answer the following research questions: (i) What motivates the move to Somalia? (ii) How do parents cultivate Norwegian cultural repertoires?

The article is structured as follows. First, I discuss transnational families and return migration. I then give a brief account of the general background of Somalis. Next, I outline the study's theoretical and analytical framework, which draws on concepts of belonging and 'cultural repertoire'. Then, I describe the study's methods, followed by the analysis, which is divided into three sections. The first section explores Norwegian-Somali parents' motivation for returning and addresses the reasons for the return. The second part examines participants' experiences of parenting and how life has unfolded in the face of their return. The third part investigates the preparation for returning to Norway and the cultivation of Norwegian cultural repertoires. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND RETURN MIGRATION

Over the past decade, research on immigrants' transnational ties has grown. The notion of transnationalism as a field of study in international migration has been heavily influenced by American sociologists and anthropologists of the late 1990s (Al-Ali, Black & Koser 2001). Among these, in particular, were Glick-Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992: 1), who stressed the importance of understanding the migrants' social process of maintaining multiple relations with their home country as well as 'establishing social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders'. In the past few years, the concept of transnationalism has been connected to return migration, which has challenged how migration scholars view transnational families (Baldassar et al. 2016). Although the debate on return migration and transnationalism is not touched upon in this article, it is important to underline that most families in this study planned only temporary returns to Somalia. Therefore, by using the term 'return' in this context, I follow King and Christou's (2011) understanding of return migration, as they stress the importance of understanding it from the perspective of migrants themselves. Although there is a large body of research on transnational families and return migration, the scope of this section can only cover some of the features of this vast and complex subject area.

Research on transnational families and return migration in different contexts, ranging from Latin Americans in the United States (Orellana et al. 2001; Weeks & Weeks 2015) to Turks, Polish and Pakistani migrants in Europe, tends to focus on the impacts of traveling back and forth between countries of origin and host societies

(Engbersen et al. 2013; Erdal 2013; Klok et al. 2017). These studies differ in approach and scope, ranging across social, economic and political practices. However, considerable research among transnational returnees has tended to emphasise the first-generation labour migrants (Al-Ali, Black & Koser 2001). As the literature on transnationalism and return migration has expanded, several studies from the second-generation perspective have emerged. This literature has tended to focus on the second generation's desires to connect with their country of origin (Carling & Pettersen 2014; King & Christou 2014). Other studies on the second-generation migrants have highlighted the impacts of children's visits or returns to their parents' home countries and transnational schooling (Haikkola 2011; Mason 2004; Reisel, Bredal & Lidén 2018). In a European context, studies on return migration and visits by the second generation have been connected to forced visits/return. For example, Bolognani's (2014) study of the second-generation British-Pakistanis emphasised that studies have tended to highlight visits as problematic habits that could lead to forced marriages and school disruption. These problematic approaches have also emerged in the Nordic context, especially among Swedish-Somalis and Norwegian-Somalis. Media reports (NRK 2018, 2020) and studies have highlighted parents' sending their children to Somalia to escape Nordic welfare institutions (Lidén, Bredal & Reisel 2014; Oslo Economics 2020; Thomas 2016) or sending children to strict Quranic schools. Nevertheless, I argue that the social problems highlighted in these studies partially inform the current knowledge base, as they tend to depart from viewing the issue from the perspective of before or after the return to the origin country.

SOMALI IMMIGRANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

Somalis are one of the largest non-Western immigrant groups in Norway (Statistics Norway 2019). Most Somalis in Norway came as refugees following the fall of President Siyad Barre in 1991, which resulted in more than 20 years of civil war. Research among Somalis in Norway and other European societies has shown that Somalis score poorly in terms of employment, education and societal integration (Fuglerud & Engebretsen 2006; Hammond 2013). These challenges reflect the few formal qualifications from their home country. Moreover, Somali immigrants have reported being exposed to discrimination and racism in the labour market and when meeting professionals (Henriksen 2010; Vrålstad & Wiggen 2017). In recent years, an increasing number of scholars (Friberg & Elgvin 2016; Haga 2019) and media have given attention to Somalis' distrust of welfare institutions, particularly the school system (Thomas 2016) and CWS. The relationship between CWS and several migrant groups is currently marked by mistrust in Norway (Vassenden & Vedøy 2019). In a Swedish study, Osman et al. (2016) argued that Somali parents in Sweden feel alienated and that parents experience racism and discrimination in school and kindergarten, which contributes to their avoiding health institutions. In a recent paper, I showed similar findings regarding how the fear of being prejudged leads young resourceful Norwegian-Somali parents to engage in selective behaviours vis-à-vis public institutions (health, schools, etc.) to prevent reports to CWS (see Handulle & Vassenden 2020). Somalis have been the subject of a rich body of scholarly work; nonetheless, ethnographic studies on returns to Somalia have been marginal in the literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

