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TRANSNATIONAL AND LOCAL NEGOTIATIONS OF IDENTITY:

Experiences from second-generation young people in Finland

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Abstract

This article discusses how second-generation identities are negotiated in the intersection of multi-ethnic realities of everyday life in Helsinki and often multi-sited kin-based transnational ties. The discussion draws from a research project that examined the second generation's reproduction of transnational fields of relations and identity negations. First, the article outlines the societal context of ethnic hierarchies in Finland that structure identity negotiations. Then it presents four case studies, each representing a specific combination of transnational ties and experiences and local identity negotiations. The intersection of a transnational context, local structures of ethnic hierarchies, and family practices places the children between competing reference points that lead to distinct identities between, but also, within different ethnic groups. The article concludes that children of immigrants do not simply continue their parents' transnational practices, but reproduce and interpret the transnational context as a part of their local lives. Transnational identity construction is an exercise that does not lead to transgressive identities related to global space, but to local struggles for a positive identity. Nevertheless, it opens up a global perspective for identity negotiations that is not contained within the local or national context.

Keywords

Second generation • youth • transnationalism • identity

1 Introduction

A large body of research on both sides of the Atlantic addresses the ethnic identities of the second generation, and its becoming (or not becoming) a part of the national group. These studies tell us that national identification seems to be harder and harder to achieve, which contradicts the predictions of the classical American assimilation theories that ethnic identification will fade or at least become "symbolic" (e.g. Purkayastha 2005). Instead, ethnic, religious, and especially local identifications can be stronger and also simultaneous (Groenewold 2008: 105–111; Kasinitz et al. 2006; Myllyniemi 2010: 20–24). These developments are shaped by intensified global contexts and transnational ties, new migration from the Global South, and increasingly diverse migration populations, as well as discrimination in the host societies. Furthermore, young people's sense of ethnicity heightens when they grow up and reach early adulthood (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Group boundaries seem to be maintained, not eroded (Wimmer 2008).

The transnational dimension has only recently been added to the analyses of identity struggles (Åkesson 2011; Baldassar 2001; Louie 2006; Purkayastha 2005; Smith 2006). Many have doubted the relevance of transnational ties in the lives of the second generation, mostly because the definition of transnationalism is limited to certain activities, such as remitting, visiting, and knowledge of parental language. Measured this way, it seems only a small proportion of children of immigrants are involved in transnational activities in the US context (Kasinitz et al. 2008). However, participation

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seems to be higher among, for example, Moroccan and Turkish origin groups in Europe (Groenewold 2008: 119–120).

Despite these doubts, many argue that the second generation will remain active in other societies as well, because of the better and cheaper opportunities to keep in touch and travel. Moreover, along with some other scholars (Levitt 2009; Smith 2006), I argue for a contextual understanding of transnationalism in the lives of the second-generation young people. Measuring certain activities as an indicator of transnationalism does not capture the realities of the second generation (Gowricharn 2009: 1624). Regardless of their own participation, young people are variously incorporated in a multilayered web of border-spanning relations, and situated in competing ideological, moral, and cultural reference points, symbolic boundaries, and categorising powers in the various nodes of their transnational social networks (Levitt 2009; Purkayastha 2005). The nodes of the transnational network have been mostly conceptualised as being located in one sending and one receiving town, area, or country (e.g. Smith 2006), but this article shows that depending on the family histories of migration, the second generation can be situated within a multi-sited network with multiple nodes in multiple countries (see also Hautaniemi forthcoming). Multi-sitedness shifts the emphasis from the relationship to the place of origin to the network's structure and the resources it implies.

The studies have shown that some groups develop ethnicity that achieves a balance between the constraints and opportunities in multiple places and nations (Purkayastha 2005); others propose a model that sees ethnic identity being constantly challenged in the various places of the network (Smith 2006; Valentine et al. 2009). For some, transnational relations offer a chance for a personalized ethnic identity that challenges the more abstract categorizations in the host country (Olwig 2007).

With these insights in mind, I aim at contributing to the evolving discussion on identity negotiations in a transnational context. Contrary to studies on transnational negotiations of ethnic identity, which address and compare specific ethnic groups (Åkesson 2011; Louie 2006; Smith 2006; Valentine et al. 2009), I examine the intersection of multi-ethnic realities of everyday life in Helsinki and kin-based, often multi-sited transnational ties. The discussion draws from a research project that examined how young people who belong to culturally distant groups and occupy a lower place in the ethnic hierarchies in Finland negotiate their identities and reproduce the transnational fields of relations. The article presents four case studies – Adar, Samir, Lalita, and Maryam – each representing a specific combination of transnational ties and experiences and local identity negotiations. In this way I aim not only at discussing the complexities of multi-sited identity negotiations, but also the reproduction and re-interpretation of the transnational context.

