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Roots, Rights and Responsibilities: Place-making and Repatriation among Somalis in Denmark and Somaliland

Mette Fink-Nielsen, Peter Hansen & Nauja Kleist

Abstract

How do Somalis residing in Denmark and repatriated Somalis in Somaliland understand the questions of repatriation, home and belonging? Which livelihood strategies and strategies of mobility do they deploy? How are the places of exile and homeland experienced? And why do some Somalis in exile return to Somaliland, while others remain abroad? In this article we analyse how Somalis in Denmark and Somaliland understand and practice their own possible or actual voluntary repatriation. We do not pretend to offer the final answers to the questions above, but present some analytical reflections focusing on the interplay between abstract ideas of place, processes of place-making and very concrete livelihood strategies, often transnational in nature. Our main argument is that both questions of identity, emotions, and loyalties *as well as* questions of economy, responsibilities towards others and rights related to territorial entities, and citizenship are important for understanding the visions and practices involved in voluntary repatriation.

Introduction

Voluntary repatriation has been emphasized as an ideal durable solution by the UNHCR since 1980 (EXCOM 1980, 1985, 1993, 1994, 1997; Allen & Morsink 1994:1; Aleinikoff 1995:262). The idealisation of voluntary repatriation has however been challenged by researchers pointing at the assumptions within the 'international refugee regime' – such as the idea that refugees have a unambiguous sense of belonging directed towards their homeland, and the perception of repatriation as a distinct phase in the so called 'refugee cycle' (see Harrell-Bond 1989; Malkki 1992, 1995, 1997; Warner 1994; Aleinikoff 1995; Hansen 1998, 2001; Chimni 1999; Fink-Nielsen & Kleist 2000).

As our analysis will show, the idea of a strong national belonging among refugees that is so to speak *realized* by returning to the Homeland is widespread among the Somalis who have returned to Somaliland. Nevertheless the concrete livelihood strategies employed by both the Somalis in Somaliland and in Denmark complicate the perception of repatriation as an unequivocal strategy that terminates relations between the country of exile and the homeland.

The multi-sited field

Our approach is inspired by the conceptualisation within the social sciences of the concepts of diaspora, transnational migration, place and identity (Gupta & Ferguson 1992, 1997; Malkki 1992, 1995, 1997; Basch et al. 1994; Olwig & Hastrup 1997; Lovell 1998; Rapport & Dawson 1998; Al-Ali & Koser 2002). The analysis is based on two separate fieldworks[1] conducted among Somalis in Hargeisa, Somaliland, who have returned from exile in Western Europe and North America, and Somalis in Copenhagen, Denmark, who consider returning to Somaliland. While the fieldworks are situated in different geographical and social locations they are linked - not only by striking analytical similarities, but also by transnational practices and relations turning our separate fields and fieldworks into a multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (Marcus 1995).

Somaliland is the self-declared, though not internationally recognized republic in the North Western part of (former) Somalia. The geopolitical boundaries correspond with the boundaries of the former British colony, British Somaliland, which joined the UN-trusteeship of Somalia, the former Italian colony of Italian Somaliland, in 1960 to form the Republic of Somalia. In 1988 the civil war broke out, and a large number of people fled to the neighbouring countries, North America and Western Europe. Somaliland (re)claimed its independence in 1991, following the victory of the Somali National Movement, the ousting of the former dictator Siad Barre, and the continuing disintegration of the Somali State. The civil war resurfaced two

[1] Our fieldwork was undertaken in relation to our respective master theses (Fink-Nielsen & Kleist 2000; Hansen 2001). Since then Peter Hansen and Nauja Kleist have carried out multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Somaliland, Copenhagen and London in relation to ongoing PhD projects.

years later. Peace conferences between the warring clan based militias led to peace in Somaliland in 1996, and people from the West started to return (Samatar 1994; Bradbury 1997). The majority of Somalis in Somaliland belong to the Isaaq clan. Clan is often emphasized as a central component of Somaliness, and while we recognize the importance of clan in many contexts, we have chosen to highlight other axes of identity in this analysis. (For discussions of the concept of clan and lineage organisation see Lewis 1994; Samatar 1994; Griffiths 1997, 2002; Farah 2000; Fink-Nielsen & Kleist 2000; Hansen 2001.)

In Somaliland fieldwork was based in the capital of Hargeisa among highly educated men in their forties or fifties who fled Somalia in the 1980's as political opponents of Siad Barre's tyranny – and who have returned with a Western citizenship. They all explain their repatriation in the language of patriotism and in the order and idiom of nations. As people who have returned to take part in the practical and political rebuilding of their homeland as well as fertilize the ground for the future homecoming of their exiled families.

