

Centre for Research in International  
Migration and Ethnic Relations, CEIFO



## Final Decisions

*The Swedish Migration Board and the Representation of Return-Migration<sup>1</sup>*

Erik Olsson

CEIFO Working paper

2010:1

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### *The Swedish Migration Board and the Representation of Return-Migration<sup>1</sup>*

by

Erik Olsson

CEIFO, Center for Research in International Migration and Ethnical Relations,  
Stockholm University

#### **Abstract**

The article highlights some dimensions of the policy discourse of the Swedish nation-state when dealing with issues like the return of refugees to their countries of origin and how this policy is implemented in practice. It is illuminated how priority is given to particular ‘refugee-groups’ as a target for repatriation activities. There is particularly in the practice a deep concern with the migrants’ need to take decision to either move to the country of origin or to settle for good in Sweden. The migrant-situation appears as a ‘mode of life’ that could involve the individual only in a limited period of life and the migrants must be assisted to decide when to exit. The study also shows that the life situation of refugees particularly conflicts with the (assumed) normality; having roots in a foreign country will imply a displacement from your original culture and leaving kin and friends.

Keywords: Return-migration, Nation-state, Refugees, Policy, Practice.

Erik Olsson

PhD, Associate Professor

Centre for Research on International Migration and Ethnic Relations

Stockholm University

SE-10691 Stockholms universitet Sweden

+46-8-163810, erik.olsson@ceifo.su.se

## Introduction

This article will highlight some of the important dimensions of the policy discourse of the Swedish nation-state when dealing with issues like the return of refugees to their countries of origin. The article also discuss how this policy, promoted by the Swedish Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*), SMB,<sup>2</sup> is implemented in practice. The general motive for the choice of investigating policy and practice in this sense is the belief that this will be helpful in the deconstruction of the state's position and rationale when formulating migration policy.

For this purpose, I will rely on three assumptions. First, it is suggested that the state, via its migration policy makers, will utilize a certain image or idea (i.e. model) of migration when formulating a policy and that this model is represented in the policy discourse. Secondly, it is assumed that refugees will have experiences of migration and, in particular, return issues in ways that are shaped by their life situation of being (in this case) refugees and by the discourses in society and that these will colour the narratives of migrants. It should be noted that these 'shaping discourses' will potentially include all that is discussed, debated, etc., about migration in a given society but, above all, policy as well as a diaspora's own ideas about returning to the 'homeland' (Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Thirdly, it is suggested that, by juxtaposing the state's model with the migration model discernable from refugees' narratives of return issues, we will be able to understand the 'rationale' in the state's migration model while simultaneously shed some light on how this policy relates to the 'reality' of refugees.

This article basically tries to answer the following questions: How are migration and return issues conceived of in the discourse of the state and what features/dimensions are central in these? How is this policy implemented in practice by the responsible authority and how does the institutional staff represent migration issues when carrying out assisted returns? How do (the targeted) refugees perceive the issue of return and how do they conceive of the state's rationale in this?<sup>3</sup>

## Theoretical Departure: Roots or Rational Choice?

The analysis will focus on the discourse guiding the SMB's practice and its expression when implemented in the work with assisting returns. I will in relation to this make a brief methodological observation. When I refer to practice, I basically mean discourses that are implemented and practised in different kinds of activities (discursive practices). Discourses have the potential to be constitutive and form the objects to which they refer (Foucault 1972) when put into action. Here, my intention is not to discuss the mechanism of these practices and to suggest what kind of power these are equipped with. Practice will, here, connote the actions and arrangements taken when the officials carry out (or at least are supposed to) their tasks (in this case, to assist in return migration) in their capacity as representatives of a state institution. In some sense, it could be assumed that these officials are conducting the work of a thinking institution (cf. Douglas 1987).

How then can we understand the state's way of representing migration and returning? Nationality and belonging to a certain country in a world of nations are in the modern world the 'normal' way of living (Malkki 1992). From this, a preliminary conceptualisation of how migration and migrants are represented from the state's point of view will be outlined. I will here distinguish particularly two tendencies in the modern national thinking that will affect the way the term return is understood and implemented in terms of policy and practice.

The first dominant way of understanding migration, at least in Western society, is framed by a widespread discourse of roots, which, according to Liisa Malkki (1992, 1995), is part of the global order of a world that in its capacity of ‘sovereign, spatially discontinuous units’ (Malkki 1992: 26) embeds humans in space and soil. According to this normative discourse, humans are represented as if they were plants rooted in their places of origin in terms of identity, and that the dominant social environment and culture of that place have a strong impact on their future lives.

