

SOMALI-SWEDISH GIRLS – THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
CHILDHOOD WITHIN LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL  
SPACES

Gunnel Mohme



Somali-Swedish Girls –  
The Construction of  
Childhood within Local  
and Transnational Spaces

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*Till Göran, min livskamrat*



# Tack!

*Den som äger stranden äger havet, och borgen är hans som råder  
över slätten, men friheten bor på bergstopparna.*

Så står det på en papperslapp som jag burit med mig genom livet, först i min plånbok och sedan i lådan i mitt nattduksbord. Citatet kommer från en bulgarisk dikt. Man kan fundera över om det var en längtan efter frihet som fick mig upp på den toppbestigning som att skriva en avhandling kan liknas vid. Och varför då, jag har aldrig gillat att bestiga berg och lider dessutom av svårartad svindel. Jag gillar dalgångarna bättre, sitta i solen på en sten och dricka fjällvatten ur kåsa. Så vad som fick mig hit vet jag inte. Möjligen en längtan att lära och förstå. Nu är jag här, efter en lång och mödosam klättring.

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*Stockholm i september 2016*



# List of papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to by their Roman numerals.

- I. Mohme, G. (Submitted). Somali-Swedes' reasons for choosing a Muslim-profiled school – Recognition and educational ambitions as important influencing factors.
- II. Mohme, G. (2014). 'Samira doesn't live here anymore': Somali-Swedes' mobility as transnational practice. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 4(3), 118–125.
- III. Mohme, G. (2014). Imagined adulthood under transition – Somali-Swedish girls' life-planning in a late modernity context. *Gender and Education*, 26(4), 432–447.

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## Chapter 1. Establishing the research terrain

*It is the day for the girls' big dance show. All the girls in the younger age groups and the female teachers at the Muslim-profiled school where I have done the fieldwork for this thesis are invited to the school's lecture hall to watch the performance. The show is part of the Physical Education lessons, but the girls' aspirations have been much higher. For weeks they have spent all their spare time at the school practicing in carefully locked classrooms, so my expectations on the performance are high. Chancing upon the girls' teacher, I asked her what the girls were going to show to the audience.*

*– I have no idea, she answered. They have chosen what to perform themselves. So it will probably be a little of everything.*

*So when I take my seat in the auditorium together with all the others I am thinking of African dances, such as I saw on a school trip to Istanbul a few years ago where some of the girls danced in the home of the Turkish guide, or such as I saw some young Somali-Swedish girls dance at a meeting at a Somali association in Stockholm.*

*After a typical Turkish folkdance by some girls of Turkish origin, a group of Somali-Swedish girls giggle and chatter as they enter the stage. And so the music starts. But it is not African music, and the dance is not African either. On the stage, group after group of the schools' many Somali-Swedish girls show amazingly choreographed performances and different varieties of street dance to music by artists like Michael Jackson, Chris Brown, Sean Paul and Lil John. They are dressed in typical street dancewear; some have taken off their hijabs and pressed a cap over their head or pulled up the hood on their hoodies, while others have placed a cap over their hijab.*

In focus for this thesis is a group of girls from Muslim families of Somali origin living in Sweden. The girls are between ten and twelve years old and students at a Muslim-profiled school that I have in this thesis named 'the M-school'.

The number of refugees from Somalia increased dramatically in the beginning of the 1990s. Today, there are approximately 83,000 persons of Somali origin living in Sweden – either born in Somalia or born in

Sweden from one or two Somali-born parents (Statistics Sweden, 2015a). Although more and more persons living in Sweden have a Somali background, the general knowledge about Somalis is quite limited, and except for a few studies there is very little research on Somali migrants in Sweden (see, however, studies by Johnsdotter, 2002; Melander, 2009; Salat, 2010). Somali-Swedes are looked upon as having problems integrating into Swedish society, a problem which might have socio-economic and cultural causes (Salat, 2010). Studies have furthermore shown that the unemployment rate among Somali-Swedes is high. In fact, among all migrant groups they are the ethnic group that stands furthest away from the labour market (Carlson, Magnusson, & Rönnqvist, 2012; Salat, 2010). They are also the group that Swedes experience to be the most culturally different (Mella, Ahmadi & Palm, 2014).

The scarce knowledge about Somali-Swedes also applies to girls of Somali origin growing up in Sweden. In books and media the Somali culture is often described as oppressive towards girls and women (see for example Waris Diries's autobiographical books 1999, 2004, 2005). We can also read that girls are at risk of FGM – female genital mutilation – or being sent on their own to Somalia if they become too 'Swedishized' (Johnsdotter, 2007a).

The Somali-Swedish girls in this thesis are students at a Muslim-profiled school, a type of school that is questioned among many in the majority population (Mella et al., 2014). These schools are accused of adventuring one of the school's crucial roles, that is to be a meeting place for children of all backgrounds, and of not being able to convey important values such as democracy and equality to the students (Francia, 1998; Gerle, 1997). An early report from the Swedish National Agency for Education claimed that parents who choose a Muslim-profiled school for their children were not particularly interested in becoming integrated into Swedish society – which they moreover know little about – and that they perceive such schools as a place where their children, especially the girls, can be protected from becoming 'too Swedish' (Swedish National Agency for Education – SNAE, 1997). These families were furthermore, according to the report, often both economically and socially marginalised as well as low-educated.

In 2005 I was employed in the administration at the M-school. My knowledge of Somalis, their background and their current life in Sweden was limited at the time and confined largely, as for many others, to what I read in the media. I realised that despite the media attention, it was, ironically, very rare that representatives of the Somali community were themselves heard and listened to. I was motivated by this, and by

knowledge and information that I acquired from, among other sources, Somali-Swedes I met at the school. Moreover, the scarcity of Swedish research on this particular people group, and the reasons why some parents choose to enrol their children in Muslim-profiled schools, helped me decide that Somali-Swedes at the M-school should be my research subjects and that my research should highlight their own perspectives. That the place for my research should be at the school where I worked was for me an obvious decision. This was not only because I seemed to have easy access to my research subjects (Why carry coals to Newcastle?) but also that my experience as a primary school teacher made schools a well-known environment, and girls between ten and twelve years old are the ages I know best.

According to other researchers on Somalis in diaspora, the group is considered as hard to research (see for example Horst, 2009; Kusow, 2003; Liberatore, 2013; Salat, 2010). That my research field was also my workplace turned out to be a unique possibility to build trust, and my embeddedness in the research context might even have been a necessary, or at least enabling, component concerning the results. I will elaborate more on this in chapter 4, where the methodological and ethical considerations for this thesis are put forward.

## Aim and research questions

This thesis follows a social constructionist research tradition, where a fundamental view is that people construct meaning through everyday encounters with each other in social interaction.

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore diaspora experiences among Somali-Swedish parents and their daughters where the girls are enrolled in the M-school.

The thesis explores:

- How the group in question negotiates and manages some of the challenges of being Muslim migrants.
- How relations to former countrymen are constituted and maintained within transnational social spaces.

The thesis set out to study Somali-Swedish girls at the above-mentioned school and how they construct their childhood and perform their agency in the face of informal and formal structures. In order to capture this and make it intelligible I found that it was not enough to listen to what

the girls themselves tell; it was also necessary to explore their context. This meant that I could reach deeper into the girls' own understanding of how their current life as well as their plans for the future develop in a local and transnational context.

The starting-point for this thesis is some descriptions that examine, discuss and analyse several specific and current practices of importance in the daily life of the Somali-Swedes I researched, such as how different priorities in a school choice situation are negotiated, how living a transnational life is pursued and what the girls' have in mind for their future.

The specific research questions concern:

- How the Somali-Swedish group argue for their choice of a Muslim-profiled school for, even though these schools' existence is repeatedly called into question for being divisive and incompatible with basic Swedish beliefs. What are their school choice strategies? Are there other explanations than the school's faith profile?
- How and why two features of Somali-Swedes' transnational practices – mobility and onward migration – occurs. How does the young generation act and react to their parents' transnational practices and how do they perceive being transnational?
- How a group of girls of Somali origin living in Sweden ascribe meaning to their imagined futures. What are their expectations of future careers and family life, and how do they experience the discourse in which these expectations occur?

This thesis consists of three studies, each addressing one of the above-mentioned research questions. The theme of each study was chiselled out through ethnographic fieldwork, but also by thoroughly studying literature by anthropologists, sociologists, economists, historians and political scientists regarding Somalia, and more specifically, Somalis in their country of origin and in diaspora.

## Thesis research fields

This thesis belongs to a research field that deals with issues concerning migrants, or rather the migrants' children. It takes a transnational perspective on migration, challenging ideas on ethnic pluralism and classical assimilation theories (see for example Basch,



Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Faist, Fauser & Reisenauer, 2013, pp. 88–108).

The thesis also belongs to the so-called ‘new paradigm for the sociology of childhood’, a research field that started out in the 1990s, where childhood is regarded as a social construction and children looked upon as having agency and being competent actors (see for example Corsaro, 2011; James & James, 2004; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2005; Lee, 2005; Mayall, 2012; Qvortrup, 2005; Thorne, 1993).

### **Traditional migration research**

Migration theories have, for a long time, been dominated by the conception that migration is almost like travelling on a one way ticket, and that emigration from a country of origin and immigration to a new country is something definite and everlasting (Faist et al., 2013; Gustafson, 2004; Levitt & Waters, 2002). As a consequence, and over time, the migrants’ cultural heritage would fade away, and future generations would be totally adapted to the new country of residence – what is often referred to as assimilation (Engebriksen & Fuglerud, 2009; Faist et al., 2013; Kokot, Tölölyan & Alfonso, 2004; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The focus in this traditional migration research has been on the receiving countries and on integration, for instance how migrants and their children adapt to their new countries, issues that have focused on problems (Engebriksen & Fuglerud, 2009; Gitz-Johansen, 2004).

A part of traditional migration research is a view on rootedness within a nation’s border as the natural state, where the residents of a country are kept together by common, stable and more or less unchangeable values to which newcomers should integrate. This kind of migrant research often ends up in a kind of comparative science between different cultures, where a normal and superior ‘us’ and a deviant and inferior ‘other’ are often discussed in terms of colonisation and colonised cultures and individuals (Bhabha, 1994/2004; Hall, 1993; Phillips, 2009; Said, 1997; Schmauch, 2006). Today this assumption of a division between the ‘West’ and the ‘rest’ (Hall, 1993) is transferred to Western societies with diverse ethnic and cultural populations (Dahya & Jenson, 2015; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The ‘rest’, or the ‘other’, in the West is often identified as belonging to one of the Muslim minorities (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

For children of migrants in Sweden, such migration discourse would also mean that the longer they have lived in Sweden and the more they are exposed to ‘Swedish culture’, the more likely it would be that they

adopt a 'Swedish identity'. From the majority society's perspective, this is not only regarded as the natural but also as the desirable (Gitz-Johansen, 2004). This is a view of childhood built on traditional childhood research where Western norms and ideas are the obvious universal standard and something for other conceptions of childhood to measure up to (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). Although it has become more common to study migrant families and their children, the focus is still on adjustment within the host society rather than on searching, for example, for different cross-cultural patterns that go beyond a European or American socio-cultural context (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007) or on incorporating a transnational perspective on migration (see for example Faist et al., 2013).

A field where both traditional migration research and traditional childhood research is manifested is in the depiction of the 'migrant Muslim girl'. Muslim girls (and women) are often presented as being vulnerable and oppressed by their families and/or husbands and trapped by their culture, traditions and religion. Honour-related murders and Muslim-profiled schools are cited as examples or proofs of this (Bigelow, 2008; Jacobsen, 2011; Karlsson-Minganti, 2007; Phillips, 2009; Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010; Scharff, 2011; Shah, 2006; Shain, 2011; Zine 2006). Researchers, in Sweden as well as in other Western countries, have paid particular interest to the use of the *hijab* in a Western context: what the hijab implies, and whether it should be permitted in school and in public places (Benhabib, 2004; Freedman, 2004; Karlsson-Minganti, 2007; Phillips, 2009; Salat, 2010; Sixtensson, 2009; Zine, 2006).

### **The new paradigm of childhood research**

By the end of the 20th century, childhood studies took a new turn. Childhood became increasingly acknowledged as a social category and children as a distinct group with autonomous status (Christensen & James, 2008; Corsaro, 2011; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Thorne, 1993). Underlying this movement is a shift in mindset, from regarding children as invisible and tacit objects to be talked about, to considering them as subjects and competent actors with agency and voices of their own who ought to be listened to and talked with (Christensen & James, 2008; Christensen & Prout, 2002; James et al., 1998; Kellett, Robinson & Burr, 2004; Qvarsell, 2003; Zeitlyn & Mand, 2012). Regarding children as actors implies that they 'act, take part in, change and become changed by the social and cultural world they live in' (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481).

This new paradigm of childhood, with its ideas on childhood as a social construction and children as competent and with agency, is a

result of the ongoing social, political and economical changes in the world caused by globalisation and its consequences for society and individuals. However, the new paradigm did not only occur because of structural changes in the outside world; it is also a result of a development of knowledge, ideas and thoughts on how a childhood should be and how children should live (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001). One of the most well-known works, which has inspired many of today's childhood researchers and which highlights childhood as a social construction, is 'Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life' (1962) by the French historian Philippe Ariès. He criticised the concept of universal childhood. Ariès claimed that childhood did not exist in, for example, Medieval Europe, but was invented later, between the 1500s and 1800s. Although this has been questioned (see for example James & James, 2004, p. 12), Ariès provided childhood researchers with a view that related childhood and children to the historical and cultural realities. In a cultural perspective, there exists a diversity of child- and childhood constructions influenced not only by what time and in what part of the world they emerge, but also by class, gender, ethnicity and religion (Prout & James, 1990, p. 8).

This new childhood paradigm (which is no longer so new) has been prosperous with an impact on different disciplines within childhood research in the Nordic countries (see for example Halldén, 2007; Hundeide, 2006; Sommer, 2005). Childhood as a construction and children with agency were ideas that fit in with the democratic values and equality of all people, policies that became part of the development of the Nordic welfare states in the post-war period (Brembeck, Johansson, & Kampmann, 2004; Engebrigtsen & Fuglerud, 2009).

That a child is competent should be understood as the child being 'reflexive, autonomous and robust' (Brembeck et al., 2004). However, emphasising children's competence creates new questions: What makes a child competent? Does this competence include all children, or are there children who are incompetent? Competence does not seem to include certain children. The focus is often on incompetence when, for example, migrants' children and children from minorities are described (Gitz-Johansen, 2004). Often discussed in connection to this is divisiveness and conflicts between cultures, and Gitz-Johansen claims that the culture to which the minority child belongs is associated with the problematic, while the majority child is described as the normal and ideal. This might be one explanation for some common perceptions and stereotypes when talking about children with a migrant background, not least in the school: 'the rowdy and underachieving immigrant boy' and

'the clever but oppressed immigrant girl' (von Brömssen, 2003; Gruber, 2007; Jonsson, 2007; Parszyk, 1999; Runfors, 2003; Rutter, 2006).

This reveals that even today, within the new childhood paradigm and with all the knowledge this has brought forward, childhood discourses from before are still with us, which shows in how we often interrogate and analyse the present (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001, p. 6).

## Children's perspectives

Viewing a child as competent and with agency makes us understand that a child has a voice. In the new paradigm of childhood, it therefore became important to listen to children and also to try to understand what they tell us from their own horizon – that is, to take the child's perspectives (Halldén, 2007). Listening to what children say, and, more importantly, to understand this from their own perspectives, may be easier said than done. An example of this, which involves young Muslim girls, is the so-called '*l'affaire foulard*' (the hijab affair) in France. The affair started in October 1989 in the town Creil, when three girls were expelled from their school because they turned up dressed in the hijab despite having been forbidden to do that by both the headmaster and their parents (Benhabib, 2004; Fernando, 2010; Freedman, 2004; Phillips, 2009; Teeple Hopkins, 2015). This incident marked the beginning of a heated debate that was to continue for years, challenging the deep-rooted tradition of *laïcité* that characterises France (Benhabib, 2004; Fernando, 2010; Freedman, 2004; Phillips, 2009; Soysal, 1997; Teeple Hopkins, 2015). In the following years the affair was referred to in most discussions on *laïcité*, religious dressing, and whether religious symbols should be permitted in school and in public spaces; it also led to other similar affairs (Fernando, 2010; Freedman 2004, Teeple Hopkins 2015). According to some analysts '*l'affaire foulard*' is the origin of the prohibition against religious symbols in municipal schools in France, which became law in 2004 (Fernando, 2010; Phillips, 2009; Teeple Hopkins 2015).

In this stormy and loud debate there were three voices that were not heard – those of the three girls (Benhabib, 2004). Benhabib considers that if the girls had been listened to, and if the reason for their actions had been understood, the debaters would have learnt that it was not so much about religion – as everyone seemed to have taken for granted – but rather about a cultural defiance, the right to manifest their North African origin.

## Children's perspectives – a dilemma

Taking the children's perspectives by listening to what they express is probably an even more complex issue if the children have another cultural, social, ethnic or religious background than those who are supposed to listen to them.

Let us return to the street dancing girls of Somali origin at the dance show in the M-school. How would their performance have been understood and analysed within the new childhood paradigm? It is not unreasonable to suggest that it would have been interpreted as an example of successful integration – 'they' have become like 'us'. With their hijabs replaced by caps or hoods and the event taking place in a Muslim-profiled school, it may even have been analysed as a kind of resistance towards oppression caused by their culture, tradition and religion. But is this analysis relevant and how do we know whether it is correct? Could it not be possible that the girls would have danced the same dances if they had lived in Somalia?

What if I had asked the girls themselves? How would they have explained their choice of dance and music for the dance show? By chance and in a completely different context, I met another girl of Somali origin; she was brought up in a small town in south-western Sweden. Throughout her school years she was the only girl of Somali origin and the only black girl in her school, in addition to being one of only a few children of migrant parents. Moreover, she was always the only girl with a hijab. I thought that she could help me to understand the girls' choice of dances. However, when asked about the Somali-Swedish girls that I have studied and their street dance, she looked puzzled and said:

*– I don't really know what you are talking about, since I have no experience of that. My classmates and I mostly listen to Håkan Hellström<sup>1</sup>.*

## A note on writing style

Throughout this thesis I have opted to use the terms 'Somali-Swedish' or 'Somali-Swedes' when referring to the girls and their families. Should I have been consistent in my intention to employ the children's own perspective, I should, of course, have used the word the girls mostly use

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<sup>1</sup> Håkan Hellström is a popular Swedish pop- and singer/songwriter who sings in Swedish. One of his most popular songs is 'Känn ingen sorg för mig Göteborg'.

about themselves, namely 'Somalis', although most of them are Swedish-born and Swedish citizens. I chose the term 'Somali-Swedes' to avoid confusion with Somalis still living in Somalia or migrants of Somali origin who are living in other countries. The use of the term is thus not an identity-ascribing category.

My use of the term 'Somali-Swedes' instead of 'Swedish-Somalis' (svensk-somalier), which is a more common order in Swedish, is consistent with the term used for Somalis in diaspora in *Bildhaan*, the international journal of Somali studies, and the practice of well-known researchers on Somalis in diaspora in other parts of the world: for example 'Somali-British' (Lindley, 2007), 'Somali-Americans' (see for example Abdi, 2014), 'Somali-Canadians' (see for example Kusow, 2004a) or 'Somali-Danes' (Kleist, 2004). This order is also common in research on other ethnic groups, of which African-American is the most well-known. The Oxford English Dictionary explains it as 'An American (especially a North American) of African origin; a black American' and it is the most preferred term among black Americans since the late 1960s. My choice of term is thus logic, as the study is written in English and the articles are published in and submitted to international journals.

I have also avoided the term 'second-generation immigrants', first and foremost because I really dislike the term. I feel that it reinforces 'othering'. Most of the girls in my study are born in Sweden, and a more correct term is 'children to migrants' as their parents have migrated to Sweden.

Another aspect of the girls in my study is the colour of their skin. In Sweden there is an ongoing debate among researchers, the media and the public at large regarding the use of the word 'race' (Hübinette, Hörnfeldt, Farahani, & Rosales, 2012; Trondman, 2006). In Sweden, this word is almost taboo, a sensitive subject, and often replaced by ethnicity or culture, or even religion. More and more often I have also come across the term 'visible minorities' to describe 'non-white' people (see for example Höglund, 2013). However, ethnicity is not interchangeable with race. While race is a visual marker, often related to a certain part of the world and also to certain characteristics, ethnicity refers to cultural and social manners, which are created and characterise, for example, how one imagines a Swede or, for that matter, a Somali (Hübinette et al., 2012).

When the term 'race' is used in this thesis, it should be understood as socially constructed and a carrier of ascribed imaginations, where societal belonging and deviation, inclusion and exclusion, are grounded on the colour of one's skin. Racial imaginations are developed in a context and co-produced together with others, and this is made in a con-

stant state of negotiation and change (Alexander, 2006; Barth, 1969/1998; Best, 2003; Gunaratnam, 2003). To conclude: race is something that is attributed to a group in a process, and associated with different hierarchies of societies and the power relations that emerge between different groups (Gullestad, 2002; Mohme, 2012; Stier, 2008). When I use the word 'black' about the informants, it is because they use that word about themselves, and as my research continued I heard this word more and more often when Somali-Swedish youths described themselves.

## Researching Somali-Swedes as a category

In Sweden, it is quite unusual in research on children and youth, as well as in educational science, to follow a certain ethnic group as I have done. Since the 1990s the official policy ambition in Sweden has been to erase conceptions of certain ethnic groups when migrants are discussed (Strömblad & Myrberg, 2015). This also seems to be the case in migrant research. There are several reasons for this. Ethnic labels may, for example, pave the way for imagined ideas about differences between people, and this will in turn strengthen the risk for prejudices and discrimination.

In research as well as among the public at large, an often used expression to describe those who have migrated to Sweden (no matter from where in the world they are from or why they migrated) is the word 'immigrant'. This is furthermore often used to describe the migrants' children, although they may have been born in Sweden. A categorisation such as 'immigrant' may function as enabling, by for instance drawing attention to problems that migrants might have in common in their contacts with authorities. However, labelling people as 'immigrants' may cause the same problems as ethnic labelling; there is a risk that imagined ideas about differences between people take hold, in this case a contrast between 'the immigrant' and 'the Swede', ascribing identity to groups migrating from other countries.

So why does research on immigrants as a category seem to be more accepted than research on specific ethnic groups? One explanation might be the traditional view on immigrants, refugees and even Muslims as something temporary which will be phased out with continuing integration.

There may be other drawbacks in choosing a certain ethnic group to research, as I have done with the Somali-Swedes at a Muslim-profiled school in Sweden. The group in focus for my research may, for example, become reduced to nothing but their ethnic and religious background, or

rather to imaginations concerning their ethnic and religious background, when they are so much more. There is also a risk that the descriptions of them as a group become generalising and categorical, conveying an idea that all Somali-Swedes share the same values, opinions and feelings, and ignoring differences between them as well as similarities with all others in Sweden. Presenting the Somali-Swedes as a group with certain characteristics may also give an impression that these characteristics are unchangeable features. A group's identity is not set in stone. Following a social constructionistic research tradition, identity is something created in a historical, cultural and social context, and thus it may change over time and place, which makes it difficult to draw any general conclusions.

This said, I also claim that researching Somali-Swedes as an overall and ascribed category has some advantages. It may help us to make stereotypes on Somalis in Sweden visible, and thereby revealing discrimination, injustices and inequalities towards people of Somali origin. It may also help us to understand how they associate what they do, how they think, and not the least why they think as they do, with their Somali origin, and by living in Sweden but belonging within a transnational social space (Faist et al., 2013).

