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Culture, networks and social capital: Tamil and Somali immigrants in Norway

Oivind Fuglerud and Ada Engebretsen

Abstract

This article discusses the use of ‘social capital’ as a methodological approach to the situation of two different minority groups in Norway, the Sri Lankan-Tamil and the Somali. It argues that although there are important differences between the two groups with respect to social networks and, therefore, with respect to social capital, the current conceptualization of this term has weaknesses. In particular there is a need to incorporate the various forms of transnational connections and the different “cultural grammars” underlying the lives of people in exile into our explanatory models.

Keywords: Immigrant groups; social capital; cultural grammars; Norway; Somalis; Tamils.

Introduction

This article is an exploration of one methodological approach to a particular research question. The essay stems from a project where two anthropologists compare social networks among Somalis and Tamils from Sri Lanka living in Norway as a way of focusing other differences between the two groups. In Norway, Tamils have emerged in the public eye as a kind of model minority, with Somalis situated at the other end of the scale. To select only two variables: while Tamil families have a labour income far beyond the immigrant population average, most of the income in Somali households comes from welfare. Seventy per cent of the Tamils own their own homes, compared to 24 per cent among the Somalis.¹ The aim of the project, in short, is to throw some light on why these differences prevail by looking at networks of support within the two groups.

The question, then, is how this kind of comparison may and should be carried out. Obviously, there is a danger of a project like this contributing to the marginalization of a minority based on essentialized conceptions of cultural difference. A number of writers in recent years have identified a new rhetoric of exclusion, directed against immigrants in European countries, grounded not in conceptions of biological difference but in a semantic of cultural incommensurability (Barker 1981, Taguieff 1987, Stolcke 1995). Ong (1996, pp. 119–20) has lamented the ‘academic cottage industry on refugee affairs’, which ignoring the disciplinary effects of the welfare state, provides the raw-material for a diffused philosophy of culture informing the work of agencies dealing with immigrants. Her focus is the way ‘hierarchical cultural evaluations assign different populations places within the white – black polarities of citizenship’.

Nevertheless, the starting point of the two researchers has been that defining itself as a comparative discipline social anthropology should be able to make some sense of the issue at hand. Our position was, and still is, that the way to fight the spectre of politicized essentialism is not to avoid cultural comparison but to problematise the framework within which such comparison is carried out. As noted by Lithman (2004) ‘...it is clearly noteworthy how enmeshed much social science has become in the day-to-day issues of immediate social and political concern, and in this situation also accepts the premises handed down through the political-administrative system’ (ibid.: 156). The task of anthropology should be to remind ourselves and others that in diagnosing the complex local situations created by present-day global interconnections, we need to take into account not only what co-exists side by side in a country like Norway but what lies outside the spotlight of comparison, in the life-world left behind – or brought from one place to the other – in the process of migration.

Social capital and segmented assimilation

The most refined comparative project measuring the performance of different immigrant groups in recent years has been Alejandro Portes’ and his associates’ shaping and application of the concept of ‘social capital’. Our purpose in this article is to begin developing a critique of this concept from an anthropological perspective. More specifically, we shall explore ways of complementing Portes’ perspective by drawing on discussions of the way space and place is symbolically constructed. We believe that this represents one way of acknowledging people’s practices as culturally informed without regarding culture as an essentialized quality of a person or group.

In his book with Ruben Rumbaut (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), and in a number of other books and papers (e.g. 1995, 1996), Alejandro Portes combines insights drawn from earlier writers on social capital in putting together a rather complex model for analysing the situation of the 'new second generation' of immigrants to the U.S. By this term is meant the children of immigrants, mainly Latin American and Asian, settling in the U.S. during the final decades of the twentieth century and transforming themselves into a variety of ethnic groups. The starting point of Portes and Rumbaut is that these immigrants on arrival in the US face a different society than did the migrants of European origin a hundred years earlier, and so, therefore, do their children. While some groups among today's second generation may well go through a smooth transition into the mainstream and keep ethnicity as a matter of personal choice, others will have to muscle their way up, socially and economically, on the basis of their own community's networks and resources. Still others will have to carry their ethnic identity as a mark of subordination, and will be at risk of joining a new rainbow underclass in America's inner cities.