According to the root image, humans are identified as if the territory of their birth and its culture are inscribed on their bodies. Refugees are (here) liminal persons not only exposed to the ‘stranger’s’ position when encountering unfamiliar customs and people, but will also suffer from a loss of culture, identity, and habits (Malkki 1995: 508). We can logically assume that the nation-state for this reason, but also for ‘fiscal’ reasons, will perceive refugee migration as problematic. The refugees are in need of ‘therapeutic interventions’ (Malkki 1992) because they not only suffer from persecution, but also they are detached from their home-territory. This is particularly likely to happen when nations are in a phase of accentuated nationalism and in cases when the states have developed a strict control of their societies.

The root discourse conceives of return as something that will put an end to the migration cycle (Malkki 1995: 509). However, a second tendency in the modern world is the strong belief in rationality. The neo-classical push-and-pull model of migration, once popular in social science, is an expression of this. According to this model, there are more or less rational causes of and motives for people migrating, while the question of whether individuals should remain in an area or not depends on the cost–benefit-conditioned decisions of the individuals concerned (cf. Castles and Miller 1993; Faist 2000). Although the criticism of this model being too simplistic and individualistic (Castles and Miller 1993) while, for instance, treating migrants as atomistic agents (Faist 2000) has attracted wide support, the impact of the push-and-pull model on the way that migrants and migration are perceived cannot be ignored. There is a strong majority-belief that people migrate because it is economically favourable and that they move to countries and places hoping for more success. These assumptions could easily be rejected with reference to arguments found in, for instance, forced migration or by simply pointing to the impact of state control and regulations. Still, the rational-choice approach is a dominant way of understanding the reasons for migration.

The idea of a rational choice in migration, used in, for instance, a neo-classical perspective, seems to be in contradiction with the emphasis on roots when juxtaposing it with ideas of return. If migration is an act of cost–benefit decisions, the decision to move or stay is a matter of making expectations and calculating the possibilities. How come so ‘few migrants from most places and why so many out of few places?’, as Faist (2000) has framed the question. If returning would be as ‘voluntary’ as at least the governments expect it to be, returning to the countries of origin would be dependent on the prospective return migrants’ positive expectations. Many migrants who live in wealthy and economically favourable countries do, however, return even to relatively poor and unstable countries where they could not expect to live in safety and peace. Others stay even after their country of origin developed in economical terms. In these cases, the roots seem to be an operative agent but so is also the action of the states where they reside.

It is, however, important to define the context where these discourses may be represented. There is no guarantee that the state will make a similar reflection as, for instance,

the critics of the rational-choice model do. Nor will the contradiction in combining rational ideas with 'root' ideas be as obvious in the position of the state. For this reason, it is interesting to examine more precisely how the state implements policy while, in some way, utilizing a rationale that departs from either the roots or rational-choice discourses (or both) or some other migration models and how it all is composed in the state's practice of repatriation. The central question in this article is to look at the discourses and practices of the state and to explore how this root and rational view of migration phenomena is represented in the accounts about the migrants' (perceived) abilities and desires to return to their countries of origin.

### **The Context: Repatriation in Swedish Migration Policy**

The Swedish state has since the late 1940s not been particularly concerned about return issues (Johansson 2006; Södergran 1998). One of the few exceptions is found in a 1984 government bill (SFS 1984: 890) where the Swedish authorities offered a provision for (non-Swedish) migrants wishing to return to their countries of origin to apply for a small grant (the equivalent of 150 Euros per person) and a contribution to the costs of tickets and the relocation of goods. This grant had 'humanitarian' motives and reflected expressions of it being a human right for a person to live in his/her country of origin. Another exception was supporting organizations in their activities intended to assist returning migrants. The Swedish state had, apart from these exceptions, practically no activities of its own within the field of return migration, and, until the early 1990s, there was scarcely any debate on this issue (Johansson 2006). Sweden seems here to have followed an international trend of treating repatriation as a taboo issue (Preston 1999).

This international trend did, however, change and over time repatriation has become the norm of concluding exile (Preston 1999). For instance, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 1992, declared the 1990s as the decade of repatriation (UNHCR 1996; Preston 1999). In line with this change, the official Swedish migration policy also went from dealing exclusively with immigration to, what was claimed as, 'migration as a whole'. This change also conveyed the incorporation of return migration as a dimension of the migration policy (Johansson 2006; Södergran 1998).