## Thesis outline

Chapter two presents a short background of Somali history as well as cultural and religious patterns that have paved the way both for the 'Somali identity' and the ongoing Civil War, which has brought Somalis as refugees to Sweden and other countries in the Western world. Some of the transnational practices that affect children are described. Somalis' situation in Sweden is analysed, including a short discussion on being singled out and discriminated against by the majority because a deviant skin colour. The situation for Somali women and girls in Somalia, as well as in Sweden, is also mentioned. The chapter furthermore includes a short commentary on the Swedish school choice reform, which many parents of Somali origin in Stockholm utilise, and on independent schools, of which the M-school is a faith-based example. A description of the educational attainment for Somalis in diaspora is discussed, where the reasons for why so many of them underperform are highlighted.

Chapter three offers an overview of the theoretical framework that has been the basis for the analyses of the empirical data. The studies in this thesis are made with a social constructionistic epistemological basis. Drawing on Anthony Giddens's structuration theory and ideas on late modernity (1984, 1990 and 1991) made it easier to understand the lives of



the Somali-Swedish girls and their families in their local Swedish and transnational contexts. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı's so-called family change theory (2007) gives a valuable contribution to understanding what happens in families in a migrant situation. As I found Giddens and Kağıtçıbaşı somewhat limited when it came to analysing Somali-Swedes transnational strategies, they were completed with Thomas Faist's ideas on transnational communities and theories on 'transnational social spaces' (Faist et al., 2013).

In chapter four, the methodological approach is elaborated. The study is an ethnographic study, an approach that is common in research with and on children and childhood, as well as in migration research. The chapter also includes a discussion on ethical considerations when researching children with a migrant background. Chapter five is a summary of the three articles that are included in the thesis. Chapter six summarises and discusses some of the conclusions from the three studies in this thesis. Chapter seven is a brief presentation of the thesis and its results in Swedish.

## Chapter 2. A short story of a long past

Most children at the M-school (that is the target Muslim-profiled school) have parents who have fled Somalia and the Civil War that has raged almost continuously since 1991<sup>2</sup>. Somali migration is typically described as conflict-caused: Somalis have left because of violence, persecution, clan-conflicts and political uncertainty, combined with severe drought (Fangen, 2008; Lindley, 2010; Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010; UNDP, 2009). Today, Somalia is regarded as one of the world's most failed states (Harper, 2012; Howard, 2014; Menkhaus, 2003; Williams & Cummings, 2015)<sup>3</sup>. The country has one of the largest numbers of refugees in the world, and the Somali diaspora is spread all over the globe<sup>4</sup>.

Settling in Sweden was nothing planned. One reason that Somalis applied for asylum in Sweden was the country's liberal immigration policy in comparison to many other countries in Europe (Geddes, 2003; Salat, 2010). Today, there are approximately 83,000 persons of Somali origin living in Sweden – either born in Somalia or born in Sweden from one or two Somali-born parents (Statistics Sweden, 2015a). This makes Somalis the single largest group of African origin and the fourth biggest group of Muslims in Sweden. About 24,000 are children between 0 and

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<sup>2</sup> Somalis should not only be associated with today's Somalia. In ancient times Somalis inhabited more or less the whole Horn of Africa, and during the colonization of the Horn of Africa they came to end up in different countries. Today, the Somalis on Africa's Horn live in Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia (Ogaden), Kenya, Djibouti and Puntland.

<sup>3</sup> The same year that president Siyad Barre was overturned, clans in the northern part of Somalia joined and founded Somaliland. The independence is self-proclaimed and has not recognised by any country or international organisation. Since 1991, the situation has been relatively calm in Somaliland and the country has remained relatively unaffected by the Civil War in Somalia.

<sup>4</sup> Of the approximately 8 million inhabitants that the country once had, UNHCR estimates that about 1.5 million are internally displaced (UNHCR, October 2015). Many Somalis are refugees in the neighbouring countries – Kenya 418,000, Ethiopia 251,000, Yemen 249,000). Many Somali migrants have made their way to the West (Berns McGown, 2003; Gundel, 2002; Kleist, 2004; Lewis, 2008; Rutter, 2006; UNDP, 2009), mainly to the US, Canada and the UK. Large groups of Somalis are also to be found in the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Gundel, 2002; Kleist, 2007; UNDP, 2009).

17 years old (Statistics Sweden, 2013a). Most Somali-Swedes live in the larger cities (Johnsdotter, 2002; Kubai, 2013). Stockholm hosts about 11,000 people born in Somalia. Most of them reside in the western part of Greater Stockholm (Salat, 2010). Other parts of Sweden where many Somali-Swedes reside are Göteborg, Malmö, Borås, Borlänge, Örebro, Eskilstuna and Katrineholm (Kubai, 2013).

To do Somali migrants and their children justice, and to understand how they perceive themselves in Sweden today, it is important to have some knowledge about their background. The aim of this chapter is therefore to provide some insight into their history and culture. Research on Somalia and Somalis usually draws attention to three different features that are said to characterise Somalis: the nomadic origin, belonging to a clan, and the religious affiliation to Islam. In the following these three characteristics are used to present an idea of Somalis' origin. They are completed with a fourth, which is central for the aim of this thesis, and for understanding Somalis in diaspora: transnationalism. Somalis' situation in Sweden is depicted with a few examples from the media. Some examples of how black Africans experience racism in Sweden are given. The chapter also includes a brief outline of how the lives of women and girls have developed during the Civil War in Somalia and their current situation in Sweden. The chapter ends up with a short presentation of the school choice reform in Sweden (which was a prerequisite for the M-school to start), and Somalis' attainment at school.

## A brief background of the Somali

To summarise a people's history in a few lines is nothing that can be done easily, and given the stereotypes that already exist around Somalis there is always a risk that the descriptions will be regarded as normative, generalising and simplified.

One reason why it is quite complicated to comprehend the Somali history is that it is built on oral tradition (Lewis, 2002; Rutter, 2006). It was not until 1972 that Somalia received a common written language (Abdi, 1998; Lewis, 2002; Rutter, 2006; Williams & Cummings, 2015), thus before that very few Somalis were published. Therefore, when it comes to the early history, we must rely on what explorers and Western

colonisers such as Ibn Battuta, Richard Burton, and even a novelist such as Karen Blixen, have written<sup>5</sup>.

Most research on Somalia and Somalis, whether it is about politics, political science, history or anthropology, describes Somalis as a homogenous ethnic group that has historically shared a language of oral tradition, a culture, a way of life and the same religion (Garibo-Peyró, 2012; Horst, 2006a; Lewis, 1994; Rutter, 2006). That Somalis are a homogenous group has, however, been questioned in recent years. The group may be homogenous in terms of language (but this too is questioned) and religion, but there are other critical factors that form the Somalis and make them quite heterogeneous, such as class, status and occupation (Besteman, 1995). This is a discussion far beyond the aim of this thesis, but I think it is interesting to mention, as the general idea in much of the research and also the debate on Somalis, in Somalia as well as in the West, is still about the homogeneity of the group.

## Nomads, clans, Islam and transnationalism

Having a nomadic origin, belonging to a clan and being Muslim are, as mentioned above, three features that are said to characterise Somalis. Young researchers on Somalis have, however, recently questioned the image that such terms, often used by researchers from Western countries, convey. They argue that this contributes to entrench a Western colonised view of the group, consolidated in the hegemony and supremacy of whiteness (see for example Liberatore, 2013). This was, for example, lively debated during the last SSIA-conference (Somali Studies International Association) in 2015. However, to describe Somalis as being nomads, belonging to clans and professing Islam is common not only among researchers, but, to my experience, it also often dominates

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<sup>5</sup> Though the Moroccan explorer Ibn Battuta, who came to Somalia in the 14th century, describes Somalis as hospitable and modern (Tamrat, 1977), many in the Western world seem to have been more influenced by the image of them as hostile and violent, as reported by the British explorer Richard Burton after his illfated expedition to Africa's Horn in the 19th century (Godsall, 2001). In 'Out of Africa' the Danish novelist Karen Blixen describes the Somali men living in the so-called 'Somali town', close to her farm in Nairobi, as warmongering and causing armoured fights between clans (Dinesen, 1992). The young Einar Thurfjell, who came to Somalia as a Christian missionary in 1934, and whose written reports to his congregation I acquired through his daughter-in-law (a remote friend of mine), describes the Somalis he met as fundamental 'muhammedaner' (muhammedaner was the commonly used word for Muslims until the last decades of the 20th century) and how threatened he felt by their chieftains.

Somalis' own understanding of themselves. My aim is of course to avoid any kind of stigmatisation and white supremacy, and I have tried to achieve this by completing the picture with a transnational perspective on Somalis in diaspora.

## Nomads

Being nomads or at least having a nomadic heritage is something that is mentioned by scholars, for example professor Ioan M. Lewis, whose anthropological research in Somalia has dominated the scene (Lewis, 1994, 2002). In a dry and hot country such as Somalia – almost entirely consisting of savannah plains and semi deserts – nomadic pastoralism, that is, herding camels, cattle, sheep and goats, has become one of the few viable options (Lewis, 2002; Omar, 2009).

The nomadic Somalis are also described in more recent research, for example in the Dutch anthropologist Cindy Horst's research on Somalis in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya (2006a). Horst describes Somalis' nomadic heritage as consisting of three elements: 'a mentality of looking for greener pastures; a strong social network that entails the obligation to assist each other in surviving; and risk-reduction through strategically dispersing investments in family members and activities' (Horst 2006a, p. 2).

Some scholars claim that the description of Somalis as nomads is exaggerated, emanating from the time when nomadic clans started to dominate the political realm and glorifying all that could be associated with a nomadic way of life, while denying and excluding the history and culture of the many sedentary farmers in the fertile southern part of the country (Besteman, 1995; Muhktar, 1995).

## Clans

Somalia is considered to be a clan society (Bjork, 2007; Kusow, 1995; Mansour, 1995; Omar, 2009; Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010). The Somali clan system is traced through the male line and is based on the four nomadic clans Dir, Darood, Isaaq and Hawiye, and Digil and Rahanwayn who are associated with the agricultural south (Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Garibo-Peyró, 2012; Lewis, 2002). Each clan is divided in sub-clans, which in turn are divided into sub-sub-clans and so forth (Garibo-Peyró, 2012; Lewis, 2002; Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010).

The clan system is often described as 'class-less'. This is, however, only relevant within the Somali clans but not between them (Kusow, 2004b). There have always been assumptions that some clans are nobler than

others, and there are also people who do not belong to any clan (Bjork, 2007; Kusow, 2004b). In order to prove their clan belonging in an oral society, Somalis should be able to tell their ancestors names several generations back – some say seven generations (Salat, 2010).

Historically clans have played a significant role regarding survival and safety in a society without a iota of public welfare, and where fights over limited resources were common (Harper, 2012; Horst, 2006a; Kusow, 1995; Lewis, 2002; Mansour, 1995; Omar, 2009). Clans are also often mentioned as an explanation behind the divisiveness of Somalia, and the inability to shape a nation historically as well as during the Civil War (Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Garibo-Peyró, 2012; Lewis, 2002; Mansour, 1995; Rutter, 2006).

There have been periods of attempts to break up the clan system (Lewis, 2002). The most well-known example is when president Siyad Barre in the beginning of the 1970s banned clans as inconsistent with the ‘Scientific Socialism’ that he tried to carry through (inspired by the Soviet Union to which Barre’s reign was closely allied) (Lewis, 2002, p. 209). The Siyad Barre anti-clan rhetoric has been questioned, as Barre in his different appointments and nominations prioritised members of his own clan, which – of course – annoyed the other clans (Mansour, 1995). The various liberation movements that were shaped during Barre’s reign, and which succeeded in driving him from his power, were also built mainly on clan belonging (Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010).

Although an everyday experience for Somalis in Somalia, clan has become a taboo topic and something that Somalis are reluctant to acknowledge, at least to outsiders, when living in the West, as they fear that they will be misunderstood and regarded as hopelessly behind their times (Bjork, 2007; Johnsdotter, 2007b; Tillikainen & Mohamed, 2013). Furthermore, many Somalis themselves avoid being involved with clan issues as they believe that the clan system has brought no good, and blame clannism as the cause for the war and for much of the insecurity in the country today (Bjork, 2007; Salat, 2010).

Anyhow, clans and clan affiliations are ever present in the daily lives of Somalis in diaspora (Bjork, 2007; Johnsdotter, 2002; Johnsdotter, 2007b; Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010; Tillikainen, 2007). Clans function as safety nets and entrance tickets for clan members moving abroad, and clans are also units for important decisions and support (Al Sharmani, 2007; Berns McGown, 1999; Bjork, 2007; Johnsdotter, 2007a; Johnsdotter, 2007b; Horst, 2006a; Kusow, 1995; Salat, 2010; Tillikainen & Mohamed, 2013). The Swedish researcher Charlotte Melander has, for example, shown how members of the same clan support each other (2009). On the other hand, inter-clan rivalries and antagonism between different clan-

families may foster divisions (Salat, 2010). The clan affiliation may thus be supportive, but also divisive, limiting and controlling (Johnsdotter, 2007a; Johnsdotter, 2007b; Salat, 2010).

## Islam

Positioned on the Horn of Africa, Somalia has historically had many contacts with the Arabian Peninsula, for example through trading. This may be one reason why this part of the world adopted Islam early (Adam, 2010; Garibo-Peyró, 2012; Lapidus, 2002; Lewis, 1994). The new religion spread from the coastal towns to the interior parts of the country, where it meddled with different pre-Islamic traditions (Adam, 2010; Lewis, 1994).

Somalis are Sunni Muslims belonging to the Shafi'ite school of jurisprudence, and their religious practices have historically been inspired by Sufism (Adam, 2010). Islam has always been an essential part of Somali culture and researchers on Somalia and Somalis claim that the identity of being Somali is synonymous with being Muslim (Garibo-Peyró, 2012; Lapidus, 2002; Lewis, 2002; Omar, 2009). An example of Islam's strong position is how Siyad Barre, in his attempt to get support from the religious leaders, proclaimed that his Scientific Socialism was fully compatible with Islam (Adam, 2010; Garibo-Peyró, 2012).

The development of political Islam, and when it comes to Somalia mainly known through Al-Shabaab, goes back to the 1970s when Somalia became a stage for different types of Islam and Islamism (Ahmed, 1999; Abdullahi, A.M., 2010; Tillikainen, 2010). The fights that we hear about today in the news reports from Somalia may have some of their roots in clans, but also in different fundamental interpretations of Islam.

Somalis' Muslim faith seems to become strengthened after their migration to the West (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Berns McGown, 1999; Collet, 2007; Salat, 2010). This can be explained by the sense of security, belonging and identity that Islam gives in the difficulties caused by a life in exile (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Berns McGown 1999; Collet 2007). Omar Ahmed Salat, who made his research on how Somalis in Sweden integrate to the Swedish society, found that Somalis seemed to have a higher degree of religiosity than other Muslim minorities in Sweden (Salat, 2010). He claims that this might have had consequences for the acceptance of Somalis by the wider society.

## **A transnational approach on Somalis in diaspora**

Today, with so many Somalis in diaspora, their experiences of having a nomadic heritage, belonging to clans and being Muslims reflects life not only on the Horn of Africa but also on a global level. How this is managed by Somali-Swedish migrants and their children can be understood by incorporating a transnational perspective concerning their different plans and practices. A transnational approach to migration challenges traditional migration research with its focus on integration and assimilation and by highlighting the ties that many of today's migrants continue to maintain with their countries of origin after migration (Basch et al., 1994; Faist et al., 2013; Kokot et al., 2004; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Shun, 2001; Vertovec, 2009). New technology and cheap travel also make it possible for people in diaspora to stay in instant – and constant – contact with former countrymen wherever they are in the world.

In recent times, a growing body of research on transnational migration has focused on families (Fouron & Glick Schiller 2002; Giorgas, 2008; Haikkola, 2011; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Olsson & Farahani, 2012; Smith, 2002; Smith, 2006). Much of this research deals with children and parents who live in different countries (the United States often being one of the countries), and describes how 'familyhood' is upheld across national borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002, p. 3). The underlying reasons for families to live apart, and the consequences for children and adults, are analysed (see for example Parreñas, 2005; Orellana et al., 2001; Smith, 2006).

Studies from the United States on different cross-border strategies claim that children often have an important role in a family's transnational practices, and that the main motive behind a family's decision to live apart is to create a better future for the children (Orellana et al., 2001). However, even if children depend on adults for their living, and adults convey a transnational life to them, they may experience this in other ways than the older generation and are able to mould it into something else, as well as create their own transnational practices and perspectives (Faist et al., 2013, Gardner, 2012; Jones–Correa, 2002). In the following some aspects of different transnational practices of Somali families in diaspora will be highlighted.

### **Transnationalism in a Somali context**

A transnational approach on Somalis' situation in diaspora has become common in research on Somali migrants. One example of this is the anthology 'From Mogadishu to Dixon – The Somali Diaspora in Global



Context' edited by Abdi M. Kusow and Stephanie Bjork (2007). Researchers from the United States, Finland, Denmark, Germany and Egypt share their research on Somali migrants' transnational practices.

Often-mentioned examples of transnational practices among Somalis are a propensity to move, which encompasses travelling abroad to visit family and friends and onward migration to other countries, as well as remittances, that is the money that Somalis in diaspora send to support their families in Somalia (Affi, 2014; Al Sharmani, 2007; Boyle & Ali, 2010; Engebriksen & Fuglerud, 2009; Horst, 2006a; Johnsdotter, 2007a; Johnsdotter, 2007b; Kusow & Bjork, 2007; Lindley, 2010; Melander, 2009).

There are a few Swedish studies that describe how Somalis in Sweden maintain transnational practices, for example the anthropologist Sara Johnsdotter's studies on mobility and transnational practices as a consequence of a wider definition of family (2007a, 2007b), and the sociologist Charlotte Melander's research on Somali-Swedes and their supporting of former countrymen within their transnational network (2009).

#### Propensity to move and broad family definition

In her research, Johnsdotter has shown that close cohesion and a wider than usual definition of families – compared to a Swedish nuclear family – has had consequences for Somalis transnational practices when it comes to mobility (2007a; 2007b). This may also include children, who are sometimes moved between non-parental family members in different countries (Johnsdotter, 2007a; 2007b; 2015). Johnsdotter describes how the responsibility for the children is collective and taken care of within the wider family definition; those who seem to be the best providers for the children will also be regarded as parents. An example of this extended parental responsibility is a debate in Sweden concerning the so-called dumped Somali children, primarily teenagers who are sent to stay with family in Somalia often in order to escape bad influence from peers, while their birth parents and siblings remain in Sweden (Johnsdotter, 2007a; 2007b; 2015). This has, for example, been described in the documentary book 'Dumpad – Den Sanna Historien om Ahmed Hassan Ali' ('Dumped – The True Story on Ahmed Hassan Ali') (Brinkemo, 2004). While the Somali birth parents considered sending their children to Somalia as in their children's best interests, this was not how the Swedish authorities, and subsequently the public debate, perceived their actions (Johnsdotter, 2015).

## Remittances

Charlotte Melander's dissertation 'Inom Transnationella Lokala och Sociala Världar – Om Sociala Stödutbyten och Försörjningsstrategier bland Svensk-somalier' ('Within Transnational and Local Social Worlds – Social Support Exchange and Strategies for Earning a Living among Swedish-Somalis') (Melander, 2009), focuses on another common transnational practice among Somalis in diaspora – remittances. This is an example of how old traditions of support within families and clans have survived and become a transnational practice (Affi, 2014; Horst, 2006a; Lindley, 2007; Melander, 2009; Salat, 2010)<sup>6</sup>. According to Melander, remittances seem to be central in the informal social insurance system among Somalis living in Sweden. In fact, much of their daily life is affected by moral negotiations on how much money that was appropriate to spend on your family in Sweden (from resources that were often already very limited), and how much of what was left should be sent to family members in Somalia (Melander, 2009).

International research on remittances has found almost the same moral negotiations as Melander has. The British scholar Anna Lindley, who has done extensive research on the effects of remittances on Somalis in Somaliland and London (see for example Lindley, 2007, 2009a, 2009b), found that although the drive to remit might encourage labour market participation and investments in the Somali regions, it could also increase poverty as well as limit savings and investments in the UK (Lindley, 2009b). Lindley also describes how deciding whose relatives are in the most urgent need of help can cause tensions between spouses (2009b, see also Engebriksen, 2007). Young persons may even put off marriage and starting a family because of remittance obligations, something that Cindy Horst found when studying Somali-Americans in Minnesota (2006b).

## Girls and women in Somalia

The picture that emerges when reading literature on the situation of girls and women in Somalia through the ages is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, their life conditions are described as subordinate in a patrilineal society characterised by patriarchal structures (Affi, 2014; Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Ibrahim, R. M., 2004; Ingiriis, 2015). While

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<sup>6</sup> Somalis' remittances expect to reach between one and two billion USD annually (Hammond, Ali & Hendrick, 2012; UNDP, 2009), and exceeds all other resources of income in Somalia (Hassan & Chalmers, 2008).

boys have been, and still are, sent to school to a greater extent than girls, and are expected to participate in decision-making concerning for example different clan issues, the girls should rather be engaged in domestic work. After all, it is the boys who will be the future providers for their birth family and clan, while the girls sooner or later disappear to another family (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Ibrahim, R.M., 2004; Ingiriis, 2015; Omar, 2009; Salat, 2010). On the other hand, Somali women are also described as strong and not particularly subordinate. Hassan, Adan and Warsame put it like this: 'Somali women, whether nomadic or urban, have never been submissive, either to natural calamities or to social oppression' (1995, p. 166). Women in the countryside have been regarded as the backbone of the Somali economy, having the main responsibility not only for the home, but also for most of the cattle-farming (Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Gardner & Warsame, 2004; Ibrahim, R.M., 2004; Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Historically, women could also claim at least some political influence (Gardner & Warsame, 2004; Ingiriis, 2015; Kapteijns, 1994; Lewis, 1994). A married woman belongs to her father's clan but must also be loyal to her husband's clan, to which she is linked through her sons (Gardner & Warsame, 2004; Ibrahim, R.M. 2004; Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Though a woman could not participate in the clan's decisions, her position 'in between clans' meant that she could mediate when different groups fought over important assets such as water and pasture (Affi, 2014; Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Ibrahim, D., 2004; Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Middle-class girls living in the urban areas had in many ways a different life situation than rural girls. They had, for example, more access to education and more free time than rural girls (Dini, 2012). This means that prior to the Civil War, Somali girlhoods could be quite different, depending on where in the country a girl was born and in what socioeconomic realities she was brought up.

However, some reforms during Siyad Barre's reign with his Scientific Socialism, which was meant to make Somalia more equal, did benefit girls and women as a whole (Affi, 2014; Ingiriis, 2015). Education was improved for women, clans were banned and a new Family Law that made women equal to men in marriage was introduced. Much of the new family law was, however, never implemented (Affi, 2014; Ingiriis, 2015). In the labour market women could be found in positions that had earlier been reserved for men – for example officers in the army – and women were also appointed to political positions (Affi, 2014; Ingiriis, 2015). Critics claim that the reforms were only a part of Barre's grandstanding, and that those women who came to hold top positions

were mainly related to top ranking military officers either by marriage, clan affiliation or clan allegiance (Ingiriis, 2015).

