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Transnational Life Course, Human Development and Diverse Landscapes of Opportunities among Young Somali Men

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ABSTRACT

It has been argued that being raised in a transnational social field, second-generation migrants are not only socialized into the local practices of their country of settlement but also into those rules and institutions that characterize their country of origin or the birthplace of their parents. Going beyond this, I would argue that there is a need to explore to what extent this socialization process creates opportunities, and what prospects there are for individuals to make use of them. What specific social, cultural and material resources or capabilities are accumulated in a transnational life course? Given that human development and mobility are intrinsically relational in nature, an agency-oriented ethnographic approach to human development and its articulations at individual rather than community level seems crucial.

***Keywords**: Somali migrants, transnational communities, human development, life course, ethnography.*

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s and at the beginning of 1990s, the civil war in Somalia escalated into tragic violence resulting in over 1 million people becoming fugitives from their homes, neighborhoods, towns, and the country. Many of them now live in Africa, Europe and North America forming a transnational community frequently called the Somali diaspora[1]. Today, after more than 20 years and after at least one generation has grown up in exile, the question of the Somali diaspora remains one of the key factors shaping the country's future and influencing prospects for peace in the regions of the Horn of Africa.

A lot of expectations have been laid on diaspora members from those remaining in Somalia, and the communities in exile are indeed involved in many activities that support the overall development of their country of origin[2]. These

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1 Diaspora in this article refers to a dispersed and active Somali transnational community with a common history, country of origin and cultural heritage. On diasporas in general see Cohen 1997; Esman 2009. On a Somali case see Kleist 2008 ja Osman 2009.

2 In formal aid practice, for example, more recognition of diasporas and their constructive involvement in development processes has been demanded (see Brinkerhoff 2008). Also more critical knowledge on the relationship between migration and development has been claimed (see Glick Schiller 2009). On diaspora and conflict, see Pirkkalainen and Abdile 2009.

stretch from remittances sent to family members to engagement in the political process of peace building and increasingly in business activities in the Horn of Africa. Although Somalis in general are very much engaged in the everyday life of their families in Somalia and in the events of their country of origin, they are so to different degrees. Whereas some of them travel back and forth, and some have even returned permanently, many are still hesitating despite keen aspirations for homecoming. Evidently, the return as such does incorporate different meanings and opportunities for those who left the country as adults some 20 years ago compared to those who left in early childhood. Furthermore, for those born in exile, the country is strongly present in their everyday life, even though it is experienced differently, as a discursively produced concept of a home country.

This article deals with young Somalis who were born in Somalia, but who left the country at an early age and grew up in exile in Finland. Although, de facto, they are not a second generation born outside Somalia, I argue that their time span experience as young refugees outside of Somalia make them in fact "second" relative to those who have had the opportunity to spend their adolescent years in Somalia; they have been very differently socialized into ways of being Somali in their early formative years. More specifically, the article deals with these Somalis' aspirations and opportunities and with the available possibilities to engage with their Somali past within a transnational space of national ties and familial connections. The notion of human development is addressed in this context.

It has been argued that being raised in a transnational social field, second generation migrants are not only socialized into the local practices of the country of settlement but also into those rules and institutions that characterize their country of origin or the birthplace of their parents (Levitt 2009). Going beyond this, I would argue that there is a need to explore to what extent this socialization process brings about opportunities and what are the prospects for making use of them. What specific social, cultural and material resources and capabilities are accumulated in a transnational life course, both in persons and in communities?[3] I also aim to ask why for some of the second-generation migrants, transnational experience means further mobilities not only between country of origin and country of residence but increasingly within global networks of labor, education and kinship. Based on ethnographic work with young Somali men in and out of Helsinki, my aim is to present some of their individual life courses over 30 years as a specific set of transnational practices that not only reproduce people, cultures and diaspora mentalities, but that also

[3] Scrutiny of UNDP notions of human development is critical here. The 2009 HDR on Migration defined development as "the expansion of people's freedoms to live their lives as they choose". Less is still known however about human development and its dimensions qualitatively across time. See Alkire 2010. For a thorough discussion on human development and mobility, see de Haas 2009, 2010.

bring forth opportunities, resources and activities not exclusively oriented towards origins.

