TRaNS: Trans –Regional and –National Studies of Southeast Asia Vol. 4, No. 1 (January) 2016: 41–63.
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"Why don't you think of Malaysia?" - Narratives on Educational Migration, Emotions, and Social Capital among Transnational Students

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Abstract

This contribution is about a female transnational student from Turkey, Hafize, studying for four years at an Islamic Malaysian university. She was interviewed during the research project "Transnational Student Mobility in Higher Education in Asia", a multi-sited ethnographic project containing six sub-studies aiming to illuminate student voices and the impact of cultural processes on student-inhabited transnational spaces, identity negotiations, and networks. Through a bottom-up perspective, and with life story as the principal method, the project illustrates processes of social change and relations between the individual and society. Questions are posed about, inter alia, *the motivations and reasons that may be identified in the educational stories. Hafize's narrative is discussed as a relational and contextual story, in which family relations and the significance of education, gender, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic and political situations intersect. Education is given different meanings: instrumental and reflexive as well as emotional aspects. Turning points and the concept of capital, especially social and emotional capital, are addressed. Hafize's family of eight siblings is deeply involved in serial reciprocity, a tightly bonded network supporting all the children in their efforts to study. Hafize's story is substantially gendered and 'ethnified' – a reflexive emotional identity project, in which education and religion are given high priority. In Turkey secularist legislation was an obstacle. The studies abroad provided possibilities for self-development but tempered with some limitations.*

KEYWORDS: Transnational education, intersecting narratives, gender, ethnicity, religion, social and emotional capital

Introduction

"My parents accepted my going to Malaysia – they knew that I wouldn't have a life if I didn't go. Education was my first love. They were ready for that because for four years I had been applying to universities, trying to get money and scholarships. They accepted it, they didn't say anything. I didn't tell them that I didn't know anybody here in Malaysia. When I was

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https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2015.26 Published online by Cambridge University Press

leaving Turkey my father said: 'I do not want you to go'. Then we hugged each other and I said: 'Dad, I have to go'".

THE OPENING ACCOUNT IS from Hafize[1], a female transnational student from Turkey, talking about her MA studies at an Islamic university in Malaysia[2]. She is one of the students interviewed during the research project *Transnational Student Mobility in Higher Education in Asia – An interdisciplinary study of young people's strategies and living conditions.*[3] Hafize's story, like many other stories recorded during the project, shows that transitions related to education are emotional as well instrumental issues (cf. Christie 2009). In Turkey, secularist legislation hindered Hafize from participating in higher education – a situation she struggled hard to overcome. With the support of her family, Hafize tried different strategies, in which social media and networking came to play an important role.

In this article, as in the entire project, we aim to illustrate processes of social change unfolding within the relations between the individual and society – between structure and agency – through a bottom-up perspective and with 'life story' as the principal method. The questions we pose concern the motivations and reasons for the educational journey and how these incentives intersect. The transnational perspective (Gargano 2009; Vertovec 2001) draws attention to trans-boundary mobility in which individuals, through daily activities and social, religious, economic, and political relations, create social fields that transcend national borders (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). This approach allows for individuals who have not been part of mainstream research on transnational mobility within higher education (cf. Marginson and Sawir 2005) to make their voices heard.

In this article focusing on Hafize, the aim is to discuss 'narrative' as a relational and contextual story (e.g. Andrews *et al.* 2013). Questions concerning family relations and the significance of education, religion and culture, ethnicity, gender, generations, and socio-economic and political situations are highlighted. Hafize's story is an illuminating example of the complexity that many of the transnational students tell of. For Hafize, education is given high priority and many meanings. Turning points in life and the concept of capital (cultural, social, economic, symbolic and emotional) in relation to the individual and to the family/relatives will be addressed (e.g. Bourdieu 1997; Coleman 1990). A substantially gendered story is told, in which education is clearly given priority for example over marriage and where Hafize is very much involved in her large family and sometimes acts as the breadwinner. The personal narrative is very much a

[1]All names in this article have been anonymised.
[2]According to statistics on international students coming to Malaysia – a new hub for higher international studies – about 30 per cent come from West Asia (see Graf, this issue).
[3]The project was funded by the Swedish Research Council.

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2015.26 Published online by Cambridge University Press

process of relating – constructed by means of relationships (cf. Mason 2004). It is also a story related to ethnicity and religion, which both play a very important role for Hafize. The MA studies in Malaysia can be seen as providing a "Third space" (Rizvi 2010), with possibilities for self-development. The sojourn in Malaysia is not an ultimate goal but rather a stopover on a continuing educational trajectory (cf. Doherty and Singh 2005). Back in Turkey Hafize is attempting to validate the education she has obtained from both Turkey and Malaysia and at the same time trying to get accepted in a PhD programme abroad.