In Denmark fieldwork was carried out in Copenhagen. The approximately 14.000 Somalis presently residing in Denmark constitute one of the larger groups of immigrants. The main part of the Somalis arrived as refugees from the Somali civil war in the 1990's or through family reunion. While the Somalis in Denmark often are described as a relatively weak group with severe social problems, including a very low employment rate (cf. Skak 1998; Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2004), the majority of the Somali men and women interviewed are holding jobs and do quite well in the Danish society. Several have lived in Denmark since the 1980's and some have obtained Danish citizenship. The two groups of informants represent, in other words, quite specific socio-economic and political positions.

Both the Somalis in Hargeisa and Copenhagen take part in transnational networks and transactions and have family members and friends scattered in Western Europe, North America, Somaliland, and in the neighbouring African and Arab countries. They maintain contact with their families by phone calls, letters, e-mail, fax, or visits, though the intensity of the contact

varies. Some of the Somalis in exile send money or presents when they can afford it, while others support their families on a regular basis. Both 'abroad' and 'at home' the Somalis refer to Somaliland as their homeland and to Somali culture as an existing entity, but there are differences in how the transnational relations are framed and lived.

Through the following two stories of Aisha and Abdi we wish to show how the symbolic value of place can either 'clash' or 'co-operate' with the concrete possibilities and impossibilities that specific locations and positions offer. How the experiences of exile, racialization processes and gendered life circumstances contribute to framing the concepts of home and culture as well as to giving rise to different livelihood strategies and im/mobility, and how a closer look at the hierarchies of place and Somali culture might challenge prevailing ideas of centre and margin.

At the margins of Somaliness: the story of Aisha[2]

Aisha is a Somali woman in her early 30s. She is an unemployed single mother of four, living in a small apartment in a suburban area of Copenhagen. Aisha arrived in Denmark in 1987 after having married a Somali man. Shortly after the civil war broke out in the northern Somalia, and Aisha – pregnant with her first child – found herself stuck in Copenhagen. In Somalia Aisha's dream was to attend university in the US - and from Europe, she had thought, it would be easy to go to the States and gain access to the good life. But everything turned out differently, as the following account of Aisha's first impressions of Denmark shows:

> *„It was snowing then, and it was freezing. The houses and the people were different. In Somalia you always think about the West as beautiful as a diamond. But it is not. My ex-husband lived in a two-room flat, with a living room, a bedroom and a tiny, tiny bath and toilet and a small kitchen. It was very different to how the Somalis live; if one has the money, one lives very well. My family in Somalia lived in a big apartment, six rooms. And when I came, it was dark, it was winter and my husband had to go to work during the day, and I was alone at home all day. I was very sad, always looking at the door. It was so dark. And*

[2] Aisha as well as other names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of informants.

when you go out, you do not know anybody. And then you become another. Another than you expected."

As Aisha says, she became another. In more than one sense. Another person than expected. But also An Other. Almost daily she encounters Danes who tell her to 'go home'. To Aisha, as to many other Somalis, life in exile is characterized by a fall in social status, by loneliness and by racism (cf. Affi 1997; Griffiths 1997; Mohamed 1997; Farah 2000). It is a life at the margins of Somaliness, and it is a life that is experienced and articulated as the opposition to the 'Somali culture', that Aisha misses so much. And which Aisha thinks is to be found in London.

„You feel as in Somalia. In London there are many Somalis, and they live the Somali way. They have a lot of contact among each other. Most of the men are employed, and the women take care of the home as the Somali women do. In London you meet people from all over the world, from different countries. And the best thing is that no one calls you an immigrant or says that you come from Somalia, or that you are a foreigner. Nobody talks like that. So if you live in London, you become free […] But I am alone, I cannot live in London. It is good if one has got a husband. And if one earns money. People there also receive something as social security. But not much."

With regard to the possibility of obtaining education and work and acceptance as a Somali, multiethnic countries like the UK, Canada and US are placed high in the global hierarchy of attractive localities. But at a concrete daily level, moving to London is difficult for Aisha. As a single unemployed mother with the responsibility for four kids the social security system in Denmark offers better opportunities. Still Aisha is longing for at place to be accepted, where she may belong. She does not mention returning to Somalia as a realistic option. Among her close family only her father is still living there. Her kids do not speak Somali very well. She does not have any money or any education. Life would be difficult. But other Somalis do return. And what many of them share with Aisha is either an explicit experience of othering or a feeling of not belonging in the country of asylum.

