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# Balancing inclusion and exclusion among Somali migrants in Germany

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## Abstract

We discuss the balancing acts of inclusion and exclusion by analysing how Somali migrants in Germany attempt to manoeuvre between various norms, individual interests and various social networks. Building on Glick Schiller and Caglar (2016), whose work on urban sociabilities emphasizes social relations in which people act as equals, we argue that ethnic (self-)identification is important as it serves as a basis for boundary-making and for bonding within and bridging and linking between groups. Thus, a focus on sociability and ethnic identification (as a category of praxis) can, in some cases, go hand in hand. Moreover, we argue that inclusion into local Somali communities, which is often discussed in public discourse as leading to exclusion from German society, helps to establish connections. Simultaneously, exclusion through racism can lead to (self-)isolation of Somalis, but also places pressure on younger Somalis in particular to forge alliances with non-Somali Germans to stabilize their situation. Balancing social inclusion and exclusion among Somali migrants in Germany therefore can have ambiguous and at times paradoxical outcomes.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we argue that the process of migrants settling down in a new place is a balancing act between practices of social inclusion and exclusion. These practices are relational and steeped in power relations. Based on our ethnography, we consider individual practices of building or severing relationships that frequently lead to ambiguous results. We contend that certain practices that are often discussed as exclusionary can also become a basis for bonding, bridging or linking (Putnam, 2000; building on the idea of strong and weak ties by Granovetter, 1973) across imagined group boundaries, while seemingly inclusionary practices might lead to exclusion.

Concepts such as inclusion, exclusion and integration are frequently used in migration research. As categories of analysis employed by scientists, journalist, and politicians, they are politically laden and obscure more than they enlighten. Yet, as categories of practice, as we use them in this article, they can help to better understand the everyday experiences of social actors (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 4). Foblets et al. (2018) emphasize that many migrants encounter various types of exclusion – in the legal sphere, in terms of socio-economic participation, or in the places that are available to them for housing, for example. However, Glick Schiller and Caglar (2016) argue that in addition to exclusion, inclusion and emplacement – understood as social processes that lead to migrant newcomers (re-)building networks of connections in particular places under particular conditions – can also take place. In these processes of emplacement, urban sociabilities can emerge. They comprise relationships in which people act based on equality and shared interests, rather than on being different (ibid.). Instead of essentializing differences, analysts of migration should look at human encounters and “domains of commonality” between newcomers and locals (ibid.: 18). Moreover, “the social relations formed by people as they encounter each other” should be the unit of analysis (ibid.: 20).

We realize the theoretical merit of this perspective. Still, our empirical data suggest that socially constructed identity groups also play an important role, at least when considering recently arrived migrants who are constituting a (hyper-)visible minority in a place such as Germany. Certainly, as Eidson et al., (2017:242) argue, “identification draws the boundaries between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of categories of likeness, distinction, and solidarity” quite clearly in situations where many other things are unclear (especially from the perspective of migrant newcomers). In anthropological writing, “inclusion” and “exclusion” into groups are mainly discussed in relation to the making and maintaining of “collective identities” – related to the classification of who belongs to a certain group and who does not. Social groups, however, are not constituted by any objective cultural difference but by certain cultural features which are chosen as markers of group boundaries in situations of social contact (Barth, 1969). Boundaries between ethnic (or other) groups are based on a “continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders” (ibid.: 14). Georg Elwert (1997) used this framework for developing his own concept of ethnic, national and religious “we-groups,” stressing the “fuzziness of limits” and “processes of switching between different frames of reference,” but also processes of reproducing those “we-groups” (ibid.: 251). One obvious problem regarding “we-groups,” however, is that the “we” is taken for granted, while it is actually the result of complex internal negotiations (Turaeva, 2016: 209–212). In fact, collective identities are always “under construction” within a group and in relation to dynamic surroundings shaped by other (dynamic) collectives and by legal, political and other conditions (ibid.).

It is therefore important to think about inclusion and exclusion not only along lines of collectives, but also in terms of individual practices of building or severing relationships and transgressing or supporting social boundaries. The results of these practices may be ambiguous. Moreover, the relationality of processes of inclusion and exclusion, which is central to the discussion in anthropology (Foblets et al., 2018; Schlee & Werner, 1996), is often overlooked in migration research. This is particularly true of work on “integration,” for which the term “inclusion” can be used interchangeably. Additionally, as Jenkins (2008: 43) stresses, who can define whom as belonging (or not belonging) to a certain group is also a question of power. In this context, Schinkel (2018) rightly criticizes that in much of the literature integration serves as a concept of analysis without any clarification as to what it means. Migrants are constructed as “ethnic others,” whereas the “host society” is taken for granted.

For our conceptual framework, we focus on social relations created through complex social interactions that can lead to inclusion and exclusion. Inclusion and exclusion have to be understood as relational processes of forging similarities and/or differences. We seek not to take any social collective or we-group as given but leave space for how the “we” is constructed. As categories of practice, attributions of collective identity are still highly relevant. This also means that migrants themselves are, in some cases, establishing their own “otherness” in relation to the society they settle in and by making use of ethnic categories. This process of (self-)ascription of identities is related to differences in access to resources and societal standing. Therefore, acts of exclusion (e.g. of a minority by a majority group), which require a position of power in order to be carried out, need to be distinguished from practices of “self-exclusion” (Landau & Freemantle, 2009) or “self-isolation” (e.g. by a minority group), which can be reactions to experiences of exclusion.