BELONGING

In exploring what motivates Norwegian-Somali parents to move to Somalia and how they cope with their return, I found Yuval-Davis's (2006, 2011) understanding of belonging to be a relevant framework. Yuval-Davis (2006) discussed the notion of belonging as a 'dynamic process and not a reified fixity' (2006: 199) that makes people belong in various ways and to many different objects of attachment. She further argued that, to understand the notion of belonging thoroughly, we need to distinguish between three analytical levels on which belonging is constructed. The first level concerns 'social locations', which is an abstract concept about grids of power relations in society influenced by specific group affiliations, such as gender, race, social class and professional affiliation, that affect the power one holds when navigating society. These social locations are fluid and constructed in different historical contexts. The second level relates to individuals' identification and emotional attachments to various individuals and groups. As Yuval-Davis (2006) argued, identity is not just personal, and collective identity narratives provide a collective sense of belonging.

The third level relates to ethical and political values and concerns how social locations, construction of individuals and collective attachment are assessed and valued by the self and others. This relates to the notion of what Yuval-Davis (2006, 2011) called 'politics of belonging' and Crowley (1999) defined as 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance'. Yuval-Davis argued that we need to understand politics of belonging from the perspective of constructions of belonging. In other words, we should view politics of belonging from the perspective of what is required for a specific person to belong to the collective. This may include common decency, common culture, religion, loyalty or solidarity based on common values or projected common values. Erel's (2011) study on racialisation and migration in a small English city found that ethnic minorities' and migrants' social locations and individual identifications intersect in complex ways, which leads to negotiations over normative criteria to belong in the community. These normative categories are in line with Lamont and Molnár's (2002: 168) understanding of symbolic boundaries as 'conceptual categories constructed by social actors'. According to Crowley (1999), these symbolic boundaries, or categories, are also what separate the world population into 'us and them'.

I also engage with Swidler's (1986: 273) concept of 'cultural repertoire', which she defined as a "'tool kit" of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct "strategies of action"'. Repertoires are composed of rituals, ideas, practices, habits and worldviews that are utilised as everyday guidelines to construct a meaningful life. Cultural repertoire, in this sense, differs from the classic anthropological culture concept, as cultural sociologists focus on traditions and narratives embedded in the society that individuals have access to and which form meaningful patterns in their everyday lives (Lamont & Molnár 2002). In this study, cultural repertoire as a concept is well suited to bringing out the cultural tools people create, and it allows us to understand how parents cultivate cultural tool kits.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This article draws from two months of fieldwork in one region of Somalia with parents who had returned from Norway. The fieldwork lasted from January to March 2017. Data collected from June to December 2016 in Norway form the important

backdrop for this study. The fieldwork in Norway allowed me to gain access to the participants in Somalia. Although I grew up in Norway with Somali parents and speak both languages fluently, I experienced challenges accessing the Somali-Norwegian community in Norway. People assumed that I worked for the Norwegian government and was sent by CWS to infiltrate the community. After spending approximately a month in Somali cafés, shops and a mosque praying alongside the participants and being exposed to numerous tests of cultural knowledge, I started gaining the trust of the Somali-Norwegian community as a researcher rather than someone sent from the government. The gatekeepers in Norway were essential to establishing preliminary access in Somalia, and they introduced me to a gatekeeper in Somalia. This gatekeeper in Somalia introduced me to the Norwegian-Somali community there and to several diaspora cafés and shopping malls. The region in which I conducted the research has been anonymised to protect the participants' identities.