In what follows we first briefly describe the theoretical and methodological framework of the article. We then present our analysis of Hafize's trajectory as a transnational student – treating it as a transnational intersecting educational story related to gender, ethnicity and religion. This discussion includes, in the context of Turkey, important turning points and the way emotions are intrinsic to the process of choice-making (Barbalet 2001; Christie 2009; Griffiths and Scarantino 2008; Reay 2005; Sheer 2012). In the next analytical section we focus on the family as a domestic unit – especially in relation to different forms of capital including motivation through parents encouraging and promoting feelings of confidence and interest in their children. Here, we frame our discussion with reference to the ideas of Bourdieu (1997), Coleman (1990) and Reay (2005). In the third part of the analysis, we focus on Hafize's stay in Malaysia in terms of both opportunities and obstacles. In the concluding discussion we return to look upon the educational trajectory as an intersecting story and again pay attention to young people as a transnational and political category in relation to social spaces/processes and structures – a discussion that also includes emotional underpinnings.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Theoretically our interdisciplinary research project draws inspiration from cultural, migration, ethnicity and gender studies (e.g. Appadurai 1991; Kell and Gillian 2008; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006). Our specific goals have been to focus on the trans-boundary mobility within higher education and to examine young peoples' strategies, conditions and visions for education. With the emphasis on agency and individual students' educational strategies that are, nevertheless, embedded in various family and kinship-based groups' values and visions for the future, it is possible to analyse the international students' agency, through which they attempt to the make sense of the work and negotiate various identities (Lomer 2014). The project is multi-sited and contains six individual sub-studies. Synchronised field studies (cf. Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) of intra-Asian student mobility have been carried out in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Myanmar (Burma), Indonesia, Singapore, Nepal, India, Malaysia, and Thailand. All six researchers involved with the project have been working with life

https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2015.26 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stories linked to a broader context and using a common set of questions. The interviews were conducted in English, and a total of about 80 students were interviewed. In the case presented in this article, one author (Jacobsson) was responsible for the sub-study in Malaysia and Singapore, and the other (Carlson) was responsible for the sub-study in Turkey. Three interviews were conducted with Hafize in Malaysia while she was finishing her MA degree. One further interview took place in Turkey when Hafize had returned after her MA studies. Continued contact was then maintained via e-mails and social media. We consider an individual's life story and a society's story as an integrated whole with reciprocal influence (e.g. Andrews 2007). Although we especially focus on one story in this article, we also refer to other stories documented by the larger project – some themes and patterns recur. In addition to individual interviews, we also conducted focus group interviews in both Malaysia and Turkey, and carried out interviews with key people at the universities. Contextual, background, data were also collected in Malaysia and Turley.

Life Stories: Processes of Relating and Intersecting

A 'life story' approach has been chosen as a method in order to illustrate processes of social change and relations between the individual and society. Based on their various positions in the society, the individuals' experiences will be highlighted also over time. Like Behar (1990), we have chosen to use the concept 'life story' rather than 'life history' and thus emphasise the creative part of the narration. To narrate is to create meaning and to talk about one's own life is a creative process – a reflexive identity project (Taylor 2010). A narrative is a way of bringing order to the world by incorporating events in temporal structures with a beginning, middle and an end (Andrews 2007). However, identity creation is still an on-going and open-ended project for the speaker in interaction with the 'listener' (Andrews *et al.* 2013; Bruner 1991; Burkitt 2008; Gubrium and Holstein 2001). As Mason (2004) points out, it is also important to pay attention to the fact that the students' stories are being constructed by means of relationships they had/have made/make – particularly, but not exclusively, with those whom they regard as family and kin.[4] It is a question of processes of relating; people's practices and identities are embedded in webs of relationships. This means that both agency and identity need to be understood relationally. It is also a question of 'belonging' related to 'emotions' – this is an issue that is continuously being modified and contested with intersecting ethnic, cultural and religious tensions within as well as between societies and states (Yuval-Davis 2011).

[4]Of course, the interview situation is to be considered a social interaction, in which both the researchers and the informants are involved in a symbolic game of negotiating, where different aspects could/should be taken into account. However, while this problematic is not developed in the context of this present article, see other discussions (e.g. Carlson 2015; Kvale 1996). We have mainly been interested in the dominant discourses that many are part of - both informants and researchers (cf. Talja 1999).