The literature on diaspora communities reveals that origins are assumed to be not only a main source for identification but also a major dictating and regulating factor of mobility as such, ideally featuring a permanent return (Gundel 2002; Hansen 2004; Fink-Nielsen et al. 2004; Lilius 2001; Horst 2004; see also Levitt 1998, 2009). This fascination with roots and origins is articulated strongly by diaspora members themselves and it is also increasingly acknowledged in policies of circular migration. In circular migration policies, mobility is primarily seen as a pendulum between two end locations, the origins and the host societies[4]. I would suggest that this pendulum model is simplistic because some of the mobility within diaspora communities, especially among Somalis, is in fact multi-directional and directed by opportunities potentially created by transnationalism itself. I argue that human agency and capabilities to make use of these opportunities are fundamental in migration and global mobility.

1. An Ethnography of Contested Childhood

This article is based on longitudinal ethnographic research. Its core informants are young Somali men who arrived in Finland in the mid 1990s and with whom I have done successive interviews up to today, 2011. In the late 1990s I also engaged with them in schools, youth clubs and private gatherings and documented their everyday teenage life and experiences, as reported in a monograph published in 2004[5]. The monograph dealt with the contested understandings of youth and related articulations of temporal struggles and circumstances, following how some 20 teenage boys turned adolescent, and later young men. Some of the informants had come to Finland as unaccompanied children but were reunited with their parents later on. Some of them spent years in public children's homes, whereas some of them lived with their own parents or close relatives. Today, most of the boys live on their own, and despite their diverse backgrounds, they still keep contact with each other. Most of them are originally from Mogadishu, only a couple of them being from Northern Somalia, but they represent more than two clans and many sub-clans. My present research intention is to generate a multi-temporal approach to multi-sited methodology, so that identification and transnational experience over time would inform the anthropology of human mobility[6]. Furthermore, my objective is to comment on

4 See for example EU communication on circular migration http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/07/197

5 In Finnish Pojat – Somalipoikien kiistanalainen nuoruus Suomessa [Lads – contested Somali youth in Finland].

6 Recent anthropological research has shown that we need comparative research across time and space in order to explore aspects that shape the immigrant experience including

diaspora studies from the "inside out",[7] i.e., to highlight the emplaced individual processes of coming of age in exile.

Recent discussion on human development and mobility builds on highly influential socio-economic theory on human capabilities and well-being (Sen 1999). In this developmental discourse, capabilities on the individual level are understood as opportunities to achieve a state of well-being through mobility. Moreover, it scrutinizes whether this resourceful frame of capabilities may or may not have an instrumental role on more general community or macro-level development (de Haas 2009, 2010b). However, given that human development and mobility are intrinsically relational in nature, research needs to address the role of human agency in these processes (ibid.). In this context, I find it crucial to introduce agency-oriented ethnographic work on human development and its articulations on individual rather than community level.

I would argue that it is also essential to bring in contemporary anthropological insights regarding place, culture and mobilities in order to widen the scope of methods and hypotheses within more instrumental or policy-oriented migration studies. Transnational networks of exchange, either as social forms of organisations, companies or families have gained more and more attention within the social sciences (Garsten 1994; Bryceson & Vuorela 2002). This has also affected the ethnographic enterprise, interrogating the relation between place and culture and making the site of inquiry more problematic (Ferguson & Gupta 1997; Olwig & Hastrup 1997; Hannerz 2001; see also Glick Schiller 2009). Whereas some anthropologists have questioned the very distinction between the local and the global (Strathern 1995a; Tsing 2000), others have brought in more "grounded" ways of dealing with the *emplaced and situated presence* of persons in spreading cultural flows (Englund 2002; see also Strathern 1995b). In my view, it is through this process of emplacement that capabilities are gained and articulated.

Consequently, to identify forms of resources and capabilities it is necessary to look ethnographically at the dynamics of Somali male repatriation and how they conduct transnational family affairs. Such resources are not limited to remittances. They include other cultural or economic investments, such as land, partnerships in business or "investments" in the schooling of children, or in finding a spouse within the dispersed community. Know-how transfers, such as business assessment or knowledge on health, are also significant. Likewise, the process of cultural identification and social reproduction (however contested in nature) can be illuminated through ethnographic case studies.