Identity negotiations in a transnational context are far from simple, but are forged on many fronts: in relation to ethnic hierarchies and related discourses in Finland, local multi-ethnic contexts, transnational network and their transnational families, as well as the different nodes of the network which all present youths to different sets of hierarchies and discourses. Within this context young people respond to their complex contexts in diverse ways. Transnational relations, and particularly visits, can alienate from the place of origin and support minority ethnic identification in Finland, as Adar. Another path supported by better experiences during visits leads to an identification in which both contexts, Finland and the place of origin, become meaningful. The ethnic hierarchies in Finland are combated with a stronger ethnic identity. The third path involves cherishing orientations to other places, either to the place of origin or to the global opportunity structure (cf. Hautaniemi forthcoming) whether as a response to the discriminatory atmosphere in Finland or just because it is possible.

The article is structured as follows: First, I outline the societal context in which identity negotiations take place in the local lives of young people in Finland. This context is formed by the new migration and changing ethnic hierarchies in Finland since the beginning of the 1990s. The specificities, especially the relevance of categories "immigrant" and "foreigner" which conflate people with varying cultural, social, and economic backgrounds, set the backdrop for any identity negotiations for the second generation in Finland. Consequently, I discuss my data in terms of general identity construction, not only in terms of ethnicity. Then I present the theoretical background, data, methods, and the four cases. In the conclusion I will discuss the prospects of identity in the transnational context.

2 New migration, new symbolic boundaries, and the transnational second generation in Finland

Along with European countries such as Italy and Ireland, Finland turned from a country of emigration to a net receiver of immigrants only in the beginning of the 1990s. Currently approximately 3.1% of the population are foreign citizens (Statistics Finland 2011), but the number of immigrants and children born in Finland to one or two immigrant parents is estimated to amount to 6% of the population (Martikainen & Haikkola 2010). A significant number of them are concentrated in the metropolitan region around Helsinki. In the 1990s the major sources of immigration were return migration from the former Soviet Union by certain Finnish-origin groups, humanitarian migration from conflict areas, and marriages with native Finns. From the beginning, these groups have included people from different socioeconomic and occupational backgrounds, making the ethnic/national groups internally heterogeneous. Because of the small number of immigrants from relatively many sending countries, ethnic/national groups in Finland are quite small. Migrants from Estonia and Russia are however an exception.

In Helsinki these migration patterns have led to different local outcomes. While Western immigrants are scattered around Helsinki, non-Western immigrants have concentrated in certain

poorer, lower middle class/working class neighbourhoods (although ethnic segregation remains low compared to most European cities) (Vilkama 2010). The respondents in this study lived in these areas with small, but significant immigrant population that is multi-ethnic, multireligious, and socioeconomically mixed. The complex interaction between national and immigrant minorities and majority shapes the experiences of the second generation, rather than a relationship between immigrants and majority.

The new migration rapidly increased the ethnic and cultural diversity in Finland and affected ethnic relations. In the eyes of the majority these boundaries do not necessarily rest on groupings along the lines of ethnic or national origin. Instead, Finland has witnessed the emergence of a negatively defined and rather vague category "immigrant" (Huttunen 2009). Koskela (2011) offers a more nuanced view of this distinction. Based on surveys on majority attitudes (Jaakkola 2005, 2009) she proposes that the ethnic hierarchy in Finland is constituted along two axes: Cultural familiarity/proximity and educational/employment status placing presumably highly skilled, preferably Western migrants on top and the presumably unskilled humanitarian migrants from the Global South at the bottom. Finns prefer Scandinavians and white Americans (Jaakkola 2005: 72) and are more favourable towards the Polish and Estonians compared to Russians and Somalis (Jaakkola 2009: 52–53). Religion and "race" (phenotype), and other visible cues provide additional bases for making social distinctions (Bail 2008; Hautaniemi 2004). Koskela (2011) further suggests that the former are sometimes called "foreigners" (*ulkomaalainen*) as opposed to the more negative term "immigrants" (*maahanmuuttaja*). In lay understanding, the vague term "immigrant" is thus associated with the bottom category and has become a major new symbolic boundary in Finland.

