Making a difference in Mogadishu? Experiences of multi-sited embeddedness among diaspora youth[1]

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Abstract

Civic participation today is increasingly multi-sited, operating in, between and across specific locations. Growing numbers of people experience *multi-sited embeddedness*, which I understand both in the sense of belonging to and engaging in multiple communities. In this article, I focus on those who left Somalia as young children or were born to Somali parents in exile, and ask what motivates these young people to return or turn to the Somali region. What inspires them to engage in Somalia through short visits and longer stays? What experiences shape their civic engagement and where do they engage? And how does that engagement affect their sense of identity? The article is based on 80 in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions in Garowe, Hargeisa, Mogadishu, Oslo and the Twin Cities. Informants stayed for shorter or longer durations in the Somali region but lived for the larger part of their lives in Norway or the United States. I illustrate how young people's civic engagement impact feelings of belonging as much as their sense of belonging influences their civic actions. In this article, I argue for non-binary ways of studying multi-sited embeddedness that do justice to diaspora youth's everyday negotiations.

Introduction

> 'I love Minnesota, but I also love Somalia. You can't be fixed in one area. There's no rule or book that says that you have to make your home in one place' (Rahma Isse[2], Minneapolis)

> 'It cannot be 'either/or' for me. I belong to both places' (Yussuf Abdi, Oslo)

These remarks by Rahma Isse and Yussuf Abdi, young individuals living in Minneapolis and Oslo, draw our attention to the fact that dominant binary way of discussing citizenship and belonging do not do justice to the everyday realities of many people today. There is a clear difference between belonging as an individual feeling of being at home, or place-belongingness, and the social aspects of discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion, or the politics of belonging (Antonsich 2010). The challenge with the latter aspect of belonging, which is often expressed in binary ways, is that it determines the language these young people have at their disposal to describe their experiences, and it thus affects their sense of being (Bulhan 2015). This article attempts to create a new, non-binary language to describe multi-sited embeddedness. It thus aims to contribute to the existing academic literature that has challenged binary debates on identity and belonging through concepts like hybridity (Bhabha 2012), intersectionality (Anthias 2008) and others.

My contribution aims to bring together perspectives on national identity and other forms of belonging with those on civic engagement, arguing that the two are intrinsically linked and often multi-sited. I ask what experiences shape the civic participation of young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans and in which locations their civic participation takes place. How does these young people's sense of identity - hybrid, intersectional, multi-sited or embedded - impact their engagement in several locations? And how does that engagement affect their sense of identity?

In debates on citizenship in Europe, the need for active participation among citizens is increasingly stressed, and a strong sense of belonging to the nation is assumed to be central to civic engagement. While the low electoral participation of young people is often highlighted as an indication of reduced civic participation, increased use of social media leads to new forms of societal engagement. And while politicians often lament the lack of civil-political engagement among immigrants, many new citizens volunteer, take up political causes, or set up associations in a range of locations. In culturally and religiously diverse societies, citizens have different frameworks for how they act and interact with their close and distant surroundings. This article explores the frameworks for action that young people with a refugee background operate from, based on a study of young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans who return to their country of birth or turn to the country of birth of their parents. As Braakman and Schlenkhoff (2007) have also argued based on research among Afghans abroad, questions of belonging and identity gain new significance when return becomes an option for young refugees and children of refugees. This option brings to the fore the question of 'where do I belong?'

The article is based on 80 interviews and four focus group discussions. This data was collected from September 2013 to June 2014 and in March-April 2016. Our informants were selected based on expressing a distinct wish to make a contribution to Somali society through business investments, participating in civil society and taking up political positions. As such, they consist of an 'elite' group who express a clear interest in - and often have the resources to – contribute upon return. The

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[2] All names of informants are pseudonyms.

research team[3] conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 29 returnees from the United States and Norway in Mogadishu, Garowe and Hargeisa; 27 semi-structured interviews with Somali-Americans who had made at least one recent return trip to Somalia; and 24 semi-structured interviews with Norwegian-Somalis who made at least one recent return trip to Somalia. Furthermore, three focus group discussions were held with locals in Mogadishu, Garowe and Hargeisa about their perceptions of diaspora returnees; and one workshop was conducted in Oslo with approximately 30 Somali students participating, focusing on civic engagement and return.

All data was recorded and transcribed, and prepared for entering into qualitative data analysis software. A codebook was developed collectively within the team in order to be able to analyze the data across locations. Data was coded on themes like motivations to return, networks, contributions upon return, and cross-cutting nodes like belonging, civic engagement, gender, generation and diaspora definitions. The data I present in this paper only represents a small selection of the extensive indepth data we collected. This selection is based on the common patterns we identified in the data, which are described in the paper and then illustrated through selected quotes. More extensive descriptions of particular individuals, through vignettes, are added to illustrate the breath of the data and the variations in the individual stories of the people we spoke to.