Socially constructed differences do not only distance and exclude people, but can also provide some actors with cultural and/or social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that can be used to build connections between different imagined collectives, in our case Somali migrant communities and other parts of the German society. This is akin to what Griffiths et al. (2005: 33) have studied concerning organizations of refugee communities in the UK. Drawing on Putnam (2000) and Granovetter (1973), they distinguish between “bonding social capital,” which is relevant for establishing and maintaining “we-groups”; “bridging social capital,” which refers to social networks outside one’s own community with people from similar social background (akin to Caglar’s and Schillers sociabilities); and “linking social capital,” which indicates hierarchical “relationships with those in power and official bodies” (ibid.).

In our article, we look at the daily struggles of Somali migrants who attempt to balance multiple overlapping social networks and sociabilities without losing access to important resources, such as education, work or family support. We show that migrants’ existences oscillate between various situations of exclusion and inclusion that frequently are intertwined and sometimes produce one another. Based on our ethnographic material, we delineate the boundaries of migrants’ agency under certain constraining conditions. Migrants make choices on a daily basis with whom and how to interact and build close relationships. Ambiguities emerge because establishing new social relationships often means losing others; therefore, inclusion into one relationship (at the individual level) or community (at the collective level) can mean exclusion from another relationship or community.

At first, we explain the perceived particularity and isolation of Somali communities due to their closely knit social networks within Germany. We argue that it springs from two interrelated factors: (racist) exclusion (as Blacks, Muslims etc.) by parts of the society in Germany and boundary-making and self-isolation by Somalis themselves. In combination, these factors make Somalis part of a cluster of “hyper visible minorities” to which also other Africans, Muslims and securitized refugees belong (see Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, 2016). Subsequently, we present four fields of social interaction, in which the question of balancing exclusionary and inclusionary practices plays an important role. We use the term balancing with regard to individuals and their negotiation of belonging in Germany. The fields of social interaction, where balancing comes in, concern firstly local Somali networks related to associations, shops or football clubs; second, daily interactions with parts of the German population in public spaces; third, encounters with German institutions, such as schools or the judiciary; and fourth, contact to other migrants and other Muslims.

The article is based on anthropological research among Somali migrants in Germany. The research, conducted by a group of six student researchers and two Somali speaking German academics and coordinated and supervised jointly by the authors of this article, took place in eight different areas in Germany (Halle/Saale, Leipzig and Erfurt and their surroundings in eastern Germany; Kassel, Muenster, Cologne, Frankfurt and Munich and their surroundings in western Germany) between August 2017 and December 2018. About 80 biographical narrative and semi-structured interviews were conducted using common research questions and a semi-structured questionnaire in Somali, English and German. When possible, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In this article, we decided to highlight the voices of ten interviewees, whose experience resonate more broadly. The interlocutors were Somali migrants who had come to Germany from the 1970s onwards as asylum seekers, students or workers, with the majority (about 80%) having arrived after 2011 (and 44% after 2015) as asylum seekers. While in some of the

research locations older Somali communities have existed for decades, in other places Somalis have settled only in the past decade. In addition to interviews, the researchers also conducted participant observation in Somali shops or at meetings of Somali associations. After the field research, all data were analysed within the research group. For coding, we used the software MAXQDA which helped to structure the interview material. About 40 per cent of the people interviewed were women, and about 50 per cent were between the ages of 19 and 28. Both numbers generally correspond to the gender and age balance of Somalis in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019).

## SOMALIS AS A HYPER-VISIBLE MINORITY IN GERMANY

The term “visible minority” was coined in Canada to distinguish newer immigrant minorities from both Aboriginal Canadians and other “older” minorities whose differentiation according to language or religion was less visible. Building on that categorization, Creese (2011: 24) used the term “hyper visible” to refer to recent immigrants from Africa who “have the distinction of being both hyper-visible within Vancouver in relation to the majority population of European and Asian origins and a tiny minority in terms of numbers in the local area.” We use this term to indicate that Somalis in Germany are more visible than the established minorities of Turkish or Eastern European origin. As a tiny minority group in most parts of Germany, their members distinguish themselves even from newcomers from other African countries.

Among many German social workers and administrators, Somalis have a reputation of isolating themselves from both Germans and other refugee groups. We heard this sentiment during meetings with the staff of NGOs (such as the Diakonie, a protestant charitable organization) engaged in projects concerning refugees and various administrators tasked with matters of integration in Halle (Saale), Gera, Munich and other places throughout Germany. Somalis are perceived as staying within their own communities. There are two main factors leading to this impression: first, the distressing experiences of many Somalis of being disliked and excluded in multiple ways as Blacks and Muslims; and second, social control among Somalis themselves combined with a “purity ideal” that often precludes closer social relations, such as marriage, with non-Somalis. Taken together, these factors produce a negative feedback effect. They prevent migrants from moving out of the usual Somali circles and thus establish Somali communities as an “ethnic other,” which contributes to the continued marginalization of Somalis in Germany.