Furthermore, Finland lacks a higher-order and encompassing identity. National identity in Finland is closely intertwined with ethnicity, which makes it difficult for anyone without parents of native Finnish backgrounds to be Finnish (Lepola 2000). This differs from the conceptualisations of national identity in some other European countries. Among young people, the borders of Finnishness are policed with additional criteria, such as "ordinariness", which is required from anyone in order to become Finnish (e.g. Souto 2011: 111, 138).

This article concerns young people who are easily categorised as "immigrants", although they are differently positioned in relation to both Finnishness and the "immigrant" category. The ethnic hierarchy presented above does not structure identities in a totalising manner. Second-generation identities, friendships, and categorisation are situational and alliances and boundaries can change (Anthias 2001). However, I suggest that young people especially to face the danger of being categorised as "immigrants" are forced to negotiate the hierarchy and its negative attributes. This has twofold consequences for the identities of young people. The hierarchy and associated discourses generate identities by categorisation (Jenkins 2008). This categorisation in turn forces "immigrants" and others to take a stand towards these boundaries (cf. Waters 1999). It also downplays ethnic identities and groups, especially in the second generation.

In response to the boundary "immigrant"–"Finnish", young people with immigrant backgrounds who fall in the category "immigrant" have created different responses. They highlight their high ambitions, respectability, and similarity with the majority (Peltola 2010) or emphasise cultural differences towards majority representing their cultural traditions morally superior to Finnish culture (Souto 2011; cf. Espiritu 2001). Young people have also taken advantage of the difference between "foreigners" and "immigrants" and have created an interethnic, collective identity that they label "foreigner" (*ulkomaalainen*) (Haikkola 2010; Souto 2011). Thus, young people of various immigrant backgrounds are not necessarily trying to cross the symbolic boundary in order to feel or be accepted as "Finnish", but draw boundaries to positively distinguish themselves from majority Finns, which seems to follow the developments in other Western countries (Dümmler et al. 2010; Espiritu 2001; also Waters 1999: 285–325). They renegotiate the meaning of the category "immigrant" and rename it. In this article I focus on how the transnational dimension enters into these negotiations.

3 Theoretical background

Two distinct theoretical approaches underlie the analysis of the article. First, I understand the transnational context from a network analytical perspective. Following Olwig (2007), the transnational context is conceptualised as *fields of relations* that encompass both local and translocal social relationships that form the transnational context of everyday life (Olwig 2007: 8–9). A network analytical perspective emphasises multiple destinations with multiple nodes rather than a link between a single sending and receiving area (Brettell 2000: 107).

Identity processes, on the other hand, are understood from an interactional perspective. In his general theory of social identity, Jenkins (2008) has taken up Fredrik Barth's (1969) original notion of group formation as a process of boundary making. Social identities, such as ethnicity, emerge as a product of simultaneous internal (self-identification) and external (imposed) categorisation. Internal identification involves identifying self or group qualities and categorisation, for example, differentiating oneself or one's group from others and defining others. External categorisation refers to labelling and categorising processes in interactional (everyday interaction) and institutional (in institutions, organisation, or statistics) order (Jenkins 2008: 40–45). The production can be harmonious: the external identification and internal identification can reinforce each other, validating the maintenance of a (group) identity. On the other hand, especially in the cases of migrant minorities, the external attribution and how others see the group in question can be in conflict with the self/group conception. In the search for a positive

identity, the categorising power produces resistance, defence and differentiations, new group identities, assimilative attempts, or ways of "talking back", and discursively constructing one's own group as superior (Wimmer 2008: 1036–1043).

Together these models imply three things: Although the place of residence – Finland in this case – is the most relevant context for the second generation, the network analytical perspective draws attention to multiple nodes. Each of these nodes that people are embedded in presents its own identity-conditioning factors, such as histories of local belonging and exclusion, and patterns of class and ethnic segregation (Vertovec 2001: 578–579). Identities are forged in relation to structures and categorisation in multiple destinations, and because they are situated in such a complex context they are complicated and ambiguous (Smith 2006). On the other hand, the view directs attention to how the network structure itself conditions identities (Olwig 2007).

4 Data and methods

During 2006–2008 I interviewed 29 young people aged 13–16 living in Helsinki. 16 were girls and 13 boys. All belonged to the broadly defined second generation (e.g. Purkayastha 2005): 10 were born in Finland, 12 migrated before the age of 7 (the starting age of compulsory school in Finland). 7 came during the first school year (ages 8 and 9). One respondent was 11 years old when her family moved. The group had origins in Russia, Estonia, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Kurdish region (Iraq, Iran, and Turkey), the Middle East and North Africa, Central Africa, Somalia, Central and East Asia, Australia, and the Indian subcontinent. Three had a mixed nationality family background. Most families (23/29) entered Finland as refugees, asylum seekers, through family reunification, or marriage.