While those we interviewed represent all age groups and the paper draws on analysis of all data, I focus specifically on those who left Somalia as children or were born in Norway or the United States. This constitutes approximately half of those interviewed, and most of those who took part in the workshop in Oslo. Experiences of multi-sited embeddedness are relevant for most members of the Somali diaspora, but there are considerable generational differences between those who came of age in Somalia and left the country as adults, and those who spent most of their childhood in Norway and the United States. It is in particular the experiences of the latter group that I find interesting to explore in greater detail. The transnational activities and networks of the older generation have been studied extensively whereas these young people's realities have mainly been studied in terms of their levels of integration. They are often described as 'second generation migrants' or 'first generation Americans, neither of which does justice to the multi-sited embeddedness of their experiences. I use the terms 'Somali-Americans' and 'Norwegian-Somalis' to reflect and expand the debates in the United States, where this group of people is described as American or Somali-American, and in Norway, where they are referred to as Somali or at best Norwegian-Somali. These are also terms that are most commonly used amongst the communities themselves.

The paper starts with a description of the concept of multi-sited embeddedness, after which I describe the empirical reality of (re)turn to Somalia. I use the term '(re)turn' to both capture the reality of those who were born in the Somali region and thus return to their place of birth and of those who were born in Norway and the United States who turn to – visit and explore – their parents' country of birth. The paper then analyses how belonging and civic engagement are embedded in multiple sites. I argue that multi-sited embeddedness both relates to feelings of belonging and acts of engaging in communities. At the same time, belonging and acting are closely

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[3] The project collaboration was between PRIO, the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) and the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. For HIPS, data was collected by Anab Nur and lead researchers were Abdi Aynte and Maimuna Mohamud. For Humphrey: Kadra Abdi and Ahmed Muhumud and lead researchers Ryan Allan and Carissa Schively Slotterback. For PRIO: Cindy Horst, Faiza Kassim, Sagal Mohamed, Sundus Osman. For the ACT project, Ebba Tellander conducted life histories.

linked: civic engagement stems from belonging, while belonging is formed through actively engaging in the community. What is more, as the data shows, many of the young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans we spoke to act *in order to* belong: their civic engagement denotes a claims-making to be included in a wider community. This community can be situated locally, nationally, transnationally or globally, and can be defined by a range of characteristics, of which national identity is but one.

Multi-sited Embeddedness: Belonging and Civic Engagement

Citizenship is often understood either in the passive or formal sense or in the active or moral sense (Bosniak 2006; van Bochove et al 2010; Schinkel and van Houdt 2010; Mouritsen 2014). Kymlicka and Norman (1994: 353) refer to 'citizenship-as-legal-status, that is, as full membership in a particular political community; and citizenship-as-desirable-activity, where the extent and quality of one's citizenship is a function of one's participation in that community'. The notion of citizenship, in its passive or formal sense, has been criticized for failing to take into account the differentiation of lived experiences of citizenship - in terms of access to rights and claims to membership - along the axes of, *inter alia*, ethnicity, gender, race, class and religion (Yuval-Davis 2011). I will take a grounded approach by exploring citizenship in the active and in the moral sense through empirical data focusing on people's lived experiences. The research for this paper studied engagements and motivations in Somalia as well as in Norway and the United States. It focused on citizenship practices as ordinary practices that are part of everyday life (Staeheli et al 2012) and as not necessarily taking place in only one location. This approach challenges the common understanding of the links between civic engagement and national identity, as my starting point is a focus on civic engagement that is not pre-defined in relation to a single nation but can take place on local, national, transnational or global levels.

I conceptualize active civic participation as everyday formal and informal practices that people themselves define as civic, which can take place on a range of geographical levels. Civic participation entails people giving 'a voice to societal concerns, e.g. by engaging in political parties, local committees, parent associations or migrant lobby organizations; and/or organizing solidarity and self-help, e.g. by taking leadership functions in religious associations, ethnic associations or informal self-help networks' (Vogel and Triandafyllidou 2005:11). Similarly, Chanan (1997:1) defines active citizenship as 'the people's capacity to take an active role in public affairs, whether through formal democratic structures, through the press, through public debate, through associations, political parties, trade unions, local clubs and societies or simply through informal networks and mutual aid among neighbours, friends and family'. Both definitions of active citizenship move beyond traditional understandings of citizenship as a legal status defined by basic rights and obligations and as self-evidently connected to the nation-state (Bosniak 2006).