During our research, it became clear that many Somalis felt excluded in Germany. They presumably stuck out as Africans in places that were not ethnically diverse (with the exception of some metropolises). This concerned mainly those who had arrived in Germany from 2011 onwards, but also appeared in interviews with Somalis who had come to Germany much earlier. Already in the 1990s, and more recently, from 2015 onwards, anti-migratory discourses gained popularity in Germany. In connection to these discourses, Islamophobia increased following the 9/11 attacks and, again, with the activities of the “Islamic State” from 2014 onwards. In the “summer of migration” of 2015, large numbers of asylum seekers, most of whom originated from Muslim-majority countries, came to Germany (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016; Kalmar & Shoshan, 2020; Lewicki & Shooman, 2020). Subsequently, the number of attacks against various minority groups, including Muslims and Jews, increased (Sadeghi, 2018). In Germany and elsewhere, Somalis are part of the “securitised other”. After the attacks of 11 September 2001, Somalia became a hotspot in the “war on terror” (Bakonyi, 2002). Stemming from a country that is nearly one hundred per cent Sunni Muslim, Somalis were viewed with increasing suspicion worldwide (Liberatore, 2017: 2). During our research, we heard many stories about various incidents in which Somalis had been verbally harassed or even physically attacked, while the local police were slow to respond, if they did at all. In a small town near Halle (Saale), a young Somali man was shot in the head with an airgun in 2015 as he walked home from language school. He was treated in the hospital. The police started investigations only after a German friend of the victim, who was a journalist, wrote about the case in the media some days later (Stange, 2015).

This atmosphere of rejection and physical insecurity led to a sense of social exclusion among many Somali migrants. It is important to note that, in many cases, these experiences compound earlier experiences of exclusion Somalis had at home, on the way to Europe, as well as in other European countries before their arrival in Germany. Due to decades of war and failure of state institutions in Somalia, many of the younger migrants (particularly those who arrived around 2015) had little a chance to gain a proper education and or employment. On the way to Europe, many were subjected to human trafficking and exploitation. Before they arrived in Germany, many had already spent time in Italy, the Netherlands or other in European countries where they often experienced abuse and difficulties such as not being paid for (illegal) work or being homeless due to inefficient or indifferent local governments (e.g. in Italy). Once they reached Germany, many Somalis continued to feel marginalized in the social, economic and bureaucratic spheres, in addition to outright racial discrimination. The places where they found housing were mainly in deprived areas, outside of urban centres. Access to further education was difficult and many were not allowed to work right away. If they could get jobs at all, they received low-paying jobs requiring no specific education or with contracts that were usually short term. Often agencies called “*Zeitarbeitsfirmen*” brokered these jobs and in exchange received a percentage of their already meagre monthly salary. Local government institutions often placed extreme hurdles by only offering services in (bureaucratic) German, which is challenging for any non-native German speaker to master unless she or he had studied German for many years. The implications could be dramatic: sometimes work permits were not issued or resident permits not prolonged since the applicants did not understand when and to whom they should apply for these services.

One response to this sense of exclusion is active self-isolation. This is amplified by a certain Somali “purity ideal” widespread among Somalis. This ideal is established through various ideological orientations and practices. On the one hand, differences concerning purity are made within the social structure of Somali society, which rests on the principle of belonging to a patrilineal descent group for which “clan” is often used a shorthand terminology in much of the academic the literature (e.g. Bjork, 2017). Among Somalis, members of so-called majority groups and members of so-called minority groups are differentiated from one another. Inter marriages between members of majority and minority groups are normally considered taboo (Helander, 2003; Luling & Adam, 2015). In Somalia, belonging to a minority group comes along with no or limited access to major economic resources, political power and education (Hoehne, 2015). Yet, most Somalis consider themselves as a “cultural nation” (Lewis, 1983: 9), despite all this internal stratification and exclusion, and inter marriages with non-Somalis are rare. “Somaliness” (Somali: *Soomaalinimo*), referring to a dynamic conglomerate of orientations regularly including adherence to Sunni Islam, patrilineal descent, certain food preferences and Somali language, is used to draw boundaries against non-Somalis (Kusow & Bjork, 2007: 3). However, it is worth noting that these boundary-drawing processes are dynamic. Younger Somalis in the diaspora, in particular, develop their own ideas about Somaliness which are less bound to “traditional” markers of identity (Liberatore, 2017: 26 and chapter 5; Liin Abdullahi Nur, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

In Somalia, norms of morality related to Islam and Somali traditions are guarded through strict social control within the extended family. In the diaspora, this kind of control often vanishes due to different kinds of opportunity structures, particularly for Somali women (Boyle & Ali, 2009: 61–64). Norms also change over time in Somalia, which again influences the orientations of those migrating. In the wake of the protracted warring in Somalia and the simultaneous rise of reformist Islamic currents globally, many people have become more religiously conservative (ibid.: 59). Our research indicated that, in the absence of strict social control, rumours about (im)moral behaviour still influence Somali lives in the diaspora. One of the consequences of norm violation can be exclusion from the (extended) family network, which is important especially in times of need.

Based on experiences of exclusion from German society, as well as notions of Somaliness and social control, Somalis in Germany often exhibit social distance from non-Somalis. In addition, legal and economic conditions in Germany structure dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. For instance, the welfare system for refugees results in a tightly calculated budget and allows only for limited participation in public life. We observed that newly arrived Somali women would rather stay at home, unless they attend language courses or get a vocational education.

Young men often enjoyed more freedoms. However, if they departed too far from the above-mentioned norms, they jeopardizes their reputation among fellow Somalis.