The new Swedish Government policy in this field became apparent in 1994 when a government bill (Prop. 1994/95: 150) announced the formation of a planning group for the possible repatriation of Bosnian refugees. Shortly after this bill, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs directed the SMB to take action and responsibility. Simultaneously, the state started to look into the possibilities of allowing return migration for Somali refugees. This policy was, perhaps due to the political instability in the targeted countries, not fully implemented immediately. Gradually, a policy of repatriation became evident in subsequent government directives. For instance, the appropriation directions to the SMB (*Regleringsbrev* 19.12.1996) say that '... voluntary repatriation should be directed to and adapted for groups with different needs. Individuals from Bosnia and Herzegovina along with Somalia and other areas on the Horn of Africa should be prioritised'.

The terms which came to govern migration policy in the early years of the twenty-first century, and which profoundly integrated return issues into migration policy, were, as a result of the earlier instructions, spelled out in the 1996/97 government bill (Prop. 1996/97: 25).

This bill reads in part:

Contributions internationally and in Sweden may have the long-term goal that refugees should voluntarily be able to return safely to their countries of origin. This view will as a rule characterize the reception of refugees in Sweden from the beginning.

The view that good integration in Swedish society is the best precondition for return is still valid.

Those refugees who wish to return but lack resources may receive increased support.

Return-migration programmes may be adapted to the different situations of the groups.<sup>4</sup>

The bill does not explicitly touch upon the motives *why* the state should be involved in the migrants' desire to return to the countries of origin. Instead, it frequently refers to the country of origin and the voluntary aspect of the return. Moreover, there is no reason as to why Bosnians and Somalis were singled out as the two target groups (although other groups were not excluded). It should be noted that in Sweden these target groups represented two refugee categories that arrived in significant numbers in the early 1990s due to violent conflicts in their respective countries. It should also be remembered that both Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were experiencing war or war-like situations and insecurity. In fact, in the same year as the 1994 government bill was published, the state of Somalia collapsed due to the bitter war between different groups and factions. The same year, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced heavy fighting and the Dayton Peace Accords were not signed until 1995. The implementation of actions for these categories was then, from a humanitarian perspective, an unexpected task. Even more surprising is that Bosnians, at the same time, were obliged to apply for a visa when visiting Sweden, and most Somalis were given temporary protection for a year instead of a residence permit as before (if the refugees qualified for refugee status, that is).

At the time of the introduction of the Swedish repatriation policy, there was an international consensus on the urgent need to reconstruct Bosnia and Herzegovina. The discussion preceding this reconstruction by means of returning refugees already started during the war. In this spirit, the UN High Commissioner in Bosnia and Herzegovina declared that 1997 would be the year of repatriation from the European Union (Walsh, Black and Koser 1999). According to officials at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, these criteria led to Bosnians being prioritized when the new policy was discussed. The Somalis, as it seemed, just happened to provide a sufficient comparison with which one could just implement the repatriation practice modelled on the Bosnians. Memos from the time of the above-mentioned preparation of the new task reveal, however, that the authorities discussed the possible return of Somalis simultaneously with the Bosnian case. In both cases, there was a clear tendency to ascribe refugees with a natural motive for returning 'home'— doubts were even overtly expressed that Somalis would be able to integrate into 'Swedish society' and the Government would simply facilitate the means to do so. It was also found that the SMB was deeply involved in the preparation of the task, and, in fact, high-level SMB officials already in 1994 took important initiatives to carry out the investigations and put them into action.

In sum, this change in Swedish migration policy was launched in the mid-1990s and authorized the SMB to develop a practice assisting the return of migrants.

The target was refugees (but not other migrants) who had a residence permit but were not yet Swedish citizens. Migrants with Swedish passports were disqualified from the ensuing programmes.

It is remarkable that the target groups chosen from among a number of candidates were two groups from countries which were both in a state of war and conflict.

### **Return Migration as an Event**

The implementation of the new Swedish migration policy in the 1990s was, above all, manifested in the 1996/97 government bill. The bill contained the final directives for the SMB to establish its own operative activities in assisting, what was called, 'voluntary return'. This meant that the SMB singled out repatriation as an activity area of its own, with a budget which allocated resources in five areas. The first included the former cash grant to returning refugees, which, as a direct response to the above-mentioned bill, was increased to SEK 10,000 (with a maximum of SEK 40,000 per family).<sup>5</sup> A second was the opportunities for prospective returnees to travel to the countries of origin for visit and check out the situation there. A third area was the provision of information about various possibilities on how to receive support for the return as well as about the situation in the destination country. The fourth, and, in economic terms, most important, activity area was the administration of the funding of projects intended to assist in return migration. Funding applications were sent by non-government organizations (NGOs), Swedish municipalities, and different ethnic or religious associations. Finally, the fifth activity area was in the form of networking, which meant contacts with organizations/institutions, in order to find ways to support repatriation, also mentioned in the government bill. This was chiefly carried out in the form of setting up a network council for each geographical area (e.g. the Balkans and the Horn of Africa), which included key people, representatives and/or officials from NGOs, ethnic associations, and municipalities involved in repatriation activities as well as representatives from other authorities.