Fieldwork in Somalia consisted of observations in diaspora cafés and participant observations in the Norwegian school and playground. The school was a primary school for grades 1–4. The teaching language was Norwegian, and the teachers were both ethnic Norwegians and the second-generation Norwegian-Somali returnees. In addition, I conducted 13 individual in-depth interviews in Somalia with parents from different families and 18 formal interviews in Norway. This article highlights the 13 interviews in Somalia. In 12 of the families, both parents had returned to Somalia, but in one family, only the mother returned to Somalia with children while the father stayed in Norway. The samples for the formal interviews consist of eight females and five males. Parents' ages ranged from 30s to 50s, and they had three to six children ranging in age from 2 to 14 years. Participants were both first generation (Somali migrants who immigrated to Norway as adults) and second generation (descendants of Norwegian-Somali migrants who were born or raised in Norway). Their occupations included engineers, nurses, teachers and business owners. Most parents were employed in Norway and took one-year leave without pay to move to Somalia. Those who stayed longer than one year in Somalia resigned their job in Norway. Most of the families stayed in Somalia between 6 months and 2 years. In all the families, one or both parents established a business or were employed in Somalia in work similar to what they had in Norway. The intended duration of their stay in Somalia was unclear for many.

Most conversations and interviews were in Somali or a mixture of Norwegian and Somali. The interviews took place in their homes, workplace or a café. The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. I transcribed all interviews verbatim. I sought in-depth familiarity with data through repeated readings of fieldnotes and transcripts. Dominant themes that were coded during data collection and analysis included parenthood, childhood, recognition, networks, belonging/identification, marginalisation, financial situation, otherness, Norwegianness and social mobility.

The study was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. Participants were given information about the study in Somali and Norwegian and were provided consent forms to sign before the interviews began. Participation was voluntary.

RECONSTITUTING BELONGING THROUGH PARENTING IN SOMALIA

In this section, I will first unpack how parents' motivation to return to Somalia was influenced by their struggle for a sense of belonging in Norway and their worries

regarding their children's future. Their struggle to belong appeared to be derived from experiences of exclusion and stigmatisation in Norway and to also be connected to their fear of being prejudged by Norwegian welfare institutions. Second, I will describe experiences of parenting and how life has unfolded in the face of their return. The parents narrated their return life through a sense of relief, acceptance and adapting to the new social context. Lastly, I will suggest in what ways the parents have cultivated and reproduced Norwegian cultural repertoires in Somalia in preparation for their future return to Norway.

MOTIVATION FOR RETURN

The parents expressed that a motivational factor for moving to Somalia was the desire to strengthen their children's Somali culture, linguistic and religious identity by bonding with their family in Somalia. Parents emphasised that they were worried about the development of their children's self-image as Norwegian-Somalis based on their own experiences of stigmatisation involving negative encounters in their everyday lives in Norway. Common accounts included experiences of being stared at in public transportation or in shops and of feeling mistreated or suspected by school or kindergarten employees (cf. Handulle & Vassenden 2020). Even social gatherings that were supposed to be communal and inclusive, such as the Norwegian *dugnad* (voluntary work conducted within local communities), were experienced as draining because parents constantly wondered if their ethnicity or religion would be pointed out by native Norwegians. Muna, a 30-year-old second generation, articulated it as follows: 'I stopped going to dugnader because it got uncomfortable and awkward. People [native Norwegians] stare at you and ask many uncomfortable questions.'

Many participants referred to social encounters as difficult and often connected this to their ethnicity and religion (Islam). The feelings of exclusion in Norway were related to concerns for their children's future with regard to being Muslim and Somali in Norway. Hence, the parents believed that living for a period of time in a society where their children could identify with others in terms of colour and religion would strengthen their self-image as Norwegian-Somalis for their return to Norway.

Basra, a 43-year-old first-generation mother of three, explained her motivation for moving to Somalia:

It is important to me that I give them [my children] strength or tools to do well... My children feel that they are Norwegians. They tell me, 'I'm a Norwegian, mom, because I was born there.' And it's sad to say this, but what they do not know yet is that, even if you feel like a Norwegian, everyone in the society will look at you as a foreigner, and the older you get, the more it gets pointed out and you are reminded that you are a foreigner.