Experiences of racial discrimination on account of being African and Muslim and the feeling of being separate from the majority of society, as well as notions of exclusiveness, consolidate Somalis' status as an "ethnic other" and hyper-visible minority in Germany. Yet, we have to insert a caveat here: since much of our data stem from contexts in which Somalis recently settled down in Germany, we might see transformations of aspects of Somaliness in the near future, comparable to the situation in the United States (Boyle & Ali, 2010: 50, 59). For now, however, we wish to emphasize that in contrast to the critique of the "ethnic lens" in migration research, voiced prominently by Glick Schiller and Caglar (2016) and Schinkel (2018), the ethnic differentiation we observed was part of complex processes of social boundary-making involving migrants as actors. Therefore, they are meaningful for understanding the current situation of Somalis in Germany. We show in the following that social boundary-making processes not only establish forms of exclusion but can also form a starting point for social inclusion.

## FOUR FIELDS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

### Local Somali Networks

Local Somali Networks are not only created in the private realm, but also centre around Somali shops, associations or playing football. In the political discourse in Germany, these kinds of origin-based migrant organizations are sometimes perceived as a form of segregation or self-isolation leading to the establishment of a "parallel society" (Gestring, 2011). Thinking along these lines would equate inclusion in the Somali networks with exclusion from what is considered a German majority society. We argue, however, that – similar to what Griffiths et al. (2005) found in the UK – establishing an active Somali community life in Germany can help not only to bond, but also to build bridges and links between socially constructed communities (Somali and others) and thus foster cooperation, inclusion and create sociability as outlined by Glick Schiller and Caglar (2016).

Solidarity among co-ethnics can be highly important for settling down, especially at the beginning (Majka & Mullan, 2002).<sup>3</sup> Our research partners referred to this kind of solidarity – which among Somalis frequently is underpinned by patrilineal descent – as opening-up possibilities for advice and financial help, for comparing one's own situation to that of others with the aim of achieving a better status and also for care and emotional support in times of need (for instance, in the case of sickness). As Barre, an interviewee from Erfurt,<sup>4</sup> mentioned: "Everybody needs financial help. If it works, I borrow something; we lend it to each other. If it doesn't work, one has to grit one's teeth. Or when there are other questions, for instance concerning the local administration, we assist each other. There are, for example, others who are in the same situation as I am, but they are allowed to work. And then I know, ok, it can also work differently."

Somali social networks also create a sense of home away from home. This is important, because many Somali migrants (male and female) left their families behind. Many miss their families and hope for a reunion once their legal status permits this. Spending time with other Somalis as a way of bonding can help to fulfil an emotional need. It can also help to cope with traumatic experiences back in Somalia or during the journey to Europe, such as near-death experiences due to thirst, hunger, torture and the dangers of crossing the sea (Ali, 2016). Many Somalis spoke about trying to forget what happened and also about the fear haunting them when they were alone. Omar, who lives in Cologne, mentioned: "It's very difficult when you're not in your home with the other people, your family; it's very difficult.... on the other hand I'm very happy to live here, to be in Germany." Preferred meeting places are public outside areas as well as semi-public spaces, such as train stations, certain cafes and, for men, places to play football. Somali shops, where they exist, are also used as places to meet and to chat.

However, some who have been in Germany since the 1990s are no longer as closely connected with other Somalis, particularly not with the newly arrived youths. Mulki, who lives near Cologne, sees a couple of reasons



for this, including the rather small number of Somalis in the area where she resides and the fact that all of them are occupied with work and other activities. Thus, she only meets with other Somalis for weddings or similar events. But she also consciously keeps a distance from those who recently arrived in Germany. Even though she is helping them as part of her work for a small NGO (e.g. with translations), Mulki said: "I need to keep some distance. Because I have been living here for a long time and I know what I am doing, and the newcomers are sometimes unable to cope. I don't want to have a lot of private contact [...]. The people have to realize first what is [going on] here. There are many rules in Germany [...] And the head [of the newcomers] is still in Somalia." Her social distance from other Somalis is underlined by the inability of Mulki's children to speak Somali.

The mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion become especially visible in regard to Somali associations. On the one hand, interviewees talking about such associations in Germany often stated that most of these are run by individuals with their own personal goals or the desire to help only their extended (patrilineal) families. On the other hand, the need for Somali associations (particularly in Eastern Germany, where before 2011 hardly any Somalis resided) was mentioned quite frequently by Somalis themselves as well as by NGO workers and communal administrators concerned with refugee work. Somali associations provide a place to meet and assist Somali newcomers. They also help German actors involved in refugee work to find partners for managing issues such as spreading important news to refugees or with whom to jointly conduct seminars. Somali associations are also useful for communicating with the authorities, who are sometimes unable to cope with the cultural or religious demands made by migrants. In Halle (Saale), for instance, a young Somali man committed suicide while in custody in 2017. Since it appeared that he had no relatives in Germany and the town officials refused to allow unrelated Somalis to become involved in the case, his body was cremated after five months in the city morgue and the urn was buried in the cemetery for the poor. Somalis in Halle were upset by the horrifying treatment of the body (particularly from an Islamic perspective). In conversations, some interlocutors stressed that an established Somali association in the city could probably have prevented this. Here an ethnic organization's classical "linking-function" (Putnam, 2000) was in demand.

Caselli (2010) and Pirkkalainen et al., (2013) mention the linking function of immigrant associations in Italy and Finland. Yet, as Caselli (ibid.: 70) highlights, there are problems with representativeness. The latter was also a relevant topic regarding associations in Germany reflected upon by many Somalis. In many cases, Somali associations place their focus on Somalia and not on life in Germany, an aspect discussed rather critically in some of our interviews. Quarrels within the associations and the local Somali communities organized by clan or region of origin – for example Somalis from Somaliland, which unilaterally declared independence from Somalia in 1991, usually do not want to participate in associations with others who support Somali unity – are a frequent source of division (see also Pirkkalainen et al., 2013).