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long-term effects on migration. Research on transnational communities focusing on the second- and third-generation is highly related to these themes. See Macdonald 2002; Jerman 2006; Hautaniemi 2007a; Levitt 2009.

7 For this innovative approach to networks "inside out" see Riles (2001: 3). With network she wants to refer to a set of institutions, knowledge practices and the artefacts thereof that internally generate the effects of their own reality by reflecting on themselves.

In the following, I will present a few examples from my empirical material where agency is highlighted through interviewees' reflections on mobility and emplacement over time.

2. PAYING BACK – BEING GRATEFUL AND TIES OF LOYALTIES

Muhamed, now a young father and soon to be in his early forties, left Somalia and Mogadishu when he was just turning ten years old. In 1992 he stayed for a year with his mother, uncle and siblings in Dar Es Salam before they received official permission to come to Finland. He recalls his first refugee years as turbulent and demanding. The playful everyday life on the streets in Mogadishu, war and violence, refugee journey outside Somalia, school in Helsinki, new language, and internal family reorganizations – all came to mean challenges for the youngest but most responsible son of his mother. The whole family, not least the mother and this junior middle school student, experienced rapid changes in their social circumstances which they navigated in a way they had never experienced before (Hautaniemi 2007).

Today, after 20 years in exile, Muhamed has acquired fluent Finnish, three vocational professional qualifications and permanent work as a caretaker in a service house for elderly people. He is also married to a Somali woman from another European country and has become a father of three boys. When I talk with him about the past, he points out how successful and lucky he has been. He especially wants to thank his mother for being not only the most important person in his life, but his best friend and lifetime mentor. Without his mother he would never have been able to become what he is and what he still wants to be.

We discuss the political situation in Somalia, and this makes him express his desire for change and peace. I am showing him pictures from Somaliland which I recently visited, and he wants to show the photos to his wife and all the children including their cousins staying with them. The children who come to see the photos ask about the war, the guns and the dead people, like those they have seen in films on TV. Muhamed tells them about the beautiful landscape in Somalia and the good life people used to live before the war.

I have known Muhamed since the mid-1990s, and I know how hard he has worked for his family members in exile and in Somalia. I also recognize how hard he has struggled for his schooling and to make a living during the last 20 years. Moreover, and in spite of our different backgrounds in terms of age and culture, our long-term friendship has taught me much about growing up as a responsible Muslim. The importance of this process is not limited to Muhamed. Rather, over time, it has become a public and explicitly political issue in Somalia and in the diaspora as the radicalization of Islam has increased. The process of growing up Muslim has also been contested due to the growing suspicion of Islam by western anti-terrorism politics and fundamentalist Christian groups in the West. I know Muhamed has a strong Muslim identity

and deep religious conviction. He also has a thorough comprehension of the secularized Lutheran ethos that characterizes Finnish society, and which he also has been partly socialized into. This has many times led us to discuss basic facts of life, our responsibilities as human beings, judgments and views on life here and there in the world. Like now, when I pose a seemingly financial question of remittances in Somali families, we end up discussing morals.

> "We only regularly send money to my wife's mother in Kenya: 100 Euros every month. If my mother asks me to help someone she knows needs assistance, I send money, because I deeply respect my mother and I trust her 100 per cent; otherwise not. But, you know sometimes I feel money is not used wisely out there. Once we helped our relative to buy a truck for business purposes. But he did not stop calling us for more money. If it wasn't an overheating truck engine it was a flat tyre. Can you believe it, nothing is enough. They think that we get money free. For example, this guy asked us to go to 'this wall' where you can withdraw cash. Some of them are so ignorant that they do not know even what an ATM is."[8]

Muhamed thinks it is not self-evident that his own sons will continue sending money, and there have been some cases when Muhamed himself has refused to remit. As he put it, he does not want to support those Al-Shabab related gangs who "just kill people for nothing", but he also refuses to support clan conflicts by paying compensation in clan disputes. He says:

> If we continue paying this blood money, we continue keeping murderers alive. Why should I pay money so that the opposing clan would not take revenge by killing someone from my clan who committed a murder. I do not think the world or Somalia would ever be better if we keep the murders on the streets. I think killing an innocent person purposefully is a crime which can be solved by the death penalty only.