Living at the centre: The story of Abdi

Just off the main street that follows a dry riverbed and divides Hargeisa in two halves, Abdi owns a juice bar. Within weeks after opening in 1998 it became an attraction in Hargeisa, a place where people went to meet, talk, and occasionally to have a fruit juice. Abdi and his family fled from Burao to Ethiopia October 1988 when the army of the former Somali president Siad Barre bombed the northern cities in Somaliland. From Ethiopia they travelled to Yemen where his mother's clan originated. As for the rest of the population in Somalia, tracking and locating ones clan relations had become a strategy for surviving the civil war. Abdi stayed in Yemen for five months and then left for Sweden - his family remained in Yemen.

Abdi lived in Sweden for nine years and returned to Somaliland in 1998. He did pretty well in Sweden, and stresses how he learnt the Swedish language very fast; that he went to school, and that he finally worked as a teacher at a private school, teaching Somali and math to Somali children. In contrast to many Somalis who have either returned from the West or still are in exile, Abdi does not unequivocally describe life in exile in negative terms. Still he articulates an experience of living among a different people with a different culture:

> *„There is racism all over the world, even in Somaliland there is racism. But me personally, I did not experience racism in Sweden, never. Nobody called me a nigger or 'you black bastard', I did not experience those things. And I have many good friends in Sweden, my colleagues at school and at work, we were almost friends. It was all right to live in Sweden, but not 100%. I cannot say 100% because the difference between Swedes and Somalis is very, very big. Swedes are very closed, they are not open, and you cannot become friendly with a Swede all at once, or with a Dane for that matter. I think it has to do with cultural differences. We are more open and it is very easy to be friends with someone from Somaliland."*

Abdi articulates his life in Sweden as relatively successful. He managed the challenges of Western life, was working, studying and well liked. But by contrasting images of Swedish culture as closed with Somali culture as open, helpful and welcoming, he still creates an unbridgeable cultural and

social gap between himself and the Swedish population.

> *„I remember once when I lived with a Swedish family. The man, with whom I stayed in the flat, told me that he had never visited the other apartment next door, where other Swedes lived, that he had never actually entered the apartment. They only say 'hello', but he had never been inside. In the building other Somali people were living also. Then I told him that my Somali neighbours and me are mixed. That my teacups are in all the other flats where the Somalis live. Or my Somali neighbours plates and blankets are in my apartment, we mix. I can sleep in the neighbour's flat, I can eat in the neighbour's flat, we are mixed. So it's different. Besides it's very cold in Sweden."*

To Abdi and Aisha (not) belonging to Sweden or Denmark does not primarily relate to citizenship, but is about engaging in social life. They describe the Swedes or Danes as different, and the culture as closed, resulting in lonely and isolated lives. Abdi and his Somali neighbours helped each other, he says, and a notion of sharing not only teacups but also a cultural identity is constructed in comparing life among Swedes and Somalis. Aisha however does not share her teacups with anybody, she has a very limited social network, and she is stuck in Copenhagen, dreaming of London, where everything could be different.

Exile and Homeland

Some of the Somalis that have repatriated to Somaliland would probably explain to Aisha that life in London is indeed no better than life in Copenhagen, and that Somaliland is the only place they can entirely call their own. Abdi and other repatriated Somalis express feelings of being part of a culturally homogeneous culture and included, accepted, and recognised as valuable and important individuals – living an ideal life in Somaliland as opposed to their lives in exile. In the following we analyse how social contexts and relations as well as symbolic constructions of exile and homeland feed into each other in a mutually constitutive process - and we show that the stories and experiences of diasporic and repatriated Somalis vary within different social and political settings.