Since 1999, the SMB's repatriation practice has been organized based on a regional model. This was accomplished by establishing a group of officials who worked in their respective SMB region and jointly acted as an operative group. When reorganizing this, the SMB also showed that the board was taking repatriation matters seriously. The SMB's head office was coordinating this group and was also handling the individual applications for return grants while the officials in the regional districts were assigned general responsibility for these issues in their respective region. The majority of these regional officials had other workload responsibilities and their task was mainly to deal with applications for repatriation-oriented projects or to supply information to a group or organization when time allowed. Several times a year, internal conferences were arranged and committees set up with the purpose of discussing common issues in their practice. On rare occasions, the officials made on-site visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina or the Republic of Kosovo (which over time was established as a possible repatriation country).

The top year for the individual return-grant applications has, so far, been 1997, which was the first year after the authorization of increasing the grants. The number of applications in 1997 exceeded 1,000, which, however, seemed to be a consequence of migrants anticipating the increase, because the following years saw the numbers decrease dramatically. For instance, the SMB received less than 200 applications in 2000 (158 applications granted) and only 26 applications (19 granted) in 2007, ten years after the increase was implemented.

It should, here, be noted that the Swedish regulations disqualify potential applicants with a Swedish citizenship, which, in fact, is a large share (about 60 per cent) of the foreign-born population in Sweden.

Most of the resources were, in practice, directed towards the funding of projects that assisted Bosnians and Somalis in their return plans. After having received criticism, the SMB avoided the naming of target countries but replaced this with 'examples' of countries suitable for repatriation and as target countries for projects. For instance, the SMB's website ([www.migrationsverket.se](http://www.migrationsverket.se)) currently (2010) lists countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It shows that refugees continue to receive special attention and that the Swedish Government still gives some priorities to unstable countries.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Migrant Dilemma**

In the SMB's practice, the self-evident fact is, in various ways, repeated: people will sooner or later want to return to their countries of origin! When this will occur seems to be a matter of time, circumstances, safe conditions, and the family situation. This does not mean that SMB officials aggressively demanded that refugees should 'go home', however. There is no doubt that the SMB's discourse on repatriation has humanistic references. It is suggested in many of the officials' utterances that migration is both involuntary and circumstantial. In the texts as well as in individual utterances, it is underlined that people should return on a 'voluntary basis' and that it is understandable that making the decision to move yet again is sometimes difficult. One of the top-level officials admitted in relation to this that the repatriation policy could be conceived of as a way to 'push the individual decision'. It is, nevertheless, clear from officials' statements and official texts (such as the government bill, appropriation directions, and internal memos) that refugees are represented as deeply attached to one single country. The discourse implicitly refers to 'normality' in terms of the stability of being in one single place that would benefit migrants if they could achieve it. Let me give some examples.

In the wake of a new Swedish migration policy (Prop. 1996/97: 25), the text in the government bill underlines the normality of a stable and integrated life. This implies that people need to be integrated into a national structure: 'The view that a good integration in the Swedish society is the best precondition for a return is still valid'. The text frequently refers to the importance of combining the integration achievements of the migration policy with a strategy that seriously considers the return aspect. In the same bill, it is articulated that return migration in general must rely on a well-founded decision and due to this it is important to inform about the conditions in the refugees' countries of origin.

In an SMB memo from 1998, the idea of stability as a kind of precondition for return was emphasized: '... refugees should receive relevant information enabling them to make an informed decision about their future. *Statens Invandrarverk* [SMB] should provide the means for those people who have decided to return'. In similar phrases, it is clearly stated that integration and stability in the host country will provide the best preconditions for such a decision.

Official declarations like the 1996/97 government bill, as well as the various utterances of SMB officials, emphasized the importance of making a serious *decision* about future life. The same idea was also repeated in later statements by the SMB as well as different NGOs working with repatriation.