'Societal concerns' and 'public affairs' demand more active forms of civic engagement that can take place on a highly-specific local level – such as a neighbourhood in a city - but just as well beyond the nation-state transnationally or globally. Furthermore, the nature of the societal concerns that people wish to give voice to, or the nature of the public affairs they wish to take an active role in, remains open in these definitions. This will require us to move beyond participation in common affairs that are pre-determined by traditional powerholders in government and academia, such as voting or membership in formal organizations, to a wider range of 'unpaid, legal, and nonviolent ways of addressing social problems and issues' (Levine 2008: 102) as identified by citizens themselves. It will

also require us to move beyond the local and national to the global and transnational; building on theoretical advances that have developed in light of people's new everyday realities.

The literature on transnational citizenship and transnationalism more broadly (Balibar 2004, Basch et al. 1992, 1994, Smith 2007), does focus on emerging forms of cross-border citizenship and on transnational civic and political engagement. Here, the role of migrants in the social and political life of more than one nation-state is explored (Basch et al. 1994: 5). This literature has made an important contribution in arguing that there is a single field of social relations and interconnected social experiences across nation-state boundaries. Yet the transnationalism literature mainly looks at migrant engagement in the public sphere of the country of origin, through political mobilisation, philanthropy and other activities (Horst 2008; Lyons and Mandaville 2012). Somalis across Europe, for example, are heavily engaged with the conflict in and rebuilding of Somalia through sending remittances as well as through political engagement; after all 'Mogadishu is only an SMS away' (Horst et al. 2013: 6). At the same time, they aim to influence foreign policy towards Somalia through advocacy and a range of other ways from their European country of settlement (Tellander and Horst under review). Norwegian-Somalis, for example, are in a unique position to take both Somali *and* Norwegian interests into account and thereby facilitate international relations between Norway and Somalia (Tellander and Horst under review).

While it has been a crucial corrective to explore transnational engagements, the transnationalism literature poses a number of challenges. First, migrant practices are more than 'long-distance nationalism' and require a holistic understanding of civic engagement that incorporates the local, national and transnational levels simultaneously (Koinova and Karabegovic 2017). A second challenge to existing literature is that it tends to assume that migrants' ethnic and national ties to their country of origin explain civic participation in either country of origin or residence. As critics of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2003) have argued, this leaves the impact of factors like class, gender, generation and religion unexplored. A third challenge lies in the either/or perception created by work on transnationalism. There is often a zero-sum assumption that sees transnational involvement as a direct challenge to local engagement and 'good citizenship' on a national level. Various recent studies have argued against this assumption by showing the complementarity of transnational and local practices (Carling and Vatne Pettersen 2014, Erdal and Oeppen 2013, Nagel and Stahæli 2008, Oeppen 2009, Snel et al. 2006). In a further attempt to move beyond such dichotomies, I have argued elsewhere for an understanding of migrant engagements in development cooperation as a form of civic engagement in *multiple* locations; as citizens of their countries of residence and origin simultaneously (Horst 2013).

I have here chosen to go one step further by coining the concept 'multi-sited embeddedness'. I draw inspiration from Van Houte et al (2014), who use the concepts of 'multidimensional' and 'multi-local' embeddedness; which largely focus on an individual's identification with and participation in one or multiple *spaces of belonging*. They again draw on Kloosterman's work on mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman et al 1999, Kloosterman 2006, 2010), a theoretical framework developed to understand migrant entrepreneurship; as well as others who have used the concept of 'embeddedness' in their work on migration and belonging (Oeppen 2009, Ryan and Mulholland 2015). In this work, 'multidimensional' is used to highlight the crucial interplay between the social, economic, institutional and cultural contexts (Kloosterman et al 1999). 'Multi-local' is introduced to do justice to emerging work on the interlinkages between transnationalism and integration that

illustrates the importance of particular locations in connections across borders. I prefer to use 'multi-sited' to illustrate that the reality of the lives of many is constituted of 'a network of localities which are linked to each other through various types of flows' (Horst 2009: 120). These localities are particular places, such as cities, but at the same time everyday local realities are influenced by a range of scales, including the national and transnational (Erdal under review).

In this paper, I illustrate how 'embeddedness' is created in the interactions between feelings of belonging and practices of citizenship. What I will argue, based on interviews with young individuals who are citizens of Norway and the United States but have lived in Somalia for parts of their adult life, is that this interaction can best be understood from a multi-sited rather than a national perspective. Here, I find inspiration in the work of Keller (2013), who has coined the term 'worldly citizens'. He shows, using the example of immigrants, how it is possible to display civic virtue which is not grounded in national patriotism. Keller argues that an immigrant's sense of place, and of identification with particular communities and ways of life, often settles only on certain aspects of the new country. '[S]he may yet have a strong sense of place, and a strong sense of which places do and do not feel like home. It is just that 'home' for her is not coextensive with a single country' (Keller 2013: 245).