This was a common reflection among parents. They simultaneously emphasised the importance of their children connecting with their family in Somalia based on the belief that it would make their attachment to Somalia and their Somali identity stronger. Mason (2004) has argued that children of immigrants gain attachment through establishing meaningful relationships and getting virtual images of places of origin; this, in turn, contributes to belonging. However, what seemed to most concern parents in this study, and what was a primary motivational factor for moving, was the importance of teaching their children to be aware of their own Somaliness and that being Somali and Muslim in Norway may come with struggles. Some parents

would tell their children that they must always do better than their native peers in school, work and even leisure activities. Hamze, a 45-year-old first-generation father, explained:

They [children] must know one thing, and that is that they [Somali children] and 'Ola' [Norwegian name] cannot be on the same level. If you are just as good, then Ola will always be chosen first. Because the world is like that, the world is unfair. You must do twice as good to be considered on the same level as Ola. Because that's how discrimination and racism work, and it is not going away.

This seems to reflect power grids in society (Yuval-Davis 2011) in which the participants felt they were viewed as a lower social category than native Norwegians. The parents described a lack of belonging in Norway, and they believed they had to teach their children to work twice as hard as their native peers. Moving to Somalia gave parents an opportunity to show their children a country that has advanced since its time of war and poverty. In addition, parents gained recognition and respectability in Somalia by being in a higher social category than they were in Norway. They wanted their children to establish a good self-image as Norwegian-Somalis and as children of Somali descendants and, thus, laid the grounds for being viewed as resourceful parents and for their children to see Somalia differently.

EVERYDAY LIFE AS A PARENT IN SOMALIA

Participants described less stress and noted that they felt seen and valued in Somalia. In particular, they mentioned that it is less burdensome when they do not constantly have to convince others that they are good parents as they did when meeting Norwegian welfare institutions, such as school and kindergarten staff. They also narrated a sense of relief regarding being employees. For example, many parents utilised their higher education or other forms of knowledge attained from work relations in Norway. They described being respected and valued and just 'doing' their job without frequently thinking about the need to do extra work to be on the same level as other employees (i.e., native Norwegians). As one mother, Amina, a 30-year-old second generation, said:

In Norway, people measure you depending on how you look [ethnicity], what you wear, what your children wear, where you live. And I will never be accepted as a hundred percent part of the society, and when you feel inferior in a society, it does something to you, and you try to think, 'OK, how can I change it?' But then, you realise you can't. But here [Somalia], you don't have that, and I'm just happy here.

Almost every participant talked about the burden of being measured in Norway by native Norwegians, particularly by welfare institutions. This contrasts with their experiences in Somalia, where they have felt recognition and even admiration from locals. This phenomenon of migrants returning because of experiences of misrecognition or marginalisation in an exile country is not an uncommon finding in migration studies. Kleist (2008) called it 'recognition return', which refers to the diaspora returning to the home country and gaining political power, as 'identifying as diaspora' provides a sense of legitimacy and power.

Although many parents emphasised that they have felt appreciated in Somalia and recognised as good parents and employees, they also stated that they had to adapt to a new 'everyday' in a new social context. Despite speaking fluent Somali, many participants have had to get used to the small talk and everyday interactions with locals. Ismail, a 32-year-old second-generation father, said:

I can't stay here [Somalia] forever. My family and I have had to adjust to things because it is different, and it's mainly the small things that make it big things. Like how people talk, walk- small things like that. It is funny, but sometimes I miss the little isolated life in Norway.

This statement was common among participants and suggests the complexity of belongings. Participants consider both Norway and Somalia as their home countries. In Somalia, they have experienced well-being in terms of psychological affirmation and being perceived as good parents. In addition, they have escaped the negative public discourses about Somalis and worries about being prejudged by welfare institutions (e.g., CWS and kindergarten). The temporary return seems to become a matter of recharging and rebuilding themselves as parents and preparing their children to be confident in their Somaliness. Nonetheless, parenting in Somalia also entails safeguarding their children's Norwegianness.