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Various Kinds of Capital, Relationships and Space

Relational issues and networks have also been in focus when analysing different forms of capital consistent with both Bourdieu's (1997) and Coleman's (1990) theoretical frameworks. Bourdieu's concepts of capital are all relational. In Hafize's narrative analysed in this article, the social and emotional capital are of special interest. The definition of 'social capital' is put as: "the aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to possession of durable network of more or less institutionalized relationship of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1985: 248). According to Patricia Allat 'emotional capital' can be defined as "emotionally valued assets and skills, love and affection, expenditure of time, attention, care and concern" (Allat 1993: 143). This stock of emotional resources comprises support, patience, and commitments. In considering Hafize's story of her family as a social unit as well as an active agent distributing different resources, both Bourdieu's (1997) and Coleman's (1990) reasoning have been useful in examining various types, contents, and forms of capital, and uses of relationships. Coleman is also useful in the analysis through his emphasis on some of the mechanisms that generate social capital: reciprocity, expectations, and group enforcements of norms, and his concept of 'bonding' (Coleman 1990). In terms of reciprocity, we draw on Moody's discussion of 'serial reciprocity' (Moody 2008). Finally, when discussing Hafize's stay in Malaysia, we shall also pay attention to the notion of "Third Space" (Rizvi 2010).

The Trajectory of a Transnational Student: An Intersecting Story

A "Special" Family: Gender, Ethnicity and Education

As Yuval-Davis has pointed out, identity narratives often constitute major tools of ethnic projects (1997: 44–46). Gender often intersects with such ethnic projects, and is striking in Hafize's story when she describes her family as "a very special one". Her family hails from a city in Turkey, "a very small city" she says, and "very traditional, very conservative": "As a girl you can't go out alone. My family is not like that. I am so happy with my family. My family is so modern". On several occasions, Hafize stresses, that what is special about her family has to do with their ethnic background as Circassians.[5] And this is clearly linked to gender aspects and also to their approach to education. Hafize underlines: "In

[5]Circassians comprise several ethnic groups in the north western Caucasus. There has been a substantial Circassian diaspora in Turkey since late nineteenth century due to the fact that a series of uprisings were brutally put down by the Russians and many Muslim Circassians were driven from their homeland and deported to the Ottoman Empire. Turkey has the largest Circassian population in the world and they settled particularly near Samsun on the Black Sea coast and in the regions near Ankara and Kayseri in central Anatolia and in Istanbul. The predominant religion among Circassians is Sunni Islam (Nil Dogan 2015).

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my family girls are more important than boys. I am not a Turk, but 'tjerkess'…. Circassians you can say are matriarchal, that's the great thing in my family". The issue of ethnic background, and its importance is something that Hafize returns to repeatedly. Being a minority in a majority society can also mean being involved in resistance.

Hafize is the oldest of eight siblings: three brothers and five sisters. When she talks about her siblings she is reluctant to mention their names. Instead, she talks about Brother 2, Brother 3, Sister 4, and so on in order of age. Hafize also speaks about her mother as a person who loves children: "She wanted more and more regardless of gender". Both parents were concerned about education for all their children. The importance of parents is something that recurs in many students' stories across the *Transnational Student Mobility in Higher Education in Asia* project. Often these parents are not highly educated, but express a desire for the children to pursue a higher education. Not least the mothers, who as in Hafize's case, usually have the least education Hafize said of own her mother: "it was important for her to love school".

> "I think because of her, we really loved to study. Study was not something we had to do. We enjoyed it – we had good things….My mother followed us to the house gate every day, kissed us and waited for us when we came home."

The mother figure is highlighted as an essential paragon in terms of studying, and this is associated with strong emotions as we hear in Hafize's story (cf. Reay 2005). The mother is very much present in everyday life of strict routines conveyed in a loving manner. She was an autodidact in reading and writing. The entire home is imbued with an interest for study and learning and there is a particular room destined for reading and discussion. Even if the parents do not have a formal higher education a lot of time is devoted to informal learning. At the age of 40 Hafize's mother attended adult education classes for three months and received a diploma. She is a housewife and the father works as a typographer. Economically, the parents are not wealthy according to Hafize. They are from the lower middle class, but they own a house that will play an important role for several of the siblings and their educational journeys. All eight siblings are involved in higher education. When in the interview we talk about the importance of studying, Hafize emphasised several times that this was not something the parents said that the children had to devote themselves to.

Interviewer: And both your parents said that education was very, very important.
Hafize: They didn't say this.
Interviewer: They didn't say this. But you understood it.
Hafize: As words never. They acted….I think that is more important than words.