G*ender* is an aspect that often renders the relationship to the country of

asylum difficult. It is an often-encountered problem that the social position of many immigrant men - including Somalis - disintegrates in the Western societies (Affi 1997; Griffiths 1997:15-16; Mohamed 1997; Farah 2000:157; Marchal et al. 2000:5; Kleist 2002). As the role of the male breadwinner disappears, so does the male authority, causing frustrations and identity problems among many men. The repatriated men in Hargeisa describe their frustration of not being able to provide properly for their families while they were living in exile. In Europe and Canada they lived on welfare, and in the US they were on their own and forced to take whatever job they could get. Either way they had become a disappointment to themselves and their families. Sitting in a small apartment, arguing with the kids, drinking beer and just waiting for the next welfare check to be dropped in the mail box, did not fit their male ideals of taking care of the family very well - turning the figure of the sole male provide into yet another icon of the lost and missed Somali way. The fact that many women in Somaliland have worked outside the home for a long time does not seem to disturb this feeling. If we analyse nostalgia of the past as a way to understand their present situation (cf. Järvinen 2004), we can argue that the icon of the lost male breadwinner reflects the frustrations of everyday life in exile as much as the realities of gender relations in Somaliland. The experience of loss of male authority is shared among quite a number of the Somali men - though not by all. Few women articulate this phenomenon as problematic, but rather point at the marital and family-related troubles caused by the frustrations of the men. The divorce rate is said to be high among Somalis in diaspora, and some researchers talk about a 'single mother phenomenon' (Affi 1997). The high rate of Somali single mothers is not only a result of divorces, but is also caused by the fact that a number of Somali women enter the countries of asylum without their husbands. As the case of Aisha shows, the task to care and provide for a family as a single mother is a huge responsibility that circumscribes the actual possibilities of action and choice. Aisha and other Somali women talk about loneliness and how they miss support from their families to help out with the daily chores of taking care of the family. While Denmark or other welfare states might offer economic and material possibilities, the majority of women articulate the networks they miss to be of a special Somali kind and to be found in Somaliland. Apparently the women sometimes do return to Somaliland to gain access to these networks and support from the family, but more often it seems to be the other way

around - that the men repatriate before their wives.

In either case, repatriation to Somaliland not only relates to rebuilding the nation, but also to re-establishing social relations within the families and in society more generally. In repatriating the Somalis not only return to an ideal homeland, but also to ideal male or female relations, thereby linking the constructions of Somali culture in exile and homeland with gender and family ideals.

Apart from the issue of gender, constructions of exile and homeland often pivot around experiences of racism and exclusion from the national identity of the country of residence – especially in terms of race and religion, i.e. the black skin and Islam. Experiences of exclusion, racialization and marginalization in exile are part of the processes of establishing a sense of not belonging to the country of exile and a reinforced sense of belonging to Somali culture and a larger Somali community. In Somaliland Abdi and other repatriated men engage in defining a specific Somaliland history and culture characterized by acceptance, sameness and inclusion thereby inverting the negative aspects of life in exile. In Somaliland, they say, nobody asks them where they come from, what they are doing there, or when they will leave - as people did in the West. Everybody shares the same religion, looks the same, wears the same clothes, eats the same food, and shares the same problems, the men explain.

The relationship between returnees and stayees of course varies between different empirical cases. Both stayees and returnees may be welcoming, tolerating, accepting, rejecting, antagonistic or even violent towards each other (cf. Van Hear 1998:56). In Somaliland the relationship between returnees and 'stayees' seems neither to be outright positive as identified by Kibreab (2002) in the case of Eritrea nor especially conflictual as identified by Stefansson (2003) in the case of Bosnia. Contrary to both the Eritrean and Bosnian cases almost everyone fled Somaliland. In other words there are only few 'stayees' to claim the moral high ground in relation to returnees. The general picture is one of acceptance and high expectations towards returnees. Many people in Somaliland look upon returnees and Somalilanders from the diaspora as holding a special responsibility towards their personal and national wellbeing. However, if returnees are not able to

meet the financial demands made by a vast number of relatives, friends and acquaintances they may face social exclusion, harassment or even threats (see Farah 2004).

Belonging to Somaliland is not only about abstract notions of sharing a culture, history and national future as an independent and internationally recognised country, but also about the social and sometimes even economic mobility Somaliland as a locality enables. In doing their patriotic duty as responsible Somalis, the repatriated men are not only recognised as named individuals, but also as educated persons that can play a vital roles in transforming the country from a scene of war into a well functioning modern nation-state. The positive images of life in Somaliland and the Somali culture need to be understood in relation to social dynamics of recognition, responsibility, and reciprocity – for instance in being able to find a well paid and respected job in Somaliland.

The repatriated Somalis from the West are few in numbers, but they play an important role within the economy, in politics and in developing the country. They have the economic, social and cultural resources - foreign citizenship, dollars, education, skills, and networks - to return to and survive in Somaliland. For an educated male elite, work can be found among the numerous NGOs and UN-organisations present in Hargeisa. In working for the UN and NGOs involved in rebuilding the country, the repatriated men express a sense of being included in something important. They make a difference and feel needed in ways life in exile never opened for. This feeling of inclusion into a community of sameness goes hand in hand with an experience of regaining once again an individual identity, instead of the categorization by foreign authorities as a refugee, an immigrant or an alien. In the words of Abdi:

> *„People feel more secure here, not in terms of peace, but psychologically. Going back to your own place where you can understand the culture, where most people know you. You know if I get an accident, while I was there in Sweden just anybody passing me would say: 'Oh, a black has been hit by a car'. But downtown Hargeisa if a car hits me, you know, probably the first five people will say: 'Oh, it is Abdi'."*

Repatriation and the rediscovery of individuality are often described as an embodied process. As a healing process in which senses are regained, physical disabilities and mental diseases cured and the physical and social pains of being lost in the middle of a national nowhere, away from ones original homeland and the territorialized national community healed. In this way repatriation is inscribed into the discourse of the physical and mental pathologicalization of refugees, that is said to be restored to health by returning to the homeland and the national order of things (Malkki 1992).