The danger, as it seems, was that refugees would otherwise end up in an unsolvable dilemma and SMB officials repeatedly expressed their determination not to contribute to this dilemma when the question of staying or returning could be plaguing the refugees. Instead, the necessity of the refugees taking a decision was underlined. This was clearly expressed in the evaluation team's interviews with the SMB officials who, in general, were opposed to our arguments, saying that migrants sometimes need an open-ended strategy with which to face the future. The SMB's point was clear: one should not promote a situation where refugees could consider a return to Sweden after a failed period in their countries of origin. A similar tendency is also observed by Laura Huttunen in a study of the Finnish return policy: 'the refugees should either live here or there, either settle permanently in Finland and become "normal" residents there, or return to Bosnia permanently' (Huttunen 2010: 56).

In fact, the centrality of the refugee's *decision* in discourse and practice gives it an organizational power that guides the officials in their work. What the discourse tries to deal with is the expected migrant dilemma of being 'in-between'. This explains why the SMB tries to encourage the refugees to seriously consider their return, perhaps by visiting their old countries, then to make a (final) decision about which country they will spend the rest of their lives in. This idea is well supported by the opportunity for the migrant to be granted a visit (*besöksresa*), paid for by the SMB, in order to inspect the conditions in the country of origin.

The same obsession with the act of decision making is further demonstrated when looking into what criteria guided officials in their assessments of applications for repatriation projects. Projects that, according to SMB officials, were expected to contribute to people's welfare and their successful return were usually highly ranked in these assessments. In many cases, however, a project could be approved even if it did not aim to assist refugees in their immediate return plans, but, instead, supplied them with information about, for instance, the conditions for returning to Somalia or Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, it was assumed that 'serious' information would contribute to informed decisions.

The importance attached to 'the decision' will cast light on some of the special aspects of the practice. One controversial issue was that the SMB was not completely open and transparent when informing migrants about the rules and regulations regarding the Swedish residence permit. According to Swedish immigration regulations, individuals holding a residence permit will lose it after having registered a move to another country and not having returned within a year. A common procedure in Swedish migration practice is, however, that those who have been permanently resident in Sweden for more than five years can register for a new residence permit without any problems. This praxis is officially declared and acknowledged. Returning migrants are entitled to the same treatment, and the individuals who received a grant or who participated in a repatriation project (or both) could also benefit from this procedure by not having the first year registered as a permanent 'emigration' (which gives them two years' respite). In the same manner as the returning Bosnians from Finland, as observed by Huttunen, the returnee had to negotiate about his/her possibility of having a residence permit. The full information about the practice of permits was not included in the standard information of the 1990s. This lack of information was pointed out in a government bill (1996/97) and then (after some years) completed in the standard information brochure and later also covered in the FAQs on what will happen with the residence permit when moving from Sweden, which are on the SMB's website ([www.migrationsverket.se](http://www.migrationsverket.se)). In their response to this criticism, some officials declared that the SMB should not give returnees false hopes of receiving a residence permit. In personal communications, some officials also confessed that they did not want to give that kind of information as it might make migrants' decisions more

difficult. Statements like these were, of course, a bureaucratic rationalization on behalf of the officials, since the same ‘to-be-sure’ strategy implies the impossibility of providing information about most other possibilities requiring a formal decision. The regulations for a residence permit simply conflicted with the ambitions of ‘helping’ refugees to make a serious decision about their lives.

My interpretation of this strict line in the event of a dilemma is that the SMB is trying as much as possible to furnish its practice with ‘clear cases’ as this will streamline the bureaucratic and institutional procedures in complex issues. A clear case is, in the SMB’s eyes, needed due to the existence of a migrant’s dilemma which could obscure a straightforward decision about his or her future residency. What, then, is the problem with a hesitant refugee?

First, the SMB’s repatriation practice was, at the time of its establishment, both controversial and largely unknown to prospective returning migrants. It meant that the practice had to ‘show results’ in order to gain support and acceptance. At first glance, it failed in this task as the low numbers of returnees attracted by the SMB’s repatriation practice illuminate. The ‘failures’ were interpreted as signs of refugees being more oriented towards ‘integration’ than return. At least, they were able to make a ‘serious final decision’ about the future, it was maintained. To this, I would remark that many of the migrants kept their return plans even after coming back to Sweden and the little interest shown by individuals to utilize the support or to participate in the activities was rather an effect of the government demanding a ‘final choice’ about where to live. Instead, the ‘excuses’ in the SMB’s discourse demonstrate how this practice was legitimized. The picture of a happy ending to the migrant dilemma is important and explains why the SMB put considerable effort and prestige into stipulating ‘successful returns’ (in the eyes of the SMB) and ‘closed cases’.