The concept of multi-sited embeddedness is useful to describe this reality, as it suggests openness in relation to the importance of the local, national or transnational. In this sense, it presents an important aspect of spatiality, alongside socio-spatial positionality and translocalism, discussed in the introductory article to this special issue (Koinova 2017). In some instances, engagements and feelings of belonging are very localized, whereas on other occasions embeddedness has a transnational or global (cosmopolitan) character. Fumanti and Werbner (2010) illustrate how migration introduces a process of expanding horizons, permeable ethnicity, intercultural communication and the creation of citizenship. They encourage researchers to understand activities that take place in the transnational social field as 'rooted in moral ideas and values' and call for reviving the notion of 'virtuous citizenship'. At the same time, such moral rooting can be strongly linked to personal and communal ties to people in the country of origin. Sinatti and Horst (2015) argue that much research on diaspora development contributions reduces 'virtuous citizenship' to ethnicity. Such work often 'does not take into account that a shared sense of humanity might underpin the urge to assist, the wish to help others as fellow human beings. Instead it assumes that nationality or ethnicity is a defining feature of the relationship between helper and helped' (Sinatti and Horst 2015: 141). By using the concept of multi-sited embeddedness, I aim to provide an alternative to binary understandings of embedded belonging and acting which focus on national or ethnic identities only. Multi-sited embeddedness leaves space for gender, age, class, religion and a host of other identity markers to play a role as well.

Young Somalis (re)connecting

VIGNETTE 1: Hassan Jaamac, early 20s, Mogadishu

> We came to Norway in 1999 and I went to school there. We used to live in a small place outside Oslo. I grew up with Norwegians. All of my friends were Norwegians. I was playing football there. I used to work there as well. I worked in a shopping centre. I was the first black person to work in that shopping centre. [...] Every black person that was in the shopping centre used to come and say hello to me.

> After I completed my High School I felt that the town was too small for me and I wanted to see other places. My family and I moved to London, UK. I continued to go back to Norway at least three or four times a year to visit my friends. In the UK, I started my own company. It was a business like Dahabshiil

[remittance business]. My father's friends, my father and I put some money together. I worked there for four years. I still felt like something was missing. So I sold the business and moved to Somalia and started a business here. I had a couple of shops here – I would sell them every few months or so. Once I was in the hotel industry. Then I went to the family farm that we had outside of Mogadishu. At that time it was very scary but I thought since I was not in the government, it would be ok. I had already taken a big risk coming here.

After that I went back to the UK but I couldn't really fit in anymore so I returned to Somalia. I continued to do some business here. I also did some courses on security in London. I thought Somalia needed to get some proper security. The security that we have is [provided by] the old people who have been in the job forever. In order for Somalia to get better, we need to come back and help them out.

The Somali Civil War started in December 1990 and may be said to have ended in December 2012, when the first permanent central government since the start of the civil war was installed in Mogadishu. However, many challenges remain and the political and security situation in south-central Somalia and at the border between Somaliland and Puntland remains very fragile. In the meantime, the self-declared and unrecognized independent state of Somaliland has had stability for over two decades. An estimated 1 to 1.5 million Somalis fled the country over the last 25 years, and many have rebuilt their lives elsewhere. Regional refugees have often been expected to stay in refugee camps under humanitarian regimes, severely limiting their opportunities to rebuild their lives. Those further abroad - including in Europe and North America - have often had better opportunities for a fresh start. Many of the first to move – in the late 1980s and early 1990s - were the country's urban elite, and their families are among those who have been successful in re-establishing themselves. They are also amongst the ones who are now returning with the aim of contributing to the rebuilding of Somalia, often having kept transnational connections while in exile.

Minnesota is amongst the top destinations for Somalis, and in recent years, Minneapolis is said to host the largest number of Somalis in the US. Based on Community Surveys, the total number in the United States is estimated to be at 151,838 (2014 1-year estimate), while the estimates for Minnesota are at 38,873 (2011-2013 3-year average)[4]. The highest concentration can be found in the 'Twin Cities' Minneapolis and Saint Paul, but small towns like Rochester, Marshall and Owatanna also attracted considerable numbers in recent years. Somalis in Minnesota arrived mainly in the mid to late 90s (Layman and Basnyat 2003). Some were officially resettled but the large majority of Somalis residing in Minneapolis came from other states (Mattessich 2000). Secondary movement from within the US was stimulated by low unemployment rates, an open, welcoming climate towards migrants, relatively good social security arrangements and education and health care provisions, as well as the large Somali community already settled there.