Charity is close to Muhamed's heart. He wants to be like his mother who used to help all the poor neighbors in Mogadishu with scrap portions of meat she got from her husband's butcher. Muhamed wants to be a good Muslim and a good person, that is also why he has recently been in India helping poor homeless people there, and he would like to do something for his home country as well. He asks me if he could join me next time I am travelling, it is such a long time ago that he was in Africa, "*20 years almost.* "

Most of the young SomalisI know in Helsinki feel strongly about their families that are spread all over the world. They are rooted in a global network of kinship which is built on trust and mutual assistance over time. Even clan loyalties are strong. To my knowledge, every single Somali person, young or old, knows the *hawala* banking system through which remittances are

8 Interviews were done in informal situations and often spontaneously, mostly unrecorded, but written down afterwards in field notes.

transferred. However, this does not mean that understandings of responsibilities are uniform, and here I think the notion of second-generation experience is significant.

Somali society is generally portrayed as a clan-based society where a person's belonging is primarily defined through his or her membership in family and household-level sub-clan units. All units from the same sub-clan are said to be related to other familial sub-clans, which in turn relate to common ancestors of a main clan. Generally, the clans are also understood geographically, as pastoral or agrarian territories owned by specific clans. Many refugees who arrived to Finland come from Mogadishu, where clan membership became politicized during the Cold War and the time of the dictatorship. Clan politics was not exclusively about urban districts and territorial divisions of power, but the dependency between urban and rural kin grew in importance along with the fight over state resources and influence (Lewis 1993; Simons 1995; Cassanelli 1995; Besteman 1999; Hoehne & Luling 2010). However, a number of the second generation Somalis do not identify with those power struggles to the same degree as their parents. Many of them have spent their formative years in exile and have formed lifelong relationships across clan lines. Actually, this also happened in Mogadishu among their parents, as businesses and schooling socialized people in addition to the clan background, but the civil war and experienced violence affected the first generation differently because it forcefully divided adults. Children, on the other hand, through settling in the new country, Finland, made links amongst themselves at school, in youth clubs, in the mosques, and not least in the street, where they came together to protect themselves against prejudice and increasing racist violence.

Looking back to my fieldwork material from the late 1990s, I recognize the turbulent years and the central theme of being the first Africans settling in Finland. This meant not only the role of the exotic, seductive and dangerous, but it also redefined roles within the Somali community. Generational experiences differed; the important ties of large kin groups were cut or became fragile and, most importantly, the role of parents changed.

In recent studies on remittances and the patterns of sending money within the Somali diaspora, it has been recognized that obligation and practice to send financial assistance may vary, and are not self-evident in all Somali relationships that are transnational. It is less known, however, how certain relationships of dependency are maintained over time and across generations. I assume, like in Muhamed's case, that mothers are key players in maintaining those economic relations even if studies show how men actually remit more (Lindley 2010: 116–143).

Abdi, one of my long-term informants, told me how he one day sent money to a person whom he did not remember. However his mother told him that he had played as a toddler with this person in Somalia. More qualitative knowledge is needed about those relationships that are reproduced over time and which capabilities are inherited from one generation to another. In Somali families, one makes investments, whether financial or moral, in order to be a good person but

also for the future. Reciprocity is not necessarily based on a mutual relationship between individuals and families but is a larger behavioral pattern of interdependency involving real and imagined people whom one may need one day. As part of this mothers know that the key institution for immediate family and their well-being is the institution of marriage.

3. Transnational Bonding and the Importance of Marriage

Not only have I been able to follow how this group of young Somali men have become grown up men, I have also had confided in me some private and intimate anecdotes on how it is to date a Finnish girl who has a mad racist father, how to be secretly and passionately in love with a girl whom one's own parents do not accept and how it is to escape marriage arrangements made by one's mother. Becoming a husband seems to mean new responsibilities which all second-generation Somali men do not look forward to. However, it is often the will of a mother and the help of older sisters that change the mind of even the most confirmed bachelor.

Many of the informants confess that they would immediately move back to Somalia if there were peace. They would also do whatever is required to help their parents to move back. They are also quite realistic about becoming fathers and taking care of their children. However, they are somewhat resistant to the traditional pattern of arranged or negotiated marriages. Muhamed, who married a Somali girl from another EU-country, trusted his mother and sisters, who organized a family gathering in a big city where Muhamed travelled alone by train and bus. Now he is a happy husband and father.