One example of an association aiming to incorporate Somalis from different clans and regions is "Seven Nomads" in Wiesbaden. It was founded in 2014 by Somalis who were born or have grown up in Germany. The association was established and is run by young Somalis aiming to connect with other young Somalis in their late teens and up to mid-thirties. Their main focus is to show examples of successful Somalis from all over Europe and to educate young Somalis on how to make use of the opportunities they have in Germany. Interestingly enough, the association promotes not only an inclusive agenda concerning the different clans and regional affiliations, but also in relation to gender. Bilal from Darmstadt, a member of "Seven Nomads" explained: "We see it like this: we have invited four men and four women to present their work. This is not an obligation, but it was our wish." In this way, patriarchy, deep-rooted in Somali society, is challenged, while Somaliness (e.g. a sense of commonality in terms of clothing style or food preferences) is promoted and safeguarded. A closer look at this association, however, reveals an element of exclusion, as well. Run by German Somalis of the second generation, it focuses on topics and promotes networks relevant to young professionals fluent in German and not to those Somalis who have only recently arrived. This makes this association an example of the split between established Somali communities and the more recent arrivals (on similar developments among other groups of migrants, see



Yanasmayan, 2016). One can interpret this as a difference in access to various forms of social and cultural capital in a Bourdieuan sense.

Even though only a few people are actively involved in Somali associations in Germany, and these associations frequently tend to have an exclusionary dimension based on clan-affiliation, region of origin or the educational background of the members, they can nonetheless serve as links to the local authorities and NGOs involved in refugee work. Being active in these associations also means actively taking part in social life in Germany. It can create sociability, as through these associations people increase their contacts within their surroundings. The Somali association in Kassel called *Soomaalida Jarmalka* ("Somalis in Germany"), for instance, actively contacts members of different parties in the city council with whom it discusses migrant-related concerns. The association's members regularly comment on German politics on the association's Facebook page. In this way, they consciously step outside of their "ethnic container." Some of the Somali associations also cooperate with other interest groups. Bilal, for instance, referred to the Initiative "*Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland*"<sup>5</sup> as a partner for "Seven Nomads."

Occasionally, networks are established spontaneously among Somalis to tackle an urgent issue. We heard this from Somalis in Erfurt, where some Somali activists mobilized their communities and others to demonstrate in front of local government buildings to demand improvements in the delivery of services, such as access to German language courses. Political demands for inclusion in German society in this case resulted in stronger cohesion among local Somalis and networking between communities in different towns.

## interactions with German majority society

Somalis in Germany are confronted with the tension between certain Islamic provisions and what is considered "normal" by the non-Muslim majority in Germany. For example, Somali school children, like children from other Muslim families, are often insecure about what to eat at school as school lunches and even sweets consumed by other children might include pork products. Some parents and teachers do not react sensitively to Islamic food taboos, which are considered to go against German traditions. In a primary school in Halle (Saale), for instance, one could hear the position that "if they [the Muslim immigrants] are coming to Germany, they have to adapt to our rules."<sup>6</sup>

Following the surge of stricter currents of Islam globally and the traumatic experiences related to civil war and state collapse since the early 1990s, the practice of Islam has become more rigid in Somalia (Schlee, 2008: 83–85). This trend has also influenced Somalis in the diaspora (Tiilikainen, 2003: 65). With the emergence of the militant Islamists of Al Shabaab around 2006 Somalis' religious piety intensified. Therefore, the incongruity of Islamic practices and life in Germany is felt even stronger among Somalis today, especially among those who arrived more recently. It is also the case, however, that when Somalis migrate, some pay less attention to the religious and cultural norms that were non-negotiable back home. For example, some young Somali men started consuming alcohol when they arrived in Germany, whether out of curiosity and personal taste or to cope with hopelessness and boredom. Across from the main station in Leipzig, one can observe a handful of Somali men hanging out and drinking with Eritreans as well as with Germans. Drinking together can be seen as a way to create connectedness and possibly sociability, producing new forms of inclusion beyond ethnic containers. Yet, it also leads to new exclusions – from the local Somali community as well as from those parts of German society whose members consider drinking during the day as distasteful. A number of Somalis we interviewed talked about this issue. Bilal said: "They are not only drinking alcohol, but misuse it. That means that they do many stupid things or spend their whole money just on alcohol. [...] When someone is already [mentally] broken before he gets his papers, one can imagine how his future will look like." But many Somalis abroad still respect the norms by which they were socialized. This includes the notions of Somaliness, which are in several regards close to contemporary Sunni Muslim culture.

One area in which righteousness and morality based on Islam is expressed most visibly is in the dress code of men and women. According to current moral imperatives, Somali women are supposed to cover their whole body

from their head to their ankles (this was different some decades ago). Individual digression is possible through various details and some of these norms are re-negotiated in the diaspora (Tiilikainen, 2003: 62). Still, many Somalis would be religiously and morally offended to see another Somali woman wearing trousers or going without a headscarf in public.

The difficulties of dealing with these norms were highlighted by Khadra, a young Somali woman in Munich, who portrayed herself as having already rebelled against her family and social norms back in Somalia, resulting in her running away from home when she was 15. After coming to Germany, Khadra quickly tried to build a new life:

The Somalis were not nice to me, because I was talking to a lot to Germans, and Germans came to visit me. And I was wearing jeans and took off my head scarf. Because for me, it was an option; but some [Somali] men called me and said if I wasn't respecting the rules, I could regret it for the rest of my life. They told me that I was being a shame for the Somali community and they lived here longer and they don't like it. [...] The [other Somali] girls always talked about me, looking at me, as if I was a whore, like I was always trying to have contact with Germans. It was tough for me, and I tried to kill myself.