What Portes and Rumbaut try to do is to isolate the factors deciding the social mobility, upwards or downwards, of different groups of youth with immigrant background. As decisive in this respect they regard the following four: 1) the history of the immigrant first generation; 2) the pace of acculturation among parents and children and its bearing on normative integration; 3) the barriers, cultural and economic, confronted by second-generation youth in their quest for adaptation; and 4) the family and community resources for confronting these barriers. Since our interest here is primarily in the concept of social capital and its role in adaptation, we shall limit ourselves to point four. The authors argue (p. 62) that the family resources necessary to promote educational success and ward off the threats posed by discrimination, narrowing labour market options, and street culture are of two kinds: education and skills providing access to economic goods and opportunities, and social capital in the form of family structures and ethnic networks. Portes and Rumbaut share Coleman's (1988) view that one of the most important assets one can impart to children, not only emotionally but in terms of social mobility, is growing up in a two-parent family. For the unit of the family the outside environment in the form of the co-ethnic community, determines the level of social capital available. This social capital is crucial in two respects: first, it tends to increase the economic opportunities available to immigrant parents, and, second, strong ethnic communities normally enforce norms against divorce and marital disruption, thus helping to preserve intact families.

Particularly commendable in Portes' and Rumbaut's book is the fact that it deals not only with the positive but also with the negative effects of social capital. One of the challenges facing children of immigrants is a measure of solidarity among the marginalized, translating into a denigration of schools and their staff as instruments of racial oppression, and of education itself as incapable of bettering their situation (2001, p. 60). This oppositional ideology often ends up reinforcing the blockage of opportunities that it denounces.

However, in this book the authors do not explain in detail the mechanisms involved in the creation of social capital, neither in the positive nor negative sense. Before turning to our empirical discussion, we shall go to another work involving Portes where the authors do go into the underlying mechanisms. In an earlier paper Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner (1993) distinguish four specific sources of social capital: *value introjection*, *reciprocity transactions*, *bounded solidarity*, and *enforceable trust*.

Value introjection emphasizes the moral character of economic transactions, guided by value imperatives learnt during the process of socialization. It regards economic transactions as reflections of an underlying social and moral order, and is a first source of social capital because it moves people to act in ways other than naked greed. This modified behaviour becomes appropriable by the collectivity as a resource.

Reciprocity transactions give rise to social capital through the accumulation of 'chits' based on previous good deeds to others in the primary exchanges of favours, information, approval, and other valued items of which social life consists. While the difference from regular market behaviour is that such transactions centre not on money and material goods but on social intangibles, in contrast to the first type individuals are not expected to behave according to group morality but rather to pursue selfish ends.

Bounded solidarity focuses on situational circumstances that can lead to group-oriented behaviour apart from early value introjection. Its classic sources are best exemplified by Marx's analysis of the rise of proletarian consciousness and the transformation of workers into a class-for-itself, the internal solidarity borne out of a common awareness of capitalist exploitation. As put by the authors, '(a)s a source of social capital, bounded solidarity does not arise out of the introjection of established values or from individual reciprocity exchanges, but out of the situational reaction of a class of people faced with common adversities' (1993, p. 1325).

Enforceable trust, the final source of social capital, is characterized by individuals subordinating their desires to collective expectations in anticipation of long-term market advantages by virtue of group

membership. The motivation for complying with the wishes of the group, in other words, is the anticipation of utilities associated with good standing in a particular collectivity. As is the case with the second source discussed above, the predominant orientation is utilitarian, except that behaviour is not oriented to a particular other but to the web of social networks of the entire community.