Ali, on the other hand, travelled to Hargeisa, Somaliland, to meet his mother's relatives whom he did not know and ended up in a marriage which broke down immediately after the wife immigrated to Finland. His mother advised Ali to leave the wife after she announced that the only reason she married Ali was for the immigration permit. The wife was pregnant and the decision was not easy for him. However, the mother persuaded Ali with warnings of an unhappy future. "Now your problems with her are like the size of the baby camel, and you can accommodate it, but the problems will grow as a camel does, and there is no space for an adult camel in any kitchen". Ali divorced, and now he is considering marrying another Somali woman from the Netherlands. He works day and night to be able to support his child and his future wife.

Ismail's flight from Somalia to Helsinki via Moscow in the early 1990s was characterized by loneliness and the tragedy of a double loss. Together with his sister he left his family in Somalia but his sister died tragically from an unknown disease in Helsinki right after they arrived. At first Ismail lived alone, but as a minor, the authorities placed him in a public children's home. He was joined by

his parents only after five years, and the relationship between him and his father has never been good. Exercising traditional authority over his son, the father did not appreciate Ismail's experience and knowledge of Finnish society and the opportunities available within it. In Ismail's eyes, the father has lost his status as a wise person in the family, because he simply lacks the language and cultural skills to understand the surrounding Finnish society. Notwithstanding the respect towards his father, Ismail lives on his own, and he is careful not to travel to Somaliland. His mother has encouraged him to travel to Hargeisa and learn Somali culture there. In spite of Ismail's curiosity to see Somalia again, he fears that the welcoming party by the family members in Hargeisa would turn out to be his wedding. To avoid that, he keeps his job as a taxi driver and dates a Finnish woman. Turning 32 soon, he needs to consider, however how to build a family. At least that is how his mother and father think.

I argue that space and place for a Somali person in exile is important, but that the source of identification lies in the wide transnational family network, which is truly global in character. Loyalties and responsibilities are embedded in those relations. The sense of belonging is partly negotiated vis-à-vis Somalia which defines origin and ethnicity. But, for the second generation, belonging can mean many ways of being. Identities, likewise, are flexible. Many young Somalis live increasingly in relation to family members widely spread throughout the world. Mothers know that marriage is one way to ascertain those ties of identification; the young second generation sees those relations also as a source of other opportunities, such as business collaboration. However, like in the arranged marriages, those ties may sometimes appear challenging.

4. Decent Work – The Transnational Labor Market

As time passed and the men finished their comprehensive schooling in the Finnish education system, they entered the age when options for further opportunities presented themselves and personal independence grew. In principle, one may enroll in the labor market, but in practice one normally needs additional professional training – either vocational or academic – to be employed. Many youngsters chose the vocational stream, and given the reality of restrictive labor markets in Finland, they ended up trying more than one such stream. For example, Muhamed first undertook studies in the information technology industry, but after becoming unemployed, he undertook training in transportation. He got a permanent position as a bus driver in the Helsinki public transportation company but could not combine his family life with the irregular working hours. He then finished a shorter training in real-estate management and, finally, found more meaningful and permanent work.

Many of the informants are working in the transportation field, driving either public or private buses and taxis. In Finland, as in many other Western countries, migrants are increasingly working in this sector. Consequently, the

young men jokingly refer to transportation as a traditional Somali niche, and the only realistic source for a steady monthly income, "Only that the camels have been replaced by motor vehicles." Looked at from another angle, training in the transportation sector and related working experience may open up opportunities in labor markets beyond Finland. It is not uncommon to hear how some of their fellow Somali acquaintances have moved to London to become taxi drivers in order to make a living closer to a bigger Somali community and other kin. Some of my informants have considered doing the same. During my field visit to Eastleigh in Nairobi in 2010, I met a Finnish Somali man who had moved first from Helsinki to London and from there to Kenya. Subsequently he had established his own truck company operating between Uganda and Kenya. Furthermore, in Kenya, I recognized how Somali migration patterns do not necessarily signify circular migration between the country of origin and one host country in Europe. Rather, Somali circular migration often means (after acquiring the citizenship in an EU-country) options for labor or entrepreneurship in many places in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and even Asia. Thus, for the second generation Somalis, a political membership in Northern Europe combined with good professional education and contacts in transnational fraternal (or quasi-fraternal) networks, unfolds into wider circles of labor opportunities in global space. So-called circular migration thus has a different implication for the first generation compared with the second one.