The embodied, national and patriotic discourse surrounding voluntary repatriation evokes the gendered image of 'the true returnee': A patriotic man healing the ruptures of the national order by repatriating to the homeland. In solidarity with those who stayed in Somaliland and the women and children still in exile, he returns to rebuild their homeland. Repatriation is the final journey that *realizes* homecoming and ends mobility - often narratives of flight, exile and repatriation resemble the form of a *rite de passage*. In a sedentary and national imagination of the world in which the only legitimate form of mobility is flight and repatriation, narratives of failed repatriation, or of mobility other than patriotic repatriation, are rare.

The articulation of Somaliland as a discrete cultural entity – as *„your own place where you can understand the culture"*- also needs to be understood in relation to an explicit *political* context. The naming and framing of Somaliland as an independent state and as the place for the Somaliland nation can be seen as a political act in itself considering the lack of international recognition of Somaliland. Nobody among the repatriated diaspora in Hargeisa openly questions the legitimacy of the independence of Somaliland, and nobody has any doubts about where they are. They may have fled the Republic of Somalia, but clearly they have returned to Somaliland.

The difference between Somaliland and the rest of Somalia is articulated as a matter of different colonial experiences. Somaliland, the repatriated men explain, has a different colonial history than the rest of Somalia, and therefore its claim to independence is legitimate both in a political and cultural sense. In Somaliland the unique Somali culture has survived

because of the British way of indirect rule, whereas the Italian way of direct rule in Italian Somaliland has implanted an alien culture on the original Somali culture. In this way the returning Somali men contrast images of Somaliland as a location of an authentic and pure Somali culture with images of the Republic of Somalia as a location of an inauthentic and defiled version of the Somali culture. Through emphasizing this authenticity and cultural purity the men take part in a cultural and political nation building process (Cf. Hansen & Kleist 2004).

Aisha and other Somalis in Copenhagen express this cultural and political nation building process less directly. While both men and women are engaged in defining a specific Somali culture and none of them dismiss or question the idea about Somaliland as such, only a few them are actively engaged in activities directed towards *Somaliland* as a cultural or political entity. The question of cultural authenticity is articulated as a question of before and after the civil war rather than a question of colonization. And more strikingly, the Somaliness is articulated as embedded within the social relations between people, as a human quality not limited to a special *Somaliland* culture and not restricted to exist *in Somaliland.* On the contrary, as Aisha's dream of living 'the Somali way' in London illustrates, this Somaliness is diasporic, it can travel and is said to exist *among Somalis* - no matter which part of Somalia they originate from. In this sense Somaliland is more a *metaphor of homeliness* (Rushdie 1994:93) than a clearly demarcated *site* of true Somaliness.

Social obligations towards nation/family

The constructions of Somaliland as homeland and the way the relations to the homeland are articulated, relate to the social obligations of the persons in question, to their rights, responsibilities and possibilities for acting. To return to the homeland in order to help building the nation or to stay abroad in the country of asylum to take care of family and kin can both be strategies that contributes to the development of the homeland. In an analysis of livelihood strategies it is important to recognise how places are repositories of rights and possibilities (Kibreab 1999), and that places are rendered meaningful through both discourse and practice (Feld & Basso 1996). The way the Somalis talk about the nation as a home is framed by their concrete livelihood strategies. Different strategies that might have the

similar goal of taking care of the family and/or the nation.

To decide whether 'to stay or to go' is not easy. Often it is experienced as an 'excruciating dilemma' (Voutira 1991:409) involving articulations of responsibility towards children and/or the nation and expectations of social and economic opportunities. The strategies might place the family or the country as the primary arena of responsibility resulting in different actions and understandings of development and of rebuilding the country.