The reforms came to an abrupt end when the Civil War started in 1991. Health care has since then been next to none existent, and almost the same goes for the possibilities for children's education. During the first years of the Civil War, most schools in Somalia were closed; in 1993, some schools started to open again, supported by volunteers and organisations such as UNICEF (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Williams & Cummings, 2015). As this is being written, schools are functioning in some parts of the country. Nevertheless, Somalia has one of the lowest enrolment rates for primary school-aged children – according to UNICEF 42 per cent are enrolled in school, of those 36 per cent are girls (UNICEF & Ministry of Human Development and Public Services, Somalia, n.d.).

The Civil War has also led to changes in gender roles and responsibilities (Gardner, 2004). As is normal in war zones, the situation for girls and women has deteriorated in many respects (Dini, 2012; Gardner & El Bushra, 2004). There are, for example, reports of rape and sexual violence against internally displaced girls and women (Dini, 2012; Gardner & El Bushra, 2004; Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013; Musse, 2004). Some women have also been recruited to the different armed forces (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Because of the Civil War, many women have found themselves the breadwinner in the family, as their husbands have been killed or have disappeared, or because the men have lost their source of income (Affi, 2014; Ahmed, 1999; Berns McGown, 2003; Dini, 2004; Gardner, 2004; Ibrahim, R.M., 2004; Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013; Kleist, 2010).

Whilst the Somali women are victims of the war, the war has also – as brutal as this might seem – in some sense strengthened their power vis-à-vis men, both economically and politically. Forced to become the breadwinner of the family, many women have found a source of income by working as traders in small-scale trade, selling clothes, vegetables and household items in the market, and even further away in neighbouring countries (Berns McGown, 2003; Gardner & Warsame, 2004). The Norwegian researcher Rannveig Haga describes this in her dissertation 'Tradition as Resource: Transnational Somali Women Traders Facing the Realities of Civil War' (2009).

Women have also made political progress. Today women are engaged in politics on all levels in the country (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). The women who have made political careers come from the urban middle-class or have a diasporic background from a country in the West, with a high level of education (Affi, 2014; Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Nonetheless, women's success may help to raise the political conscience also among

less privileged women (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Other examples of how women with diasporic backgrounds contribute are those who have relocated to Somalia to build schools, hospitals and to work with human rights and health projects (for example on FGM – Female Genital Mutilation). Many of those projects are primarily designed to benefit women and children (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013).

However, despite womens' engagement in improving conditions, the progresses are very limited and the situation is fragile. Women's and girls' social status and position are still far from equal to men's and boys'. Somalia is still a country embedded in traditions and patriarchy, particularly in the more rural settings (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). In addition, the last decade extreme religious groups' strong views on how women should behave have placed extra strain on the development for women in this region (Ahmed, 1999). Famine, drought, risk of rape, violence, dismal health care, FGM of almost every girl, one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, and limited access to schools and education have furthermore put Somalia on the list of the five most dangerous countries to grow up in as a girl and live in as a woman (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2011).

## Somalis in Sweden

Reports and articles on Somalis in Sweden often describe them as a socially and economically vulnerable group. Often associated with Somali-Swedes are the so-called 'dumping' of their children in the country of origin, FGM, and in recent years also even illiteracy among Somali refugees (Brinkemo, 2004; Johnsdotter, 2002; Salat, 2010). Another issue brought up in connection to Somalis is their high rate of unemployment. In 2010 only 21 per cent of all Somali-Swedes between 16 and 65 years old were employed, compared to 73 per cent among the population at large (Carlson et al., 2012). While other migrant groups from outside Europe also have high unemployment rates, Somali-Swedes have the highest, and Carlson et al. provide some reasons for this. In general, Somali-Swedes have a lower education than the majority population or an education that does not fit the existing labour market, and many of those who are of working age have furthermore arrived quite recently to Sweden (see also Salat, 2010).

While there is high unemployment among Somalis in Sweden, their employment rate is twice as high in Minnesota, where Somalis are regarded as hard-working and entrepreneurial (Carlson, 2007; Carlson et al., 2012). To explain this, factors like self-selection or differences

regarding the functioning of the respective labour markets have been raised (Carlson et al., 2012). Another explanation could be discrimination. According to the so-called EU-MIDIS survey published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2009, 41 per cent of the participating Somali-Swedes had experienced discrimination in a job-searching situation. The same survey also revealed other areas where Somali-Swedes experienced discrimination, such as housing, and in public areas such as restaurants and cafés. The Somali-Swedes that participated explained the discrimination in terms of their ethnicity and religion. These results are in line with a Swedish report from 2014 that was published by the Ministry of Employment on how people of African decent (that is not only Somali-Swedes) experienced their situation when it comes to for example education, labour market, housing, health, etc. The report was conducted by the Multicultural Centre (Mångkulturellt Centrum) and is a review of existing statistics, surveys and previous research. It revealed that African-Swedes experienced marginalisation in all the above-mentioned sectors. Interesting in connection to this is the yearly Mångfaldsbarometern, which among other issues measures how the majority population in Sweden experience cultural distance from different minorities. Of all the minorities, Somali-Swedes is the group that Swedes experience themselves to be most different from culturally (Mella et al., 2014).

### **Somali-Swedes in media**

When Swedish media write about Somalis in Sweden, they often address issues concerning cultural difference, marginalisation and socially deprived and exposed youths. Articles may, for example, be about young men at risk to be recruited by Islamists from Al-Shabaab (see for example 'Säpo bevakar terrortränade svenskar' – 'The Swedish Security Service monitors terrorist trained Swedes', Dagens Nyheter, 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2012) or about being sent on their own to Somalia if they do not behave (see for example 'Per Brinkemo om barnen Sverige glömde: Svenska barn dumpas i Somalia' – 'Per Brinkemo on the children that Sweden forgot: Swedish children are dumped in Somalia', Expressen, 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2004).

An example of how Somali-Swedes have been treated by Swedish media is the series of articles that the Swedish daily paper Göteborgsposten (GP) published in October 2007, which focused on Somali migrants living in Gothenburg. The articles were written by the Swedish journalist Christer Lövkvist and had titles like 'Mot undergången' ('Towards collapse') (Lövkvist, 2007, p. 6), 'Muna är stark, stolt – och

oroad' ('Muna is strong, proud – and worried') (Lövkvist, 2007, p. 4), 'Integrationsministern är självkritisk – i andra länder lyckas somalier' ('A self-critical Minister of Integration – Somalis succeed in other countries') (Lövkvist, 2007, p. 4), 'Kraven på bidrag måste skärpas' ('The requirement for social security must be tightened up') (Lövkvist, 2007, p. 4).

The articles led to a number of letters to the editor (see for example Göteborgsposten, 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 2007, and Göteborgsposten, 20<sup>th</sup> of November, 2007), and a month later about 30 Somali-Swedes demonstrated outside the head office of Göteborgsposten (Johansson, 2007, p. 15). Among the authors of the letters and the demonstrators were some Somali-Swedes who, while they agreed with the author of the articles, thought that he had been far too brusque. Others felt humiliated and offended; they thought that the articles were highly exaggerated and saw them as a hostile attack on an already vulnerable group.

To summarise, the articles in Göteborgsposten described an ethnic group in total decline and whose everyday life was characterised by unemployment, drugs, crime, benefit fraud, poor school achievement, broken families and as extremely hard to integrate into Swedish society.

Another example of media coverage of Somalis in Sweden is the information that first appeared in an article in Dalademokraten, a local newspaper in Dalarna, which stated that half of all Somali refugees that have come to Borlänge during the last few years are illiterate (Simonsson, 2008). This is also an illustration of how information presented in the media regarding an ethnic group can become an established truth that starts to live its own life among the public at large. The information in the local newspaper was spread as a fact to other media in Sweden, both local and national press, including the news on Swedish public service television. There it was mentioned as a problem that not only concerned Dalarna, but a fact that was relevant for all Somali refugees in Sweden, irrespective of where they had settled. The huge number of illiterate Somali refugees was also mentioned and discussed as a problem in the Swedish Parliament (see for example Skriftlig fråga 2011/12:286 and Interpellation 2012/13:28). Furthermore, it became widely used by the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) in their criticism of the supposed mass immigration. In an article in the largest Swedish daily newspaper, Dagens Nyheter, their leader Jimmie Åkesson wrote:

*'The Sfi (Swedish for Immigrants – my comment) is not at all prepared for the influx of illiterate migrants from Somalia, though everyone should have been aware of this being an obvious*

*consequence of policies already decided on.' – own translation  
(Åkesson, Dagens Nyheter, 5<sup>th</sup> of November, 2012)*

*'Inom Sfi är man oförberedd på tillströmningen av analfabeter från Somalia trots att alla borde ha vetat att detta var en naturlig konsekvens av redan beslutad politik.' (Åkesson, Dagens Nyheter, 5<sup>th</sup> of November, 2012).*

Åkesson's article did not go unchallenged, and the pros and cons were discussed both in debate articles and on editorial pages in Swedish media. The information that was presented as a fact in the beginning, that half of the Somali refugees are illiterates, was not questioned. However, in August 2013 a study that analysed the information about the illiterate Somalis in Borlänge was published (Fadai & Garni, 2013). The authors of the study found that there was no basis for the information that flourished. There has never existed any written documentation on the illiteracy among Somali refugees in Borlänge, and when the authors of the study interviewed those involved in the Sfi, they found that the number of illiterates could be estimated to seven per cent at the highest. Fadai and Garni, the authors of the study, collected their own information from around a hundred Somali refugees. They found one person who was illiterate. In fact, most of the refugees had spent several years in school, some had been to high school and some even had diplomas from universities. The study went virtually unnoticed and received almost no attention in the Swedish media.

There are, however, also some examples of positive media coverage of Somalis in Sweden. Nerikes Allehanda, a local newspaper, had for example an article about a family who had engaged a man of Somali origin to take care of and train the camels that the family had bought for their farm ('Snart är kameltrion redo för turridding' – 'The three camels will soon be ready for riding tours', Ericsson, 2011). Another example is the initiative by a Swedish bandy profile in Borlänge who launched a bandyteam with Somalis who came to participate in the World Championship in Bandy 2014, competing for...Somalia. This was widely reported even in international media (see for example BBC, 2014). It also became a film 'Filip och Fredrik presenterar trevligt folk' ('Filip and Fredrik present nice people'), which was launched in January 2015. Other positive stories on Somalis are often about athletes such as the long distance runner Mustafa Mohamed and the basketball player Fahriya Abdi.

When a group of Somali-Swedes in Gothenburg published the book 'Vara, Vilja, Kunna' ('To Be, To Want, To Be Able') in 2010 (Benkel &



Salad), the journalist Christer Lövkvist followed up his articles from 2007. In the new article, the Somali-Swedes came to appear in a somewhat different light: as ambitious young persons with big plans for their future (Lövkvist, 2010, p. 4).

The positive and good examples of Somali-Swedes tend to highlight individuals, but when media present them as problems they often generalise and refer to the Somali-Swedes as a group. Somali-Swedes are of course not alone in being depicted with negative stereotypes by Swedish media, this is something happening to other migrant groups in Sweden as well as in other parts of the Western World (Brune, 2004; Cottle, 2000).

## Experiences of racism

I have above described how Somali-Swedes' social and economical vulnerability contribute to their marginalisation. The description of Somali-Swedes would, however, be incomplete if I did not mention anything about their own experiences of racism in Sweden due to their skin colour. To emphasise race as a parameter of how, for example, Somali-Swedish girls construct their childhood is a paradox, from a Swedish perspective but also from a Somali perspective. The Swedish self-image is that Sweden is not a racist country (Hübinette et al., 2012; Schmauch, 2006). Race is regarded as an almost taboo topic, and not recognised as an organising category for social classification.

To Somalis, race and racism is something unknown and not experienced from their country of origin; in Somalia social stratification is tied to clan-based, non-racialised classification systems (Kusow, 2006). Thus it is actually after coming to Sweden that Somali-Swedes have become racified, and their racial identity as being black has been put forward, while other identities they themselves may prioritise are subdued.

In his book 'Yesterday, Tomorrow – Voices from the Somali Diaspora' (2000), the Somali author Nuruddin Farah shares an experience from a meeting he had with Somalis in Gothenburg during one of his visits to Sweden. A Somali man comes up to him and asks if he realises that in Somalia you were not Somali:

*‘– How do you mean? I asked.*

*– Because did not we tend to divide ourselves into smaller units, each of us locating our identities in one or another of the clan*

*families? I was a member of this family, you were probably a member of another, and so on!*

– *And in Sweden?*

– *Here we are refugees first, black Africans second and Somalis last.*  
(Farah, 2000, p. 190)

Bilan Osman, a young Swedish journalist with Somali origin, expresses similar thoughts in an interview in KIT, a digital publication (Arnroth, 2016). In Sweden she is above all identified as black and Muslim and not by, for example, her family-background – her father is a professor in chemistry and her grandfather a famous poet. As black and with African origin, she seems to be part of a racified discourse that has survived old colonial structures, where an African was not only regarded as subordinate, but also uncivilised and primitive (in contrast to the white supremacist who was civilised and reasonable) (Schmauch, 2006). In 'Peau Noire, Masques Blanc' Frantz Fanon, the noted African-French psychiatrist, described his experience of being black: '*Le Noir n'a plus à être noir, mais à l'être en face du Blanc*'. (Fanon, 1952, p. 119) ('Being Black is no longer about being black, but to be Black in relation to the White' – own translation). What Frantz Fanon wanted to emphasise is the powerlessness connected to his skin colour.

In a report from Centrum mot rasism (Centre against racism), 50 Somali-Swedish men and women from seven towns and between 18 and 65 years old were interviewed about their experiences of discrimination and racism (2011). Almost all of them had experienced verbal abuses because of their Somali origin, their skin colour, and their religion. The women interviewed told that they were often singled out because their hijab or a view that they had many children, they were also ascribed ideas regarding FGM. Men with Somali origin said that when in public places, they were often suspected of being terrorists.

In another study from the Equality Ombudsman (2007), 33 black youths and young adults (not only Somalis) between 15 and 31 years old, in Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg were interviewed. They reported that they had experienced racism from an early age, mostly in form of racified language, different violations of the integrity and discriminative treatment (p. 17). The racism did also seem to have a gender dimension, while the young men were often suspected of criminal or violent behaviour, the young girls experienced recurring racified sexual harassments from white men in the majority (p. 18).

African-Swedes (and thus not only those with a Somali origin) is the Swedish minority most exposed to hate crimes according to statistics from The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande Rådet – BRÅ) in a report published by the Multicultural Centre (2014). Afrophobic<sup>7</sup> hate crimes are characterised by a high proportion of physical violence that often take place in public areas, such as schools, place of work, residential areas, shopping malls and restaurants (p. 7).

In her dissertation 'Den Osynliga Vardagsrasismens Realitet' ('The Reality of Invisible Everyday Racism') Ulrika Schmauch studied how people of African decent living in Sweden experience and deal with everyday racism (Schmauch, 2006). She found that their experience of racism includes denigrating remarks, but also a general feeling of being excluded from the majority society. However, the silence and denial around racism in the Swedish society, make those affected doubt that what they have experienced is racism.

From time to time, discussions on racism and whether Sweden is a racist country arise, especially in connection to debates on whether the use of some words and expressions should be regarded as racist or not (Hübinette, 2013). Many of those participating in these debates are black youths and of Somali origin, as Bilan Osman. Two examples where young black women have participated with experiences, discussions and analyses are the digital media Rummet (The Room) and Svart Kvinna (Black Woman).

## Girls and women in Sweden – Living conditions under transition

There are very few studies on the situation of Somali-Swedish girls and women. In the following some Swedish studies on the Somali diaspora are presented, they are completed with studies from Norway, but also other countries in Europe. The focus is on girls and women and on issues such as FGM, gender roles, engagement in voluntary organisations, religious affiliation, and educational attainment.

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<sup>7</sup> Afrophobia is a term used to define hostility towards people with a background in sub-Saharan Africa or who are African diaspora. The term is used by BRÅ since 2008 (Multicultural Centre, 2014, p.12.)

## Female genital mutilation (FGM)

One of the most highlighted issues when Somali girls and women are described is the prevalence of FGM. The Somali fashion model Waris Dirie is probably the person who has made FGM most known to the public at large. She herself was a victim of this as a small girl in Somalia, and her autobiographical books are bestsellers and widely known in Sweden (Dirie 1999, 2004, 2005).

FGM has been prohibited in Sweden since 1982. In 1999 the law was reformulated to include future cases of FGM of Swedish girls taken abroad for the procedure (Johnsdotter, 2002). In Sara Johnsdotter's dissertation, 'Created by God. How Somalis in Swedish Exile Reassess the Practice of Female Circumcision' (2002), the tradition with FGM is analysed. According to Johnsdotter, FGM is still made on most girls in Somalia, but seems to have been abolished after the migration to Sweden. She explains that this has mainly religious reasons. In Sweden, Somalis have come closer to their religion, and as Islam concludes that God's creation is perfect as it is, humans should not touch it.

Whether FGM has come to an end among Somalis in Sweden and the fear that girls of Somali origin are being mutilated still persists and is now and then debated in media (see for example 'Könsstympling – ett nytt svenskt problem' – 'Female genital mutilation – a new Swedish problem', Pehrson & Neuman in Svenska Dagbladet, 1998, and 'Hon kämpar mot könsstympling' – 'She fights against FGM', Lindqvist in Östgötakorrespondenten, 2012, 'Fler könsstymplingar anmäls – mörkertalet extremt stort' – 'More genital mutilations reported – unreported cases are extremely high', Bengtsson in SvD, 2016). FGM is a difficult crime to prove and suspected cases are often shelved. When this is written Sweden has had two cases that led to convictions (Johnsdotter, 2008).

In 2014, a new research project on FGM and its extent in Sweden was launched, led by PhD student Anna Wahlberg and supervised by Sara Johnsdotter. The project aims at evaluating how FGM can be prevented among newly arrived Somalis.

## Changing gender roles and family patterns

The Civil War meant challenges especially for women in Somalia. But in times of social upheaval, gender roles and living conditions do also change for those who take refuge to other countries (Gardner, 2004; Kleist 2010). Many Somali refugees who settled in different Western countries came from relatively prosperous backgrounds in different towns. They were brought up under Siyad Barre, and could take advan-

tage from the educational initiatives that he launched (Abdi, 1998; Gardner, & El Bushra, 2004; Salat, 2010). Coming to the West, however, meant that they had to take some steps down the social ladder, when it came to their socioeconomic situation and their social status as a minority (Engebriksen & Fuglerud, 2009).

Coming to Sweden have also challenged old gender roles and patriarchal traditions from the country of origin, often – many claim – in favour of the woman (Salat, 2010). Salat explains that the difficulties for Somali men on the labour market, as well as in the Swedish welfare state, have displaced the traditional roles of Somali men as breadwinners. Free education, health care, child and housing benefits, and maternity leave are examples from the Swedish welfare system that have made the Somali families less dependent on others, something that seems to particularly have benefitted the women in the family (Salat, 2010). This may, according to Salat, also be one explanation to the high percentage of divorces among Somalis. That Somali women in diaspora take advantage of their new rights and that this have consequences for the men's role in the family, as well as on an increased propensity to divorce is something that also researchers in other Western countries have observed (Boyle & Ali, 2010; Engebriksen, 2007; Engebriksen & Fuglerud, 2009; Fangen, 2008; Hopkins, 2010; Rutter, 2006; Tillikainen, 2007).

In a study by the Norwegian sociologist Katrine Fangen, young Norwegian men and women of Somali origin told her about their lives in Norway. Fangen found that those who had own experience of Somalia before settling down in Norway found the transition between the two societies less problematic than their parents (2008). They reported that on the whole they feel more free and can do other things in Norway than they could normally do in Somalia, mentioning education and going out to have coffee or to the cinema as examples. Both boys and girls mentioned this perceived freedom, but they also thought that the limits their parents put on the girls are stricter than those for the boys (Fangen, 2008). This strictness is, according to another Norwegian study by the two Norwegian anthropologists Ada Ingrid Engebriksen and Øivind Fuglerud (2009), nothing that the Somali girls see as something that is forced on them, but rather as a self-imposed restriction. In their study, Engebriksen and Fuglerud compare how youths with Somali and Tamil origin reflect on, for example, their position in the families considering freedom and room for manoeuvre. Engebriksen and Fuglerud saw that the girls (regardless of being of Somali or Tamil origin) perceived themselves as relatively autonomous. This had not so much to do with how the girls' room for manoeuvre was organised, but was more about what the girls themselves experience as control and autonomy.

While Norwegian girls' position could be characterised as 'I know what is best for me', the girls of Somali origin characterised their position as 'I know what is best for us (the family)', while the girls of Tamil origin saw their position as 'They (the parents) know what is best for us (the family)' (p. 125). Engebriksen and Fuglerud consider that these differences could be explained by different family ideologies. In this regard the Somali girls' position, which according to the authors is an example of a Somali ethos on equality, independence and personal strength, acknowledges the family as the appropriate authority – but not always and not about everything (p. 126). Important to consider in this respect is how Somalis historically, but also today in diaspora, define family. Sara Johnsdotter, who has studied Somali families in Sweden, explains, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, that an ideal Somali family is considerably larger, more extended and consisting of far more members than those that for the moment live under the same roof (2007a, 2007b). Somali girls feel connected to and also responsible for these extended families (2007b, p. 119).

Fangen (2008) and Engebriksen and Fuglerud (2009) describe that the strictness on girls is particularly pronounced in the interaction with the opposite sex. According to Johnsdotter (2002) this is about guarding and preserving the girls' so important chastity, which ultimately is about making sure that the girls do not get pregnant before marriage (see also Engebriksen & Fuglerud, 2009). It is the patrilineal principle of the Somali society that plays its role here – a child born outside marriage is, according to Somali tradition, born without blood ties. The women interviewed in Johnsdotter's research claim that the girls' chastity is best guarded if the girls are raised to be good Muslims. This does however not mean that the interactional patterns between genders have not changed in diaspora. Salat (2010) mentions, for example, that the courting rituals among Somali-Swedes are redefined. Somali women are now able to court with fewer restrictions from the family and with more anonymity (as most of the family who could have put restrictions live in Somalia and are unable to see what is going on), and also to invite those they court to their own apartment. Furthermore, an American study has found that arranged marriages are more unusual among Somalis in the United States than they used to be in Somalia (Boyle & Ali, 2010).

### **Engagement in organisations**

Above, I have described how women of Somali origin in diaspora are engaged in different kinds of humanitarian aid work in Somalia. In her study, Katrine Fangen (2008) found that there is a relatively high

engagement among those she met, but more in different projects in Somalia as well as for the Somali case, than in traditional Norwegian politics or NGOs. There are, to my knowledge, no studies in Sweden on whether Somali-Swedish women and girls are engaged in a similar way. There are, however, associations engaged in gender related issues (see for example Sara Johnsdotter's report to the Swedish Inheritance Fund in 2010 on 28 different projects carried out by Somali associations), and there are also associations aimed at Somali-Swedish youths (for example NUF – Nätverket för ungdomars framtid – in Stockholm). Pia Karlsson-Minganti wrote her PhD on young Muslim girls' engagement in SUM – Sveriges Unga Muslimer (Sweden's Young Muslims) (Karlsson-Minganti, 2007). In focus for her work were young Muslim girls in general, and how they negotiate their belonging both to a religious congregation and to the society at large.