Strength and weaknesses of Portes' perspective

There is no doubt that social capital is a powerful analytical tool, and may be seen to explain many differences e.g. between the Tamil and the Somali communities in Norway. There is little doubt that the Tamil community is considerably more developed with respect to both bounded solidarity and enforceable trust than the Somali. Partly this has to do with the way networks are structured within the two groups. On the one hand, social networks among Tamils in Norway tend to be less family-based and more friendship-based than what is the case among the Somalis. As a result of strict immigration control and deportation practices Tamil migrants have not been able to settle their extended families in Norway. As a result, arenas, meeting-places, and cultural functions have been organized either by individuals, by informal friendship associations, or by political organizations. In terms of *internal* organization this has resulted in the predominance of what Putnam (2000) would call 'bridging capital', that is a lack of boundaries between different groups and factions, at the same time strengthening the 'bonding capital' of the group as a whole. On the other hand, there seems to be a difference in the networks of spouses, in the sense that while among Tamils we often find overlapping networks between husband and wife, among Somalis spouses more often have separate networks. Partly the higher degree of enforceable trust among Tamils also has to do with the higher degree of internal 'reachability' of the members of this group. As pointed out by Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993, p. 1337), what is important for this kind of social capital is the possibility, and ability, of keeping people in line, to mobilise for some kind of common goal, something which requires both a common standard of behaviour and means of communication.

This being said, what we find problematic with Portes' and his associates' perspective is that social capital takes the form of an analytical tool-kit applicable in a standardized manner. Or to put it differently, it allows for difference between social entities only in the limited range of variables included in the model. These variables are the ones accessible for observation in the here-and-now where the comparison is carried out. Thereby it serves to de-contextualize particular selected social qualities from their moorings in social and

cultural patterns more difficult to observe at a given moment. While the model outlined by Portes and Rumbaut (2001) pays attention to the way different immigrant groups have been received by the American society, there is no room for taking the wider context of migrating populations into consideration. The same limitation we find in Portes' and Sensenbrenner's discussion of 'bounded solidarity'. As seen above, this important, basic form of social capital is described by the authors as a collective identity, a 'we-ness' (1993, p. 1328) emerging out of a group of people confronting the (same) receiving society in the same way. What is focused is not the continuity and possible transformation of cultural tradition but the '*re-enactment*' of practices in a particular situation: '(t)he salience of many cultural practices and their re-enactment after immigration do not come about spontaneously, but usually result from the clash with the host society and they are, in this sense, an emergent product' (1993, p. 1330).

In sum, our argument is that the application of the concept of social capital for the purpose of comparing one group against another leaves out much of the 'embeddedness' necessary for a proper understanding of minority immigrant populations. More explicitly it seems to lack ways of taking into account the historical depth and the geographical interconnections constituting the here-and-now situation as a social fact. For the purpose of illustration we shall briefly discuss aspects of these two dimensions relevant to the situation of Tamils and Somalis in Norway, which fall outside the social capital spotlight:

Demographic profile and phases of migration

Many of the differences between the two groups in question with respect to employment and economy can be explained simply by their different histories of immigration and their different demographic profiles. Among minority groups of any size the Somali is the one with the shortest history in Norway. Numbers provided by Statistics Norway (Lie 2004) show that only thirty-seven people of this background, to be exact, have lived in Norway for more than fifteen years. 62 per cent have lived in Norway for less than five years, 20 per cent between five and ten years. If we go to the Tamil community the situation is different. Here we find that among first-generation immigrants 60 per cent have lived in Norway for more than ten years, 30 per cent for more than fifteen years, only 22 per cent for less than five years.

These different histories of immigration are accompanied by different demographics. In short, the Somali group of first-generation immigrants is considerably younger than the Tamil, one out of three being younger than twenty years of age. Among the Tamils the overwhelming

majority of first-generation immigrants are today between thirty and forty-five years, reflecting their arrival in late youth and early adulthood ten to fifteen years ago. The majority of adult Tamil immigrants today are women coming to reunite with husband or family in Norway.

Two points can be made against the backdrop of these figures. One is the empirical that the Somali community show all the signs of being a new exile community, still in the process of establishing, while the Tamil community has reached another phase of 'maturity'. The fact that the process of emigration from Somalia is in a more intense phase than what is the case from Sri Lanka may also be one reason for the more unsettled family relations we find within this group. While members of the Tamil community in Norway have to a large extent been able to bring their family members out of Sri Lanka, reunite with spouse and children, and settle members of the extended family in other western countries, in the Somali case this process is still going on. This is reflected in the large number of one person households. As much as 26, 5 per cent of Somali households in Norway are of this nature, compared with 16, 2 per cent among ethnic Norwegians and 10 per cent of Tamil households. A whole 28,8 per cent of Somali households consists of single parents with children, compared with only 2,6 per cent of Tamil households.