Some of the men I came to know as serious learners in the late 1990s, took their way up to academic level, and broke the average blue-collar migrant stereotype. However, they too have faced obstacles to permanent and decently paid work in the Finnish labor market. The market is often characterized as too closed and regulated, despite its otherwise equitable reputation. Hassan, who moved from Helsinki to a town in central Finland to undertake his third grade exam in accounting, came to know foreign exchange students from all over the world.[9] Successfully some of them decided to establish a company facilitating contacts in trading natural resources between Europe and Asia. Hassan moved to Asia for some years, where he also met African based Somali businessmen, who requested basic and informal business training European-style from him. His second-generation education was appreciated there by the first-generation men. Normally, age determines a superior position for older countrymen in Somalia, but in this case, age relations were renegotiated due to the knowledge capital acquired by the younger.

Hassan is currently in Finland in order to finally finish his degree. However, business ideas keep him busy. His latest idea is related to trading in agricultural products from central Africa to Caucasia. His wider networks do not comprise only Somalis, but include also others although his closest partners are indeed second-generation Somalis grown up in Europe. However, they do not only operate in what one may call a "traditional Somali way", e.g., informally among

9 Not Finnish though, because, according to Hassan, they do not want to take risks – "They rather sit in their sauna," he says.

family members. For example, they do not use the "hawala" banking system in those cases when it might not be competitive. Similar networks of trust characterize their businesses to those of the first generation, but they also employ more western and more formal business conduct. For example, they use written agreements and ideally expect transparent reports of gains and losses.

Global trade and localized production here and there, do not turn away second-generation Somalis with solid professional and transnational backgrounds. Their loyalties do not solely lie in host countries but they are affected by the opportunities that they provide. For single unmarried men, the opportunities can be identified in a straightforward manner. More complex matters enter into the equation when you have children and you need to take care of them or provide good education. In Finland, as in all Scandinavian countries, basic public services in this regard are of high quality – and for these young men, personally proven. Hence, work mobility may be restricted due to one's family situation (cf. Vertovec 2007). Farah, for example, has not yet established a family of his own. His girlfriend is Somali and studies in another European university. Farah himself is about to graduate in biochemistry, and even if he finds a permanent job in a renowned hospital laboratory in Helsinki, his future horizons lie in the Middle East. Working in an oil-rich Muslim country is not only culturally more congruent, but income-wise highly competitive. His brother already works in a Middle Eastern country for an ICT-company and earns many times more than in Finland. However, bringing up his future family in Finland seems still to be a strong alternative for Farah.

5. TO BE "AN ISSUE" – EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION GENERATE MOBILITY

In Hargeisa, in 2010, I met a Somali man who had spent two months in the USA in the late 1980s. Later, he returned to difficult circumstances in Somaliland because he got tired of "being an issue" all the time. With this phrase, he referred to a stigmatizing and suspicious public atmosphere in USA with regard to Somali refugees and their contested ways of being in the new host country. This experience is strongly echoed in lives of the young male informants I have been working with over nearly 15 years in Finland. Abdi who lives and works in a medium size university town in Finland comes regularly to Helsinki to meet his former friends, and he is full of aspirations to do something for Somalia. He has considered investing in a small manufacturer of packing items in Somalia. He says:

> "I want to do something for my country, but still I think more peace in Somalia is needed. I still lack the confidence to make the move, but I keep thinking about this every day. – You know, or maybe you cannot even imagine it, but every morning I make my way out from my

> apartment, I need to remind myself that I do not belong here. And it is because I look like this, like a black guy."

Abdi says he is tired of being treated as a second-class citizen in Finland, and he experiences his appearance as an obstacle to being a "naturalized" person in Finland. Hassan feels the same, and he says that racist comments are restricting his otherwise successful life.

What are these examples telling us? First of all, the theme that repeatedly comes up in my field data from the late 1990s up until today is racism. Racism is either an aggressive or a banal encounter in a public place, or it is more sophisticated exclusion in various everyday life situations. Longing to be somewhere where you are not distinctly different is a major concluding thought at times of despair.