### Religious affiliation of girls

In 2014, media reported that Daesh<sup>8</sup> had recruited some young Somali-Swedish girls living in the same area as most Somali-Swedish families in Stockholm (see for example 'Larmet: Tjejer från Stockholm till krigets Syrien' – 'The Alarm: Girls from Stockholm to the war in Syria', By in Dagens Nyheter, 11<sup>th</sup> of June, 2014). To youths with a migrant or minority situation, religion takes another role than for their parents (Cesari, 2006; Scourfield, Gilliat-Ray, Khan, & Otri, 2013). While their parents still have cultural connotations associated with their Muslim faith, this is not possible for their children, as those cultural features are not present where they currently reside (Scourfield et al., 2013). The English anthropologist Giulia Liberatore draws similar conclusions in her dissertation 'Transforming the Self: An Ethnography of Ethical Change amongst Young Somali Muslim Women in London' (2013), where she has followed a group of young (late teens to early twenties) women of Somali origin in London. The Islam they profess has many differences to that of their mothers: they go to other mosques, mix with Muslims with other ethnic backgrounds, and they are more pious. Liberatore argues that to analyse how these young Somali-English women profess Islam it is not enough to understand this from their background in a family with origin in Somalia, but also to account for their current situation as a vulnerable minority in England. So for young Muslims, the migration to Western secular countries as well as the

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<sup>8</sup> Since January 2016 Daesh is the term that the Swedish Government recommends for what was earlier named IS – Islamic State.

experience of racism and sense of exclusion, together with an Islam that also in the Muslim countries have become more politicised, may have paved the way for them risking to be recruited.

### **School choice, education and educational attainment**

The M-school, which is the place where most of the fieldwork for this thesis took place, is a faith-based independent school. Independent schools are privately owned and publicly financed, and these schools were made possible by a reform in Sweden in 1992 (Alexandersson, 2011; Bunar, 2010; West, 2014). (Before that reform there were only a few private schools in Sweden.) The independent school reform permitted publicly financed faith-based schools, and thus paved the way for the first Muslim-profiled school, which started in 1993 (Berglund, 2007).

Contemporary with the reform that permitted independent schools is the so called school choice reform. This reform makes it possible to, upon availability, choose another school than the one that the local authority decides (which often is the municipal school closest to where the family reside) (Bunar, 2010).

The reforms, both the one on school choice and that on starting independent schools, have been, and still are, much discussed among politicians and researchers (Alexandersson, 2011; Bunar, 2008; Bunar, 2010; West 2014). These discussions have for example focused on whether school choice and independent schools encourage or inhibit one of the Swedish school's most important roles: to provide equal access to an equivalent education, regardless the students' background (Bunar, 2008; West, 2014). In this regard faith schools, and especially those with a Muslim profile, have been particularly criticised. The research on these schools and what they achieve is still quite limited (however, for research on Muslim-profiled schools and schools with an Arabic profile see for example Aretun, 2007; Berglund, 2009; Brattlund, 2009; Gustafsson, 2004).

The majority of the students at the M-school are of Somali origin and most of them do not live where their school is situated, but in one of the socially deprived parts of Stockholm. A vast majority of those who live here do have a migrant background and their residential area is associated with high unemployment rates, social and economic vulnerability and exclusion. The schools in these areas do not only have low status and bad reputation, they are also regarded as underperforming and often end up in the bottom in the Swedish National Agency for Education reports on the Swedish schools' academic performance (Andersson, 2003; Bunar, 2010). Parents who have the possibility do often



avoid these schools and choose to enrol their children in another school – independent or municipal (Bunar, 2010). The parents who choose other schools for their children are on average more educated (Bunar, 2008). Statistics also reveal that students with migrant background are slightly overrepresented in independent schools (West, 2014). What ethnicities are not reported, however.

Independent schools (Muslim-profiled as well as schools with other profiles) are a quite popular choice when Somali-Swedish parents in Stockholm choose compulsory schools for their children. In 2013 about 39 per cent of the Somali-Swedish students on the compulsory school level went to an independent school, compared to 27 per cent among the students in Stockholm as a whole<sup>9</sup>.

To my knowledge, there are no separate studies on how girls of Somali origin born in Sweden succeed at school. In general, children born abroad have lower attainment at school, than those born in Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2013b). The same statistics show that this applies particularly to children who have their origin in Africa, whose results are the lowest among all groups compared (and most African migrants have their origin in Somalia) (2013b). Compared to students with origin in Bosnia and Chile, the attainment of students who have migrated from Somalia was considerably lower (Behtoui & Olsson, 2014).

According to the Swedish Higher Education Authority and Statistics Sweden, 29 per cent of the women and 24 per cent of the men born in 1987 and of Somali origin had begun higher studies at a university or a college at the age of 25 (Statistics Sweden, 2014). The corresponding share among the Swedish population at large is 52 per cent of the women and 36 per cent of the men.

Lower attainments among students who have come as migrants can be explained by their age when coming, and the time they have spent in their new country (Statistics Sweden, 2013b). Swedish studies do also show that the parents' educational background is important for how their children will succeed at school (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2012). That a student's socioeconomic background is one of the strongest factors behind the school results is well-known from other

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<sup>9</sup> To find out how many of the Somali-Swedish students in Stockholm's compulsory schools that were enrolled in independent schools, I compared the number of students permitted to classes in their native language Somali in municipal and independent schools. In 2013, when these numbers were collected, 2,590 students were permitted to classes in Somali of them 1,014 students went to one of Stockholm's independent schools. The information was given to me in a personal contact with Stockholm's Schools and Education Division on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, 2013.

countries, and have been reported by for example PISA (see for example OECD, 2010). Although some of the Somalis who migrated to Sweden as adults are highly educated, most of them have a comparatively lower education than other migrants, as well as the average native Swede. Almost 60 per cent of Somalis between 25 and 64 years old, who have migrated to Sweden after 2000, did only have compulsory school education (Statistics Sweden, 2015b).

Jill Rutter, a British school researcher, has done studies on how children of Somali origin and living in England succeed at school. Her studies show that Somali youths underperform in the British schools (Rutter, 2006). This might, according to Rutter, be explained by the Somali students' age when they arrived and their length of stay, but also by traumatic experiences and the lack of proper schools in the country of origin. But Rutter did also find explanations in the young Somali-English group's current situation, in factors such as cramped living conditions and parents' limited education, which makes it difficult not only to find a place where the children can do their homework, but also to get support from their parents. Rutter also revealed a negative stereotyping of the students of Somali origin among their teachers. The boys were generally regarded as aggressive, while the girls were considered as oppressed. A study in two Danish primary schools, where a majority of the students were of Somali origin, show similar stereotyping from the teachers. The girls were often looked upon as submissive and their parents were seen as lacking ambitions for their daughters (Gitz-Johansen, 2004). In their report on Somalis in seven European cities within the project 'At home in Europe', the Open Society Foundations found similar examples of teachers having low expectations on their Somali students (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

## Chapter 3. Theory of structuration, consequences of late modernity and family change as epistemological starting point

This thesis has a social constructionistic epistemological basis, that is a view that childhood, regardless of where it is located or when in history it occurs, is basically a social construction. Childhood might be said to resemble a room that the child enters. The room is already furnished to some extent, but with resources at hand and by using competence and agency the child can refurnish the room and also replace some of the furniture (Hägglund, 2006; James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 2005).

A theoretical framework that has inspired today's childhood researchers is the structuration theory as it is worked out by Anthony Giddens (see for example James & James, 2004, p. 37; James & Prout, 1997, p. 5; James et al., 1998, p. 202; Prout & James, 1997, p. 27; Valentine, 2011). Giddens's structuration theory has also been a theoretical basis for this study. The epistemological analysis is also done with an understanding that we live and develop our social life in late modernity, also here inspired by and using terminology from Giddens (1991). The family change theory as it is worked out by Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı (2005, 2006, 2007) was used as a tool in the more diagnostic part of the analysis. To comprehend the Somali-Swedes' transnational practices, Giddens's and Kağıtçıbaşı's theories were completed with Thomas Faist's ideas on transnationality and transnational social spaces (Faist et al., 2013).

Before going further into Giddens's theories on structuration, late modernity, the family change theory and the theoretical approach to transnationalism, a short description of social constructionism will follow.

### Social constructionism

Social constructionism is multidisciplinary and has been influenced from a number of disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology and

linguistics (Burr, 1995). The prerequisites for social constructionism are to be found several hundreds years back in history in the time of Enlightenment.

Of great importance for social constructionist theory and much quoted are the two sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman. In their seminal work, 'Social Construction of Reality – a Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge' (1966) they explain social constructionism as follows:

*'Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definite reality. Its limits are set by nature, but, once constructed, this world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself.'* (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 204)

A basic premise for Berger's and Luckman's work is the individual's perception and understanding of the social environment. This becomes the starting-point for different habits and routines that the individual form, which in turn are transferred between individuals and generations, and become a shared understanding of traditions and cultures. Little by little this emerges as objective truths and as such also taken for granted. Social constructions are thus constructed in between people. The daily life and social interactions are practices which are the prerequisites for shared versions of knowledge (Burr, 1995). One of the most important tasks for social constructionism is to critically examine this taken for granted knowledge. Social constructionists argue that this kind of knowledge is specific and dependent on the culture and the historical period in which it occurs. Thus, a view of the world that people have on one continent or in one historical period cannot be assumed to be the same in another part of the world or in another historical era. Taken to its extreme this implies that there are no universal truths.

By analysing how people construct their understanding and knowledge about social contexts, social constructionists have contributed to critically scrutinising different categories such as class, gender, ethnicity and race. They have not only investigated how these categories are created, but also how they are maintained by, for example, traditions and power.

## Anthony Giddens's structuration theory

Giddens's theory of structuration began to find its shape and content in the 1970s. In 1984 'The Constitution of Society' was published; this is his most important work on the theory of structuration and the basis of my presentation in this chapter. One may say that Giddens's theories on structuration continue the tradition and is a refinement of social constructionism as it has been presented by Berger and Luckman. Giddens also sees the structures that surround us and our own human agency as interrelated, synthesised and developed in a recursive and dependent relationship (Giddens, 1984). Society can be viewed as a continuous process in which people are active and simultaneously structure and are structured by the society. Structuration theory asserts that individuals are active and knowledgeable with the capacity to transform their setting through action (Giddens, 1984, p. 21f and 28iff). According to Giddens's structuration theory the basic domain of study of the social theory is neither the experience of an individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time (p. 2). Structuration theory, with its view on agency, also makes it possible to analyse children as competent social agents, or as beings (and not only as becomings, which used to be common in childhood research) (James et al., 1998, p.25; James & Prout, 1997, p. 27).

The structuration theory is complex (and quite extensive). The following is a brief and limited description of some of the theory's key elements with bearing on this study: the duality of structure, rules and resources.

### Duality of structure

Crucial to Giddens's structuration theory is the so-called 'duality of structure' (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). The term 'duality' implies that agency and structure are not separate and mutually independent entities, but different sides of the same reality – like two sides of the same coin – and brought together by social practices. Structure is out of time and space and exists as memory traces; they are internal and become visible only if the actors utilise them (p.25). Structure is further comprised of different social systems that, in various ways, influence human agency. Giddens claims that societies cannot exist without human agency. This should, however, not be understood as actors creating social systems, rather they 'reproduce or transform them, remaking what is already made in the continuity of *praxis*' (Giddens 1984, p. 171).

Structure is both the medium and the outcome of social relations (p. 26), and they guide human behaviour in social settings. Furthermore, the structures are constituted by rules and resources (p. 17).

## Rules

By rules Giddens means 'techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices' (Giddens, 1984, p. 21). Rules may be either formal or informal. Formal rules are for example laws, while informal rules are all those tacitly known social conventions and procedures that are often taken for granted. Although it may seem as if laws control our lives the most, Giddens claims that informal rules have a more profound influence on our social life, relations and encounters. The line between formal and informal rules is furthermore not as sharp as it may seem. An example is how religion has been and still is experienced by different people.

## Resources

Structure does not only consist of rules, but also of resources, and here Giddens distinguishes between resources that are allocative and resources that are authoritative (Giddens, 1984, p. 33). Allocative resources are material and include the natural environment and physical artefacts that humans dominate, for example technological innovations. Authoritative resources, on the other hand, are non-material and control interactions and relations between people and those institutional arrangements that give actors control over other actors – that is authorisation. Using Giddens's words: 'types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors' (p. 33).

It is by using authoritative resources that people may manage the 'organisation of life chances (constitution of chances of development and self-expression)' (p. 258). To organise life chances is something central to all of us, and the way in which these resources are constructed impact on people's capability to draw on them. How people mobilise, manage and control their resources is thus closely linked to their agency. Agency – when it comes to the use of resources, what resources are used and how they are used – is related to what an individual think he or she can and cannot achieve. The mobilisation of resources has a particular bearing on the 'practical consciousness' of human agents or 'what actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action, but cannot express discursively' (Giddens, 1984, p. 375). Thus, as an actor you have power over resources;

they are, however, differently possessed depending on economic resources, cultural capital and/or the network an actor possesses (and some people can also, for a variety of reasons, mobilise their resources to a greater extent than others). This is central when understanding how power asymmetries between groups of people in our contemporary society are constructed. How migrants in a new country are positioned and position themselves may depend on individual abilities, as well as on the power and influence they are given in their new country. It may also depend on their background and position. When trying to make the best of their current resources in a new country, they will stumble on constraints, but there are also enabling factors that will make life easier than before.

The relation between agency and structure is nothing fixed, but subject to changes that may be related to where and when the relation is produced and reproduced. The duality of structure should thus be regarded as a continuous process. This is a process that takes place in a social structure that Giddens has termed 'late modernity'. In the following, some of the characteristics that, according to Giddens, distinguish our late modern society will be described in brief.

## The theory of structuration and late modernity

Modernity, as the term is used by Giddens, is something that emerged when our societies were industrialised. The consequences this had on social relations, for example, is of relevance to Giddens's theory, as this modernity has continued into our contemporary society, but has developed, which explains the concept 'late modernity'. During late modernity social change has not only been much faster than before but also much more profound. This may have had extensive effects on more or less everything in a person's life: on a person's thoughts, on social practices as well as on modes of behaviour.

Three main elements characterise the dynamism of late modernity according to Giddens (1991, p. 20): 'Separation of time and space', 'Disembedding mechanisms' and 'Institutional reflexivity'. The description of late modernity in the following is inspired from Giddens's two books 'The Consequences of Modernity' (1990) and 'Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age' (1991).

## Separation of time and space

In premodern societies, a certain time was often interrelated with place; a time-concept like 'sunrise' was, for example, linked to both season and place. After the invention of both clocks and calendars, the perception of time has become more and more independent of place. To work between '9 and 5' is a global phenomenon, and not bound to a certain space. Giddens means that time and space are 'emptied', and this separation permits the time-space 'zoning' of social life, which is a precondition for the modern mode of social organisation (Giddens, 1990, p. 16).

Different technological achievements and innovations have further-enhanced this separation and made the world a much closer place. People travel around the globe in a way and to an extent never seen before, whether voluntarily or not. Most people do not have to travel to become a part of the ongoing globalisation. When something happens in one part of the world we do not only get to know about it in the same minute, but it may also have an immediate impact and effect on us, though we are living far away on another continent (Giddens, 1990). In a way we have become 'deterritorialised'.

A consequence of this separation of time and space is that people not only become more deterritorialised, but also detraditionalised (Giddens, 1990, 1991). Influences from other parts of the world may break in and challenge old habits and traditions that have been taken for granted. This may have an impact not only on relationships but also on life choices and life paths.

## Disembedding mechanisms

The ongoing separation of time and space is important for the so-called disembedding mechanisms. That is the lifting out of relationships from the local contexts and recombining them across time and space, which is furthermore done with an increasing extent and speed (Giddens, 1991, p. 18). The disembedding of relationships may occur in many different ways and result in new forms of social relations over vast distances, but so also may the maintenance of old relations that would have been impossible to keep not so long ago. The extended use of Skype, internet, blogs, Instagram and Facebook are examples of disembedding mechanisms that affect relationships and connect people.



## **Institutional reflexivity**

The third term that, according to Giddens, characterises modern social life is institutional reflexivity. The term refers to how people reflect over their actions with knowledge. 'Reflexivity' as a concept is widely used in contemporary sociology, not only by Giddens (see for example Beck, 1992, and Lash, 1990). To be reflexive in late modernity is to be aware that there are alternatives and choices and a sense of 'responsibility for the long-term consequences of ones action' (Lash, 1990, p. 149). This is in contrast to the limited agency that characterised earlier times.

Institutional reflexivity in late modernity means that an individual's reflexivity is not only created by the knowledge that is available in society but also by how individuals use this knowledge to organise and reorganise their lives. To be a reflexive agent means to be able to use the new information and knowledge you have captured by positioning yourself with a heightened consciousness within your social environment.

Late modernity with its globalised and local separation of time and space, disembedding mechanisms and institutional reflexivity has indeed given us more choices than ever when organising and negotiating our life chances. Many of our day-to-day activities are now open for choices. However, choices are often bounded by factors out of the individual hands. At the same time – and this is important – these seemingly unlimited 'choice-societies' have brought about much insecurity and uncertainty. Giddens argues that 'the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge' (1991, p.21). Notions such as risk and trust become particularly important in situations like this.

## **Risk and trust**

Giddens describes our time as a risk culture (1991, p. 3). In many ways, we live in a time when risks are fewer than ever. Surviving severe diseases is, for example, higher (some diseases even seem to be eradicated). Many of the institutions that the West has built up have made life safer than in the past. Nevertheless, while the risks have declined in some areas, they remain or have emerged in others. Giddens discusses this in terms of the ongoing globalisation, which has brought people, ideas and ideologies closer to each other. As examples of increased risks, he mentions nuclear power, economic instability and totalitarian super-states (1991, p. 4). There is a quest in the human nature, in situations of risk, to go for trust. Giddens defines trust as 'the vesting of confidence in persons or in abstract systems, made on the

basis of a 'leap in faith' which brackets ignorance or lack of information' (Giddens, 1991, p. 244).

## Individuals and their families in a cultural context – a presentation of Kağıtçıbaşı's family model

With sociological works like Giddens's, the family became a central research interest of sociological theory in the 1990s. With the interest in globalisation and late modernity, the analyses came to focus on the transformation of family patterns and how this is related to the surrounding society. One researcher in this field is the Turkish professor Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı. In her research, Kağıtçıbaşı has, from a cross-cultural perspective, focused on family relations and what happens within a family when the cultural and socioeconomic prerequisites change (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, 2006, 2007). Although there is a considerable amount of research on children and families originating in the developing world, most of it is initiated by researchers from the Western world. Kağıtçıbaşı, with her Turkish background, has been an exception (M. Brewster Smith in Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007, p. xvii).

Kağıtçıbaşı's family change theory is a contextual theory that situates the self within the family and the family within the cultural and socioeconomic environment (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007, p. 133). The theory examines the connections between socioeconomic variables and lifestyles, family structure and family system, family interaction and childrearing as well as the development of the self, and may describe how family dynamics varies across socio-cultural contexts (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, 2006, 2007; Kağıtçıbaşı, Ataca, & Diri, 2010). The theory focuses on intra-family dynamics and in particular on socialisation values, parenting, and the resultant self (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2006, 2007).

Kağıtçıbaşı's theory on family change is not unique and has certain similarities with other social contextual models, such as for example Vygotsky's socio-historical theories on cultural mediation (1978), Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) or Super and Harkness's developmental niche (1997).

The general theoretical framework consists of a context that is construed of *Culture* (collectivistic/individualistic) and *Living conditions* (rural-agrarian/urban-industrial and the level of affluence). This contextual framework impacts the *Family structure* with resultant changes in for example family type, wealth flows, family ties, fertility and woman's status. These changes may in turn feed back into culture and living conditions. The framework also consists of family systems

that entail two interacting subsystems. One, *Family values*, deals with different socialisation values within a family and describes loyalties, emotional-material investments, any differences concerning dependence that develop, the utilitarian or emotional value of children for the parents and the degree of son preference. The other, *Family interaction and socialization*, analyses family interaction and socialisation and deals with parenting styles and whether childrearing orientation is, for example, authoritarian, authoritative or permissive (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). The final result in Kağıtçıbaşı's model, *Self-other relations*, describes the self that develops within each family model.

From this basic prototype three different models of family interaction patterns have evolved:

- *The family model of interdependence*. This model describes a family type that is common in, but not limited to, rural agrarian societies and urban societies with low socioeconomic status. People often have to rely on others, mainly family members and kin, both economically and emotionally, and the children have to contribute to the family economy. Families have many children, and sons are preferred as these societies are patrilineal. In this type of family, the independence of a child is not desired and may even be regarded as a threat to the family's subsistence. Loyalty and

obedience towards parents and other adults are central in childrearing. The children brought up in these families develop what Kağıtçıbaşı calls a 'related self', that is, a self characterised by relatedness and dependency.

- *The family model of independence.* This model describes a family type which is common in Western societies and associated with the middle-class nuclear family. Many Western countries have more or less developed welfare systems providing different levels of security, health, and education; with greater affluence, the individual family members are not so dependent on each other. This family model encourages individual qualities such as independence, autonomy, and separateness. A child's autonomy is thus not seen as a threat to family livelihood, but rather as a goal. Families do not have children for utilitarian reasons and as they are provided for for many years they become quite costly, which might be one reason behind the associated low the birth rates. The children brought up in these families develop a 'separate self' – that is a self characterised by autonomy and independence with clearly defined boundaries.
  
- *The family model of psychological/emotional interdependence.* This is a kind of synthesis of the two models described above. It combines relatedness and autonomy, and the resulting self is autonomous in some respects and related in others. According to Kağıtçıbaşı, this model may help us to understand how families change with changing circumstances, for example when families move from a culture that is mainly rural agrarian. In societies with rising affluence and increasing socioeconomic development, the individual family members do not have to rely on each other when it comes to economy and welfare. Emotional relations, however, seem to persist, but within areas that are not directly linked to the material or economic interdependence.

The family change theory should not be regarded as something static, but rather as dynamic where the different aspects described above are overlapping and interacting.

## Limitations of Giddens's and Kağıtçıbaşı's theories

Although Giddens's and Kağıtçıbaşı's theories could explain why, and analyse how, family patterns are influenced when people migrate, I found them somewhat limited when it came to understanding the transnational relations that the Somali-Swedes in focus for my thesis seemed to create and recreate in their diaspora. Both Giddens and Kağıtçıbaşı seem to have not only a traditional nuclear family as the point of departure for their analyses, but also a view that the members of such families live in geographical proximity, not seldom under the same roof. The definition of a Somali family, however, goes far beyond a traditional nuclear family, and is not restricted to geographical proximity (Johnsdotter 2007b, p 119). Their relationships seem furthermore to be both tight and strong, and also remarkably durable, as it appears to involve not only those who migrate and their former countrymen in the country of origin and elsewhere in the world, but also the next generation. These extended families have incorporated a kind of transnational perspective on their lives, in daily practice as well as in plans for the future. From a Swedish horizon this is described in Johnsdotter's research on transnational families (Johnsdotter, 2007a; 2007b) and Melander's research on remittances (Melander, 2009), as mentioned in chapter 2 of this thesis. Besides, many researchers on transnationalism claim that analyses on how tight familial relationships are developed and maintained as transnational strategies, must involve motives for migration and the point in the migrants' lives when migration takes place (see for example Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Although I believe that Giddens's description of our time as late modernity contributed to my work, I think that he has omitted to add a transnational perspective to his thoughts on modernity. Giddens seems, for example, to have the West as the ideal and dismisses any thought that there may exist other possible modernities, and that different societies develop their modernity differently, something that may be brought to light when applying a transnational perspective. I also had difficulties understanding how Giddens's late modernity society, characterised by rationality and reflexivity, fit in with exclusion, marginalisation and racism, which are realities that many migrants in the West experience from the majority society.