PREPARATION FOR RETURN TO NORWAY: CULTIVATING NORWEGIAN REPERTORIES

Despite being sceptical of the Norwegian institutions' intentions, especially the feeling of being watched by child welfare institutions, the parents have attempted to construct the same institutions, such as a school and kindergarten, in Somalia, and they underlined the importance of embedding Norwegian cultural *repertoire* and sustaining their children's Norwegianness in terms of citizenship and cultural know-how (cf. Swidler 1986; Vassenden 2010). The participants emphasised that it was crucial to establish a Norwegian school. Yosuf, a 34-year-old second-generation father of three, explained:

We worked hard to start this [Norwegian school] and continue to work hard to sustain it. We developed a Norwegian-Somali organisation and linked the Norwegian school to the authorities. We also have good contact with the Norwegian embassy in Nairobi. But for now, it is really very expensive with the school because we [parents] pay for each student. But eventually, we want to get support and funding.

The parents of children attending this school described the importance of creating and following the Norwegian curriculum. They also underlined that their children must not forget the Norwegian language. Additionally, the participants believed that, by following Norwegian curricula and syllabi and working towards getting the school recognised in Norway, their children would not lose any schooling while in Somalia. They hoped this would ensure that their children could go straight back to ordinary school upon their return to Norway.

During my fieldwork, I frequently sat in a café that was described by locals as 'diaspora café', as diasporas, government officials and staff of nongovernmental organisations often visited there. Locals also labelled it diaspora café because of the expensive coffee and the Westernised interiors. In this café, the Norwegian school was known

by the customers as a 'good school'. The parents seemed to be proud of this school and worked towards creating good credibility within the diaspora community and the Norwegian embassy. Moreover, having their children attend the Norwegian school seemed to be a symbol of prestige. Daud, a 36-year-old second-generation father of three, talked proudly about how others view the school: 'The [returnee] parents from the USA, Canada and England are a little jealous of how we managed to establish this school'. Several of the parents also mentioned that parents in Somalia and in Norway frequently ask if the school has the capacity for more students, which it does not.

However, not everyone who has returned from abroad has been happy with the Norwegian school, and some stated they are worried about implementing too much, Norwegian/Westernised cultural repertoire (cf. Swidler 1986) in Somalia. For example, Saynab, a 42-year-old first-generation mother, stated:

We have a Norwegian-Somali club for the adults here where the parents meet once a month and just talk about everything, and often we talk about Norway and stuff. It's like, 'Did you read VG [Norwegian newspaper] today?' But not everybody is happy with us. Some parents [e.g. returnees from the United Kingdom] say that we are bringing the gaal [infidel] teaching here.

Additional cultural repertoires associated with parenting in Norway included the Norwegian matpakke (packed lunch), teaching through play, watching Norwegian cartoons/movies and incorporating these habits into their everyday lives. As one father said, 'We have Norwegian nights where we play games or I download Norwegian films and have movie nights'. Parents reported different habits or skills that they view important to cultivate as a preparation method for their children's return. This included celebrating 17 May (Norwegian Constitution Day), hiking or going to the established playground Leos Lekeland, a replica of the Norwegian playground. I was not in Somalia on 17 May; however, I received a video from one of the parents showing how the Norwegian school organised a children's parade during which they waved the Norwegian flag and played corps music in the background. The children's parade is a central element of Norwegian Constitution Day in Norway and appeared to be an important repertoire for the parents to recreate.

Another recurring topic mentioned was the importance of maintaining a form of children's play that they had experienced in Norway. Many of the parents described a 'right' way for children to play and were concerned with learning through playing.

You know how kids are: 'It's my toy. It's my book. Can I borrow?', etc. But here it is a lot of sharing and using each other's things without asking anything, and I had to say to the others [local parents], 'That's how my kids are, and I've taught them that [to ask and to be asked].' My wife and I have talked a lot about it and agreed that we must maintain the good cultures from there [Norway] and thought about, when they return, they must deal with it that way [asking] or else they have to start all over again. (Liban, 47-year-old first-generation father)

Deliberations on child rearing and everyday habits were recurring themes, especially as they pertain to the different forms of children's play in Somalia and Norway. The parents emphasised that it is important to continue teaching their children the importance of *participating* in games and not just winning, which some parents claimed is the focus for children who grow up in Somalia. This focus on participation may reflect the parents' values of cooperation and the egalitarianism characteristics

of Norwegian society (see Bendixsen, Bringslid & Vike 2017). Developing children's cognitive and social skills in the context of 'play' seems to be an important cultural skill (cf. Lareau 2002) within the Norwegian cultural repertoire they hoped would make the transition back to Norway as easy as possible.