For example, Great Britain is perceived as a cosmopolitan country where opportunities look very different from Scandinavia. Many Somalis are moving to towns with Somali populations in the UK, but some of them are also returning to their former host countries, or they keep strong social ties to these by regularly commuting between countries. In Nairobi, I met many Scandinavian Somalis who had moved to Kenya after some years in the UK. Many had come to Eastleigh, the district predominantly inhabited by Somalis, to start their own business. *"I like doing things in an African way informally"* or *"I want to start something on my own without too much state regulation"* were common responses to my questions about their reasons for relocating. These Somalis represented mainly the first generation which had been working hard, sometimes almost around the clock for 15 years in the Northern Europe in order to come back. "I want to be my own master," as one person from Sweden told me. Most of them were middle-aged men, and most of them had at least one son with them attending a local international school. The rest of the family were often back in Europe. Otherwise, I met only a few second-generation members among diaspora Somalis in Eastleigh. All those members I talked to were seriously engaging in entrepreneurship that needed technology and training they had acquired in the North. But, also among them I sensed feelings of being more at home in Africa than in Europe. Surprisingly and despite the proximity of Somalia, most of those I spoke with had not visited their country of origin in 15 years.

In Helsinki, a number of the second-generation informants from my empirical material, likewise long to be African again, but at the same time they hesitate to return to Somalia or even to Africa. As Hassan notes: *"Somalis are everywhere in Africa, but look at the Somalis in Kenya. They are defenseless in the same way as Somalis in Uganda were after the terror bombing there. If the Kenyan state decides a mass expulsion of them, whole Somali businesses can collapse in one day. After all, most Somalis do not have any papers or permissions, and therefore their businesses are helpless."* Persistent discrimination is the reality even in Africa. This also puzzles the second-generation Somalis who, after all, may feel excluded because of their own

transnational way of belonging and lack of a more "rooted" cultural understanding by those who have remained in African Somali communities or in Somalia. They know through their friends who have visited Somalia that being a member of the diaspora may not always mean a purely positive reputation. On the contrary, coming from the rich North often creates expectations of "huge" personal wealth on the one side, and degeneration of one's culture on the other. These expectations are not always easy to meet.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article my aim has been to highlight some of the specifics of the second-generation migrant experiences and to deal with those resources and reasons which generate a landscape of multi-directional mobility and a wide, global horizon of opportunities. My aim has not been to neglect the relationships to country of origin or the significance of the host country. Rather, I have tried to open up more complex processes of multi-sited identification where human development becomes analytically comprehensive. Mobility is bound up with specific life situations and generated through different reasons during the life course. Family life, education and work affect the process of moving and its directions. Thus, for ethnographic research in a multi-sited context the ways that identification and belonging are generated through time and in different relations is an important element. Examining these processes of identification and relationship-building over time is particularly informative for a human development approach both for academic audiences and policy practice.

Capabilities on the individual level can be understood as the opportunities to achieve something during any life course affected by mobility. In the case of young Somali men, not only can their state of well-being be addressed but also those resources or capabilities that they have accumulated over time and through mobility. In this article, my aim has not been to scrutinize whether this resourceful frame of capabilities, and reflections on these, might or might not have an instrumental role in more general community or macro-level development (see de Haas 2010a). It could be argued that an ethnographic description of agency might reveal to us something of a more general pattern of social life and improvements in its qualitative dimensions. However, this brings forth only anecdotal evidence of the very social structures that enable human development. Rather it is evident that any structures presume agency – the life course of young Somali men is a case in point.

My objective has been through ethnographic description over time to reveal the agency and contingency of individual Somali men that emerges through circularity and reciprocity, and that can only ever be done retrospectively. I have aimed to stimulate a discussion about methodological requirements resulting from a more mobile and transnational context. Along four salient themes – that of *having obligations, becoming a husband*, *working* and *discrimination* – I have

discussed how Somali migrants encounter opportunities and become aware of these, and how these opportunities are negotiated and put into action in accordance with their individual life circumstances. Consequently, I have shown how diverse the landscapes of opportunities of the Somali migrants appear. These landscapes of mobility are complex and multi-directional, and seem highly contingent and mutable.

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