## Transnationality and transnational social spaces

The German sociologist Thomas Faist's ideas on transnationality and transnational social spaces became useful tools in completing Giddens's and Kağıtçıbaşı's ideas when studying how the Somali-Swedes in my research handle the balance between old relations they preserve in diaspora and experiences they acquire in their new country. Faist explains transnationality as the social practices where people (in my case Somali-Swedes) participate across nations' borders (Faist et al., 2013). These cross-border relations may involve familial, sociocultural, economic and political spheres and include for example travelling and remittances but also the exchanging of ideas (p. 16). Transnationality should be regarded as a process, and the degree and intensity changes between individuals and over a life course and depends on circumstances (p. 66).

To describe what these cross-border ties and practices between people consist of, and how and why they are constructed, Faist has established the term 'transnational social spaces' (Faist et al., 2013, p. 1). He defines transnational social spaces as 'relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states. Transnational social spaces consist of combinations of ties and their contents, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that can be found in at least two geographically and internationally distinct places' (Faist, 2000a, p. 197).

To understand how transnational social spaces are construed and maintained among migrants the focus should, according to Faist, be on the one hand on studying values, meanings and the social life that a

certain place represent to migrants (Faist et al., 2013). On the other hand, it is also, according to Faist et al., important to study how the boundaries between spaces come into existence and change (2013, p. 60). Boundaries do not necessarily have to be borders between nations or even refer to physical places, but rather to different structures constructed within or beyond a physical place. Faist mentions the situation for Islam in many countries in Western Europe as an example, where being Muslim is synonymous with belonging to the 'other', and where this other has become incompatible with Western values (p. 60). However, there may also be boundaries between Muslims, for example between different generations. While the parents who actually migrated still have cultural connotations with the Muslim faith in their country of origin, their children do not share these experiences and may find other ways to profess Islam (Cesari, 2006; Liberatore, 2013; Scourfield et al., 2013).

It is also possible to become transnational and perform transnational practices without touching the soil of a country of origin. Many of the Somali-Swedish girls are examples of this. For obvious reasons most of the girls in my research are born in Sweden and have never been to Somalia. The transnationality and the transnational social spaces that they construct have thus very little to do with Somalia as a country and more to do with relationships on a global scale between people of the same origin, often with similar experiences, and the clusters of ties and networks that they are subject to.

### **Transnational communities**

Faist also describes different types of transnational social spaces, where his description of transnational communities is relevant to the analyses of the research present in this thesis (Faist et al., 2013, p. 59). Transnational communities are characterised by close, cohesive and lasting relations with symbolic elements, such as, for example, a sense of a common identity, emotional connectedness, and moral responsibility. Examples of this type of community are the Jewish, Armenian and Palestinian diasporas. Members of these diasporas often nurture a common memory of a lost country of origin and a vision of returning and rebuild their homeland, while, at the same time the country where they currently live refuses to fully recognise their culture (p. 60). This has much (but not everything) in common with the Somalis in diaspora and how they ascribe not only their religious faith and African origin, but also their belonging to a clan and nomadic heritage, to a common memory that they share, which they also recognise as little known and understood among their new countrymen. An obvious consequence of

the transnational social spaces that the Somali-Swedes belong to and create and recreate (as transnational spaces are not static, but dynamic and subject to changes) is a strengthening of common meanings and memories.

### **Risk and choice in a transnational perspective**

A deeper understanding of how common meanings and memories are strengthened is achieved if we include a transnational perspective on Giddens's discussions on late modernity as a society characterised by more risks and more choice.

It is probably no understatement to claim that the group in focus for this thesis has huge experiences of living with risk. The reason why many of them left Somalia was, for example, to avoid risk and to head for a more secure life. Coming to Sweden may have meant yet other risks. Being different from the majority in their new country, when it comes to religion, culture and skin colour is in itself a risk, but a risk is also the socioeconomic situation where many of the Somali-Swedes end up, with high unemployment rates and overcrowded housing conditions in socially deprived areas.

Today, face-to-face relations and a contemporary presence, are not, as in the past, necessary to build trust. This is obvious among many Somali-Swedes, whose tight relationships with extended families all over the world have not only facilitated a remaining trust in former countrymen, but may also make it difficult to build trust with people in the new country, whom many of the Somali migrants rarely socialise with and barely meet. This is a risk that will add to the Somali-Swedes' already existing marginalisation.

Late modernity has, as mentioned above, given us more choices than before, but these are often bounded by factors out of the hands of the individual. Analysing this through a transnational lens makes choices even more complex; transnationality and transnational social spaces may imply that choices are influenced by cultural traditions from the country of origin, which may function as a restrictive measure, but not necessarily so. A transnational context may also imply that the individual has more, and never before experienced, choices, as the context includes more places and countries.



## Somali-Swedish girls and transnationalisation

To comprehend and correctly analyse how the Somali-Swedish families remain and develop different transnational strategies, it is necessary to be aware of both their current living conditions in Sweden and their relations to former countrymen in the country of origin and elsewhere in the world. When it comes to transnational practices among Somali-Swedes, this may not only be blamed on a nomadic heritage and close relations with the clan and extended family, but also on the sense of belonging or not belonging to the country where they actually live and what this place has to offer concerning employment, housing and opportunities for the future (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Transnationalisation is a process that also involves the girls in focus for my studies. In the introduction to this chapter I wrote that childhood might be said to resemble a room that a child enters, and by using competence and agency the child will furnish the room. Transnationalisation adds an extra dimension to this room, with consequences for, for example, how the girls relate to different rules, how they make use of the available resources, how they experience expectations from their family and others, and how they negotiate between different cultural traditions. In this, the girls are not passive objects but actively creating their social worlds.

As mentioned, transnationality is a process, and transnational social spaces are not static units but should be regarded as socially constituted. It is therefore important to break away from an imagination of social formations and boundaries as something fixed, and focus on how, and also why, these boundaries emerge and change. To understand this dynamic it is necessary to analyse the social mechanisms at work (Faist et al., 2013, p. 60). This means that to the Somali-Swedish girls at the Muslim-profiled school, who you are, who you are expected to be and become, and who you eventually end up being, is something that is constructed in negotiation with others at the boundaries of the transnational social spaces. It is at these transnational boundaries that belonging and origin will be made visible to the girls, but it is also here that exclusion and marginalisation become clear. This is where the girls decide what values and meanings are important to maintain and to defend, but also what can be developed or simply left behind. This may involve family traditions and expectations of being a girl, but also the right to wear the hijab, go to a Muslim-profiled school and feel a close connection to others of the same origin. Class, ethnicity, religion and gender have, for example, proved to be factors that influence both the development of different transnational practices and the living

conditions in the new country (Faist et al., 2013; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The starting-point in my research is that this also applies to the Somali-Swedish girls in the Muslim-profiled school where I did most of my fieldwork.

The ideas on transnationalisation presented above are in line with today's discussions on ethnic and cultural boundaries as constructions and power structures. I see, for example, how the ideas of the girls' transnationality can be complemented with already established and well-known analyses, for example Fredrik Barth's ideas on how ethnic belonging is constructed at the boundaries between different groups (1969/1998), Stuart Hall's concept of identities in diaspora as constructed in relation with others and how they undergo transformation and are negotiable (1990), and Les Back's studies on how young people in multicultural urban environments manage the relationship between identity, culture and race (1996).

## Structuration theory, family change theory and late modernity as useful theories in this research

Putting Giddens's theories on structuration and late modernity and Kağıtçıbaşı's family change theory within a transnational theoretical frame helped me to capture, understand and analyse some of the features that I found distinctive for the Somali-Swedish group studied, whether it was their preference for Muslim-profiled schools, their propensity to move or the girls' high ambitions for the future.

Choosing Giddens's structuration theory for the analysis of the empirical data was an obvious decision. It is a theoretical perspective consistent with the new childhood paradigm where children are regarded as beings with competence and agency, and which has been the starting point for this thesis. Giddens's structuration theory has furthermore inspired many of the most important childhood researchers of our days, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In this thesis, the theory has functioned not only as a way to analyse the Somali-Swedish girls' own perspectives, but also to show that girls from a minority brought up in Muslim families of Somali origin have the agency and competence to negotiate their childhood.

How the Somali-Swedish girls act, what choices they make, how they position themselves and define their roles in relation to the expectations depend, to continue with Giddens, on which resources and in what measure they are at hand (allocative and authoritative) (1984, p.33). The availability of resources is linked to issues of power, that is, who possess

the power in a society and how this power is distributed (Gullestad, 2002; Stier, 2008).

The Somali-Swedish girls are growing up in a world and facing a reality that is quite complex (described in chapter 2), and a way to analyse their living conditions is to use Kağıtçıbaşı's family change theory. Her theory enabled a deeper understanding of, for example, the motives behind the choice of a Muslim-profiled school among the Somali-Swedes studied, the development of transnational practices in diaspora and how the girls' educational ambitions and plans for the future emerge. Kağıtçıbaşı's model sees changes in families and individuals, when moving from one value-system to another, as an ongoing process where what happens on the micro-level interacts and merges with the macro-perspective. This became useful when exploring how Somalis' lifestyles change in diaspora and over time, and how this may influence the girls. This takes us to the third theoretical perspective in this thesis. This thesis is placed in what Giddens calls late modernity. Late modernity, with its separation of time and space, disembeddedness, detraditionalisation and reflexive individuals, functioned as a way to theorise the fluidity of the processes described above: from the transnational practices that were part of the everyday life of the Somalis in diaspora to the many different positions that altogether became the Somali-Swedish girls' own perspective on their lives.

## Chapter 4. Methodological and ethical considerations

This chapter describes and discusses the choice of methods for the research and some of the practical and ethical issues addressed. The chapter begins with a brief overview of ethnography and why it is considered suitable for childhood research and research on transnational migration. Power asymmetries between the researcher and a child in a research situation is discussed. The chapter ends with a description of how my research was carried out and the ethical issues involved.

### Ethnography as method

Ethnography entails studying people in their own environments and trying to comprehend their understanding of their world (Alexander, 2006). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe ethnography as follows:

*'We see the term as referring primarily to a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.1).*

Thus ethnography is no 'quick dip' into a research field; it is rather about getting close to the field and its members by observing what is going on, participating in activities and interacting with the members in the researched field. Proximity to their daily lives and participating in activities are, however, not enough; a fuller and more complete understanding also requires a more inside perspective of how people construct their lives and what they find meaningful (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The purpose of getting close to those studied is to understand what their activities and experiences mean to them. Ethnographers try

to catch the emic perspective of those researched, that is, understanding their way of life in the same way as they themselves understand it (Agar, 1996; Alexander, 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Ethnography originated within social anthropology and was developed, for instance, in Great Britain and in the famous urban studies of the Chicago school (Alexander, 2006; Fangen, 2005; Johansson, 2010; Punch, 2005). This research consisted mainly of studies on how ideas and ways of thinking were formed in different cultures and subcultures. The studies took place in the natural environment of the subject group, and data analyses were conducted while observing. Two famous youth studies in the ethnographic tradition are *Learning to Labour* by the British sociologist Paul Willis (1977), dealing with working class youth culture and focusing on young boys, and the British sociologist Angela McRobbie's (1978) study *Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity*. As the title suggests, McRobbie's study focused on girls, which was not so common in youth culture research in those days. Willis' and McRobbie's ways of researching have been regarded as groundbreaking and continue to inspire.

## Ethnography and research on childhood and children

To many of today's childhood researchers working within the new childhood research paradigm, ethnography is considered to be a particularly suitable, if not the most suitable, method when studying childhood and children's social worlds (Christensen & Prout, 2002; James, 2001; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Pattman & Kehily, 2004; Prout & James, 1990/1997; Punch, 2002; Thorne, 1993). To describe children's experiences and thoughts, while at the same time having in mind that they are actors with agency and voices, today's childhood researchers found it necessary to develop methods that are able to catch the children's own perspectives. This is accomplished by not only listening to them (though this may be done carefully) but by hearing what they want to tell us. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to how they communicate and acknowledge that this is dependent on the context where the communication occurs (Christensen & James, 2008; Christensen & Prout, 2002; James et al., 1998; Kellett et al., 2004; Qvarsell, 2003; Roberts, 2008; Zeitlyn & Mand, 20012).

Originally, I was a primary school teacher, and my education as well as my work experience has provided me with knowledge and a great

interest for this age group. Thus, choosing girls between ten and twelve years old as my point of departure was an obvious decision. Girls in this age group belong to what researchers call 'middle childhood', that is, the years between 'early years' and 'youth' (Kellett & Ding, 2004). Until recently, children of this age have been regarded as not fully competent to be reflexive, for example, not capable of separating fact from fiction. They will give the answers that the adult interviewer wants them to give, and are sometimes fickle and unreasonable (Ali, 2006; Kellett & Ding, 2004). Current research challenges these claims, asserting that children certainly can provide reliable answers and are able actors with agency; it is just a matter of finding the right research techniques that bring this forward (Kellett & Ding, 2004; Scott, 2008).

What makes ethnography suitable for childhood research is first and foremost the design of the method where the researcher is expected to spend a considerable amount of time in the field, combining participant observations with other methods where the children participate on their own terms, often through interviews (James, 2001; Prout & James, 1990/1997), but also by drawing, taking photos, writing diaries and through other 'child-friendly' methods (Ali, 2006; Fraser, 2004; Kellett & Ding, 2004). Staying for a reasonable time in a research field, and combining different research methods, enables the researcher to gain a deep and broad knowledge about the research field and its subjects; it also provides an opportunity for the children to get to know the researcher and to build a trustful relationship.

## Ethnography and research on transnational childhoods

Ethnography – with its flexibility that combines participant observations with other methods and where the researcher stays in the field for an extended period of time – has proved suitable for studying transnational practices. Researchers on transnational children particularly emphasise that ethnographic methods provide opportunities for multi-sited research, where the researcher for example accompanies the participants during a summer-holiday, which may result in a better understanding on how children interact with, and learn from, different places in different countries (Punch, 2012; Zeitlyn & Mand, 2012).

I have conducted my research in many different places besides the school (see below). However, I was not able to accompany any girl or family abroad. On the other hand, internet made it possible to stay in touch with some of the girls and their families, although they have

relocated to other parts of the world. This is described in the article 'Samira doesn't live here any more: Perspectives on a transnational generation' (Mohme, 2014a). Thus, multi-sited research does not necessarily imply that a researcher needs to follow their informants on their journeys to other countries. New technology has made it possible to follow informants more or less wherever they travel.

## Ethnography and power asymmetries

Important in research where children are involved is that the researcher understands the power embedded in the research process as a whole, when it comes to the relations and status differences between the researching adult and the researched child (Ali, 2006; Pattman & Kehily, 2004). The site where the research takes place should also be taken into account, for example if the research takes place in the child's home, at school or somewhere else (Fraser & Robinson, 2004; Mayall, 2008; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Often discussed is the so-called 'generation gap', that is the difference in age between the adult researcher and the researched child (Fraser & Robinson, 2004; Mayall, 2008; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). However, there are also other 'gaps', something that my own research exemplifies. I am not only considerably older than the girls I study, I also belong to a white, privileged majority born and raised in a secular society that is built upon Christian values. Those I study, on the other hand, are of migrant origin and furthermore belong to a black, Muslim minority living in a suburb characterised by segregation, poverty and deprivation.

In the following I will, in short, discuss some power asymmetries that might have been relevant in my research: age, gender, ethnicity/race and place.

### Power asymmetry – age

Children are used to adults being authorities that they rely on and should obey, whether parents or teachers, and they also believe that adults know more (Morrow & Richards, 1996). This gives adults an authoritative and powerful position vis-à-vis children (Mayall, 2008). Different strategies for overcoming the asymmetrical power relation caused by age are discussed among childhood researchers. This can be achieved by, for example, adopting 'the least adult role' or the 'role of the other adult' (Christensen, 2004; Mandell, 1991; Mayall, 2008; Thorne, 1993). It entails blending into the children's social world, standing up for

them and not siding with adults (Mayall, 2008). Some researchers have also tried to completely bridge the generational and authoritarian gap by simply refusing to adopt the role of an authoritative adult and opt for a full involvement in the children's company (see for example Christensen, 2004; Corsaro, 2011; Mandell, 1991). Others, on the other hand, do not think that it is possible for adults to pass as children. In children's eyes an adult researcher is always an adult, and the differences in age, size and authority will always cause an imbalanced power relation (Christensen, 2004; Mayall, 2008; Punch, 2002; Thorne, 1993).

### **Power asymmetry – gender**

Gender issues are also something to take into consideration when power relations between the researcher and researched are discussed (Kusow, 2003; Pattman & Kehily, 2004). There is an idea that it is easier to blend in if the researcher has the same gender as those researched. The Somali-Canadian male researcher Abdi M. Kusow found, for example, that it was much easier for a female researcher from the non-Muslim Canadian majority to interview Somali-Canadian women, regardless of age, than it was for him, despite his Somali background (Kusow, 2003).

One of the pioneers within girlhood research, Angela McRobbie, notes that while it did not seem difficult for male researchers to be 'one of the boys' and hang out with the lads on the street corners (McRobbie, 1978; see for example Willis, 1977, or for a Swedish example Jonsson, 2007), it seemed more difficult for a woman to be one of the girls. Valerie Hey (1997) reports similar experiences in her study on girls' friendship. Both McRobbie and Hey found that girls seem to have a tendency to commit to small, united and exclusive friendship groups and are therefore reluctant, even hostile, to admit intruders. Furthermore, girls also tend to construct women they meet as authorities (Hey, 1997; McRobbie, 1978). It is possible that girls may have that kind of behaviour. I have, however not seen this in the more recent, Swedish research I have studied. The Swedish researcher Pia Karlsson-Minganti, who studied a group of young Muslim women, had, for example no problems in finding young girls to follow, it was rather the opposite (Karlsson-Minganti, 2007). The girls were very open and eager to inform her, though she was older than them and not Muslim. Furthermore, many girls did search for her companionship, and even friendship, outside the research situations (see also Ambjörnsson, 2004).



## Power asymmetry – ethnicity and race

Less explored within ethnographic studies is the impact that differences in ethnicity and race between the researcher and the researched might have on the research process (Alexander, 2006; Brown, 2011; Gunaratnam, 2003; Hopson & Dixon, 2011; Nayak, 2006). Many ethnographers acknowledge that race and ethnicity are issues to be aware of in the research process (Alexander, 2006; Best, 2003; Brown, 2011; Gunaratnam, 2003; Hawkins, 2010; Nayak, 2006). There is also a growing interest in ethnicity and race in relation to methodological issues, and several special issues of scientific journals have been published, see for example *Ethnic and Racial Studies*' special issue 'Writing Race: Ethnography and Difference' (2006) and the journal *Ethnography and Education*'s special issue 'Race, Ethnography and Education' (2011).

Studies that highlight ethnicity and race when research is made across ethnic divides are often made by feminist, mostly white, researchers (Egharevba, 2001; Frankenberg, 1993; Roediger, 1990; Ware, 1992). The British anti-racist and feminist academic Vron Ware reflected on being white and a woman: 'It is not about being a white woman, it is about being thought of as a white woman' (Ware, 1992, p. xii). Amy Best, an American sociologist, who describes herself as a middle-class, white, female researcher, interviewed two young, coloured, female students as part of a study on school proms. When analysing her data, she observed how skin colour was apparent. The girls seemed to have been constantly conscious of her being white and adjusted their language accordingly. Best concludes that 'as researchers do research, they also are actively doing race' (Best, 2003, p. 895). However, these methodological challenges are not exclusive to white researchers (Carter, 2004). Best's work shows similarities with that of the American associate professor Keffrelyn Brown (2011), although in her case she is black and the research subjects in her school research were white teachers working in a school where most students were African-American. Brown found that the teachers expected her to give them advice on how to teach their African-American students. She concluded that this was because she shared the students skin colour.

It has been put forward that 'birds of a feather flock together', and that ethnographical studies would be more relevant if the researcher and those researched have the same ethnical and racial background. Thus, white researchers should explore racism within white structures and institutions, while ethnic minority researchers should focus on their own minority communities (Egharevba, 2001; Gunaratnam, 2003). This approach has, however, been criticised, since ethnic and racial categories are fluid and in a constant process of construction. If

researchers avoid research across their own ethnic and racial boundaries, these categories risk becoming reified and permanent (Carter, 2004; Thapar-Björkert & Henry, 2004). The English professor of Education Ann Phoenix describes that being black has not given her free and automatic access to all the black respondents that she has approached in her research (1994). Madeleine Kennedy-MacFoy, a black gender researcher, has had the same experience. While doing her research in a school in London with mostly black students, she realised that while the headmaster, who was white, regarded her as a researcher to whom the students at the school could identify, the black students could immediately see that she was not one of them, not least from her clothing (2013). The Somali-Canadian researcher Abdi M. Kusow has also questioned whether sharing what was very much the same background – being black, Muslim and also of Somali origin – as those he researched was altogether an advantage (2003). One point that Kusow lifts is the role of social identities in politically conflicted groupings, such as for example among the Somalis, that may also pose limits for a researcher with a seemingly insider status.

Furthermore, naming and examining an assumed power asymmetry by race and ethnicity, in lieu of other above-mentioned factors, also runs a risk. It might lead to an exaggeration of this power asymmetry, and to race and ethnicity become essentialised categories that lead to generalisations (Gunaratnam, 2003).

### **Power asymmetry – place**

It is also important for a researcher to take into account the impact that different places have on how children act and react (James et al., 1998). Schools are common sites for researchers on children and childhood (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Besides the family, school is considered the most important place for a child (Mayall, 2008; Scott, 2008). Schools are also quite accessible for researchers and through their organisation a more or less tailor-made cultural setting for the ethnographic study of childhood (Alderson, 2004; Christensen, 2004; Mauthner, 1997; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). However, school is also a place where hierarchical power relations between children and adults are particularly evident and manifested, above all in the classroom, where an adult is by definition an authority (Connolly, 2008; Kellett & Ding, 2004; Morrow & Richards, 1996; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). If it is ever difficult for an adult to blend in, it is in a school. Research conducted at schools should therefore take into account that children may not only feel pressure to participate, but also to answer ‘correctly’

(Pattman & Kehily, 2004; Punch, 2002; Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Relations between children at school are also characterised by power, for example between children of different ages, between boys and girls, and between children of different ethnic origins (Pattman & Kehily, 2004).

### Power asymmetries in this research

So what power asymmetries came to the fore in my ethnographic work? One question raised earlier in this chapter, is whether my being white, while my informants were black, caused a power imbalance that should be taken into account. I must admit that when I began my research I did not reflect that my skin colour could be a factor to take into consideration. Ignoring this is in line with what classical critical whiteness studies put forward, where being white is a category that is invisible, but also one of privilege because it is the norm against which all else (that is all non-whites) is found to be deviant (Frankenberg, 1993). A central idea in critical whiteness studies is that: 'Whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitation that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157).

That I am white might, indeed, have had implications on the power asymmetry between myself as a researcher and those studied. I do, however, believe that in my case there are other power asymmetries that were more crucial. Important to take into consideration in this regard is that the majority of the students, as well as the headmaster and some of the staff, at the M-school are of Somali origin. Being white in this school is to belong to a minority, at least when it comes skin colour. However, most whites at the school are teachers, and thus, regarding profession and age, belong to an authority. I believe that my authority at the school was not because of my skin colour as white, but rather from my being quite old in the students' eyes. Something that I was reminded of on several occasions, through comments by the children I met, was my being old and very much like a grandmother.