The Norwegian *matpakke* (packed lunch) seemed to be another meaningful repertoire for parents to uphold in Somalia. As I noted in my fieldwork:

I joined the Norwegian school on a field trip to Leos Lekeland [playground]. The two teachers needed extra hands and eyes to watch the children, so some parents joined. I arrived quite early and observed that the parents who were attending the field trip had also picked up children whose parents were not joining. I was thinking to myself that this reminded me of when I was a child playing football and those times my parents couldn't join the game and I was picked up by teammates' parents. It reminded me of the Norwegian *dugnad* [voluntary work conducted within local communities] and giving your time to create a good experience for the children. I was sitting with the parents, and a mother offered me a cup of coffee she brought in a thermos bottle. She also offered me *mariekjeks* [cookies] and said, 'I took a lot of these with me [from Norway] because my children love them.' A conversation between the parents started about food. The parents had brought *matpakke* [packed lunch bag] for the children, and they were discussing and giving each other tips on how to bake good bread. Yeast became the main topic. They were talking about where to buy good enough yeast to bake bread for the *matpakke*. One mother said, 'I had to drive far to get that yeast. To my surprise, the Norwegian *matpakke* consisting of bread seemed to be very important for these parents. (Fieldnote, Somalia, 2 March 2017).

The playground, Leos Lekeland, was created by a Norwegian-Somali bringing the same ideas and name from the popular playground in Norway to Somalia. The playground is especially important because it has created a meeting place for children and parents. When I attended the school field trip to the playground, I asked the parents why *matpakke* was so important, and Fadumo, a 30-year-old second-generation mother of three, said, 'Matpakke, that's Norway. You can't get more Norwegian than bringing your two slices of bread with sweat cheese, and I kind of like it, and I don't want my children to get too used to the warm meals [served in Somalia].'

Several of the parents were concerned with maintaining the Norwegian *matpakke* and emphasised that it should consist of a bread meal. In Somalia, a typical lunch consists of a hot meal, in contrast to in Norway, where typically the only hot meal is at dinnertime. For me, having a hot meal for lunch was probably one of the main things I found beneficial during my fieldwork, and bringing my own *matpakke* did not cross my mind. However, for these parents, *matpakke* symbolises Norwegianness. This way of maintaining Norwegianness has similarities to practices by Norwegians living in Spain. Haug, Dann and Mehmetoglu (2007), who studied Norwegian seasonal migrants who settled in Spain, found that retired Norwegians preserve many traditions, such as making their own dinner and Norwegian breakfast. In the present study, the parents have cultivated *matpakke* as part of the repertoires that they believe their children need. For these parents, *matpakke* seems to be a symbol of Norwegianness, and embedding this Norwegian 'tool kit' has become essential to preparing their children for their return to Norway.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed how Norwegian-Somali parents' temporary return to Somalia with their children is heavily influenced by stigmatising experiences as minorities in Norway. Three aspects have been explored: (1) Norwegian-Somali parents' motivation for returning to Somalia, which consists of reconstituting belonging for their children and for themselves; (2) how life has unfolded in the face of their return; and (3) how they prepare for their return to Norway.

The notion of *belonging* (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011) helps us understand what motivates the move to Somalia. Belonging is viewed as *belongings* rather than belonging, as individuals may experience belonging in diverse and multiple ways and entails people belonging to many different objects of attachment (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). The politics of belonging may contribute to stigmatising already marginalised groups in society, as was experienced by the participants. As the findings show, the parents felt that moving to Somalia was necessary to escape feelings of stigmatisation, increase emotional attachments to Somalia and enhance their children's Somali linguistic and cultural skills. Tiilikainen (2017), in her exploration of the second-generation Canadian-Somalis, argued that visits to Somalia may be experienced with relief, as the migrants no longer feel like minorities. Similarly, parents reported the importance of belonging in terms of being viewed as resourceful individuals and good parents. This was also a crucial motivation for moving to Somalia. In this regard, a central part of feeling valued and a sense of belonging in a society is having access to resources and experiencing emotional belonging in everyday life (Anthias 2013). Despite having higher education and being socially mobile in Norway, the participants struggled with attaining acceptance in grids of power relations while in Norway (cf. Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). They narrated that they had to negotiate acceptance in different arenas in their everyday lives in Norway. Nevertheless, they reported feelings of acceptance without negotiations in Somalia. From this perspective, because of race, socioeconomic differences and experiences of stigmatisation, the experiences of belonging among the participants may be viewed as that of a lower social category than held by native Norwegians.