In working for the UN and NGOs involved in rebuilding the country, the repatriated men in Somaliland are part of the homeland, it's past and future. But the meaning of patriotism is not restricted to this. Abdi, the owner of the juice bar in Hargeisa, reflects on his motivations to return, adding to the multiple subjective meanings of 'development':

> *„If everybody that thinks well is staying abroad, Somaliland will never develop. If all of us stayed away, we will never become a living nation, we will not become a country, we will never become a living country. And it's not just me, there are many like me that have decided to go back to Somaliland to take part in the rebuilding and to take part of life here, and to tell our people that live here, that they have a good country."*

To Abdi 'development' not only includes rebuilding roads, schools and the envisioned technological progress, but also the task of making life in Somaliland possible again - to turn Somaliland into a liveable and living location. Thereby Abdi inscribes himself into a story of belonging and of rebuilding the faith in the community. The Somalis not only face the problems of a destroyed country, but more fundamentally of loosing faith in the possibility of living in Somaliland again. Opening a juice bar in Hargeisa is just one of the meanings of 'development' and 'patriotism' among the returned male members of the former Somali diaspora. To Abdi, and others like him, solving the problems and taking part in shaping Somaliland is one of the factors which in a rather bizarre way makes it such an attractive place and what their sense of belonging to Somaliland thrives upon.

But developing the homeland might also take place at a distance. And responsibilities towards immediate others can be seen as more important

than the development of a more distant homeland. To both Somalis in exile and in Somaliland, the decision to remain in exile or to return to Somaliland relates to responsibilities towards other people. While the majority of the repatriated men express their repatriation as a patriotic obligation, the Somalis in exile express an obligation directed towards more immediate kin than the Somaliland national community as the reason for *not* returning.

Faduma, a Copenhagen-based schoolteacher who holds Danish citizenship, is one of the Somalis who consider returning to Somaliland, a place that she has visited with her family several summers.

> *„I am counting on going back in ten years or so. That is if it is peaceful and if one day the health system is working, the hospitals and schools are working… There need to be a future for my children, not only for me. And if I see that future, then I would like to go. But I am not going without a network. I am not leaving and selling my house and everything, I am not going to do that. It is like I start little by little. And when I see that it works out well and I can bring my family, on vacation maybe, then I can see if it really works out to be here. Because it is not that far and now when I got a Danish passport, I can go back if it does not work out."*

Though active in several activities directed towards the Somali population in Denmark, Faduma does not frame *her* considerations on return in a nationalistic or patriotic discourse. Rather she talks about possibilities for herself and her family in terms of uniting her family of three kids in Denmark with her parents and extended family in Somaliland. And she talks about the future economic possibilities in Somaliland – a place she describes as a sort of unregulated Wild West where it might be possible to earn a fortune. Faduma thus stresses the individual emotional and economic aspects, rather than the future of the nation.

Likewise Faduma articulates the ambiguities related to this choice. Somaliland apparently offers opportunities that are not present in Denmark regarding social relations and economic surplus. But simultaneously Faduma would have to give up advantages and social benefits which she has access to in Denmark - and she stresses that before she and her family

can go back, Somaliland must offer a better health system, schools, and employment possibilities. *And* that she must have sufficient savings to realize the kind of life and economic possibilities that she wants to.

Like Faduma, Nuruddin, a social worker and father of four small children, would like to return. He too, dates his possible return within a ten-year frame. He has visited Somaliland and is involved in several activities directed towards Somalis in Denmark. But Nuruddin also has to think of his family – both in Denmark and Somaliland. Each month Nuruddin sends his father, the father's two wives and their children an amount of 200 US dollars and moreover he pays their rent. For this money the father's family can survive. If Nuruddin travels back, he needs a substantial financial surplus in order to go at all, and he has to earn enough in Somaliland to support both his own nuclear family as well as his father's family. And finally he has to think of the future for his kids in terms of an acceptable school and health system. As Nuruddin's and Faduma's stories show, the question of why some return and others do not must include an economic as well as a generational perspective in terms of responsibility towards the family.

While the Somalis in diaspora find that they *cannot* repatriate right now because of their family responsibilities, the few women that *do* return to Somaliland, express an obligation towards their families living in Somaliland as *their* primary reason for repatriation. A striking example is Zahra who lived in Canada with her two children before repatriating in 1998. Her husband - the father of the children - lived in Hargeisa, and Zahra wanted their children to grow up in close contact with him. Taking the miserable schools and level of education in Somaliland into consideration she decided that she would have to start a private school in Hargeisa if the children should live there. The school opened in the spring of 1999 and quickly became the most popular school among repatriated Somalis in Hargeisa. Though Zahra and some other repatriated women in Hargeisa imagine a world of nations and understand Somaliland to be their native and original country, they position themselves quite differently within the national order than repatriated men do, emphasizing their sense of responsibility towards the family rather than the nation. Whereas a man in Hargeisa would probably point to this as a token of patriotism, Zahra

stresses how she opened the school because of the children.