Her dramatic account was certainly influenced by events she had experienced in Somalia, where she had felt oppressed by her parents demanding her obedience, and another experience of having been abused by a male host in Kenya. But we heard similar accounts from others, who carefully adjusted their clothing style depending on whom they expected to meet in public (especially concerning Somalis from outside the family).

Many Somalis perceived German society with ambivalence. On the one hand, life in Germany seemed to offer them chances for a new beginning. On the other, racism and cultural misunderstandings characterized daily interactions. In some cases, Somalis who had already lived in Germany for some time distinguished between the social situation in the 1990s, which was described as "narrow," and the situation after 2015 with the rather new "Willkommenskultur" (welcoming culture). Bilal mentioned: "At that time [1990s] one was left on one's own. This is why many people who live here already since the 1990s are still not really able to speak German. There was no real *Willkommenskultur* at that time."

Many of our interlocutors, who had come around 2015, underlined the importance of German volunteers in local refugee support groups. In some interviews, an age difference was highlighted: older people were mentioned as more important for building up contacts than younger people, even though student-driven NGOs were highly active in larger cities. Omar argued: "Because you know young people are so busy with university or college and homework, I don't want to disturb them."

Somalis also distinguished between living in a big city and in small towns or villages. Bilal was very conscious about the consequences of moving out of a small town into a larger one with more Somali inhabitants. He explained: "It was clear to me that I would not stay there [small town]. I think in the whole town there was only one black person. It was nice there, but not a place where a foreigner says 'I am going to stay'." He also argued that many Somalis whom German authorities had placed in Eastern Germany, especially from around 2011 onwards (when more Somalis began to arrive, marking the beginning of a dynamic which peaked in 2015), would try to move to Western Germany. The reasons included the belief that there were more job opportunities and less racism in the West and that, in cities like Frankfurt, Cologne and Munich, one would additionally be able to connect to already well-established Somali communities. Again, Somalis mentioned age and gender as making a difference. According to Bilal, who was in his late 20s, younger men find it easier to connect to the local population than do young women or older Somalis. The latter were said to be more eager to connect to other Somalis.

Heightened interaction with Germans also increased the Somalis' chances of unpleasant encounters. During our research we heard upsetting stories about Somali experiences of racism, from verbal harassment to physical attacks. For instance, several young Somalis who had been placed by the authorities in Koethen, a small town near Halle (Saale), mentioned that they were insulted and attacked on a near daily basis whenever they left their

homes. In reaction to these challenges, several young Somalis settled with relatives and friends in Halle (Saale), moving from a smaller town to a larger one in the same area. The most extreme story was narrated by Bashir who had been attacked five times in six months in Koethen before he left the town. Interestingly, he was also the most vocal of the young Somalis there. He had reached out to the NGO "*Mobile Beratung für Opfer rechter Gewalt*" ("Mobile Advice for the Victims of Right-Wing Violence") to receive legal and social support and spoke about his experiences with racist violence to local and international journalists. In this way, Bashir's horrific experiences made him reach out even further and socialize with (possible) partners in German society.

In summary, through daily interactions between Somalis and non-Somali Germans, Somaliness as an exclusive collective identity was being built up; on the other hand, there was more opportunity for engaging more closely with non-Somalis, whether by making friends, socializing or being active in organizations working with refugees. Yet, in some cases, becoming close to Germans meant social distancing from fellow Somalis. The consequences could be harsh, as shown by the example of Khadra mentioned above. Of course, experiences of racism also placed limits on interaction – at least with those Germans who were unwilling to help but remained silent or even supportive of powerful exclusionary measures against Somalis and other hyper-visible minorities. Clearly, racist attacks against different visible or hyper-visible minorities in Germany have been increasing since 2015. They occur throughout eastern and western Germany, adding to Germany's long history of racism (Alexopoulou, 2019).

## Encounters with the German administrative–legal system

Interactions with the German society take place also in the form of encounters with the German legal and administrative system. Here, important disparities regarding normative orders and understandings of justice came to light. In Somali society, conflict settlement normally concerns families. If an individual hurts another individual, the responsibility for the damage caused is normally taken over by the extended (patrilineal) family of the perpetrator. In this context, it is irrelevant if the damage was caused deliberately or accidentally. This understanding of justice clashes with the legal system in Germany.