The study group is diverse but at the same time united by their structural location in Finland that sets the backdrop for their experiences (Anthias 2001; Purkayastha 2005). They were more or less easily placed in the constructed category "immigrants" described above, their parents had trouble finding employment in Finland (except for the Russian origin parents; see Forsander 2004), and they lived in the immigrant-populated and lower middle class/working class neighbourhoods in eastern Helsinki. Moreover, they all had a transnational family stretching to their places of origin and/or to other countries in Europe, Russia, the USA, the UK, and the Middle East. Transnationality was a family practice, based on obligation and reciprocity between family members.

I contacted the interviewees though two schools. I made the initial contact with potential participants through a teacher in both schools. After this, I used a snowballing method. I asked the students I had already met to suggest others. Some students also started talking to me in the school lobby, where students with immigrant backgrounds seemed to spend time during and after school hours. Some refused by just leaving, but some were interested and agreed to be interviewed. I explained the interview and my research interests.

The interviews were mostly pair interviews with friends. Pair interviews were chosen to make the interview situation more comfortable for the young interviewees (Strandell 2010: 102–103). This technique proved successful as the interviews were quite open and relaxed and the two participants often commented on each other's statements. The interviews were done in Finnish. All the respondents said that they also knew their parents' language, but everybody was not fluent and many reported having difficulties in writing.

The interviews consisted of three themes: a short life story, mapping of networks in Finland and other countries (transnational relations), and a thematic interview addressing children's family backgrounds, conceptions of their transnational networks, transnational practices and identity, ethnicity, and belonging. The network data reflects their concrete local and transnational attachments and the interviews their subjective conceptions of their positions in Finland and transnationally. Combined, the data questions how their transnational context is reproduced and understood and how it interacts with notions of ethnicity, immigration, and social boundaries in Finland. The data was analysed as a multiple-case study (Yin 2003) whereby each person interviewed represents a single case. I wrote case report of each person's network configuration, network formation, and personal relationships and identity work, including self-categorisation, other-categorisation, and distinctions. These cases were then compared to each other to identify commonalities and differences.

All the respondents' names in this article are pseudonyms. Some details about family histories have also been changed to ensure the anonymity of the informants. Throughout the text I will use the respondent's terminology of their places of origin, such as Kurdistan or Somaliland, which is not necessarily the same as the officially recognised nation-states their parents came from.

5 Four case stories

In the following I present four individual cases: Adar, Lalita, Samir, and Maryam. The cases represent the various places of origin and the diverse transnational attachments, practices, and feelings of belonging in the data. In the case descriptions I focus on transnational and local contexts, the relationship with the place of origin and other places, how return visits are represented, and how the respondents evoke similarities and differences in relation to these contexts.

5.1 Adar

Adar was a 15-year-old boy whose parents were Kurds from Iraq. They came to Finland in the early 1990s and Adar was born a few years later. His family was relatively well off and his brothers were self-employed in the fast food sector that many Kurdish immigrants are working in (Wahlbeck 2008). Adar was both locally and transnationally connected. He had friends with immigrant backgrounds at school and associated with his cousins regularly. His parents were actively in touch with their relatives and acquaintances in both Iraqi Kurdistan and other European countries, and Adar had also visited their hometown and other cities in Kurdistan a few times. Both of his parents participated in the evolving Kurdish diaspora politics and Kurdish cultural life in Finland. They were active in a Kurdish organisation and Adar was a member of its youth section, but mostly because “mum wants me to”, as he stated. Still, in spite of his relative reluctance, he planned on continuing the organisational activities, because he considered them “good for the Kurds who live in Finland”.

Adar’s social ties and participation in the Kurdish associations might lead one to think that he had a strong ethnic identity and was devoted to the Kurdish community in Helsinki/Finland. However, like the transnationally mobile Mexican second-generationers in New York studied by Smith (2006), Adar was in an ambivalent position. He had mixed feelings about Iraqi Kurdistan as a geographical place, his relatives and other people in Kurdistan, other Kurds and Kurdish community in Finland, and finally native Finns and Finnish culture.