Second, the introduction of such a practice is legitimized by the idea of people having a ‘home’ which, in normal circumstances, will be the country of birth. The migration model that emerges here represents migration as an *event* which has the form of a series of migrant decisions leading to ‘emigration’ and several others leading to a ‘return’. The migrant here acts as a stranger who, due to unfortunate circumstances, is displaced from his or her country. The principal frame of this discourse refers to an assumed normality which relies on the stability of a permanent and original home and people’s inherent belonging to a country. The importance of making a decision about the future is dependent on this; migration and the abnormality of the situation must come to an end. However, this pertinence to the original home could very well be altered in stable conditions, such as when a migrant has been successfully integrated in the new country. It is quite obvious that this practice was directed towards a national agenda that simultaneously defined migration as something related to an enclosed space and migrants as foreign nationals.

### **Migration as a Process**

From the interviews with refugees of Bosnian, Chilean, and Somali origin in Sweden before a prospective return and, in some cases, after they tried to return, some observations could be made that, in some sense, questions the premises of the SMB’s repatriation practice. For instance, it can easily be noted that the low and decreasing number of applicants for SMB grants was not caused by a lack of information or by a disinterest in moving back to the countries of origin among the refugees. Instead, it was clear that many migrants chose to apply for Swedish citizenship, which excluded them from applying to the SMB. Interviewees

were generally aware of the possibility of receiving support from the Swedish state but the circumstances were such that they were either prevented from applying or found it more favourable not to apply. For the ones who qualified to apply, the risk of losing their residence permit, without any guarantee of receiving a new one, had a cooling effect on the application activity.

Official registration of the residency in the country of origin was automatically followed by losing the residence permit and, as mentioned above, migrants did not always receive sufficient information about the procedures involved when requesting a new permit. Being a registered participator in a repatriation project or a grant holder might thus be perceived as risky for those concerned about keeping their various options open.

The risk taking involved in the participation in repatriation practice could be a starting point for understanding the rationale in refugees' return strategies. For instance, applying for Swedish citizenship is a more strategic and common way of securing the options needed in case the plans to settle in the country of origin fail. In a few cases, this was done while, in order to secure citizenship rights in the country of origin, one or two family members kept their original citizenship.<sup>7</sup> Many of the interviewees of Bosnian and Chilean origin were expressing interest in returning to their countries of origin and quite a lot of them were aware of the return option.<sup>8</sup> However, in most cases, the interviewees visited their country on their own. The problem they experienced with the assistance they could obtain from the SMB's practice was that it did not leave much room for flexibility. The interviewees were certainly anticipating different kinds of problems in their attempts to settle in the countries of origin and needed to keep the door open to Sweden. It was common to keep this door open by making use of the Swedish immigration regulations that permit people to live and work abroad for a year without losing their residence permit. In this flexible strategy, the necessity of securing options for a life that encompassed both countries was crucial. This possibility was also acknowledged and utilized in the repatriation projects and was later extended to be valid for two years.

Our findings confirm other observations of Bosnian (Eastmond 2006; Jansen 2008) and Chilean return migration (Olsson 1997, 2010; Tollefsen Altamirano 2000), namely that the return is in some sense the 'end to a condition of waiting' (Muggeridge and Doná 2006: 426) while simultaneously, in many cases, hazardous. Our case-observations also seem to fit well with the discussion brought up by Black and Koser (1999) saying that repatriation in some cases might be the 'end of refugee cycle' while simultaneously marking 'the beginning of a new cycle for returnees, as a new notion of 'home' is explored and created' (Black and Koser 1999: 17). From our studies it seemed that the returnees could improve their chances of a secure livelihood by means of a supporting social network that could arrange opportunities of a different kind. Particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this also involves having the 'right' ethnic or family affiliations. Social tensions are also included in the return equation, and in both Bosnia and Herzegovina (Eastmond 2006; Jansen 2008) and Chile these are often regarded with some suspicion (Tollefsen Altamirano 2000). A particular problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina was that many had to face the situation of their former homes being occupied by people who had stayed behind or moved in as internal refugees, or even had been given the property as a gift by the local authorities. This could naturally lead to chaotic situations in which the returnees had to make legal claims to their property.

In dealing with these hardships of everyday life, many of our Bosnian interviewees hesitated to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina after their return. Some of them were waiting for an opportunity to either move back to Sweden or to another country.