Transnational livelihood strategies and final homecomings

The stories above illustrate how relations are upheld through transnational practices. Whereas the borders that encircle nations, demarcate different rights and opportunities, the responsibilities more often than not cross the formal borders of nations. Below we look into other transnational activities that co-exist with the narratives of the final homecoming. As we show, representations of and practices related to future or actual voluntary repatriation to Somaliland have to be understood *both* in terms of abstract ideas of place and cultural processes of place making *and* in terms of concrete livelihood strategies, often transnational in nature.

The majority of the Somalis in Denmark - and the West - engage in a remittance economy in sending money to family members and friends living in Somaliland. In Hargeisa several money-transfer companies have opened within the last few years. The remittance economy is within the top-three of the largest economies in the country - the other two major economies being the livestock export to the Arab countries and the development economy of the UN and NGO organisations (Hyndman 2000; Marchal et al. 2000; Hansen 2004). The ideological boundaries of Somaliland may encircle an authentic cultural identity not defiled by an outside, but still the majority of the population actually survives by way of engaging with the outside world. Somaliland surely is the homeland - but Denmark, and the West in more general terms, provides better health services, schools and social benefits. To the majority of the Somalis in Denmark the strategy of transferring money is a way of securing family members in Somaliland as well as the only possible way of engaging more broadly in the homeland. In Hargeisa the returned Somali diaspora surely is needed and its work in rebuilding Somaliland appreciated. But if all Somalis now living in the West returned to Somaliland, the economy of the country and its people would collapse.

The transnational livelihood strategies are important in understanding the (non-)realization of repatriation. When Somalis discuss and practice repatriation, a strategy of *staggered return* is preferred. A single family-member - apparently mostly a man - travels back while the others stay

behind. This practice extends networks to both locations and thereby makes returning to the West easier. The livelihood strategies thereby imply both the possibilities and rights offered by the Western societies and by Somaliland. The family members in both the country of exile and Somaliland profit from the possibilities in terms of economic support, social security, school and health facilities etc. offered in Denmark or other Western countries, while access to cultural and economic possibilities in Somaliland simultaneously are upheld. The strategy of staggered return thus functions as a kind of safety net for the person returning as well as offering access to different cultural, social and economic resources in Somaliland and the West respectively.

The fact that most returnees from the West hold a Western citizenship suggests that repatriation does not equal the end of mobility, but on the contrary signals how a *high-status Western citizenship* increases access to mobility. Not only is the West a source of income, it also provides access to continued mobility, and a safe heaven in case of war breaking out again. Or if life in Somaliland simply does not work out. Returning to Somaliland with a Western citizenship does in a strict sense not count as repatriation, but as *emigration*. In this sense the Somalis confuse the often-established divide between immigrant and refugee, using naturalization in order to return to the home country.

As shown, the Somalis maintain the mobility of money and people even when they repatriate to Somaliland. The strategies include different transactions embedded in economic and social networks, such as remittances from family members in the West to the nuclear and extended family, to family members who have returned to Somaliland, as well as to people travelling back and forth between Somaliland and the West. Repatriation may be thought of as the final journey back home. But to a number of Somalis it does not symbolise the end of mobility, but rather an increased access to mobility through the means of Western citizenship.

While male patriots talk about the community of Somalis and about the history of the Somaliland nation, the women seem to relate to Somaliland through their immediate family and their histories and futures. This immediate difference in rhetoric and oral framing of the homecoming is

juxtaposed by the concrete livelihood strategies: The patriotic men are often provided for economically by their wives, children or other relatives still living in exile, thereby blurring both the division between responsibilities towards family and nation and the divide between transnational livelihood strategies and the final homecoming.

By highlighting both *practices* and *representations* of repatriation we point at the strategies of operating in a world of movement and travel and yet articulating deeply territorialized identities. This not only points to an often-noted difference between what people do and say, but also to the wishes for international recognition of Somaliland. The returned Somalis certainly do not consider themselves part of a delocalised *transnation* only retaining *„a special ideological link to a putative place of origin"* (Appadurai 1993:424). On the contrary by engaging both in a discursive and practical nation building process they are part of a 'real territorialized nation' with its own sedentary culture, even though the sedentarist discourse might stand in contrast to the outspoken mobility of many returned Somalis.