In Norway, there are 28,300 Somali immigrants, and 11,800 children of Somali immigrants[5]. Half of them are based in Oslo. While a few individuals came as seafarers in the 1970s, Somali refugees started coming to Norway in the mid-1980s, from Somaliland, with an increase after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. But the largest group of refugees from Somalia arrived in the 2000s and later, making the Norwegian-Somali community a group with a very recent history in Norway. Norway has only recently become a country hosting any substantial number of immigrants. The past decade has seen a surge in annual immigration, with numbers almost doubling between 2005 and 2011. Norwegian society is still in the process of adjusting to greater diversity and a new reality

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[4] American Fact Finder data, http://factfinder.census.gov.
[5] https://www.ssb.no/statistikkbanken, figures for 2016, retrieved 20 June 2016.

where being Norwegian is defined by more than birthplace or parentage. As Marianne Gullestad has argued, in Norway equality is understood all too often as sameness, underpinning the ethnic construction of national identity (Gullestad 2004). Norwegian-Somalis, as a large and visible immigrant group, often bear the brunt of lingering stereotypes and prejudice (Horst et al. 2013).

Since 2011-2012, the number of people returning to south-central Somalia has increased considerably[6]. While no statistics are available, full daily flights into Mogadishu offered by Turkish Airlines and the visibility of diaspora investments in business and real estate suggest that return to Mogadishu is now much more frequent than it was a few years ago. This is not only remarkable considering the continued security challenges that the region faces, but also if we take into account that a considerable number of those who are among the first to return left Somalia as children. All of those we interviewed returned with citizenship and many came with considerable resources, including higher education. The return was furthermore rarely permanent but often circular and for limited periods of time. The vast majority of those we spoke to in Somalia, Norway and the United States did not return for longer than three years, with many indicating they had only been back for shorter visits.

Rather than 'return' in the sense of it being a final stop in a migration trajectory from a place of departure in the country of origin to a place of arrival in the country of destination and back, the reality of the individuals we spoke to is better understood in terms of a multi-sited and transnational sense of civic engagement and belonging. Many of those we spoke to had engagements in, and experiences from, more than one national context. Hassan Jamaac's story illustrates this well and shows how identity markers like skin color and age, as well as contextual experiences that included feelings of otherness, life experience in a range of locations, livelihood opportunities, and concerns over security, all contribute to this fluctuating and multi-sited sense of (non-)belonging.

Belonging as multi-sited embeddedness

VIGNETTE 2: Maimuna Omar, Oslo

> Maimuna Omar, who is in her early thirties, lives in Oslo with her young child. Her family is originally from Puntland but lived in Saudi Arabia when the war broke out. She came to Norway as a child, and tells us 'I feel that I am part of the 'Norwegian we'. At the same time, I feel I am a part of the 'Somali we', also in Somalia. And I understand myself to be part of the 'Muslim we'.' These parts on occasion point her in different directions, and this is especially the case when she feels that *others* define her as outside these groups. She provides the example of how others would define a black girl with hijab as outside the 'Norwegian we', and discusses the small, everyday ways in which she is actively engaged in redefining this 'Norwegian we' so that the black girl with hijab is included.
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> Events in her teenage and young adult life like 9-11 and 22-7 have intensified her need to claim inclusion into the collective Norwegian we more strongly. At the same time, for *Maimuna herself* the different parts of her identity come together in a natural way most of the time. She explains how occupied and engaged she is with societal, collective issues, in her neighbourhood and her child's school. Maimuna also has an active role in the mosque in order to challenge some of the structural inequalities she sees in society facing minorities in their dealings with Child Protection Services. Her activism in these different areas ultimately led her to take up a political position as well.
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> When she explains her financial contributions to Somalia, she says 'In a way we are a humanitarian organization, you see, in relation to the people who are there who may be sick or have limited sources

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[6] Return to Somaliland has a longer history, and has become more substantial especially since the introduction of the multi-party system in 2003 (Bradbury et al. 2003).

of income... In a way it's my mom's humanitarian organization and we [Maimuna and her siblings] pay into her account. To take care of others and to feel like 'ok, we are the welfare state and that's really special'... But that's just something you grow up with, that you are supposed to feel responsibility'.