The second point we wish to make is the analytical one that while the consequences of these migration profiles in terms of social networks and social capital may possibly be assessed, this assessment does not necessarily reveal any qualitative truth about the two communities. If we go back to the early 1990s the Tamil community in Norway had a lot in common with the Somali community today (Fuglerud 1999), in another ten years the Somali community will have changed. The question must be asked, then, what is gained by reducing the complex time-space dimensions of social processes offset by migration to a common standard (Robinson *et al.* 2002).

The nature of transnational connections

Portes' and Sensenbrenner's emphasis on the 're-enactment' of cultural practices indicate that they see processes taking place in country of origin and country of settlement as empirically and analytically separate. In line with recent years' literature on 'transnationalism' (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992, Smith and Guarnizo 1999) we argue that one of the main analytical challenges of social science at the present time is to overcome geographical distance.

One aspect of this problematic has to do with the fact that social organization and cultural identity in the country of origin may not be 're-enacted' but continuously reproduced in the country of settlement.

It is a well-known fact that the civil war in Somalia to a large extent has been a war between different clans. The lack of central government is mirrored in an exile community without any central representative body. At the present time there are in Oslo alone more than twenty Somali organizations, most of them representing separate clan interests. Tamils are in a totally different situation. Since liberation from the British in 1948 a caste-based hierarchical society has in Sri Lanka been transformed into a national minority through the outside pressure of Sinhalese nationalist politics. The most central element in this process has been a cultural politics raising the issue of Tamil identity above internal divisions.

Another aspect of the same problematic is that with respect to Tamils in Norway today there is no contradiction between 'homeland politics' and measures that promote integration. Not only are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) represented in Norway, as in other exile countries, and enjoy support from the majority of refugees, they run most of the cultural centres teaching Tamil arts *and* school subjects to Tamil children and youth during weekends, establish youth organizations promoting higher education etc. Tamil Resource Centre, started up in a small way about ten years ago, today organizes around 2,000 Tamil children in five different locations. In a public landscape where integration and the promotion of non-Norwegian cultural identity are seen by official white-papers and the main political parties alike as inherently contradictory, Tamils are in the process of proving that this is not the case².

The analytical point here is that if we compare the two groups' brief history in Norway, it is difficult to find any justification for Portes' and Sensenbrenner's claim that collective identity ('bounded solidarity') is simply a function of the severity of confrontation with the receiving society. If we go back ten years we shall find not only that Norwegian authorities in general, and immigration authorities in particular, did all that was in their power to stop Tamil refugees from settling in Norway, but that they were continuously portrayed in the media as notorious traffickers and terrorists (Fuglerud 1997). In many ways they had the same position that the Somalis have today – at the bottom of the heap. On the other hand, there are few signs so far that the Somalis' encounters with Western societies have brought any radical changes in social organization.

Cultural orientations

The above leads us to what is our main argument, that in order to understand the life and situation of immigrant groups there is a need to take into account broader issues and more deep-seated traditions than the encounter with a particular new society. In particular, when

discussing migrants, we need to understand how the people concerned conceptualize space and their own communities within it. Speaking from a position within the discipline, Aase (1994, p. 53) argues that the task of geography should be to ask how symbolic space is socially produced. Various spaces emerge in different social contexts, and rather than taking a 'real' space for granted we should try to understand how and why certain contexts become more important than others. We therefore need to understand how peoples' life projects and priorities are embedded in their categorization and may be geographically ordered in different ways.

When it comes to the two groups in question, there seems to exist in Tamil society a 'centric' orientation; a tendency, and capacity, to build local institutions through which parts are turned into wholes and around which social order is maintained. Among Somalis we find a tendency towards dispersal and of managing tasks through long-distance networks. While these issues are intriguingly complex, and would require monographical analysis, let us very briefly discuss three issues for the purpose of illustration:

The sedentary and the nomadic

One obvious difference between Somali and Tamil society lies in the fact that while the first by tradition is predominantly nomadic, the other is sedentary. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly the importance of this fact when it comes to international migration, it should not be overlooked. Of (male) members of the Tamil landowner caste, which constitute approximately half of the population, it has been said that until recently he lived 'like a feudal lord with all his vassals round him. He had therefore slaves and vassals to serve him on all occasions, and these slaves and vassals represented different castes who served him in such capacity whenever occasion demanded' (Hocart 1950, p. 7). The point here is not inequality in itself, but the fact that the most elevated position in society implies being in the centre, or rather being *a centre*, and that this centre-position is linked to control over spatially located resources. With respect to Somali society it has been argued that the present-day migration should be seen against the backdrop of nomadic traditions and knowledge implied in concepts of *odoros* and *sahan* (Gundersen 2001). *Odoros* is the ability to predict the future on the basis of observable signs, in the sense of forming an opinion as to whether there will be grass and water somewhere else in the near future based on what you can see and hear where you are located today. *Sahan* is the next step of sending out a delegation to see not only if the grass is greener and water more abundant somewhere else but enough to actually make the decision to move people and herds. The men selected for this mission must not

only have the proper knowledge, they must be reliable, they must have the right personalities, be trusted by the others, life and death depends on them.

One historical dimension of this nomadic outlook and tradition has been Somalis seeking opportunities as seamen on Western ships. Summerfield (1993, p. 89) notes that in London a community of Somali sailors existed from the early twentieth century and that these seamen followed their traditional pattern of having a wife in each area in which they had an economic interest, thus it was not unusual for a seaman settled in the United Kingdom to have a white wife. In Somalia his Somali wife would be looking after his herds with his agnatic nomadic kinsmen and perhaps he would have a second wife in Somalia, living in her own household but in close contact with agnatic relatives, in Burrao or Hargeisa.

In the Tamil case one may presently trace two versions of transnationalism (Fuglerud 2001). While the LTTE keeps alive a diaspora identity and an allegiance based on ideas of national liberation and imaginary return, interviews made as part of the present project have revealed that ordinary Tamils' actual contact with Sri Lanka in terms of travel, business, and political engagement is less than could perhaps have been expected. Admittedly, these two dimensions may to some extent be interconnected, in the sense that the LTTE in Western countries seek to monopolise home country engagement. However, we would argue that there is also an element of the traditionally strong village identity in Tamil Sri Lanka being transposed into exile. In fact, the Tamil Home Village Associations existing in certain Western countries is one indication of this (Cheran, work in progress). While earning money to bring relatives out of the war-zone has been an overriding concern among Tamils in Norway (Fuglerud 1999), when this immediate need has been taken care of many seem to put their energy into cultural activities and providing continuously better economic and educational conditions for Tamil children where they live. This is a very different situation from the one depicted by Hansen (2003), who based on his fieldwork in Hargeisa, Somaliland, describes what he calls 'revolving returnees' in constant movement between Western countries and the place of origin. Although this is only possible for certain segments of the exile population, it does fulfil the Somali ideal of movement and of looking for better pastures.

Religious practices

The difference between the two communities, institution-building in the one case, flow in the other, may to some extent be interconnected with their different religious practices and orientations. In the one

case these de-centre and prevent integration, in the other they plant and bring together. There is a sense in which being a Muslim is a 'deterritorialized' identity: unless you are actually *in* one of the holy cities in the Middle East, you are by definition on the periphery. Mosques may be holy places but they are so by their orientation to somewhere else, to Mekka. The place of actual worship and prayer is theoretically irrelevant; it is the Umma, the Muslim imagined community that is invoked in the act of prayer. When a substantial proportion of Somali immigrants in Norway move or wish to move to London, as they indeed do, they claim that the main reason is the large Muslim community there and opportunity to live a 'true' Muslim life. With respect to daily life Assal (2001, p. 2), a Sudanese anthropologist studying Sudanese and Somali refugees in Norway, argues that Islam creates a common 'zone of intimacy' for Muslims, transcending identities like Sudanese and Somali. Thus, religion in this case leads attention away from locality and counterbalances rather than strengthens pre-existing social organization.

To a Hindu, on the other hand, temples constitute local centres. As noted by Jacobsen (2004, p. 142), Hinduism is a religion concerned with place. Places possess sacred power, the power to grant health and moral purity, to fulfil wishes or give *moksha*³ to those visiting. While most of the sacred places, for obvious historical reasons, are located in South Asia, this is not inherent in religious doctrine. New sacred spaces are still discovered or created, also outside South Asia. Tamils report that the establishment of the temple Sivasubramanyar Alayam in Oslo marked the end of a difficult period for them, and that the idea of Norway as a more permanent place of residence had now been psychologically accepted (Jacobsen 2003, p. 371). Furthermore, Hindu temples are mediums for creating wholes out of local hierarchical diversity. In religious thinking the different castes, in day-to-day life separated by strict rules, come together in providing separate but equally necessary services in temple ritual (McGilvray 1982)⁴.