The current study also suggests that discussions of immigrants forcing their children to visit their country of origin or dumping their children in the home country (cf. Johnsdotter 2015) may involve a narrow understanding of the phenomenon. The findings of this study offer important insights in that respect. The participants' experiences of being viewed in a lower social category in Norway seemed to intensify the need to belong to an accepting community (Valentine, Sporton & Nielsen 2009). This spurred them to move to Somalia, which is objectively less safe, but the parents narrated the importance of experiencing safeness in terms of attachment and emotional affirmation for themselves as parents as well for their children. Despite experiencing recognition and emotional affirmation as good parents, they have still struggled with navigating in Somalia. The parents found adjusting to the new context to be challenging, as it entailed becoming familiar with their surroundings and starting a new job. Furthermore, many participants referred to challenges in 'the small things', such as food differences between Norway and Somalia and everyday interactions with locals.

Abdile's (2014) study distinguished the first- and second-generation Somali diaspora engagements and their connection to Somalia. He argued that the first generation may be more dedicated to returning because they feel a sense of loss and that their Somali

cultural values may be threatened by the host country. For the second generation, it is more complex to belong to their parents' home country and what they view as their own host country. In this study, divergencies in generational experiences are not as clear as in Abdile's study. Both the first and second generations emphasised struggles with belonging as parents in Norway in light of stigmatising experiences. In the Norwegian context, the state is active in child rearing (Follesø & Mevik 2010); hence, the analysis shows that avoiding government surveillance serves as an important backdrop for the return. The parents perceived that their child-rearing practices in Norway were under a magnifying glass because of their ethnicity and religion, as has also been noted by Tembo, Studsrød and Young (2020) regarding perceptions of state governance among immigrant parents. Concurrently, the parents deliberately work to equip their children with 'cultural tools' (Swidler 1986) that help them develop cultural repertoires for their future return to Norway. Cultivating Norwegian cultural repertoires, such as Norwegian *matpakke*, Norwegian Constitution Day and Norwegian movies, becomes highly important in their everyday lives in Somalia, as the parents are also working to uphold their children's and their own emotional belonging to Norway. Engaging with Swidler's concept in this way resembles Lareau's (2002) concept of concerted cultivation. Lareau argued that middle-class parents train their children to develop habits and cultural skills that help them develop cultural repertoires (cognitive and social skills). Although the class perspective is important (the parents in this study would fall under the middle-class category in Norway), their experiences of being middle class come with struggles as they negotiate for acceptance in Norway. The parents in this study use the same strategies outlined by Lareau (2002); nevertheless, the motives for cultivating the repertoires in this study are also connected to training their children to navigate and negotiate their racial markers when they return to Norway (see e.g. Manning 2019).

Previous research (Haikkola 2011; Mason 2004; Reisel, Bredal & Lidèn 2018) has shown that transnational return for children of immigrants may contribute to establishing meaningful social relationships with extended family. Furthermore, Mohme (2014) noted that Somalis' transnational transitions can be explained through their cultural nomadic heritage. My study has shed light on the need for a deeper understanding of *why* a return occurs from a parental perspective and for unpacking *how* return impacts the lives of the parents and children. I do not have corresponding data from the children's perspectives and cannot draw any conclusions as to whether the child benefits from this return to Somalia. However, for the parents participating in this study, it is their *intention* of return that matters, that is, what is in the best interest of the child from a parental perspective. They believe that the temporary return will result in their children becoming more confident in their identity as Norwegian-Somalis for when they return as well as in the parents themselves becoming more confident in their parenthood.

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