How is belonging and community understood by those who belong to different national groups simultaneously, and is this fundamentally different from having a range of identities to draw on that do not revolve around multiple ethnic or national identities, for example as Catholic, vegetarian or feminist? How do individuals balance their own understanding of national identity with that of others? What makes young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans feel a sense of belonging, and where? And what happens with these identifications upon (re)turning to Somalia? While these questions are too big to explore in a generalizing way based on 80 in-depth interviews, a number of aspects clearly present themselves from the lived experiences of our informants. For Maimuna, who is civically engaged in her neighbourhood, with national issues, and transnationally, her family- and Somali background shape her choices and her sense of responsibility as much as her experiences growing up in Saudi Arabia and Norway impact her actions. She feels a sense of belonging to several communities even though she also experiences exclusion from those communities, which she actively counters through attempts to redefine what it means to be Norwegian, for example.

In an overview of the literature on belonging, Antonsich (2010) identifies belonging firstly as *personal*: the individual feeling 'at home', attached to, and rooted in a place. Secondly, Antonsich understands belonging as *interpersonal* in terms of the social aspects of discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion. The two aspects are intrinsically linked, since whether an individual feels at home never solely has to do with place but always with their social embeddedness within that place. This social embeddedness furthermore may be defined by more than just relationships with people actually living in that place. As a transnational citizen, one can feel connected to an ethnic group through family ties and a shared history; to residents of the city where one lives through shared affiliations and everyday experiences; to members of a particular religion through a shared faith and shared religious practice; and to activists within, say, the global environmental movement through a shared concern for the environment (Horst and Olsen in review).

An individual's sense of belonging to a group or a place is constructed in relations with others. Kassim (2016) builds on Barth's (1969) understanding of ethnic boundary creation and maintenance to show how young Norwegian-Somalis in everyday situations negotiate between understandings and practices of Norwegianness and *Soomaalinimo*. As Maimuna's story speaks to, in those everyday situations their own understandings of these concepts may differ from what others ascribe to these. Factors like skin colour, ethnicity and religion as well as language skills, clan and religious knowledge can all impact how individuals are perceived and what identities they are ascribed (Kassim 2016). Understandings of where the boundaries lie – some of which, including skin colour, are understood to be absolute - is just as crucial as the actual 'cultural stuff' that one may or may not be fully competent in. In these daily negotiations, confidence in one's own identity, support from family and friends, and having groups of likeminded people with whom one can be oneself are all important factors for the ease with which one is embedded in and moves between different sites.

Besides imagined boundaries, 'the cultural stuff' in terms of language skills, cultural competence and religious knowledge, matters (Kassim 2016). Familiarity with 'the cultural stuff' however differs greatly within the group of young people we interviewed. For a number of individuals, turning or

returning to Somalia led to the realization that they lacked the necessary 'cultural stuff' competence in Somalia. Halima Osman, a young woman in her 20s who is a student in Minnesota and returned to Mogadishu after leaving at the age of three, told us:

> Definitely, I think I am more grounded here than I am anywhere else. Even when I was in Somalia, I kind of felt like a foreigner. I just didn't really understand how things were done, while here you just know why people are doing things. Everything makes sense, but over there things didn't feel like anything made sense. (Halima Osman, St. Paul)

Halima is not alone in this experience, which contributes to a situation where Somali young adults who travel to Somalia independently or with their families, often hang out with others from the diaspora. Our informants indicate they feel a greater sense of ease among diaspora youth because they recognize upbringing and experiences and 'do not have to explain themselves'.

By introducing differently placed informants, I have wanted to show that our data clearly indicates that there is not one experience of belonging to multiple sites. Furthermore, it is clear from the data that multi-sited embeddedness is not simply a smooth sense of belonging to a number of specific locations. First of all, individuals face the fact that others challenge their claims to belong, as Maimuna expressed when she indicated that most Norwegians' sense of 'the Norwegian we' did not include a black girl with hijab even though she felt Norwegian. Secondly, the individuals we interviewed often felt they lacked knowledge and experience in certain locations because they had lived their lives elsewhere and thus missed much of the subtle everyday cultural codes and types of information. As such, multi-sited embeddedness is also about a fluctuating sense of not belonging. One way in which young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans addressed this and claimed belongin, was through their acts of civic engagement.