When conducting research on children, childhood researchers' advice is to take on a perception of humbleness towards the children and what they tell us, recognising them as experts and trusting them (Mayall, 2008; Pattman & Kehily, 2004; Roberts, 2008). The best way to achieve this trust is to ask the child for guidance into their world and for help to understand it (Mayall, 2008). I tried to follow this advice and remain aware of the gaps and their influence on me as a researcher, as well as on those researched. This was done by trying to build trust and by always showing great respect for the girls and for their parents, as well as by

being well prepared and knowledgeable in everything concerned with the Somali people, whether it involved history, culture or religion. When it was something that I did not seem to know or had misunderstood, I always tried to be as polite as possible, asking questions to show that I was truly interested and ready to learn more.

## Research fields and methods

The research field that became starting-point for this study is the above-mentioned M-school. The fieldwork was carried out part-time between 2006 and 2010. During the research the school was also my workplace. Ever since the research started I have been employed part-time at the school, holding different occupations in the administration: I have worked with the teachers' in-service training, been responsible for different school development projects, and worked as a student counsellor for the older students at the school.

Studying one's own organisation or workplace is often referred to as insider research or action research and involves different challenges to those a researcher from the outside might have, mainly concerning how to solve the dual roles it takes to be both an employee and a researcher. As an employee you are expected to be loyal towards your employer. The question is if you can combine that with the role as researcher, where you should stand back and survey objectively and also take a critical stance, which in turn may undermine your loyalty towards your employer (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Sikes & Potts, 2008; Smyth & Holian, 2008). It might, for instance, be sensitive to deal with results that can be experienced as negative by the group researched, and even more difficult if your findings touch upon your employer (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). It is also important to avoid mixing your roles as researcher and employee and to make sure that your colleagues know which role you have taken on at a certain point. Something that also has to be taken into consideration is that once the research is finished you will continue to have close ties or work in the organisation, which might have implications (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). In short: Can insider research be considered as trustworthy, and hence reliable and valid according to scientific criteria (Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Sikes & Potts, 2008)?

There are some advantages to being an insider. As an insider you have tacit knowledge about both the site and those researched, and you do not need a long take-off run (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Smyth & Holian, 2008). Another advantage is privileged access to research fields and

research participants as well as data that might not have been available to outsiders (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The latter was especially important to me. Ethnographic research requires trust from those you research, and trust takes time to build. Among many Somali migrants, as among many other migrants, there is a widespread distrust towards authorities (see for example Fangen, 2006), and researchers represent such an authority. To be met by scepticism and distrust may also happen to researchers of Somali origin, although they for others may seem as insiders (Kusow, 2003, p. 595).

Insider research is not unusual. That was actually how the Chicago School once started (see for example William Foote Whyte's 'Street Corner Society. The Social Structure of an Italian Slum', from 1943, where he describes the youth gang to which he belonged, in an Italian slum in Boston). Many workplaces are subject to different kinds of insider research. Much research within medical care is, for instance, carried out by nurses and doctors working in the clinic, which is also subject to their research. Insider research may also be carried out in higher education at the universities<sup>10</sup>. Some municipalities in Sweden do offer those employed at their compulsory schools the option to conduct scientific research in – and on – their own practice (so-called action research). One example is the so-called *Modellskolan* (Model school) where the University of Jönköping co-operates with teachers.

So how did I work with defining and negotiating my researcher role as an insider? During the whole research process, I have tried to keep an open mind and as far as possible eliminate the above-mentioned negative effects. My work at the school has been part-time, and I put up a strict schedule for which days of the week I worked at the school and which days I was committed to research, which made it easier to keep my two roles apart – at least for me. The informants and I have, furthermore, not been in a dependent relationship. I also had a desk available at

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10 Recent examples of midwives who wrote their doctoral dissertations on data from their own workplace are Susanne Gustafsson with her dissertation 'Patient Involvement in Quality Improvement', (2016) and Viola Nyman with her dissertation 'From the First Encounter to Management of Childbirth – An Insider Action Research in a Labour Ward World', (2015). Also, within academia there are academics researching their own workplaces. Two examples are 'Doktorshatten – En Studie av Forskarutbildningen inom Sex Discipliner vid Stockholms Universitet' ('The Doctoral Hat – A Study of Postgraduate Studies within Six Disciplines at Stockholm University'), (1992), by Lena Gerholm and Tomas Gerholm, and 'Vad Innebär Jämn Kön fördelning på Mellanchefsnivå för den Kvalitativa Jämställdheten i Organisationen' ('What does Gender Balance at Middle Management Level Imply for the Qualitative Equality in the Organization'), (2012), a report on Malmö University by Tuija Muhonen, Cristina Liljeroth and Christina Scholten.

the department at the university, and an opportunity to take advantage on the affinity with fellow researchers.

One concern put forward as a risk when doing inside research is that the employer might want to influence the research process and have opinions about the results. That was a risk that I had in mind when I planned the research project, and a reason why I decided to collect quite extensive data. However, I felt that my employer was very aware of my role as a researcher and that he did not try to steer my research in a certain direction.

### Expanding the research

It is recommended that insider researchers collect data on their research subjects on other places than their workplace (Smyth & Holian, 2008). I decided early in my fieldwork to expand the research field outside the M-school, a so-called translocal ethnography (Hannerz, 2001). I saw this as an opportunity to take a more objective stance towards those researched, but also to acquire a deeper knowledge about the girls' daily life and their living conditions, which was important for understanding their reasoning in essays and informal talks. Below is a summary of the research fields in this thesis, besides the M-school. All research fields are not mentioned in the three studies, but they have provided knowledge and insights important to understanding those in focus for my research.

### Other research fields

- *A yearly weeklong summer camp*, organised by some of the Somali associations in Sweden and hosted by a Christian folk high-school in Dalarna, Sweden. Approximately 400 persons, 100 mothers and 300 children, took part in these camps. Some of the participants at the camp were mothers and children who previously lived in Sweden but have moved abroad and were visiting the camp during their holidays. I participated twice.
- *A yearly 5-day ski camp* in Säfsen in Dalarna, organised by the M-school for their students. The camp takes place during winter leave and just above 100 students usually participate. I participated once and combined the fieldwork by being responsible for one of the cabins where five girls in grade 5 stayed.

- *The weekly Friday lectures for women.* The lectures were held in a premise that also functions as a kind of mosque. The participants are mainly young women and some, but not all, are in some way or another related to the M-school.
- *Various occasions and meetings* organised by the Somali-Swedish group that I became familiar with from the school, such as festivities related to religious celebrations, but also different manifestations related to their local community or the situation in Somalia.

## Methods

As already mentioned, I found my research questions suitable for conducting my research in an ethnographic tradition. Thus it was just a matter of designing my research practices in a way based on, and appropriate to, the perspective of those I researched. Participant observations and informal talks at the school were combined with having the girls write essays on how they imagine their future. However, the girls' childhood is not constructed in a social vacuum. To gain a deeper understanding of what they, for example, wrote in their essays, it was important to enlarge the research to include other persons in the girls' immediate environment and also to read literature on Somalis and Somalia.

The following methods were used:

- Written essays, participant observations and informal talks with the girls.
- Semi-structured and open-ended interviews with family members of some of the girls and with other persons affiliated with the girls and the school.
- Extensive reading of academic literature, reports, statistics, etc., on Somalis and Somalia.

## Written essays

In grade 5 (when the students were 11 years old) the girls of Somali origin at the M-school were asked to write essays with the title 'My future' during a Swedish lesson. A total of 68 essays were thus collected over five years. The essays varied in length; some students wrote a few lines

while others wrote a page or more. The content was, on the other hand, quite similar. Most essays started with a description of the girls' imagined profession, then most of them wrote where they wanted to live (country, but also exact places), how they wanted to live as well as how many children they planned to have. Some of the girls also had quite detailed descriptions of the car they would own as adults.

The intention with choosing the topic 'My future' for the essays was not only to examine the girls' expectations of future career and family life, but also to understand how they experience the discourse in which these expectations occur. Analysing how children and young people imagine their future may serve as a way to explore how they position themselves in the present, the social space, and their place within it (Elliott, 2010; Halldén, 1994; Hutchings, 1996; Patterson, Forbes & Peace, 2009; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Steedman, 1980). Methodologically, the essays may be seen as a type of dialogue between the individual girl and her current living conditions, where her text conveys ideas on possible ways to live today.

The reason for essays was to try a method where the girls' own perspectives and own voices came through as much as possible. Having the girls write down their thoughts allowed them to interpret the topic their own way – deciding on what was important, less interesting or secret – to a greater extent than if they had been interviewed. The method was also an attempt to relinquish at least part of my power as an adult, in exchange for following the girls down their associative trail. However, essays on a free and general topic such as 'My future' may be regarded as an imprecise tool for further analysis, compared to, for example, interviews. The method does not, for example, allow for either controlling exactly what the children will write about or follow-up questions, but it is done on their terms.

### **Participant observations**

Since my research has nothing to do with teaching and school as a learning institution, my observations were not conducted in the classrooms, but during school breaks and lunches. At the time of my research the school was located on two different premises, situated at about a mile's distance from each other. My fieldwork took place mainly in the building that housed the older students (from grades 5 to 9, that is between 11 and 16 years of age). During the time the fieldwork was conducted, the number of students in this part of the school varied, but averaged just above 100. In focus for the participant observations were the girls in grades 4 to 6, and I followed four different classes.



The school's premises were quite cramped. There were, for example, no offices or staff rooms for the teachers (my 'office' was, for instance, a small table in an open area next to two of the class-rooms), and teachers and students shared the same spaces. This gave me rich opportunities for not only observations but also small and informal conversations with the students. This phase of my study became quite prolonged and continued about four years on a part-time basis.

Conventional observations, where I sat looking at the girls' activities and interactions during the breaks on the school yard, were completed with informal talks on whatever subject the students brought up, mainly during the lunches in the small canteen at the school, where the students and the school-staff shared tables. Each class had some tables reserved, but within that restriction, the girls had free seating. I always came when the girls had already sat down, and chose a place that was free. Usually the girls had small talk going on, and I just followed. Many different subjects were brought up, such as popular programmes on television, favourite food and sweets, fashion, travels, etc. Sometimes they told stories that were directed to me, but they also asked about my opinions on different matters, and I also asked them questions on subjects they brought up. The girls knew that I was writing a book about Somali-Swedish girls, and once in a while the book issue came up: When was the book going to be published? Why did it take so long? Would I mention their names (something that they seemed to want)? The advantages of this type of everyday conversation are the informal tone and spontaneous situations (Spradley, 1979).

Participating in different parent-teacher and information meetings at the school was also part of the participant observations. To me, the parent-teacher meetings in the classes were partly aimed at providing information about my research and getting approval from the parents, but they also gave me an opportunity to become acquainted with the parents and hopefully build some trust. The information meetings, which are held about twice a year (I participated in all the meetings between 2006 and 2010) are held, on the one hand, for marketing the school to new students. On the other hand, they are held for the purpose of presenting, for example, new laws and regulations to the parents or to give lectures on interesting topics, such as dyslexia. Both the parent-teacher meetings and the information meetings were opportunities where I could get a deeper knowledge and understanding of the parents' expectations for their children and the school.

## Interviews and interviewees

To get a more thorough understanding of the girls' daily lives and plans for the future, the written essays and participant observations were completed with interviews with girls, family members and other informants. Below is a summary of the interviewees and type of interviews that I used in my research:

- *Semi-structured open-ended interviews* with five young girls who were students or recent graduates of the M-school. All had siblings who still were at the school. The aim was to acquire a deeper and more thorough view of their lives, how they experience their childhood and their view of their parents' school choice and how they thought their school had formed them.
- *Informal conversations* with approximately twenty Somali-Swedish girls at the school.
- *A focus group interview* with former students of the M-school. The group consisted of three young women and two young men who at the time were between 24 and 26 years old. The interview focused on their thoughts on their parents' school choice, on their memories of the school and how they thought that their schooling had formed them as individuals and citizens.
- *Semi-structured open-ended interviews* with five mothers of children at the M-school. At the time of the interviews, the mothers had between three and eight children each, who were or had been students at the school. The mothers were all born in Somalia and came to Sweden as refugees or by marriage during the 1990s. The aim was to explore the reasons behind choosing a Muslim-profiled school for their children and their school choice strategies, as well as their reactions and reflections on the public attitudes towards Muslim-profiled schools. Their expectations of the school and educational ambitions for their children were also explored.
- *Semi-structured, open-ended interviews* with seven men and three women with transnational experience from Egypt. Three of the interviewees had lived in and performed part of

their schooling in Egypt. Two of the men's wives and children are in Egypt while the men work in Sweden. All of those interviewed were closely connected to the M-school, as staff, with their children in the school, or former students.

## Literature

Reading literature on Somalia and on Somalis in Somalia, Sweden, the UK, the US, etc., and in different fields such as history, politics, culture and religion – as well as participation with presentations on, for example, SSIA-conferences (Somali Studies International Association) – provided deepened knowledge and an empirical complement. Extensive reading of not only academic literature but also reports, articles in newspapers and statistics on Somalis in Sweden and elsewhere might also have helped in establishing a more objective stance towards those researched. My literature studies should not just be viewed as studies in history, politics or about different geographical places. The literature has in many ways been regarded and treated just as the persons I have interviewed. Much of what I have read during the years is not included in my three studies. Nevertheless, it might still have contributed as background material, enhancing the understanding and analyses of my research questions.

The table below describes what information has been used in each study/article. X means that it is the main material, O that it is subsidiary material.

Table I. Collected data used in the three studies

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Participant observations at the M-school's parent-teacher meetings	X	X	
Participant observations at the M-school's information meetings	X		
Participant observations during breaks and lunches at the M-school		X	
Participant observations at summer camp		X	
Interviews with five mothers of students at the M-school	X		
Group interview with five former students	X		
Individual interviews with five current and former female students at the M-school, all over 15 years of age	X		

Interview with seven men and three women, all with transnational experience		X	
My future – written essays by girls in grade 5		O	X
Statistics from SNAE	O		
Literature studies on Somalia and on Somalis	O		O

## Key

*Study 1. Somali-Swedes' reasons for choosing a Muslim-profiled school – Recognition and educational ambitions as important influencing factors.*

*Study 2. Samira doesn't live here any more – Somali-Swede's mobility as transnational practice.*

*Study 3. Imagined adulthood under transition: Somali-Swedish girls' life-planning in a late-modernity context.*

## Gatekeeper and gate-opener

Several methods were used to find participants to interview. After having asked for voluntary candidates during the Friday lectures and the information days at the school – to which the response was weak – I turned to the headmaster at the M-school for help. He is not only headmaster, but also an imam and has a high position, not only within his clan, but also among the Somali-Swedish community as a whole. It was above all the five mothers I wanted his help to find, and after giving him a description of what kind of interviewees I desired, he contacted some mothers who agreed to meet me. I was concerned over his role in giving me support, and the limits between being a gate-opener and a gatekeeper. As a gate-opener he did grant me entry to the mothers, but was he also a gatekeeper with interests in presenting me with a favourable picture of his former countrywomen, which guided his choice of interviewees (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995)? My prolonged stay in the field helped me to analyse this situation. Furthermore, I had no choice but to use a helping hand from an influential person in the Somali community. Researchers have, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, described Somalis in diaspora as being sometimes suspicious and having bad experiences of being interviewed by, for instance, researchers (Liberatore, 2013; Horst, 2009; Salat, 2010). Also, researchers who have a Somali background may be met with suspicion, such as Abdi M. Kusow, a Somali-Canadian sociologist, who describes what happened to him during fieldwork for his doctoral thesis (Kusow, 2003). Kusow explains

how he became a kind of ‘suspicious insider’, especially when it came to politically or culturally sensitive issues.

The headmaster only helped me with the five mothers. The other informants were much easier to reach and I arranged all those meetings on my own.

Another important gate-opener was unexpected – my own sister. She is a midwife, and the maternal clinic where she works is located in the part of the city where most Somali-Swedish families have settled, and a considerable share of her patients are Somali-Swedish women. On the first day of the summer camp one of the women asked me if I was related to her midwife, as she thought we looked alike. I answered that her midwife might be my sister, and this turned out to be of considerable benefit for me and probably opened some doors. To many I met on all other occasions, I was no longer only a researcher: I was the sister of their midwife.

## Analysis

The analysis of this research was conducted by keeping three different understandings in mind: *Firstly*: The research that is the basis for this thesis maintains a social constructionistic view of society, a belief that children are competent actors with agency, and that this agency is closely related to and dependent on the bigger and relational context where the girls grow up. *Secondly*: As a researcher, one steps into a social reality that already exists; it is preconstructed. Its logic is complete and already constituted as meaningful. What should be interpreted and analysed in the stories collected by the researcher is already understood and interpreted by those studied. Giddens has called this a ‘double hermeneutic’, that is ‘getting to know what the actors already know, and have to know, to ‘go on’ in the daily activities of social life’ (Giddens, 1984, p. 284). *Thirdly*: Analysing is not a distinct stage but something done during the whole research process and simultaneous with the data collection, which is common in this type of ethnographical study (Agar, 1996). Analysis of different data often starts already in the beginning of the research process with the researcher’s thoughts and considerations. To conceptualise, define and try hypotheses over and over again may in fact be regarded as a way of moving forward in the research process for an ethnographer (Gubrium & Holstein, 2014).

The process for this thesis became rather extensive, combining fieldwork, interviews, and literature reading, much less orderly than is presented here. Although some of the material I collected did not come

into direct use in any of my studies, the combination of many methods, the extensive material and that the research continued for quite a long time, contributed to a, hopefully, relatively complete picture of those researched, but also a quite complex one.

To analyse these complex situations a set of different tools and approaches is often needed and some questions must be addressed. Should all the data be analysed with the same method? Are all the data as important? If not, how do I know which data is more important than another? Take for example the analysis behind the two articles 'Imagined adulthood under transition – Somali-Swedish girls' life-planning in a late modernity context' (Mohme, 2014b) and 'Samira doesn't live here anymore – Perspectives on a transnational generation' (Mohme, 2014a) in this thesis.

The analyses of the girls' essays in the article 'Imagined adulthood under transition – Somali-Swedish girls' life-planning in a late modernity context', may be regarded as semiotic, where the content of the essays and an idea that writing about the future also tells us something about how the girls perceive their present, were the starting-point for the analysis. In the analysis I chose to tackle the essays as narratives with a relational significance (Polkinghorne, 1995). The method is therefore used not only to analyse what the girls chose to place into the concept 'future', but also what guides them in choosing what to write in their essays and how this is relevant to them. Methodologically, the essays may be seen as a type of dialogue between the individual girl and her current living conditions, where her text conveys ideas on possible ways to live today and in an imagined future. However, to make this understandable I completed the analysis with other data from my participant observations and an extensive reading of literature on Somalia and Somalis. The analytical perspective during the whole research process and in the analysis was a kind of *from center to periphery* perspective.

In the study on how the girls are made transnational, the analysis was about finding structures in the girls' lives that could confirm the hypothesis that some of the girls' lived practices were in fact proofs of a transnational lifestyle, and then investigate how the girls were placed within this hypothesis. This required partly other methods and an analytical process other than that used for the essays. During the whole research process I tested different explanations and theories from the literature on transnationalism. This was thus a kind of *from periphery to center* perspective.

As mentioned, the data collection and analyses are often undertaken simultaneously. The research questions in mind when the project starts

are often of a general kind, and as the research process continues the questions develop and deepen. This has also been significant in my own research, where a long time in the field and extensive reading of literature on Somalia and Somalis in diaspora not only deepened my understanding but also led to 'fine tuning' and small corrections of the original research questions and interpretations of the data. An example of this from my research is the article on school choice strategies among a group of Somali-Swedes who have chosen a Muslim-profiled school. In the beginning, I took for granted that this choice could merely be understood as having to do with their faith, as they told me and as I had read in a significant amount of other research on Muslims choosing Muslim-profiled schools. Over time, with more knowledge about the group regarding school choice and educational ambitions, and by comparing Muslim-profiled schools in other countries, I came to realise that choosing a Muslim-profiled school was a complex process and that the reasons were not only religious.

When analysing the data for all three studies, I had to constantly weigh in the social, cultural, historical and economic context where the girls' construction of their childhood took place. Moreover, I also had to be aware of how my own background affected my analysis, that is, I had to take a reflexive stance in my analyses and not simply keep a professional distance towards the Somali-Swedish girls and the others I researched. I also needed to analyse my own thinking when it comes to how I comprehend, for example, the negative stereotypes that Somalis in Sweden are subject to. Being a reflexive researcher means taking 'two steps back' in order to enhance the understanding of what the researcher does, perceives, experiences and documents. The first step is about gaining an understanding of the research context and those within it. The second step is more about the researcher's own perceptions, reactions and practices, that is, how and why the researcher knows what he or she knows. For my studies this meant, in concrete terms, that I read and reread the data I collected. Gradually, some bearing aspects – or themes – relevant to my research question and potentially useful for building my analysis, emerged. These themes were then developed in order to gain a deeper understanding in close interaction with the theoretical assumptions that formed the basis for the three studies that are included in this thesis.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are always of critical importance during every step of a research process when conducting research where children are involved (Alderson, 2004; Bell, 2008; Kellett, 2010; Morrow & Richards, 1996). This is even more so when the children in focus have another cultural background (Graham, Phelps, Nhung, & Geeves, 2012). The caution and respect must also include the parents.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), especially Articles 12 and 13, assure children the right to express their views freely in matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989). This also covers children in a research situation. Many of today's researchers on children and childhood are, however, discussing whether and how these ethical rights can be translated into practical research (Alderson, 2004; Bell, 2008; Qvarsell, 2003; Robson, Porter, Hampshire & Bourdillon, 2009; Shier, 2010). Although children have the right to express their views, they do not always (or ever) fully comprehend what this entails and what the possible consequences might be of participating in an interview or writing an essay. Thus, ethical discussions on how to protect children's integrity and respect are necessary, but these discussions cannot only be limited to children's right to be protected versus their right to express their views. Alderson and Morrow (2011) mean that there should be a balance between enabling children to be heard without exploiting them, protecting children without silencing them and/or excluding them, and pursuing rigorous enquiry without distressing them (2011, p.4).

The research was conducted in accordance with the Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research involving Humans (Svensk Författningssamling, 2003:460) and the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for good research practice within the humanities and social sciences (2011). In the following I will elaborate on three areas that I found particular sensitive when it came to ethical considerations in my research: informed consent, choosing methods that are both respectful and transparent, and publishing research results that risk increasing a group's stigma and where the research has been conducted by an insider researcher.

### **Informed consent**

Children and informed consent has been discussed by many childhood researchers (Alderson, 2004). Informed consent is required in all research, but for various reasons it is a more complicated issue in the case



of children, and in the case of the Somali group it turned out to be even more complicated.

All those involved in my study were informed about what the aim was. It was clear that I would appreciate their participation but that it was voluntary. I informed them that they would remain anonymous and that I would not tell anyone about their participation and would use other names (many of the girls and the young adults found this strange. 'I stand for my opinion' or 'What is then the point in participating' were common comments). I also told them that I should allow them to read what I had written and thus check that I had understood everything correctly (many of the young girls thought that this was strange as well. 'We trust you' was a common answer).