First of all, he was not particularly excited about Kurdistan. He could not imagine living there and visits had turned out as a bit of a burden. Although he considered that Kurdistan was sometimes “cool”, in his opinion it was a little bit boring and they stayed too long:

> Adar: When we go to Kurdistan we stay for over two months or a month. [---] First two weeks are ok, because you meet relatives, but then, the same faces, no computer. Well, I bring my mp3 player. But it’s so annoying on the streets, shoes get dirty. And you can’t go anywhere after nine o’clock, because of bomb attacks and stuff.

Further, he did not feel close to his relatives in Kurdistan and his grandparents had recently died. As the case with many second-generation visitors, Adar had faced some difficulties with and alienation from the locals (cf. Åkesson 2011; Smith 2006). He distinguished himself from the people in Kurdistan and Muslims in general stating that people in “Kurdistan and all Muslims countries” are “very prejudiced”. Contrary to many others in my data, he did not know any cousins or other young people of his age in Kurdistan, so he had no one in particular to keep in touch with or hang out with during visits. Because of this, his transnational orientations had started to shift from Kurdistan to relatives in other European countries whom he had met briefly when they visited them during their trip to Kurdistan (cf. Lee 2007).

He had also started to think critically about some of his Kurdish male friends in Finland. Admitting he used to be like them too, he had started to distinguish himself from the “show-off” boys:

> Adar: I don’t *detest* them, but I don’t like Kurds. They are so loud, like tough guys. They get into fights a lot. I used to be like that too.

His educational and career plans also involved distancing from his friends. He planned to study cooking, but for “the sake of my own career, not because friends go there”. Adar wanted to have his own restaurant, but not a “pizza place, but a fancy restaurant”.

In contrast, Adar was devoted to the Kurdish diaspora politics and the production of a Kurdish nation-state in the diaspora (cf. Wahlbeck 1999). He referred to the (Iraqi) Kurdish region systematically as “Kurdistan” and “homeland”. This national project was, however, not really located in the geographical Kurdistan, but in the virtual space. Adar’s transnational orientations took a twist from an interest in geographical Kurdistan towards the virtual Kurdistan. During the interview we went online to check family pictures uploaded on the Internet. We also looked at some pictures of Adar’s family’s hometown and Iraqi Kurdistan we found in Google, the Web pages of the organisation his family was involved in, and a Web page Adar had created as part of a school project. It was dedicated to Kurdistan. While we surfed, Adar mobilised national symbols to create a “Kurdistan”:

> Adar: So that is our national food. *Dolma*. That’s aubergine, onions, some meat. And *fasul*, they’re beans. And *shihs kebap*. Every restaurant serves it. This link plays the national anthem of the home country. I did this in like a half an hour. And that is probably Kirkuk. It’s funny that almost all the houses have the national flag on the roof. See there, and there [points to a picture we found in Google]

Growing up, realising his family’s relative economic and civic success and getting to know the Kurdistan his family had left behind had sensitised him to the idea that you can be a Kurd in many different ways, and these can have drastically different consequences for your future. At the same time, Adar had started to distance himself from majority Finns, their customs (such as alcohol consumption), and accepting his mother’s wish to marry a Kurd. Thus, Adar was constructing an identity in relation to a rather complicated set of constraints: First of all, he differentiated along class lines within the Kurdish community and along cultural lines in contrast to the majority society. He also distanced from Kurdistan as a geographical place and the way of life there.

Adar was constructing a minority ethnic identity (Louie 2006), excluding, at the present, people from Kurdistan. Further, this minority Kurdishness did not resonate with the image of culturally inferior

and socioeconomically marginalised "immigrant". It was a respectable minority-ethnic Kurdish identity connected to organisational activities as well as family network in other European countries.

5.2 Lalita

Lalita's case was a story of a more balanced position within the transnational network and two geographical locations. She was a 13-year-old girl whose parents were originally from India. Besides her parents, other relatives lived in Helsinki as well. She had Indian friends through her family and spent time with them whenever families got together to celebrate religious holidays, such as *Diwali* (cf. Martikainen & Gola 2007). At school her friends were mostly other immigrant and second-generation youths and she spent time with them after school. Her parents kept in touch with relatives who were dispersed both in India and Western countries. Since Lalita had started to visit India with both of her parents and got to know her cousins, she also kept in touch with some of them.