Civic practice as multi-sited embeddedness

VIGNETTE 3: Roble Hussein, Mogadishu

> Roble Hussein, who is in his early thirties, lives in Mogadishu. He has been there for nearly six months when we interview him. He is from Minnesota, where he is married with children. He works as an advisor under the Office of the Prime Minister and has worked in other government jobs before that. Besides his job, he provides assistance to a range of NGOs and offers trainings and workshops at Universities.
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> Roble was born in Mogadishu and completed both his primary and secondary education there. He left Somalia for Sudan in the late 1990s to do his bachelor's degree there. From Sudan he moved to Egypt, where he worked and did additional studies. Over ten years ago, he proceeded to the United States and went to Minnesota. Roble starts working in two blue collar jobs, after which he continues his studies. He completes an MA and when he is done, he decides to go back to Somalia.
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> When we ask what influenced him to go back he says 'I always knew one thing and that was that I would add more value here than in the US. I knew that I could contribute in many ways. Being here has given me the opportunity to demonstrate who I am and what I am capable of. In the US, I am invisible but here, I am truly visible. At the University, there are people who benefit from my knowledge, my experience, my values and so on.'

What does it mean to be engaged in society when as a young individual, you are embedded in a number of locations? When you say you belong to the Norwegian we, the Somali we, the Muslim we? Or when you have been raised in several countries in your childhood and youth, like Hassan, Maimuna and Roble all have? What does it mean to want to make a difference, a contribution to

society, when you feel you are part of or in between all these contexts? Where do engagements take place, and what society or community are they targeted to?

Several of the people we spoke to related the civic engagements they described to a wish, a need and/or a responsibility to make a positive contribution to society. There is the sense amongst many of our informants that as a citizen, one needs to contribute the knowledge and competence one has to the betterment of society. Elsewhere, I have argued that refugees in particular have a very strong sense of societal responsibility that closely links to their experiences of conflict, flight and exile (Horst forthcoming). Our informants wish to draw from the range of competences they built up in a number of societies, including language skills, life experience and formal qualifications. Where they wish to make use of those competences depends on the individual's perceptions of where their contribution makes the greatest difference but also on what their best career-step might be and which place the individual is most oriented towards. Amina Matan expresses her commitment to making a contribution in Puntland as follows:

> I want to be able to sit down with my grandchildren and tell them, 'hey, when I was young, I took my bag and moved across the ocean and landed in a place called Somalia where you are actually from and I was part of the group that, you know, did something for the country. I took part in it (Amina Matan, Garowe).

Civic engagement is understood by our informants as making a contribution to society in a range of ways that are not traditionally included in research on active citizenship. Such research often focuses on political participation and membership in organizations. It thus replicates active citizenship discourses in liberal states which stress the need for (migrant) citizens to participate in society by voting and volunteering. Furthermore, this narrow focus also lacks relevance in other parts of the world. For example, in conflict and post-conflict contexts state institutions function only to a very limited extend and thus, the role of citizens and the civic engagement they display is quite different. Individuals like Hassan, Maimuna and Roble aim to make civic contributions by investing, sending remittances and supporting the state and individuals with their competence and knowledge.

Civic engagement was defined by some as participating in order to do something for others beyond oneself. There is a very strong sense of community amongst Somalis which has its base in the clan- and *xeer* system, where social groups perform functions that in other contexts, states perform. As such, civic engagement is an important aspect taught to Somali children from an early age. While many young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans lack extensive knowledge and competence in the functioning of the clan system, the sense of collective responsibility is often passed on and benefits a range of communities. Ladan Harun from Minnesota explains:

> My father had great influence on me while I was growing up. From him, I learned the sense of community. Because I am a big believer that when people come together they can achieve great things and form stronger community. My attitude towards the bigger community is not something I learned in school but something I was raised with (Ladan Harun, Minnesota).

Our informants do not only refer to their family and Somali background but also to growing up in the United States and Norway as influencing their understanding of the need to contribute to the collective good. Khadra Idris in Oslo points out 'we live in a democratic society where the will to change things stands strong. Civic engagement is about collective responsibility'. This also means that individuals have a responsibility to act, even in situations where this might be uncomfortable. Idil Abdilahi is a young woman in her 20s who lives in a neighbourhood in Oslo where many Somalis live. She describes a situation in front of the local supermarket where a group of teenagers, including a

boy with a Somali background, hang out. The teenage Somali boy insults two gay men holding hands at the same time she passes them, and she finds herself scolding the boy for this, attempting to correct his behaviour. Idil explains why she had felt the need to act:

> I feel that it is unfair to talk to people like that, I feel it is unjust to treat people like that... I do not want to be powerless and go from there feeling I could not do anything. [...] It has a lot to do with community (*fellesskapet*). I do not want people to feel excluded. Just like, if those two guys would have passed the Somali teenager and had said 'hey, you foreigner, why are you standing here?' [...] I see it in Norway, I see that people do not dare much. It is a culture where we do not get involved in other people's business [...] But I feel it is very important to react, something needs to wake up in you when you see another person being treated unjustly (Idil Abdilahi, Oslo).