Conceptions of personal autonomy

The third difference, in complex ways related to the first two, is alternative conceptions of personal autonomy. One dimension of this has to do with the fact that the strictly hierarchical, caste-based agricultural society of South Asia comes with a set of values and interactional norms that play down individual agency except for the highest ranking person. Based on fieldwork in Tamil Sri Lanka David (1973) identified two contrary 'normative schemes' by means of which actors oriented themselves to the action of others and with which they guided their own conduct. The *aristocratic* scheme, enjoining a code for conduct of enduring relationships between units, and the *mercantile*

scheme enjoining a code for conduct of temporary, specific, mutually manipulative relationships between units. The aristocratic scheme is characterized by what David terms *hierarchical amity*: diffuse, enduring, hierarchical solidarity. By the people he worked with in Sri Lanka the hierarchical aspect of relationships was described as respect (*mariyatai*), expressed in gestures where the superior give (food, money etc) while the inferior receive and serve. The superior is held always to command and to give permission for action to take place, the inferior is in his right to expect aid and support.

It should be noted that the normative scheme which David terms 'aristocratic' is not limited to inter-caste interaction. Many of the same traits we find e.g. between siblings, where age defines superiority, and between husband and wife, where women are supposed to venerate their husbands as gods. That speaking about caste among Tamils is no longer *comme il faut*, and that castes as such may in fact have lost much of their earlier social significance, does not mean that neither the normative basis nor the interactional reflexes implied by the old society are gone. We would argue that the integrative effect of the 'aristocratic scheme' is very much present in the Tamil diaspora, and that his scheme helps to explain, among other things, the important position held by community leaders.

In Somali society the agnatic line determines identity and belonging. Most Somalis would claim that they belong to two gigantic extended families, originating from the mythic Samalee and Saab, divided into six clan families. Members of these clan families count their genealogy back around twenty to thirty generations to a common predecessor. The clan families consist of a number of flexible segments, clans and sub-clans coming together for specific purposes (Boddy 1995). Women always retain their patrilineal membership and can always rely on support from their own patrilineage. Women living within their husbands' territory are regarded as ambassadors of their own lineages and clans. The potentially strained relationship between spouses created by this situation is exacerbated by the Islamic rule allowing men to take several wives. There seems to be a historical tendency for 'mother-groups' to develop, under nomadic conditions often trekking on their own, with the husband and father circulating between the different families. Even though women may be considered the subordinate part in husband/wife unions, most relationships in Somali society, including relations between different lineages or clans established through marriage, are in a sense of a contractual nature where relationships are entered into voluntarily by parties defined as equal. With divorce the wife's genetrical and uxorial rights revert to her lineage to be transferred anew in successive marriages and payment of bridewealth.

What we see here, in sum, are two cultural orientations being articulated in different empirical settings; one centring on *locality*, *hierarchy*, and *collectivism*, the other on *mobility*, *equality*, and *individualism*. The relevance to the situation of the two minorities in Norway lies in Tamils and Somalis articulating what Bauman and Gingrich (2004) have termed different ‘grammars of selfing/othering’. All forms of identity, individual or collective, involve a relationship to what is considered not to be identical. This relationship, however, is not necessarily uniform in all times and places. From the annals of social science Bauman and Gingrich select three models, on the basis of which identity and alterity are constructed. Rephrased in terms of cultural orientations, we may say that such ‘grammars’ depict systematically different logics underlying the emergence of spatial constructs in social contexts (cf. Aase 1994).

The first of these models is the binary grammar of orientalism as described by Edward Said (1978), where the operative logic is the mirrored reversal of ‘what is good in us is lacking in them, but what is lacking in us is (still) present in them’. This has been the dominant perspective of Western elites on ‘peripheral’ societies since colonial days, and is still operative in the conceptualization of minorities in many Western societies, including Norway. In this model superiority co-exists with a sense of loss, and the distancing from the self-created other is also a distancing from the idea of an uncomplicated self.