Her family had a house in India where her grandparents lived and where they stayed during their visits. Her dispersed family gathered in India for family reunions regularly. At the time of the interview Lalita had visited four times. Lalita's relationship to India and her hometown there was quite different from Adar. While Adar's identity was based on feeling different from Kurdistan as a geographical place and the people who lived there, Lalita's identity was based on an affective relationship with her relatives and her hometown in India. She experienced her visits in a holistic way. They were affirmations of her belonging in the family network and she enjoyed discovering her roots, Indian culture, and religiosity. Visiting also made her compare Finland and India:

> LH: Tell me about India.
> Lalita: It's wonderful to be there, all the relatives come, dad's sisters and their children. They stay over at our place: And we rented a bus and went to see all historical places, religious places.
> LH: What else do you remember?
> Lalita: People, first and the surroundings, it's totally different than here. People are closer, friendlier. Of course here as well, but there, it's more affectionate. If you can't carry your shopping bags, people help you right away.

Lalita had been able to balance India and Finland in her transnational everyday life. The two locations seemed to live in a harmonious coexistence. While India was geographically far away, visits had made India socially close and reachable, and also enjoyable, which set Lalita's experiences apart from Adar's. Financial resources to travel and communication technologies made it easy to make the best of both places while staying in Finland.

Persons from the Indian subcontinent have an ambivalent position in the ethnic hierarchy in Finland (Koskela 2011). They look different, but they are often considered to work in the IT-sector although many – like Lalita' s father – are self-employed in restaurants (Martikainen & Gola 2007). Still, in response to what she felt was the "Finnish culture", Lalita engaged in a subtle negotiation of her identity as an Indian in Finland. She was careful not to denigrate Finnishness and Finnish culture. She appreciated Finland and acknowledged that in comparison to India, Finland is able to guarantee a decent standard of living to all of its citizens and human rights are more respected. However, as Adar, she distanced herself from what she considered morally doubtful Finnish traditions, such as alcohol consumption and the disrespect that young people show towards their parents. The morally and emotionally superior traditions could be found both in India and in the ways she and her family lived according to their Indian culture in Finland.

Besides moral and cultural superiority, Lalita's case can be interpreted as constructing "properness". Marja Peltola (2010) has noted that both adults and young people from non-Western countries use respectability, decency, and their educational and employment ambitions to present themselves as "decent citizens" and claim equality with the majority (see also Lamont & Bail 2007). The emphasis on decency is a way of challenging the negative images attached to "immigrants". Like many other girls (but not all) in the data, Lalita presented herself as a perfectly integrated, well-behaved young woman who was not involved in majority youths' teenage behaviours and had high educational and career ambitions. This was like claiming that she is as good, and maybe even better than any other majority Finn. Thus, for girls properness involved distancing from Finnish youth cultures. For some of the boys it involved an additional dimension: distancing from the potentially harmful peer relations with other youths with immigrant backgrounds.

5.3 Samir

Samir was a 15-year-old boy. His father was from North Africa and mother Finnish. Samir was closely connected to his transnational family networks and especially some of his cousins. He was deeply affected by his visits to his father's place of origin. He enjoyed the occasion of being surrounded by his large family and admired the more relaxed way of life of his father's country of origin. He shared Lalita's feeling of belonging among her relatives gathered in the hometown. People played football, went to the beach, and attended mosques. Most significant, was, however, the absence of Helsinki's racist and discriminatory atmosphere. Samir's appearance was not that different from white Finns, but still he had experienced racism. Hautaniemi (2004: 97–116) has shown how all boys with different skin colour became labelled as potential criminals in the public spaces of Helsinki at the turn of the century. Samir was partly affected by the general suspicion. As he had gotten to became older he had started to hang out in public places such as malls and fast

food joints with his friends who had immigrant backgrounds and who looked different. With them Samir became labelled as belonging to the undifferentiated group of "immigrants" and subject to discrimination. Souto (2011) has equally noticed that "immigrant" identity is somehow "contagious". In specific, tense local contexts even hanging out with friends with immigrant backgrounds is considered violating the norms and boundaries of "ordinary Finnishness" by the majority youths. Samir recognised his slippage to the wrong side of the boundary:

> LH: So do you experience a lot of racism as well?
> Samir: Well now that I hang out with Finns, then not. But if I am with a couple of foreigners, then somebody bothers you all the time. If you're a big group they [the police] labels you all.