The idea of community that Idil refers to here, is crucial to explore further. Not only can it be multi-sited in relation to different national contexts, but there is also the question of what the collective refers to within or beyond each national context. Maimuna Omar explains her move into local politics from a wish to make a contribution to Norwegian society at large:

> A short time ago, I decided to become politically active. I understood that it wasn't necessarily within minority environments that I was going to be able to make change happen, but I needed to be 'out there'... So that I can stop talking about my hijab but rather talk about drop-outs in secondary schools, talk about swimming lessons, talk about recycling, talk about the labour market and how it can be more inclusive and enabling more people to be called in for interviews and such [...] My perspective is missing out there and it is important to have more voices to gain more perspectives (Maimuna Omar, Oslo).

A number of the young people we spoke to, in particular in Norway, saw the importance of contributing on a local and national level from a particular minority position. A number of them also identified this as the ultimate civic engagement: challenging stereotypes by being oneself and contributing to society. Idil Abdilahi from Oslo phrases this as follows: 'It is civic engagement to have to represent a whole nation in a good way and women in a good way and Islam in a good way'. By being 'good citizens' and participating actively in everyday life in Norway, but not conforming to perceptions of what Norwegians look like, Idil, Maimuna and others consciously challenge ideas of Norwegian-ness through everyday practices. Their civic engagement takes place in both formal arenas – such as when Maimuna engages in local politics in Oslo or Roble works as an advisor under the Office of the Prime Minister in Somalia – and through informal, everyday practices such as when Idil reacts to what she sees as unjust treatment of marginalized groups in her local neighbourhood.

Conclusion

In this article, through the stories and words of young Somalis in Oslo, the Twin Cities, Mogadishu, Garowe and Hargeisa, I have shown that civic participation today is increasingly multi-sited, operating in, between and across specific locations. Growing numbers of people experience *multi-sited embeddedness*, and thus our dominant binary way of discussing civic engagement and belonging does not do justice to their everyday realities. This multi-sited embeddedness both relates to feelings of belonging and acts of engaging in communities, and throughout the article it has become clear that these two aspects are closely linked: we act because we belong and we belong because we act. But also, and as importantly, young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans act *in order to* belong. Their civic acts to contribute to society and community – ranging from speaking up against unjust acts in Oslo to working for the Federal Government of Somalia – are often deliberate claims made in order to be included in the national community, whether this is in the United States, Norway or Somalia.

Using the term multi-sited *embeddedness*, I do not want to suggest that these young individuals always belong, in every context. Multi-sited embeddedness clearly also leads to feelings of not being 'at home' at different times, in different places or with different social groups. It is a fluid experience that depends on time and context. Furthermore, there is a great variety of experiences and understandings of belonging and engagement. Yet what is the same across these differences, is the ability that young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans have to use different experiences and understandings across different locations. Norwegian and American society has shaped these young individuals as well as their Somali families have, and the experience of (re)turning to Somalia and being able to imagine life in different contexts impacts their sense of place and identification with particular communities and ways of life. By experiencing multiple perspectives and ways of doing things as part of their everyday reality, these young people have the potential of being worldly citizens (Keller 2013) that do not necessarily take things for granted and are very reflexive individuals. Throughout their move towards adulthood they go through a process of finding their own way, making their own choices as to where to belong and act – often ending up with a flexible mix of inspirations from different sites and settings.

The empirical data presented clearly confirms the literature that argues against dual understandings of identity as well as the literature that challenges either/or perceptions of integration and transnationalism (Erdal and Oeppen 2013). As I have illustrated in this article, the daily realities of the young people we interviewed bear witness to a multi-sited sense of embeddedness both in the ways they discuss identity and belonging and in terms of their civic engagements. This often happens without a strong sense of identity clash within this group of highly resourceful individuals. As Antonsich (2010) highlights however, belonging is not just about an individual feeling of being at home but also about the politics of belonging, which plays out in the negotiations between those claiming belonging and those in a position to grant it. In this paper I have argued that this interaction is not just taking place within one national community, but within a range of communities. The challenges that do occur largely occur in the meeting with an either/or discourse that forces individuals to choose between national identities or that excludes them from the national 'we', as is the case in Norway where skin-color and religion are identity markers that place young Norwegian-Somalis outside the 'Norwegian we' (see also Gullestad 2002). Illustrating the value of conceptualizing the experiences of young Norwegian-Somalis and Somali-Americans as multi-sited embeddedness, the article has aimed to make a contribution to challenging this exclusionary discourse by showing how far removed it is from the daily lived realities of increasing numbers of young individuals in Norway and the United States.

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