The second model is that of the segmentary lineage system, borrowed from Evans-Pritchard’s description of the Nuer in Sudan (1940), but equally applicable to Somali society. Characteristic of this model is that every individual is part of a pyramid of identifications ranging across genealogical levels, determining identities and alterities according to context. According to the operative logic of this model the Other may be a foe at one level, while being an ally in a context placed at a higher level of segmentation: ‘Fusion and fission, identity and difference are not matters of absolute criteria in this grammar, but functions of recognizing the appropriate segmentary level’ (Baumann 2004, p. 23).

The third model is the model of ‘encompassment’ borrowed from Dumont’s analysis of the Indian caste system (1980), a form of social organization historically found also among Tamils in Sri Lanka. Characteristic of this model is the act of selfing by appropriating, or coopting, selected kinds of otherness. Rather than contextualizing difference by recognizing a multitude of levels, this grammar works on two levels only, the higher level subsuming lower-level difference in its own universality. What exists on the higher level always represents – ‘encompasses’ – a larger diversity found on the lower level; ‘you may

think that you differ from me in values or identity; but in reality you are one part of me'.

What is brought out in this discussion is that in 'segmentation' and 'encompassment', the two grammars represented by our two minorities, we may not only be dealing with different forms of social organization, bound to specific times and places, but with different operational principles making themselves relevant in a variety of ways and in settings not encountered earlier. For example, it seems reasonable to understand the endless efforts made by Tamil individuals to establish community centres and teaching facilities for the second generation, and the support and acclaim they receive, as a reflection of 'hierarchical amity'. With respect to the Somali, it is not unreasonable to see some of the difficulties they encounter in dealing with Norwegian public authorities as the result of a segmentary logic premised on bonds of loyalty not being fixed to locality. As noted by Bauman (2004, p. 23), the selfing of selves and the othering of others according to context, as the segmentary logic implies, is inherently at odds with a system based on institutionalized politics and territorial power structures.

Concluding comments

Portes' concept of social capital contributes to an understanding of the situation of Somali and Tamil immigrants in Norway but is not without its problems. The main difficulty is that the measurement of capital is seen as interlinked with social mobility, upwards or downwards, as understood according to the norms of the majority society and measured against participation in the markets and institutions of the territorially bounded nation-state. Success is defined in terms of individual access to higher education and a socio-political position; the model does not capture the psychological and social benefits of networks in their own right, neither does it take into account to what extent the cultural and spatial logic of different groups of migrants are compatible with social and political organization in the society of residence.

Our data suggest that the cultural, demographic and cyclical features of different immigrant populations as well as features of the host society at different points in time are all important in processes of adaptation. Viewing social capital in terms of social mobility in the country of settlement lead us into letting majority conceptions and interests govern our studies, rather than exploring the cultural grammars underlying the purposes for which minorities themselves put social capital to use.

Notes

1. Tamils in 2001 had a labour-market participation of 61, 1 per cent (both sexes), compared to 60,8 per cent for the Norwegian population as a whole (Lie 2004). Somalis at the same time had a labour-market participation of 25, 8 per cent. Somali households have a lower income than the immigrant population average, and more children to spend it on. With respect to social mobility it is worth observing that as much as 48,7 per cent of second-generation Tamils 19–24 years are taking higher education, and more women (58,8 per cent) than men (40,9 per cent). While among Somalis we still do not have a second generation of comparable age, this is far beyond the national average (31,4 per cent women and 21,6 per cent men).
2. The caption at the web-page of the Tamil Resource Centre reads: 'The Tamil people in Norway develop the Tamil language, the religions, education, culture, and social networks. Children, youth, and adults should be able to benefit from this in different ways. Our intention is to integrate the Tamil people into Norwegian society' (www.trvs.no).
3. *Moksha* refers, in Indian religions, to liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth and all the suffering and limitation entailed in embodied worldly existence.
4. '(...) it is the provision of an elaborate system of hereditary services to the temple deity which is depicted as the central achievement, the creation of society merely an incidental byproduct. The tradition endures today (...) that the overall constitution of society should be reflected and validated in temple rituals, especially in the annual temple festivals (*tiruvilā*)' (McGilvray 1982: 72).

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