The Somalis in Denmark, however, do not envision their possible return as the final homecoming. Some of them refer to *the nomad* in describing themselves and their mobility - both in terms of the journey *to* Denmark and a possible journey *from* Denmark. The figure of *the nomad* frames mobility in positive terms not marked by the involuntary movement in time and space or the discontinuity and disruption that the life of refugees is often associated with (Preis 1996; Kleist 2004a). *The nomad* locates the journey in a greater story of continued mobility, in which Denmark and Somaliland become just two destinations in a larger network of places. It is however important to remember that this nomadic mobility is not accessible to everyone due to different possibilities and positions. In all cases it is circumscribed by citizenship and concrete responsibilities related to gender and life cycles. Women and men with responsibility for others cannot always just move from one place to another.

Concluding remarks and possible policy implications

As we have shown, both Somalis in exile and repatriated Somalis in Somaliland articulate experiences of racism, marginalization and loss of male authority or disintegrating female networks in exile. These experiences result in contrasting life in exile and life at home. In this process Somaliland becomes both a symbol and a site of community, inclusion, and acceptance, defined by its difference to the various countries of exile.

But to understand why and how some Somalis repatriate while others do not, we also have to look into the rights and possibilities different citizenships and social and geographical locations offer in a globalized world, where Western countries form repositories of specific rights and possibilities. What is said to be the final homecoming to Somaliland is often facilitated by transnational strategies, such as transactions embedded in economic and social networks, staggered return, and repatriation with a high-status Western citizenship. As well as the remittances provided to the returned men by their wives or children still living in the West.

The representations of and practices related to future or actual voluntary repatriation illustrate how Somalis experience and represent themselves as being im/mobile. Somalis in Denmark and other Western countries often experience being physically stuck, yet frame their flight and possible repatriation in narratives of the continuous mobility of the nomad. The same seemingly paradox exists when Somalis with a Western citizenship return to Somaliland with an increased access to mobility, yet frame their return in a categorical order of sedentary identities. To return with a Western citizenship is technically seen as emigration, but emotionally it is framed as repatriation, returning to the homeland.

These practices and understandings of voluntary repatriation have implications when it comes to understanding and facilitating repatriation.

First of all ensured continuous mobility can be a prerequisite for deciding to return to ones homeland. The mobility can be obtained by requiring citizenship in the country of asylum. A strategy of continued mobility appears more attractive than economic repatriation support on offer in many Western countries, ensuring possibilities as well as security in the future (see Fink-Nielsen & Kleist 2000; Kleist 2004b).

Secondly the national policies regarding repatriation have to take the need for staggered return into account. By using a strategy of dispersal the Somalis can uphold the transnational relations, thereby making use of the

different roots, rights and responsibilities the different places and nation-states offer. This also needs to be considered when framing a policy of repatriation that overcomes the axiom of belonging here or there. The Somalis might both belong in Somaliland and in the West at the same time.
Thirdly, this also implies that integration in the country of asylum and repatriation are not opposites. Not only because the integrative elements can be useful in the home country when returning – but because even when returning, the links and contacts to the West might be maintained and strengthened through social relations and through circulating images of the home country.
An ideal contemporary policy of repatriation would have to take into consideration both questions of identity, emotions and loyalties, as well as questions of economy, responsibilities and rights related to different territorial entities.

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Zusammenfassung

Wie verstehen Somalis in Dänemark bzw. zurückgekehrte Somalis in Somaliland Rückkehr, „Heimat" und Zugehörigkeit? Welche Überlebensstrategien, welche Mobilitätsstrategien wenden sie an? Wie werden Exil und „Heimat" erlebt? Und warum kehren manche Somalis nach Somaliland zurück, während andere in Dänemark zurückbleiben? Der Artikel versucht Antworten auf diese Fragen zu geben. Er untersucht, wie Somalis in Dänemark und Somaliland die tatsächliche oder geplante Rückkehr verstehen bzw. praktizieren. Das Zusammenspiel von abstrakten Vorstellungen und der Konstruktion von Heimat/Fremde und sehr konkreten, häufig transnationalen Überlebensstrategien steht im Mittelpunkt der Analyse. Der Artikel argumentiert, dass Rückkehrvorstellungen bzw. tatsächliche Rückkehr sowohl mit Identität,

Emotionalität und empfundener Loyalität zu Somaliland als auch mit „praktischen“ Fragen, wie finanziellen Überlegungen, Verpflichtungen gegenüber anderen zu tun haben sowie mit an bestimmte „Orte“ geknüpfte Rechte - nicht zuletzt mit dem über den Besitz der (dänischen) Staatsbürgerschaft gewonnenen Mobilitätsrecht.

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