This was also the reality in Chile, although the return was, in general, more peaceful. Due not only to insecure living conditions, but also multiple social and material affiliations of different kinds (family, kin, friends, assets, land, etc.), migrants might, in many cases, have an interest in having the option to move 'back'.

They could also utilize the dual attachment by working seasonally in one of the countries (normally Sweden) while spending a longer period of time in Chile or Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many of them are able to go back and forth between the two countries, exploring the possibilities of settling in the country of origin. These people are seemingly trapped in a circular pattern as they were migrating back and forth between these countries, but it cannot be denied that some of the migrants both needed the possibility of living as a transmigrant and realized it as an enjoyable reality of their lives.

This tendency among, at least, the Bosnian and Chilean refugees to travel to their countries of origin and to maintain the social bonds with people connected with their social networks illuminates a strategy similar to Rouse's observation (1992) that individual migrants' choices and preferences are likely to be non-decisive: 'Instead of leaving one community and re-orienting to another, then, many settlers developed transnational involvement that encompasses both' (Rouse 1992: 45). The gaining of multiple permanent or temporary housing, the time and money invested in finding opportunities transnationally, as well as the social bonds created and reproduced in both (or several) locations are all signs of the 'multilocal' (Clifford 1994) or perhaps transnational attachments migrants embody in their daily life. It is now widely understood that when people (for whatever reason) leave their country of residence, they are well informed by other migrants' experiences, helped by contacts/networks of friends and kin, and guided by perceived opportunities in the new country. This is not a one-way act but rather an open-ended process in which the decision to stay, return, or leave for another place might never be resolved.

Only one of the Somali interviewees foresaw an immediate return, although several had distant plans for it. The Somalis we interviewed found the repatriation programmes insulting and discriminating: 'Why is the government so eager to repatriate us to our homeland, instead of helping us to find a decent life in this country?' Many of the Somali interviewees were disappointed by the reluctance of the Swedish authorities to grant them a residence permit while the same authorities were trying to get Somali refugees involved in repatriation programmes. On this point, they directly relate to the critical point in the SMB's practice when targeting particular groups. In the Somali case, at least, we found out that this refugee group was included in the policy planning based on the view that they would not be able to 'integrate' and would need assistance in their return attempts. It should be added that the Somalis in Sweden had limited access to exploring possibilities with regard to returning. However several of them were mentioning UK or Canada as alternative destinations and according to our information many Somalis in Sweden have explored this possibility.

### **Roots as a Rational Choice?**

In conclusion, this study of the Swedish repatriation practice has highlighted two tendencies in the state's representation and rationale of migration. The first is related to the priority given to refugees and particular 'groups' as a target for repatriation activities; the second is the practice's obsession with the necessity that migrants make a decision to either move to their countries of origin or to settle for good in Sweden. If migrants could be helped in that decision, they could also avoid the risk of a refugee dilemma. Two interconnected reflections can be made from this.

The first is that the state seems to treat migration issues as if migration will be an *event*. The only exception for doing this is implicit in the assumptions that refugees were forced to leave their countries and that they were unwilling to migrate.

Given that migration, in most situations, is conceived of as an event indicates a representation of migration in terms of a rational-choice model (i.e. push and pull).

Migration occurs between two end stations; it is a phenomenon or 'mode of life' that could involve the individual only in a limited period of life and one needs to decide when it is rational to be in and exit that mode and where to settle after leaving it.

This assumption of rationality in migration will explain why the SMB in our study is deeply concerned with the refugees' ability to make decisions on their future settlement. The concern is based on the assumption that humans need to exit the 'migration mode' since this will ruin the possibility of living a normal life in Sweden. The implementation of an institutional practice, where it will be important to facilitate 'clean' cases while simultaneously taking this rational idea for granted, will shed light on why the SMB tried to minimize factors that might obscure the decision making. By doing this, the SMB tried to avoid uncertainty in dilemmas featuring the lives of these migrants. From the nation-state's point of view, the state will itself be something like a physician who could cure the problems that come, at least, with refugee migration. The practice's targeting of especially refugee groups fleeing from extremely harsh conditions (like Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s) has emanated from the same position as it expresses a general concern for the different integration problems that these groups might experience in Sweden. To repatriate the refugees is to help normalize their lives. Hence, migration will signal a denatured displacement (Malkki 1992) and the unhealthy consequences of it could, at best, be cured if migrants are assisted in making rational choices.