Markus Hoehne was involved in a legal case against a young Somali man who was accused of having stabbed another young Somali man in the hand. The accused man, Abdi, was arrested and remanded in custody shortly after the attack had happened. His mother, Safiya, was enormously stressed, since Abdi had been supporting her financially in addition to providing moral support for her. With Abdi in prison on remand, Safiya travelled to visit her son as well as the injured man, Ahmed, who had to spend some days in hospital after the attack. This had unforeseeable consequences for Safiya and Abdi. After her first visit, both the court and the prison denied her any further contact with her son. The court in charge of the case had heard that Safiya had visited the victim, Ahmed, in the hospital and that she had asked him to withdraw the accusations against her son. The court took this as an attempt to interfere in the legal proceedings and to influence a potential witness. Therefore, the court ordered the prison to prohibit any communication between Abdi and his mother. This decision was incomprehensible for Safiya, as in Somalia her behaviour would have resembled that of an elder of Abdi's family. In such a case in Somalia, Ahmed's wounded hand would have been the main problem. The aim would have been to assure compensation for Ahmed's pain and damage. Since Abdi had no male elders living in Germany (his father had died already), Safiya took on this role and, with it, the task of paying a visit of respect to Ahmed during which she indicated that the matter could be solved "between them" – the "Somali way" (i.e. by paying compensation). Safiya completely misunderstood that in the German legal system such a matter was out of the hands of the individuals concerned. When the case was heard in court after seven months, during which Abdi had been imprisoned on remand and had not been able to communicate with his family or friends, he was mentally and physically exhausted from prison and just wanted to get out. In order to do this he pleaded guilty, against the advice of his solicitor (who wanted to argue that Abdi had acted in self-defence), and was sentenced to sixteen months on parole, of which he had already served almost half in prison. Additionally, he had to work 120 hours in a social project as a volunteer and

assume the court costs. A month later, Abdi reported to Hoehne that Ahmed had started threatening him and his family. Dissatisfied by the legal verdict, Ahmed demanded financial compensation for his damaged hand. For Abdi, this meant that he had to bear a double legal responsibility, according to German as well as to Somali norms.

Turning to our argument about the ambiguities of inclusion and exclusion, the case shows that inclusion into the German legal system produced frictions and, to some degree, exclusion from the traditional Somali system of conflict settlement. The repercussions were such that, by having to settle the conflict the "German way," grievances remained that among Somalis would normally have been overcome through compensation payments. This led to the continuation of the conflict outside of the courts and to a persistent rift between Abdi and his family, on the one hand, and Ahmed, on the other. Abdi took care to fulfil the terms of the court swiftly and meticulously. One can argue that in this way he became integrated. He understood how these matters work in Germany. Simultaneously, this (involuntary) involvement with the German legal-administrative system caused Abdi's distance from some fellow Somalis.

The German legal and administrative system, and especially the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (German abbreviation: BAMF), is often perceived as threatening by Somalis. Many fear rejection by the decision-makers within BAMF concerning the evaluation of their claims to refugee status. But also those who receive a reasonable legal status continue to fear getting into conflict with the state system, resulting in many meticulously following German legal rules. For if one gets into legal trouble, one's resident permit can be rescinded or one could lose the right to work. Although deportations from Germany to Somalia have not been carried out in the past few years, the fear of being sent back if one gets into trouble with the law constantly preoccupies many Somalis. Indeed, Abdi had his work permit withdrawn by the local foreigners' office a year after the court sentence due to his criminal conviction, despite the fact that he was a first-time offender and had done everything he could to adhere to the terms of the sentence.

Other less dramatic challenges have emerged from the encounters between Somali newcomers and German institutions. Frequently, Somalis have difficulties understanding official letters. This can lead to situations in which even a letter from a telephone provider can be seen as potentially threatening. They also feel that they are not receiving enough support in some places regarding learning German or being allowed to work or to change their place of residence (for instance, to move in with a spouse or start a job elsewhere). The German state, which has provided Somalis with housing and basic life support, was at the same time also perceived as unpredictable and potentially dangerous (at least in reference to BAMF and the courts). Help for dealing respectively with the state and local institutions representing the state is often sought among fellow Somalis who have been in Germany longer, speak German and understand "the system". In a number of cases, local NGOs and German volunteers have also assisted Somalis in their struggle with these institutions. Here, bureaucratic exclusion has led Somalis to forge connections with fellow Somalis who already had acquired a certain cultural and social capital by having been in Germany for longer or with non-Somali Germans, which provided a basis for sociability as discussed by Glick Schiller and Caglar.

## Contact to other migrants and other muslims

While Somalis' problems with approaching what they often perceive as an amorphous German majority society can be partly explained by differences between Somali and German norms (including religious norms), it is more difficult to explain why Somalis also maintain rather distant relations with other migrants or with Sunni Muslim communities in Germany. In addition to the language barrier, this lack of close contact could spring from the fact that, despite being Muslim, there exist differences in the interpretation of Islam. Some Somalis mentioned that in mosques dominated by North-Africans or Arabs they were confronted with implicit racism and they felt that Blacks were marginalized. In Halle (Saale), we heard that some years ago the local imam, who originated from Egypt, refused to bury a young Somali man who, after having suffered from mental health problems for a long

time, had committed suicide. This refusal caused tensions between the (back then) few Somali Muslims in town and the imam. As a consequence, some Somalis stopped visiting this mosque, the only one in town. Several years later, in 2020, many more Somalis live in Halle (Saale) and many of the more recent Somali arrivals go to the mosque, at least on Fridays.

The exclusion of other migrants takes place in various settings, including outside of religious ones. For example, the association “Seven Nomads,” which aims to reach out to non-Somali Germans, also offered to work together with the German authorities to identify refugees “falsely” claiming to originate from Somalia. Bilal outlined:

Many people come from West Africa and they say they come from Somalia. They get asylum, even though they don't look like Somalis. They don't speak Somali. And then there was that story about a man, I think from West Africa. He had raped a woman. The man had a Somali name! In the news they said the rapist was Somali – but in reality, he was not Somali. Those who are not Somali, should not be treated as Somali. [It is a problem] that the federal police [Bundespolizei] and the BAMF wave everybody through [...]. Some time ago I worked as translator for the authorities and I tried to explain to the police that this woman was not Somali and that she should not [by allowed to] take up the Somali identity. A Somali does not need a passport; face and language are enough to identify a person as Somali.