For those under 15 years, I needed consent from their caretakers. This is usually done by sending some written information with the children, explaining the research and asking the caretakers to sign. I started out by sending a letter, but although several reminders only a few signed authorisations were returned to me. You can only speculate why this happened. The letter was written in Swedish, but when I thought of having it translated into Somali, some of the adult Somali-Swedes at the school convinced me that this would not change the situation. There are parents at the school whose knowledge of written language – even Somali – is quite limited. One explanation why the letters were not returned might have been the current living conditions. Somali-Swedish families are large with many children, and their apartments are cramped and the living conditions quite chaotic. It is not unusual that information sent by the school 'vanishes'. Moreover, many of the adult generation are, due to bad experiences, suspicious of authorities in their new country – also researchers (including those with a Somali background, as I have mentioned above) (Liberatore, 2013; Horst, 2009; Kusow, 2003; Salat, 2010). Therefore, when I heard that some parents had contacted the school about my research and were suspicious, I realised that I had to change strategy. I decided to inform them about my research and ask for permission from the adult caretakers in person. This was done in the classes at the parents' meetings and at other assemblies at the school. At these meetings I also told the parents that their children's participation was voluntary. Furthermore, these meetings provided rich opportunities for the parents to ask questions about the research directly to me.

I later realised that my way of managing informed consent is typical for anthropological and ethnographical research when researchers from Europe or North America conduct their research in less developed countries. See for example research from Graham et al. (2012) on views

and perspectives of children in relation to learning and education in a school in Vietnam, where they describe this thoroughly. This does not imply that I think that the usage of written informed consents should be abandoned. However, I believe that those working with groups (as a researcher, teacher or whatever it will be) who do not feel safe and secure and do not fully trust society or who cannot read and write, need to be a little more sensitive regarding issues that concern, for example, negotiating informed consent and how this should be approached and approved.

### **Ethical considerations and choice of methods**

Today's childhood researchers try various methods that stress the child's own perspective while remaining ethically sustainable. It has become more and more common and widely accepted to use photos and videos among childhood researchers (Einarsdottir, 2007; Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Rasmussen, 1999). It is assumed as a way to decrease the presumed power agency between adult interviewers and children and an alternative to the 'question-answer-routine' which may sometimes feel unnatural to children (Epstein et al., 2006). Using photos was never an alternative for me. The purpose with my research could be achieved anyway. Nevertheless, there are also some ethical issues to consider concerning using photos and videos in research. To many Muslims taking photos of persons is sensitive; their faith forbids drawings or photos of so-called animate beings unless it is not necessary, such as for an ID-card or passport. During my years at the school I did not see any concrete expressions of a photo ban, not at the school as such and not among the students and their families; the children take school photos, paint their own self-portraits and take selfies with their mobile phones. Nevertheless, I know that there are families with children at the school who are more restrictive on this. Furthermore, at this school there were also students with protected identity, and although the children do not have a protected identity today, I could never be sure that this would not happen in the future. I could of course assure the parents that my research material is confidential and that the pictures taken were only for my own research purposes; however, I thought that this was a little too much for me to manage with complete trust.

My intention was to tape-record all the interviews. This was not a problem with the young women I interviewed; they all approved to having the interviews taped. The mothers I interviewed, on the other hand, did not want me to tape-record the interviews. This is not uncommon; within ethnographies it is often acknowledged that the use

of a tape-recorder may discourage the interviewed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 185). During the interviews with the mothers, I took notes, which I then transferred to my computer directly after the interview. All the interviews were furthermore made in Swedish, although some of the mothers interviewed had scarce knowledge in this language. I preferred not to use interpreters, as I thought that this could have disturbed the trust. I tried to keep my language simple, and to listen carefully to what the mothers told me. I was helped by body language (sometimes we almost played charades in their living room) and drawings.

Using Swedish was not without problems and could also be regarded as an ethical dilemma. I have described some power asymmetries linked to my study, and the use of my mother tongue gave me a language superiority over the Somali mothers. In the best of worlds, and to reduce this power imbalance, I would of course have learnt Somali, but learning a new language takes time and I had to find other ways to overcome part of this dilemma. I usually started my interviews by showing the mothers a map of Somalia and asking them to show me where they were born. This opened up for good conversations and I think that it also gave the mothers at least some power over the situation.

An offer to read their interview was given to all interviewed (concerning the mothers I offered to do this reading together with them). On one occasion a young girl came back to me and wanted to remove a part of the interview, which I of course did. When I happened to meet one of the other girls about a year after my interview with her, she told me in the middle of our talk that she did not want our current conversation to be part of my study. I think that these two incidents are examples of both integrity among those I interviewed and that they were very aware of my study.

### **Ethical considerations and the publishing of results**

During the work with my thesis, I thought extensively about how to ethically relate not only the data collection and analysis, but also possible events afterwards. One ethical problem, according to the British professor of Childhood Studies Priscilla Alderson (2004), is that published research reports risk increasing the stigma for those children and young people researched. This could also be applied to the Somali-Swedish girls that I have researched insofar as it might have further aggravated their position of belonging to a group that is already stigmatised in the public eye and thus vulnerable.

Another ethical issue is the question of anonymity in insider research. Even if the institutions where the research is carried out are not mentioned by name, their identities are quite easy to reveal as long as you publish your results under your own name (Sikes & Potts, 2008; Smyth & Holian, 2008). In my case I think that it would have been easy to identify the M-school even if I had not mentioned that it was my workplace or revealed that it is located in Stockholm. However, some details about the school were important for the research and had to be given.

Thus, I could have revealed the name of the school. My reason for not doing so was not only research tradition but also a wish to, firstly, shift focus from the school as such to a more general picture of a school, its students and parents and their motivations for choosing it, and secondly to the theory-driven focus that is important in sociology-based research. The M-school becomes an example and the theories that I present could consequently be tested against other schools, irrespective of location.

When the anonymity of institutions cannot be upheld, that of the participants becomes all the more important (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). I have tried in various ways as far as possible to protect those who participated in my research, not only by changing personal names and place-names, but other details as well.

## Chapter 5. Summary of three studies

The following are short summaries of each of the three studies that form this thesis.

### Study I.

#### **Somali-Swedes' reasons for choosing a Muslim-profiled school – Recognition and educational ambitions as important influencing factors**

The aim of this study is to explore school choice strategies among a group of Somali origin who have chosen a Muslim-profiled school. Although the school has a seemingly weak backing in Islam – no denominational teaching is permitted in Swedish faith schools and they have to follow the same curriculum as all other schools – choosing a Muslim-profiled school seemed to be an appealing alternative. International studies have shown faith as the main motivation for Muslim parents to choose such a school. This motive was also the starting-point for this study. However, is that explanation correct and sufficient? Are there other possible reasons that make parents choose a Muslim-profiled school for their children?

The study is a result of an ethnographic fieldwork at a Muslim-profiled school – the M-school – where 80 per cent of the students are of Somali origin. The employed methods were participant observations at the M-school's premises as well as open-ended, in-depth interviews with two categories of informants: mothers of Somali origin with children in the M-school, and current as well as former students. The data was then complemented and compared with official statistics. The theoretical approach for the study was inspired by Anthony Giddens's theories on structuration (1984).

The analysis of the collected data showed that choosing a Muslim-profiled school seemed to be a choice that is more complex and reaches beyond the Muslim profile of the school studied. The parents' high ambitions for their children are consistent with the Muslim faith, and those interviewed found that this particular school was more able to meet their requests than what they saw as the under-achieving schools in their residential area. The reasons behind the school choice seemed

also to be about how the Somali-Swedes have experienced or anticipated their reception and treatment in the schools in their neighbourhood. Their Muslim faith and their deviant skin colour made them feel questioned and even disrespected among other students as well as teachers. The considerations behind the school choice were thus about finding a school where the children could feel safe and secure, but also a place where the parents could feel recognised.

## **Study II.**

**Samira doesn't live here any more –**

### **Somali-Swedes' mobility as a transnational practice**

This study takes a closer look at Somali-Swedes' transnational practices, primarily by exploring how and why their claimed mobility occurred. The onward migration to Egypt from Sweden is highlighted as an example of a transnational practice among the Somali-Swedes studied. Particular interest is paid to how adults transfer their transnational practices to their children, how the young generation acts and reacts, and implications for the children's sense of belonging within a transnational discourse.

The empirical starting point is an ethnographic fieldwork at the above-mentioned Muslim-profiled school. This fieldwork also involved participant observation at a summer camp in Sweden for mothers and children of Somali origin, and interviews with ten adults of Somali origin with experience of relocation between Sweden and Egypt, either personal or from close friends. Finally, girls in grade five (about eleven years old) wrote essays on the topic 'My future' (these essays were closely analysed in study 3). Among other things they wrote about where they plan to live in their adult life.

The study offers a short description of the transnational perspective within migration research. Transnational practices among Somalis in diaspora not only include mobility but also extensive remittances to Somalia, as well as support to other countrymen around the world. Somali-Swedes in this study give several explanations for their propensity to move and their prerequisites for creating and sustaining transnational practices in diaspora. Mobility is explained by their nomadic heritage, but other explanations behind the propensity to move are also discussed, such as their marginalisation and socioeconomic vulnerability. Their social cohesiveness, which makes them feel responsible for former countrymen all over the world, may be explained by their clan-based, extended-family culture. This social cohesiveness

functions as a safety net in a Somalia that has never had much of a public welfare system.

Being transnational does not require direct contact with the country of origin, and it is entirely possible to develop transnational practices without touching Somali soil, something this study shows. Most of the Somali-Swedish children in this study are born in Sweden and have never been to Somalia. Through, for example, the internet and by visiting extended family and friends of Somali origin in diaspora, they develop a transnational social space, a cluster of ties and networks, where the idea of what it means to be Somali, the so-called *soomaalinimo*, is cultivated.

Part of the study describes the onward migration from Sweden to Egypt, which was common at the time when data was collected. Moving from Sweden to Egypt is more than a change of place; it is also a change of space. The new place may imply that positions are altered with regard to factors such as class, religion, ethnicity and gender, which in turn may have an influence on how children experience that their role and the expectations on them changes – in their family, and in school.

The transnational practices described in this study seem to have become established strategies among the Somali-Swedes I studied. However, children have agency, and according to my data their transnationalism is not just a continuation and a result of that of their parents. With no personal memories from Somalia, they must rely on others and create their own imaginations of the country and of what being of Somali origin really means. This permits a more complex and comprehensive understanding of transnationalism as a whole and how children may regard their transnational situation.

### Study III.

#### Imagined adulthood under transition –

#### Somali-Swedish girls' life-planning in a late-modern context

The aim of the third study is to explore how a group of Somali-Swedish girls ascribe meaning to their imagined adulthood with regard to career and family life. Having the girls imagine their future may not only teach us more about the careers and family life they dream of but also how they position themselves in the present.

The girls are all students at the M-school, and the intention with this study was not only to examine the girls' expectations for the future but also to understand how they experience the discourse in which these expectations occur.

The basis for the analyses in this study is 68 essays written by the girls in grade five (that is about eleven years old) during a lesson in Swedish and on the topic 'My future'. The essays were collected over a period of five years in a total of eight classes. Essays as a method was chosen as a way to deploy naturally occurring data and to get as close as possible to the girls' own thoughts, permitting them to interpret the topic in their personal way to a greater extent than if they had been interviewed by me. Choosing essays as a method was also an attempt to forgo at least part of my power as an adult.

The theoretical point of departure is social constructionistic, with a view that the space within which children act – and react – is formed by rules (informal and formal), expectations and traditions in society at large, as well as within families. Anthony Giddens, whose theoretical thinking has served as an inspiration for this study, refers to the time we live in as late modernity. It is a time characterised by a continuously ongoing globalisation, with detraditionalised and individualised life paths, which in turn have made people less governed by discourses such as class and gender.

The changes and development during late modernity are thought to have been especially beneficial to girls concerning issues such as education. However, studies on girls from Muslim families living in the West often present their childhoods as not having been detraditionalised and individualised, but rather as culturally fixed and tradition-bound. In the public eye Muslim girls are associated with loyalty and obedience towards patriarchal and hierarchical structures with low educational ambitions.

The analysis of the essays in this study challenges this. The study shows that the girls have very high educational ambitions. Of the 31 occupations mentioned almost half of the girls wrote that they want to become doctors, and some of them have also mentioned a medical speciality. Other popular professions are teacher, lawyer and CEO. In contrast with previous studies from other countries in the West, where children have imagined their future, this study also shows that some of the girls are apt towards professions that are traditionally performed by the opposite sex, for example soccer player, basketball player, business-woman, scientist, and CEO for an international IT company.

When it comes to family life, which is mentioned as the second most common issue in the essays, 52 girls mentioned something about this. Many different family constellations are described. Some girls write that they will not marry but stay single, with or without children. Most girls write that they will marry and among those many mention that they want a husband who is equal to them. Most of the girls want to have two



children. This is a change from the families where the girls grow up. Many Somali-Swedish families are large: seven, eight or more children living in the same apartment is not unusual.

On the whole, the girls' high educational ambitions seem to correlate with their parents' expectations of them. Many of the girls' parents were raised in wealthy and educated families and had to give up education when they fled their country. Many mothers have also, for several reasons, become the bread-winner of their families in Sweden, and they want a better and more secure future for their daughters that includes education and a well-paid job. The professional dreams may also mirror a desire for social mobility. Being well-educated means that you can earn a high salary, which in turn means that you can move to a better house in another part of town or to another country, and that you can buy a car. The imagined future may also be inspired by the girls' environment, including reality shows, peers, schoolmates, and teachers.

## Chapter 6. Closing the loop – Some concluding remarks

The empirical focus for this thesis is a group of Somali-Swedish girls who are students at a Muslim-profiled school. I wanted to explore how the girls construct their childhood and perform their agency by considering the formal and informal structures, on a local as well as transnational level, that surround them and of which they are a part. That the new childhood paradigm, which regards childhood as a construction and children as competent and with agency, also includes children born into other social, economical and cultural contexts besides the prevalent majority society, was taken as a given when analysing the data of the three studies in this thesis.

Employing Anthony Giddens's structuration theory and its main concept 'duality of structure' as an analytical tool made it possible to not only analyse the girls agency and behaviour in relation to the structures, but also to understand that the agency and social practices of the girls can never be taken out of their context. They must always be considered in relation to the structures that might be a constraint, but also something that enables their agency. Resources, agency and social practices are closely linked to issues of power. For the Somali-Swedish girls, this may apply to managing different power relations within the family, for example different subject positions such as boy/girl or adult/child (Connolly, 2008). Power can also be about the place and space the Somali-Swedish girls are expected to occupy or are offered by the majority society. This might include subject positions such as their socioeconomic situation, faith and skin colour.

The studies included in this thesis all show how the Somali-Swedes in the studied school act in relation to existing structures by using the available resources. The following summarises this by presenting some findings from the three studies; they are non-exhaustive and serve as examples of conclusions.

- Study 1 deals with the reasons to choose a Muslim-profiled school in spite of such schools being questioned by the majority population. The Swedish Education Act – that per-

mits school choice – is indeed an example of a resource, but another resource is the parents' capability and ability to utilise this right. Students and parents gave several reasons as to why they chose the M-school: The positive aspects of its Muslim profile per se was just one; they also motivated their choice with feelings of being questioned as a group in Sweden. They put forward that the majority society did not understand them and had low expectations on them.

- Study 2 explores several examples of transnational practices like mobility and remittances. Technological developments contribute to their prevalence, but close relations to compatriots and considering themselves as nomads together with family patterns that emphasise extended families may be considered resources that enable these practices. Low expectations from the majority population in the form of exclusion and economic marginalisation might be factors that motivate the mobility, while culturally based expectations of mutual aid do play a part when it comes to remittances.
- Study 3 used essays where girls wrote about dreams of their future as an explorative tool and found very high educational ambitions. The expectations upon the girls emanated from their parents and could be explained by cultural factors as well as the current situation in diaspora. A high-status profession is not only something for the family to be proud of, it also benefits the extended family and the clan materially. Once again, favourable resources exist within Sweden, which offers free schooling at the compulsory level (even for independent schools including Muslim-profiled ones) and the university level.

In the following I will illustrate the relation between agency and structure with some examples from the Somali-Swedish transnational context. The chapter also returns to the scene that opened this thesis, the dance performance at the M-school, and I try to analyse what actually happened at the show that day.

## Duality of structure and transnationalism

In this thesis I have shown that transnational practices not only include the migrants themselves but also their children, and that children are made transnational without even having been to their parents' country of origin or to any other country in the world, for that matter. Including a transnational perspective on how the Somali-Swedish girls construct their childhood has implications on the girls' agency, their structural resources and their social practices. All in all, we have to draw a line with traditional views on issues such as how migrants integrate in a new country and their rootedness in only one country.

Transnationalism is not only about travelling between a country of origin and another country (though this of course enables transnational practices), but also about creating and maintaining relationships between each other across national borders, for example between the Somali-Swedish girls in this thesis and adults and children with the same background in Somalia or in the diaspora. An important prerequisite needed for the Somalis in my study to build transnational social spaces turned out to be, among other things, a view of themselves as nomads. In connection with this is an extended view on who should count as a family member, tight connections within these relations, and strict ideas concerning what the obligations towards family members should be.

It was the adults I met during my fieldwork who referred to themselves as being nomads and as having a nomadic lifestyle, when I asked them to explain their presumed mobility. Yet none of them was brought up in a nomadic family, and any nomadic heritage was several generations back. I never heard the girls describe themselves or someone else as a nomad, or to associate their mobility with a nomadic heritage. They become, however, part of this ascribed nomadism, either when they or someone in their close family move to another country, or when they see other families move.

While the girls never mentioned nomadism, they often mentioned and gave examples of their close relations, including extended family, all over the world. These relationships that the Somali-Swedes maintain in diaspora are about supporting each other financially, but also about strengthening common meanings and memories. They thus keep up an ethnic pride of what it means to be a good Somali with high values, instead of the representations of violence and anarchy that are more often associated with Somalia, or the general often disparaging view of them that they experience from Swedish society. The Somali word for this strengthening of values is *soomaalinimo* (Al Sharmani, 2007). As most of the girls in my studies have no experience of their own

concerning Somalia, they have to trust what they are told by the elder generation. Thus, *soomaalinimo* is rather about preserving a nostalgic memory about what it means to be Somali. This is close to Benedict Anderson's theories on imagined communities (1983/2006). As all members of a nation will never meet, their feeling of affinity and fellowship will never be more than just a feeling (Anderson, 2006 p. 26). Anderson's theories are mostly used on nations, but may also be transferred to ethnic groups (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007).

### **Transnationalism and integration**

This thesis is not about integration, but when discussing transnationalism and transnational practices the question of whether it is possible to combine transnational behaviour, and at the same time become involved and integrated into a new country, comes to the fore (Faist et al. 2013, p. 89). Today's researchers on transnational migration claim that there is no contradiction between integration and transnationalism; the two can be interrelated, and migrants performing different transnational practices are, per se, not less integrated than other migrants (Basch et al., 1994; Faist et al., 2013).

To include transnationalism with existing migration research may challenge existing models of migrant integration, such as assimilation and ethnic pluralism, but it is not a new integration model that will replace others. It is instead a complement to existing models and provides new perspectives to the analysis of the contextual factors that migrants bring and those they meet in the new host country (Faist et al., 2013). Individuals and groups of people find different ways to combine their engagement with their former country and their integration into a new country – some are more successful than others, for various reasons and with various consequences (p. 108).

In the study presented in the article 'Samira doesn't live here any more: Perspectives on a transnational generation' (Mohme, 2014a), I gave examples of three prerequisites for the development of transnational practices among Somali-Swedes and their children: a nomadic heritage, belonging to a clan and the extended family. But can the transnational social spaces that these prerequisites create and maintain also be simultaneous with integration? Let me discuss this in short by taking clan as an example. Clan systems are often associated with backwardness, and many would probably argue that clan, and everything that goes with it, is incompatible with integration into a Western country and must be left behind. In their study on Tamils' and Somalis' adjustment processes in Norway, Engebrigtsen and Fuglerud (2009) even

explain Somali-Norwegians's integration and deeper contacts with Norwegian society and its institutions by the fragmentation between Somali clans, which is caused by rivalry and feuds and has made it difficult to mobilise their internal resources. I am, however, more inclined to analyse how clanbelonging is negotiated in their diaspora by utilising Kağıtçıbaşı's family change theory (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2006, 2007). According to this theory, a family's adjustment to societies that are characterised by more developed welfare systems have different paces. The adaptation to material change is faster than to any change related to culture and traditions. To Somali-Swedes, clan may still be important, but not on all matters, not always and not for everyone.

In my research I did not come across any disruptive clan-feuds. In fact, I seldom heard clans mentioned. This may be explained by my research field being a Muslim-profiled school. Instead of focusing on clans and seeing clanbelonging as something that divide Somalis, the parents and students seemed to seek for something that united them beyond clanship. To them, their Muslim faith became something they had in common. The M-school thus functioned as an integrating arena for the Somali-Swedes, and it was in fact a place where most clans were represented among students and the Somali-Swedish staff.

The relation between transnationalism and integration thus seems to be a process that is complex and varies between individuals and groups, over time and between places. To understand these dynamics a more open, less linear understanding of integration is needed (Faist et al. p. 100). Integration is a problematic term, for example, when brought up in connection to children's education, and in school it is used exclusively in relation to minority children (Gitz-Johansen, 2004). Thus we also need to define integration, what it is and what it is not, and identify whether there are conflicting goals between transnationalism and integration. With the Somali-Swedes in my research this must be done by looking beyond stereotypes and with an understanding that transnationalism and integration might exist simultaneously.

## Back to square one – Street dance on a revolving stage

In the chapter where I presented the methods used for this thesis I described some of the power asymmetries that may exist between the researcher and the researched: age, gender, race, ethnicity and place. However, prior knowledge of the researcher of those researched is also important to consider in this matter. What is, actually, the researcher's

ability to interpret what he or she sees and hears when out in the research field?

To explain what I mean, let me turn the spotlight on myself and return to the scene in the introduction to this thesis, the girls' dance show at the school, and my expectations to see the girls dance typical African dances. How did that occur? I might have had African dances in mind because I had seen some of the girls dancing them on other occasions, but I may also have been influenced by the images of Africans that I was brought up with – that is, as a poor and illiterate people from an undeveloped and colonised continent (Schmauch, 2006). So can you be really sure that I did not fall prey to a kind of postcolonial and racified discourse, where an African origin is intimately associated with behaving 'African'? Furthermore, once they performed the street dance, it was not only unexpected because it is a dance not associated with the 'typical African'. Indeed, street dance, with its origin in African-American ghetto-culture, is not what we think that girls with high educational ambitions and students at a Muslim-profiled school would dance. Street dance at a Muslim-profiled school may be regarded as something far-fetched, given that music and dance, especially the Western influenced variety, is strongly questioned and regarded as a useless activity among, not all, but some Muslim communities (Otterbeck, 2004).

In the first chapter, I mentioned that it would not be unreasonable to analyse the girls' street dance from the new childhood paradigm's perspective as an example of successful integration ('they' have become more like 'us') and a kind of resistance towards their culture and religion. Nevertheless, there are, of course, other possible reasons and analyses. Current research on youth from different minorities and subcultures has shown that they are inspired both by their parents' original culture and by music from African-American influences. This creates a kind of 'hybrid culture' where they emancipate themselves from their parents' traditions without leaving it (the Somali-Swedish girls do still perform Somali dances). At the same time, they oppose the racism they experience by – symbolically – emphasising their minority status (Horak, 2003, p. 189). This hybrid culture is made possible by factors that I have put forward as crucial characteristics of a late modern society. According to Giddens these are: detraditionalisation, disembeddedness and deterritorialisation. Late modern societies are characterised by constant change and fluidity. However, at the same time, people's competence and agency pave the way for reflexive choices. Individuals living in this type of society are, according to Giddens, able to redefine,

rework and adjust their different cultural expressions, such as what music to choose at a dance show in a Muslim-profiled school.