The SMB worries about the dilemma that comes from situations when the individual is not able to decide and this conflict greatly with the assumption of a sedentary normality (cf. Chamberlain 1997). This is, in some way, the 'conceptual bridge' to the other dominant discourse about migration conceived of in terms of roots and authentic origin. Hence, the second reflection follows the path coming from the state's (and perhaps humanity in general) assumption that humans have a natural home and that the individual is coloured by being born into an essential cultural community. This reflects 'sedentarist assumptions about attachments to place [which] lead us to define displacement not as a fact about socio-political context, but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced' (Malkki 1992: 33). From the state's point of view, people have, and need to have, a place of origin; the image of *roots* underlines the naturalness of coming *from* somewhere which embeds humans in space and soil, in the way Malkki (1992, 1995) has expressed it. In fact, we can speak of a 'naturalized identity between people and place' (1992: 26) that gives people by birth a genuine 'home'. In this perspective, the life situation of refugees particularly conflicts with the (assumed) normality; having roots in a foreign country will imply a displacement from your original culture and leaving kin and friends. This means that migrants will suffer from both being (involuntary) displaced and having unfulfilled dreams of returning.

Finally, some observations can be made about how the rational-choice and root models, viewed as two seemingly contradictory discourses, combine in and influence the practice of the Swedish migration authorities. The rationality dimension in the former seems to contradict the more moralizing and demanding dimension in the root discourse (cf. Malkki 1992). When studying these in the discourse and practice of the Swedish state, the root tendency is

prevalent in the policy discourse, exemplified by references to the return of human rights and the displacement that refugees suffer from. In the SMB's practice, the rational-choice tendency dominates, as expressed in, for instance, the need to exit the migrant mode.

This difference in importance is probably caused by the SMB being an operative bureaucratic institution with an inherent need for finding clear cases to decide on.

The SMB is, however, in most cases, capable of mixing these two models with utterances, the intention of which is to assist refugees in making these difficult decisions, which relates the rationality dimension to the importance of belonging to one country.

This last observation means that the aura of romanticism and 'irrationality' that is perhaps associated with the idea of roots will be transformed. When the state acts in the name of a therapy that treats migratory life, even the image of roots will be subject to the rational decision making of a modern and sedentary life.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The article builds further on an evaluation study (published in Olsson 2001) which was supported by a grant from the Swedish Migration Board and by a research grant from the Swedish Research Council on Working Life and Social Science (FAS). Many thanks to the participating researchers in the evaluation study: Christina Johansson and Zoran Slavnić (Ethnic Studies/REMESO, Linköping University), Sadia Hassanen (CEIFO, Stockholm University), and the author (Linköping University and Stockholm University).

<sup>2</sup> The Swedish Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*) received its current name in 2000. The previous name—the Swedish Immigration Board (*Statens Invandrarverk*) — was associated with immigration matters only.

<sup>3</sup> The intention of our original evaluation, on which I have elaborated here, was mainly to understand the central issues and purpose of the SMB's practice, how they were approached in the activities and arrangements of the SMB, and, finally, how well this practice matched the 'needs' of migrants. The field material consists of interviews with almost the entire SMB staff working with repatriation during 2001 (approx. fifteen people) and other key people. In addition, we conducted participant observation in several SMB-organized meetings, analyzed documents and texts (e.g. government bills, appropriation directions from the Swedish Government, internal reports, and memos), and followed debates and discussions about repatriation. Moreover, we interviewed more than forty people of Bosnian origin in Sweden and in Bosnia and Herzegovina and more than twenty people of Somali origin living in Sweden. In addition, I have applied experiences from previous and on-going research, above all from empirical research regarding migration between Sweden and Chile.

<sup>4</sup> All translations of official texts from Swedish to English have been done by the author.

<sup>5</sup> The equivalent of EUR 1,000 and EUR 4,000, respectively (2010).

<sup>6</sup> It should, however, be noted that the list of countries that could be considered as examples of repatriation countries has since been extended. In 2010, the following countries are listed on the website: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bolivia, Burundi, Chile, Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Ivory Coast, Iraq, Cameroon, Republic of Kosovo, Croatia, Lebanon, Peru, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, and Turkey.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the evaluation study was conducted before July 2002 when the possibilities of obtaining dual citizenship were very limited. Since 2002, dual citizenship has, as a rule, been permitted in Sweden.

<sup>8</sup> The exact number of returnees is not available since many do not officially register their return; it may, however, be more than 7.000 of Chileans and a somewhat lower number of Bosnians who have at least tried to settle in their native country.

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