This statement by Bilal makes it clear that Somalis in certain situations build up social borders against other migrants and construct a distinctive identity based on language and even physiognomy. The latter is in line with an attitude some Somalis display against other Africans, which borders on an attitude of exclusion based on phenotype not dissimilar from the racism experienced by Somalis themselves. Simultaneously, some Somali interlocutors told us about the rejection and harassment they experienced as “Blacks” from members of other migrant communities (Eastern European, Turkish or Arab). In most cases, exclusion by less powerful groups is not as consequential as exclusion by powerful actors. Therefore, this type of social exclusion should be distinguished from the other forms of exclusion outlined above which Somalis experience in Germany. Yet, in line with our overall argument, these examples show that the balancing acts of inclusion and exclusion take place along multiple lines in a diverse German society. It should also be highlighted here that the above-mentioned exclusionary behaviour on the part of some Somalis, like Bilal, opens up possibilities to cooperate with German authorities. This can certainly be called a quite ambiguous form of inclusion.

## CONCLUSION

We set out to highlight the balancing acts of inclusion and exclusion among Somalis, many of whom have arrived in Germany around 2015 or a bit earlier, based on ethnographic research in eight locations in eastern and western Germany. For our analysis, we were inspired by Glick Schiller's and Caglar's (2016) approach, focusing on emplacement and the creation of sociability as a starting point. We took a close look at social relations and interactions between individuals and groups in specific locales. In contrast to these authors and to Schinkel (2018), however, we kept open the possibility that ethnic identification remained relevant. Our research showed that in migrants' daily lives in Germany, “self-isolation” takes place, as well. Social group boundaries (e.g. in the form of ethnicization) are established in reaction to racist attacks and harassment or social marginalization, but also due to a certain notion of exclusiveness held by many Somalis (referring to “*Soomaaliiniimo*”).

We furthermore argued that the result of these balancing acts can be ambiguous and paradoxical. This is shown by the examples in which reaching out towards others can lead to more exclusion, as in the case of Khadra who wished to rid herself of religious and patriarchal constraints by getting closer to Germans, which isolated her from the local Somali community with dire results for her emotional (and physical) well-being. Similarly, young

Somali men who consume alcohol with German friends experience both inclusion and exclusion. Additionally, we highlighted that inclusion and exclusion in the context of migrants' process of settling down offer various opportunities for connections, in the form of bonding, bridging and linking. This can have important implications for policymakers in the fields of migration and integration/inclusion. Regardless of what triggered it, "self-isolation" can create a basis for support and orientation among members of the in-group. Newly arrived Somali migrants in particular bond with fellow Somalis in informal or formal networks to cope with loneliness, trauma and various forms of exclusion (including racism, but also bureaucratic hurdles) which they experience in Germany. Somalis who have been around longer and possess relevant social and cultural capital assist others to find initial help with integrating into the economic, administrative and legal system in Germany. This happens within (informal) Somali circles that are hardly accessible to German authorities or, in fact, any non-Somali. Still, we maintain, this is not a way to establish a "parallel society," but is actually a non-formal way of inclusion that deserves recognition by state authorities. Furthermore, (self-)isolation does not only lead to exclusion but can also become a basis for bridging across group boundaries and linking to German authorities or NGOs. The example of "Seven Nomads" showed that Somali associations also cooperate with other migrant organizations on occasion. This can be a way of overcoming ethnic boundaries and produce synergies, for example in struggles against discrimination. Importantly, Somali associations provide an entry point for German authorities and NGOs to discuss matters of integration support, offer trainings, but also discuss culturally sensitive issues. As the operations of the Somali association in Kassel (*Soomaalida Jarmalka*) show, the linking does not only go "one way." Somalis can, with a formal association at their backs, reach out effectively to local authorities and shape agendas and voice their concerns regarding matters of inclusion and beyond. Clearly, established Somali associations can provide a platform for Somalis to reach out and to be reached – even if many of them are ridden by problems of "representation" due to internal splits in the Somali community. Besides, events organized in formal or informal Somali networks offer chances for non-Somali friends to participate. In this way, the boundaries between exclusion and inclusion into varying social groups become blurred.

This is in line with research that shows that migrants, who regard their own cultural base as stable, can also use it to reach out and establish themselves as active members of the society in which they have recently settled. This process can over time result in questioning and changing aspects of their own norms and "traditions," as long as the basic existence of the "we group" is not called into question, which would lead to renewed boundaries (Gans, 1997; Pott, 2001; Scharrer, 2019). This is exemplified with regard to younger Somalis who grew up in Germany and are finding their own balance between "Germanness" and Somaliness.

## Peer Review

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.12856>.

## ENDNOTES

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2. While it is too early to come to firm conclusions about this particular phenomenon, it is worth noting that young Somalis' identity practices may not necessarily be a product of self-isolation. This means that in the future, younger Somalis may find different pathways to integration into Germany.



3. The theory of transnationalism, introduced by Glick Schiller et al., (1992), is based on the assumption that migrants live connected lives which tie them to different ethnically or nationally imagined collectives at the same time.
4. All names of Somali interlocutors in the article are pseudonyms.
5. This is a non-profit association. According to its website, the association has the goal to represent the interests of black people in Germany and to stand up for justice in the migration society.
6. This was overheard by Markus Hoehne, whose children attended this school (until 2019), during a conversation with other parents.

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