The multi-ethnic group of young people with immigrant backgrounds formed the basis of most of the interviewees' social networks. The self-ascribed label "foreigner" and the associated personal and collective identity that differentiated from the negative image of "immigrant" as well as Finnishness was a source of positive self-identification for many. However, the boys especially came to realise that immigrant-only social circles might not be only positive. He was struggling with the same problem as Adar had with Kurdish boys and found himself in an ambivalent position: hanging out only with others with immigrant backgrounds (and despite defining this group positively as "foreigners") might have negative consequences for their futures. They recognised that their company might lead to incidents with the police and lower school achievement. Together with Samir's interview partner Ali who had a Somali background, we talked about their plans for secondary education. The interview fragment also reflects their attempts to avoid the restaurant sector, which has become an immigrant niche:

> Samir: I *have to* get into some school.
> LH: Where did you apply?
> Ali: To study computer technology and business administration.
> Samir: Business administration.
> LH: Is that typical? Did your friends apply to those schools as well?
> Ali: They all go to study cooking. I want to go to a school where these people don't go. [---] Where there are only Finns. That's where I want to go.
> Samir: In a Finnish [school] you can concentrate.
> Ali: And it's calm.
> Samir: If there are many foreigners, it's a zoo.

In my understanding, ethnicity or culture, or where everybody was from, did not play a part in my interviewees' relations with others who had an immigrant background, although the relationship with the minority ethnic groups in Helsinki/Finland requires more attention and research. Relationships to majority Finns were more complicated, and culture and customs were used to mark the boundary between "foreigners" and majority Finns (Haikkola 2010; Souto 2011). However, as Samir had grown older, he was suddenly in a situation where his previously non-marked friendships and peer group had become marked as different, not belonging in Finland, and as targets of exclusion. Samir felt anxious about the racist incidents he had experienced himself, but his greater concern was about the situation that he and his friends found themselves in. They were imposed an identity and pushed to the wrong side of the boundary of belonging in Finland. The private matter of each other's backgrounds had become public and they were pushed to take sides and defend themselves. To make the situation even more complex, Samir feared that these same friends were presenting a threat to Samir's future success by possibly disturbing his learning at school.

Adar solved this ambivalence by trying to secure a respectable position in Finland by drawing on two resources: the transnational Kurdish diaspora politics that took the shape of organisational activities in Finland and his educational plans and career ambitions in the restaurant business. Lalita drew on her transnational belonging and Indian culture. Maryam, whose case will be presented next, downplayed ethnic division. Samir's strategy was different. Samir found struggling with the ethnic boundaries that he considered false and annoying too demanding, and dreamed of a transnational exit:

> LH: What are your plans for the future?
> Samir: I'm going to get out of here as fast as I can.
> LH: Oh! Why is that?
> Samir: I would like to move to [father's place of origin], where everybody is the same, there's no racism. People leave you alone. Or that's how I felt now that I have visited many times [---].
> LH: But you are going to finish school here?
> Samir: Yes, I have to. Get a degree and then leave.

Samir had decided to transform Finland's asset – free education – to transnational capital. This is a vision that some of the educated youth with immigrant backgrounds in Finland seem to hold (Maahanmuuttajanuoret Suomessa 2009; Hautaniemi forthcoming). Samir was not concerned about his countrymen in Finland, like Adar was, and was not interested in cultural aspects, like Lalita, but just wanted to be in a relaxed and comfortable environment where everything "is the same" and he would not, by his experience, stand out.

5.4 Maryam

The last case represents a different way of orienting to the transnational social field in which the family network plays a stronger part than personal relationships to other places outside Finland. Maryam was a lively and self-confident girl with a Somali background. She was 15 and born in Finland. Her parents had moved to Finland from Somalia or Somaliland, as Maryam herself stated. Her family had

had an upper class position before having to flee, and they still retained some of their earlier power and wealth.

Like many others in the data, she was both locally and transnationally anchored. She spent a lot of time with her large family in Finland, especially one of her sisters and one of her cousins. At school she hung out with a mixed group of girls who were both majority Finns and of immigrant background. Both Maryam and her family kept in touch with family members spread over Somaliland, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Maryam spoke occasionally on the phone with them, chatted on the Internet with her cousins in London and “America”, and used to send gifts to her now late grandmother in Somaliland. Her father had visited Somaliland and her older siblings London and the Arab Emirates. Unlike Adar, Samir, and Lalita, Maryam had not visited – Somaliland or any other place her relatives lived in.