I have earlier stated that childhood is constructed with what is at hand. The reflexive choices that the girls are expected to make as competent and with agency thus depend on what resources are available, and this may be differently distributed due to, for example, a group's position in society. Analysed in this way, the girls' street dance may be regarded as an example of a space to act that the girls are offered by the majority population. The girls have found a space that was earlier empty and where they are permitted, as they do not threaten any of the space that is already occupied by the majority population. This may also explain why the girls I interviewed claim that they are Somalis, though they are both born and bred in Sweden. This is what one of the girls answered when asked why she did not regard herself as Swedish:

*– Then people will say that you are an immigrant, you are dark, have black skin. Then you do not want to... you do not want to say 'I am Swedish'. That will be embarrassing. So you say that you are Somali, that's much better.*

To say that you are Somali is thus about not getting an idea that you belong to something you are not allowed to. Being Swedish has less to do with citizenship; it is actually about ethnic boundaries, set up and monitored by the majority.

Thus far, it may seem as if Giddens's analysis is all about using and developing resources that are offered by others, as if the girls are victims of circumstances dictated to them by the more powerful majority population. These girls are no victims, however. They have agency and are competent, and their choice of music and street dance can also be regarded as a protest and reaction against the majority population. To choose to dance street may be a way for them to not only identify with a black urban American environment, but also stage a reaction against their own experienced marginalisation and protest the racism and disadvantages they see.

The late modern society might be detraditionalised, but the idea that there is a sharp analytic discrepancy between a past embedded in traditions and a detraditionalised modernity is misplaced. Detraditionalisation does not imply that all traditions are thrown overboard. Instead, there are scholars who support a 'co-existence thesis', which argues that detraditionalisation now, as in the past, competes, interpenetrates and interplays with the maintenance of traditions (Heelas, 1996, p. 7). This co-existence thesis also includes young people and their cultures. Their



lives are defined by an increasing flow of cultural commodities to be influenced by and to construct their childhoods from. In this late modern world, which is theirs, it is perfectly possible to participate in several subcultures that may seem contradictory, not the least for an outsider. Children and youth may slide in and out of those subcultures with considerable ease. To be a student at a Muslim-profiled school, and having a seemingly strong and firm Muslim faith, is thus fully consistent with having high educational ambitions and preferring street dance. Street dance does not threaten other cultural expressions associated with their Somali heritage, and may in some cases even strengthen them.

## Concluding thoughts

It is, as I wrote in the first chapter, quite unusual in research on children and youth to follow an ethnic group, as I have done. There is a risk that the focus is on what is different and that it makes the children and youth more estranged than they already are. This was brought up by young researchers on Somalis in diaspora that I met at the SSIA conference in 2015. They feared that the image of Somalia as a clan-based society of nomads, with all the negative suppositions of Islam in the West, would contribute to an idea of Somalis as behind the times and impossible to integrate into the West, thus painting a picture of a group living beside society in an exclusion of their own choice.

An example of this is the image of the Somali-Swedish girls as oppressed and vulnerable presented in Swedish media, as described in this thesis. Although the Somali-Swedish girls in my thesis do not recognise themselves in those descriptions, and experience a different reality, the dominant picture is still something that they must relate to and find strategies to manage.

As a matter of fact, most of the girls' daily lives in this thesis are filled with activities similar to what other girls in their age group born in Sweden do: They play football, watch reality shows, read fantasy, play computer games and bake cupcakes with different frostings. Most of the participants in the studies are Swedish citizens; the girls are born in Sweden, and although they are students in a Muslim-profiled school, it is first and foremost a Swedish school, following Swedish legislation and curriculum.

There are also advantages with studying a certain group, which I hope this research on Somali-Swedish girls shows. It may help us to understand how the girls associate what they do and how they think with their being of Somali origin. For example, in my studies I saw no conflict

between having high educational ambitions and being brought up as a girl in a Muslim family with roots in Somalia. Being of Somali origin was rather regarded as a kind of qualification. Furthermore, applying a transnational perspective helped me to widen the gaze and recognise that it is not enough to take notice of what happens in one place, if one wants to understand social processes like family, identity and identification, and integration.

To conduct a proper analysis of what is going on, and to do this from the children's own perspectives, it is essential to have deep and solid knowledge of factors that form the children's competence and agency. This will make it easier to see the processes, shifts and transformations that are going on among the Somali-Swedes as a whole, and that culture, religion and skin colour are something more than just labels attached to groups of people. They are also identities that people discover, negotiate, accept, deny, challenge or redefine with the possibilities at hand.

I believe that a deeper knowledge of the children's social, historical, religious and cultural backgrounds is important for all those who work in schools and meet children and parents from all over the world (though going back to Ibn Battuta may belong to the supplementary studies). This is important in the daily communication with children and parents, and also when teaching. More knowledge of students' backgrounds and their parents' life experiences and expectations will raise the awareness among teachers regarding how to best meet their students' educational needs, which is crucial to support them in reaching their goals and winning trust from parents. This is a prerequisite to create equal opportunities among various groups of students, which is one of the foundational obligations a school has according to the Education Act.

On the whole, I believe that there is a need for more studies of how children and youth with a migrant background (either those who are migrants themselves or have parents' who have migrated) experience their ethnicity in a transnational and local situation. The research ought to focus not only on the children's own perspectives, experiences, descriptions and thoughts, but be combined with studies of the context that forms their ethnicity. My hope is that the studies that constitute this thesis will contribute not only to the research and knowledge on Somalis in diaspora and how their daughters construct their childhoods, but also be an inspiration for child and youth studies on migrant children in general.

## Chapter 7. Sammanfattning på svenska

Det övergripande syftet i den här avhandlingen är att undersöka diasporaerfarenheter hos en grupp migranter med ursprung i Somalia. Avhandlingen undersöker hur den här gruppen förhandlar och hanterar några utmaningar som det innebär att vara muslim och migrant i Sverige, samt hur relationerna till tidigare landsmän konstrueras och upprätthålls i ett transnationellt socialt rum. I centrum för avhandlingen står en grupp somaliesvenska flickor. Flickorna är mellan tio och tolv år gamla och elever på en muslimskt profilerad skola, som jag kallat för M-skolan, där cirka 80 procent av eleverna har somaliskt ursprung (antingen är de födda i Somalia eller också är åtminstone en av deras föräldrar det). Det övergripande syftet var att undersöka hur flickorna konstruerar sin barndom. Syftet var också att utforska hur detta barndomskonstruerande interagerar med de formella och informella strukturer som flickorna är en del av. Utgångspunkten var att studera detta ur flickornas eget perspektiv, men att enbart lyssna på vad flickorna själva berättade var inte tillräckligt. Det var också nödvändigt att placera flickorna och deras berättelser i sitt sammanhang, ett sammanhang som konstrueras och upprätthålls i en lokal och transnationell kontext och formas i de relationer de har med andra: föräldrar, syskon, vänner.

### Bakgrund

Sedan början av 1990-talet har människor flytt från Somalia på grund av landets långvariga inbördeskrig och dess konsekvenser (Fangen, 2008; Lindley, 2010; Rutter, 2006; Salat, 2010; UNDP, 2009). Somalier är idag spridda över hela världen, många finns i grannländerna, men stora grupper lever i västvärlden – förutom i Sverige främst i USA, Kanada, Storbritannien och våra nordiska grannländer (Horst, 2006; Johnsdotter 2007; Kusow & Bjork, 2007; Melander, 2007). I Sverige bor idag ca 83.000 personer av somaliskt ursprung, antingen födda i Somalia eller i Sverige med en eller två somaliskfödda föräldrar (Statistics Sweden, 2015a). De flesta är bosatta i några av landets mest segregerade förorter (Salat, 2010)

och studier har visat att arbetslösheten är större än hos någon annan migrantgrupp (Carlson et al., 2012; Salat, 2010).

Fastän fler och fler personer i Sverige har somaliskt ursprung är relativt lite känt om dem och det finns förhållandevis lite forskning (se dock studier av Johnsdotter, 2002; Melander, 2009; Salat, 2010). Enligt Mångfaldsbarometerns undersökningar är de den grupp som svenskar upplever sig stå längst ifrån kulturellt (Mella et al., 2014). En viktig förklaring till detta är, enligt Salat (2010), gruppens muslimska tro. Internationell forskning visar att för somalier som migrerat förefaller den muslimska tron ha blivit starkare och ännu viktigare (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Berns McGown, 1999). Det brukar förklaras med den känsla av trygghet, tillhörighet och identitet som islam ger i de svårigheter som ett liv i exil inneburit för många av dem (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Berns McGown 1999). Somalier i Sverige har också upplevt verbala kränkningar som de förklarar med sin religiösa tillhörighet, men också med sitt somaliska ursprung och sin hudfärg (Centrum mot rasism, 2011).

Den begränsade kunskapen om somaliesvenskar gäller även flickorna. I media kopplas muslimska flickor oavsett etnisk bakgrund ofta samman med företeelser som hederskultur, utsatthet, förtryck, integrationsproblem, arrangerade äktenskap och att förhindras att utbilda sig (se till exempel Brune, 2004). Flickor med ursprung i Somalia förknippas också med könsstympning eller att de lever under hot att skickas till Somalia om de blir "försvenskade" (Dirie, 1999, 2004, 2005; Johnsdotter, 2002, 2007a). Det finns mig veterligen inga svenska studier om somaliesvenska flickors skolgång. En dansk studie i två danska grundskolor där majoriteten av elever var av somaliskt ursprung visade att lärarna ofta uppfattade flickorna som undergivna och passiva och att föräldrarna saknade ambitioner för sina döttrar (Gitz-Johansen, 2004). Det är slutsatser som sammanfaller med resultaten i Open Society Foundations projekt "At home in Europe – om somalier i sju europeiska städer" (Open Society Foundations, 2015).

När jag anställdes i M-skolans administration år 2005 inskränkte sig min kunskap om de somaliesvenska elevernas bakgrund och deras liv i Sverige till vad jag läst i media. Jag beslutade att mitt forskningsområde skulle bli den somaliesvenska gruppen, att jag skulle utgå från deras eget perspektiv och att mitt primära forskningsfält skulle bli skolan där jag arbetade. Som tidigare mellanstadie lärare blev det naturligt för mig att forskningens fokus skulle vara flickor mellan tio och tolv år.

## Avhandlingens frågeställningar

Avhandlingen består av tre studier med följande centrala frågeställningar:

- Varför valdes M-skolan? Hur argumenterar den somaliesvenska gruppen på den här skolan för sitt val av en skola som är ifrågasatt för att verka segregering och vars värderingar anses vara oförenliga med de grundläggande svenska? Finns det andra viktiga skäl till skolvalsstrategierna än skolans muslimska profil och familjernas religiösa tro?
- Somalier i diasporan brukar betraktas som transnationella. Hur förklarar de sin mobilitet och varför ägnar de sig åt så kallad vidaremigration, det vill säga att hela eller delar av familjen lämnar Sverige som de en gång migrerat till och för ett tredje land? Hur reagerar och agerar den unga generationen på föräldrarnas transnationella praktiker?
- Vilka framtidsplaner har de somaliesvenska flickorna på M-skolan? Vilka är deras förväntningar på yrke och familj och hur ser den diskurs ut där dessa förväntningar uppstår?

## Forskningsfält som avhandlingen berör

Avhandlingen hör till ett forskningsfält som kallas för det "nya barndomssociologiska paradigmet". Det uppstod i början på 1990-talet och betraktar barndom som en social konstruktion och barn som kompetenta aktörer och medarkitekter i att forma sin barndom (se till exempel Corsaro, 2011; James & James, 2004; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2005; Lee, 2005; Mayall, 2012; Qvortrup, 2005; Thorne, 1993). Synsättet innebär att det inte existerar någon universell barndom som är oberoende av kön, etnicitet, klass, kultur etc. Barndom är något som konstrueras och formas i och för varje specifikt samhälle av de förväntningar och traditioner som finns just där och just då.

Avhandlingen avser också att ge ett bidrag till migrationsforskningen. Med ett transnationellt perspektiv på migration utmanas klassiska migrationsteorier om etnisk mångfald, mångkultur och assimilation (se till exempel Basch et al., 1994; Faist et al., 2013). Med transnationalism avses de band som många av dagens migranter upprätthåller med sina ursprungsländer och med sina forna landsmän över hela världen efter migrationen. Ett transnationellt perspektiv på migration innebär att migranter inte bara kan förstås och tolkas utifrån vad som pågår inom

ett lands gränser. Intresset för detta perspektiv på migration, hur det konstrueras och reproduceras, har ökat under de två senaste decennierna (Basch et al., 1994; Faist et al., 2013; Vertovec, 2009).

Många av dem som idag forskar om Somalia och somalier, ser somalier i diasporan som ett tydligt exempel på transnationell migration (se till exempel antologin "From Mogadishu to Dixon", Kusow & Bjork, 2007). Svensk forskning har till exempel belyst hur många somaliesvenskars utvidgade familjebegrepp leder till nära kontakter och utbyte av tankar, idéer och värderingar över geografiska gränser (se till exempel Johnsdotter 2007a, 2007b). Ett exempel på en vanlig transnationell praktik bland somaliesvenskar är deras remitteringar (Melander, 2009).

## Teoretiska utgångspunkter och metodval

Avhandlingen är skriven i en socialkonstruktionistisk forskningstradition med utgångspunkten att mening skapas genom sociala interaktioner människor emellan. Den tar sin teoretiska utgångspunkt i den brittiske sociologen Anthony Giddens' strukturerings teori och hans idéer om strukturens dualitet (Giddens, 1984, s. 25), det vill säga att agens och struktur är ömsesidigt beroende av varandra och binds ihop av sociala praktiker. Det teoretiska perspektivet gjorde det möjligt för mig att inte bara analysera flickornas agens i förhållande till strukturerna, utan också att förstå att flickornas agens och sociala praktiker aldrig kan skiljas från sin kontext. De måste alltid ses i relation till strukturerna som kan vara ett hinder, men också någonting som underlättar. Resurser, agens och sociala praktiker är i sin tur nära kopplat till makt. För de somaliesvenska flickorna kan detta handla om att hantera olika maktrelationer i familjen, men också om den plats som flickorna förväntas ta eller erbjuds av majoritetssamhället. Dessa positioner kan bestämmas av sådant som socioekonomisk status, religiös tro och hudfärg. För att förstå den transnationella kontext som flickorna agerar inom kompletterades Giddens teorier med Thomas Faists idéer om transnationella sociala rum och hur transnationella gemenskaper konstrueras och förs vidare. Som ett diagnostiskt verktyg och för att analysera hur familjemönster påverkas och förändras när familjer migrerar inspirerades jag av den turkiska psykologiprofessorn Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı och hennes "family change theory" (2007).

Avhandlingen är etnografisk och varje studie bygger på ett fältarbete på M-skolan, men också på några andra platser. I det insamlade materialet ingår också 68 uppsatser som flickor i årskurs 5 skrev under

rubriken ”Min framtid”, intervjuer med flickor och vuxna samt omfattande litteraturstudier om Somalia och somalier.

## Sammanfattning av de tre studierna

Utgångspunkten för studie 1 är den skola där flickorna gick – M-skolan. Syftet var att undersöka de strategier som ligger bakom valet av en muslimskt profilerad skola. Dessa skolor har möjliggjorts genom att Sverige sedan 1992 tillåter konfessionella skolor att få skolpeng. Skolorna omfattas av samma lagar och regler som alla andra skolor. Undervisningen ska vara icke-konfessionell, men skoldagen får innehålla vissa konfessionella inslag som dock ska ligga utanför lektionstid och vara frivilliga.

Skolor med religiös inriktning är mycket ifrågasatta av majoritetsbefolkningen (Mella et al., 2014). Detta gäller särskilt muslimskt profilerade skolor, vars existens debatteras med jämna mellanrum. De anses äventyra några av den svenska skolans viktigaste uppgifter: att vara en mötesplats för barn av olika bakgrund, och att stå för viktiga värden som demokrati och jämställdhet (Gerle, 1997). Fastän muslimskt profilerade skolor har funnits i Sverige i mer än tjugo år, finns det inte särskilt mycket forskning om dem (se dock Berglund, 2009; Brattlund, 2009; Gustafsson, 2004). Vi vet inte mycket om vilka som väljer dessa skolor och varför, inte heller hur det går för eleverna.

Även i övriga delar av västvärlden är konfessionella skolor ifrågasatta av samma skäl som i Sverige. Internationell forskning visar att föräldrarnas tro är ett viktigt skäl att välja en konfessionell skola, se till exempel de båda antologierna ”In Good Faith: Schools, Religion and Public Funding” (Parker-Jenkins, Hartas & Irving, 2005) och ”Faith Schools – Consensus or Conflict” (Gardner, Cairns & Lawton, 2005). Men bakom valet av en muslimskt profilerad skola kan också ligga upplevd rasism från elever och lärare i andra skolor, eller att dessa skolor har låga förväntningar på muslimska elever (Bigelow, 2008; Haw, 1998; Hewer, 2001; Merry, 2005; Merry & Driessen, 2005; Shah, 2012; Zine, 2007).

Studien visar att skolvalsstrategier är komplexa och att det är mer än skolans muslimska profil som ligger bakom valet av skola. Skolvalet utmärks av förhandlingar mellan olika prioriteringar och kan sägas vara en slags kompromiss av det bästa från olika världar. M-skolan har inte de högsta slutbetygen men visar bättre resultat än den lokala kommunala skolan och är samtidigt en skola där barnen kan känna sig trygga och inte riskera att bli diskriminerade på grund av sin muslimska tro, sin

somaliska bakgrund och sin hudfärg. Att dela sin religiösa tro med andra är viktigt, men att bli förstådd av alla andra på skolan, både vad gäller kultur och språk, är också faktorer som inte ska underskattas. Valet av skola handlar inte bara om att hitta en plats för barnens utbildning, det är också ett sätt för föräldrarna att återfå något av det värde de känner gick förlorat när de kom till Sverige – att bli erkända och slippa uppleva utsatthet.

Studie 2 har en transnationell utgångspunkt och studerar några av de transnationella praktiker som somaliesvenskar upprätthåller. En av förutsättningarna för den relativt omfattande transnationaliteten hos den somaliska gruppen (Kusow & Bjork, 2007) är dess definition av familj som är betydligt vidare än en västerländsk kärnfamilj (Johnsdotter 2007a, 2007b). Den snabba tekniska utvecklingen och billiga resor har gjort det möjligt att hålla nära kontakt med sin "extended family" på ett helt annat sätt än tidigare; man utbyter tankar och erfarenheter, besöker varandra eller skickar pengar (Melander, 2009).

I den här studien behandlar jag framför allt den somaliesvenska gruppens mobilitet. Vidare-migrationen till Egypten från Sverige, som var aktuell när forskningen gjordes, belyses som ett exempel på en transnationell praktik bland de somaliesvenskar som studeras. Särskilt intresserad var jag av hur föräldrarnas transnationella praktiker förs över till barnen, hur den unga generationen agerar och reagerar, och barnens upplevelse av att tillhöra en transnationell diskurs.

Transnationella studier om migranternas barn har hitintills varit ganska få; kanske har man tagit för givet att transnationalism och transnationella praktiker bara omfattar de som faktiskt migrerar (Vertovec, 2009). Mer och mer forskning visar dock att i dagens globaliserade värld kan transnationella praktiker mycket väl överföras mellan generationerna (Haikkola, 2011; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Olsson & Farahani, 2012; Smith, 2006). Frågan är inte huruvida detta sker, utan snarare i vilken omfattning och varför (Levitt & Waters, 2002). I korthet innebär detta att barn som växer upp i en transnationell miljö ställs inför förväntningar och kulturella värderingar inte bara från familj och andra närstående i det land där de bor, utan också från familj och släkt i ursprungslandet och på andra platser i världen (Levitt & Waters, 2002).

Somaliesvenskarna i den här studien förklarade sin rörlighet med att de egentligen var nomader, trots att många inte varit det på flera generationer, men andra förklaringar kan också sökas i deras marginalisering och socioekonomiska situation i Sverige. Studien visar också att man inte behöver vara född i Somalia eller ens ha varit där för att utveckla en transnationell livsstil. Genom kontakter via sociala medier



och resor till släkt och vänner i andra länder upprätthålls en idé om vad det innebär att vara somalier.

En del av studien beskriver vidare-migrationen från Sverige till Egypten, som förekom när data samlades in. Studien visar att det inte bara handlar om att byta plats på kartan utan även om att byta position i en maktstruktur. De intervjuade barnen och ungdomarna framförde att positivt med att bo i ett muslimskt land var att där var deras tro var självklar och de stack inte ut. Samtidigt fanns det en del anpassningsproblem, bland annat till skolan som de upplevde helt annorlunda och mer auktoritär än i Sverige.

Syftet med studie 3 var att undersöka hur de somaliesvenska flickorna i årskurs 5 på M-skolan ser på sin framtid. Genom att flickorna delgav sina framtidsplaner i form av uppsatser berättade de inte bara om sin tänkta framtid, utan gav också en bild av hur de positionerar sig själva i sin samtid (Steedman, 1980; Halldén, 1994; Hutchings, 1996; Sanders & Munford, 2008; Patterson, Forbes & Peace, 2009; Elliott, 2010). Att låta flickorna skriva uppsatser är ett sätt att låta dem "ta kommandot över intervjusituationen" och samtidigt komma så nära deras eget perspektiv som möjligt. Det finns mig veterligen inga liknande studier där flickor från en etnisk minoritet har skrivit uppsatser om sin framtid. De internationella studier som finns omfattar oftast något äldre flickor och där har den etniska bakgrunden inte varit central.

Data består av 68 uppsatser, insamlade under fem år. Uppsatsämnet var "Min framtid" och det som flickorna nämnde först var yrket. Studien visar att flickorna har höga utbildningsambitioner: 31 av flickorna vill bli läkare och några nämnde också medicinsk specialitet. Andra populära yrken var lärare, advokat, och VD eller egen företagare. Till skillnad från andra studier i Västvärlden om barns framtidsplaner (se till exempel Francis, 2002) visar den här studiens data att en del flickor planerar en karriär inom traditionellt manliga yrken som fotbollsspelare, basketbollspelare, vetenskapsman inom naturvetenskap och VD för ett internationellt IT-företag. Några av flickorna motiverar sina yrkesplaner: De kan till exempel ha inspirerats av en nära släkting som har yrket eller av att det är ett yrke där man får bra betalt.

Beskrivningar av den framtida familjen var det näst vanligaste ämnet som togs upp i uppsatserna. 52 flickor nämnde något om detta. Bara nio flickor nämnde något om sin framtida man, men sannolikt är han inkluderad i flickornas beskrivning av "familj", något som andra studier visat (Elliott, 2010). De flesta av flickorna skriver att de vill ha två barn, en pojke och en flicka. Detta är en skillnad mot de familjer där flickorna växer upp, som ofta består av många barn. Sex flickor nämnde också att

de inte tänker gifta sig, någon nämnde också orsaken: Karriären kommer göra att de inte hinner med.

Förklaringar till flickornas framtidsplaner finns bland annat i familjerna. Många av föräldrarna på skolan kommer från välutbildade familjer, men var tvungna att avbryta sin utbildning i samband med att de flydde. En hög utbildning är också en garanti för framtiden.

De tre studierna i den här avhandlingen är alla exempel hur de somaliesvenska flickorna i M-skolan, men också deras föräldrar, verkar agera i relation till de existerande strukturerna genom att använda sig av befintliga resurser (för att använda Giddens' språk). Den tillhörighet som flickorna och deras föräldrar ger uttryck för formas av dem i en transnationell gemenskap, men kan också ses som något de blir tillskrivna och en effekt av de maktstrukturer som finns i vårt samhälle.

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