Somalis are heavily discriminated against in Finland, and the heaviest burden of “immigrants” rests on their shoulders (EU-MIDIS 2009; Jaakkola 2009). Maryam dealt with the situation by downplaying Somaliness, “foreignness”, or basically anything related to immigration or ethnicity in her identity. She engaged in emphasising what Wimmer (2008) has termed “non-ethnic forms of belonging”: other commonalities that unite people. She neither dwelt on the negative image of the Somalis in Finland nor emphasised the symbolic boundary towards majority Finns, as many others in the data (Haikkola 2010). She seemed to be a master in creating comfortable positions for herself both transnationally and locally. She positioned herself through her multi-ethnic group of friends at school. In Maryam’s view she and her friends were united simply because they had become friends at school and liked being with each other.

On the other hand, she emphasised her transnational networks and the potential for mobility embedded in the network. Like Samir she planned on a transnational exit. Her motivations were not grounded on wanting to escape (at least not openly). She was rather talking about opportunities presented by her family network. In her talk she shifted easily between Somaliland and “Africa”, London, “America”, and Dubai and presented them as places she will visit and probably move to:

> LH: Your family members have been to quite a many places. How does it feel to be able to travel to virtually any place you like?
> Maryam: Cool! I can travel to any country where I have cousins. Now I can choose, but not to America yet, though. I can go to London and Dubai, everywhere else than to America or France.
> LH: What do you think London will be like?
> Maryam: Cool! I want to see how they live there, since I have lived here for 15 years.

Such dreams of moving away from Finland are held by both majority and minority youths and are not necessarily related to migrant backgrounds or transnational networks, but in Maryam’s case it was clear that she was placing these dreams in the context of her family’s transnational networks and the practice of Somalis in Finland moving to London (e.g. Hautaniemi forthcoming). The fact that these plans were rather vague did not matter. On the other hand, she had not faced the realities of any of these places during visits, which helped her to keep her dreams alive. Her transnational network and possibilities for travel made her stand out from the crowd in terms of a large transnational network, not in terms of her ethnicity, religion, or how she looked.

Adar and Lalita claimed equality with the majority, Adar by emphasising minority identity, and Lalita a transnational belonging, while maintaining a cultural boundary. Samir was frustrated with the same boundary, wanting to escape it. Maryam’s strategy was different, and she did not bother with the boundary because in her view no difference between ethnic groups existed.

6 Conclusion: changing ties, changing identities

In this article I have examined how young people who share a structural position as “immigrants” construct their identities in the intersection of a multi-ethnic local context and kin-based transnational ties. The transnational dimension enters the negotiations in multiple ways and is affected first of all by how the second generation is incorporated into the transnational family network. This is not uniform between or even within ethnic groups. Children of immigrants do not simply continue their parents’ transnational relations and associated practices (such as remitting, civic activities, family obligations), but reproduce and re-interpret the transnational context as a part of their local lives. As such, their transnational engagements do not necessarily stem from their attachments to the “home countries” or belonging to the transnational family, since these attachments and belongings are in the process of taking shape. The focus on networks suggests that this does not always happen in relation to the place of origin. Global mobility leads to new kinds of transnational formations that are not anchored in the place of origin, but in the place of settlement (cf. Hautaniemi forthcoming). Either way, instead of fading away, transnationalisation takes new directions.

Transnationality and its meaning for identity negotiations is mediated by what their families do and their patterns of visiting, the closeness of the transnational network, and the opportunities available in Finland. The transnational family ties are a source of positive identity, because they provide feelings of belonging and also a source of distinction in relation to majority. Family networks also provide an alternative to “culture” as a source of ethnic identity (cf. Olwig 2007) and a dream of “exit” from Finland. On the other hand, experiences in other countries during visits force them to rethink ethnic identities, sources of belonging, and position in all of the

nodes. These can lead to a sense of belonging in two places or to a minority ethnic identity specific to the current place of residence but removed from the realities of the place of origin. However, although ethnicity and “foreignness” are salient identities, attempts to downplay ethnicity show how young people draw on other commonalities and try to escape the ethnic and cultural categorisations altogether.

The findings of this article also point to gender differences: transnational experiences during the childhood and teenage years do not differ much between boys and girls, but it seems that the meaning of the local peer groups (of friends with immigrant background) is more stigmatised for the boys than for the girls. It was common in the data to present oneself as decent, a “good citizen”. To achieve this in the eyes of the public, the boys also had to question their friendships. This can lead to ambiguous situations.

A transnational perspective on negotiations of identity forces them to think beyond the local or national context. How some second-generationers think of themselves is not contained within the (Finnish) nation-state. The intersection of a transnational context, local structures of ethnic hierarchies, and family practices places the children between competing reference points that lead to distinct identities. Transnational identity construction is an exercise that does not lead to transgressive identities but to local struggles for a positive identity.

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