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Like many other informants in the project, Hafize stresses the importance of support from their parents in relation to their studies, to their educational trajectories. Both parents are often described in the narratives as a kind of role model, but it is also, as in the case of Hafize, not so much what the parents say as what they do. As Hafize recounts: "My parents loved to read. When I opened my eyes I saw mum and dad reading". The parents also gave books, pencils and even a new uniform every year to Hafize and her siblings. And the house had a study room. The pattern of action in social and cultural practice can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways in everyday practices (Bourdieu 1991). These dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes, which are regular without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The most important knowledge is thus transferred without passing through language or consciousness and takes place in the actual conduct – often associated with various feelings. The habitus specifies what is "feelable" in specific social contexts and orients the mind/body in certain directions (Scheer 2012: 204–205). Emotions can from this perspective be viewed as a driving force for action: something that provides energy for actions (Barbalet 2001; Thoits 1989). The parents offer an important emotional resource linked to various types of 'capital'. In Hafize's story, there is a very strong desire to study, but this desire will come into conflict with her religious convictions – but not with her position as a woman.

Emotions Related to Education and Beyond…

Hafize talked repeatedly about a strong drive and desire for education that also has to do with gender and ethnicity. She recounted that early in her life she knew very certainly that she wanted to study. She describes her childhood as "amazing" and that she had "very understanding parents".

> "Schooling as a child was a very joyful, good time….I grew up with books. When I was four-five years old I learned how to read the Quran. And I learned to read Turkish, the Latin alphabet and how to count. I knew this before I started school."

The parents competed to give Hafize the best books and pens. Every year she got a new uniform, something that her friends didn't get. A person outside the family, who was important for Hafize during her childhood, was the teacher in her primary school. The way Hafize described her teacher as "a significant other" for her educational journey, is echoed by many other life stories documented by the project. The teacher, as a 'significant other', appears to be a sort of guide and a source of inspiration. Hafize tells the following about her teacher in relation to both her and other pupils:

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> "He liked me. I shall never forget his name. He knew how to treat children…he taught how to behave, how to act – all this I learnt from him. I was like a princess. I was best."

Hafize recounts that after primary school she was the first girl in her neighbourhood to start secondary school. Because of this, "she was seen as extreme in the society", she says – not by her relatives but by the neighbours. Again, Hafize stresses the ethnic background when it comes to views on education related to gender. Her Circassians relatives did not wonder why, as a girl, she was studying. But "the neighbours belong to Turkish culture where boys are more important than girls". According to Hafize the neighbours wondered: "Why is this girl studying? Tomorrow she will get married. She doesn't need an education." Even, "Education at any level was seen as extreme."

In Hafize's story many examples recur of when she makes various choices. She frequently went into detail, and a wide range of emotions is very much in evidence that animate various processes and incidents (cf. Christie 2009; see also Coole 2005). In the examples Hafize emphasised that her family belongs to a minority in Turkish society. She underlined repeatedly that her own ethnic group has a more open view of gender. Tensions in this context are linked to feelings of pride and resistance. In terms of ethnic background and emotions, Hafize recounted that early in her school life she adopted a position when she refused to read an oath every morning, a practice that she regards as very nationalistic. But her protest was subdued – she moved her lips, but did not utter the words – so that teachers and classmates would not understand what she was doing.

> "From primary school onwards I had to say: 'I am a Turk, and this and that.' I never said that – it's very nationalistic. I was moving my mouth or hiding from the teachers. I never volunteered to lead this refrain. However, one teacher forced me to lead the others – then I realised that I had not memorised the words in spite of hearing them every day at school for four years."

Hafize's own view on citizenship has to be understood in terms of wider social debate since the 1980s when globalisation processes led to questioning of the perception of equating citizenship with national identity. In relation to this development, citizenship has been defined as being not only synonymous with national identity, or legal status, but as a condition that involves rights, political and social recognition, and/or economic (re)distribution (Isin and Turner 2003). However, the Turkish schooling system still emphasises a view of citizenship in which membership of the nation state is perceived as synonymous with national identity (Carlson and Kanci, under review.). The daily oath recited by school children is considered to show respect for the Turkish Republic and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Father of the nation, the country's first president. The oath

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comprises certain values and the students read it in all public and primary schools every morning:

> "I am a Turk, I am right, I am hard working, my principle is to protect young people, to respect the elders, to love my country and my nation more than my soul. My ideal is to advance and go further. Dear Grand Atatürk, I take the oath to walk without stopping towards the target you have shown us, on the path that you have opened for us. My presence is a gift to the presence of Turks. Happy is the person who says, 'I am a Turk'" (Kaya 2009: 26).

Hafize protested against this oath and, as we have heard, she defined herself as a "tjerkess", not a Turk. However, as regards ethnicity and the parents, Hafize emphasised that they wanted their children to be Turks. The children learnt only the Turkish language at home: "My parents wanted us to be Turks. They said that they missed their homeland a lot so they didn't want their children to undergo the same feelings" (cf. Nil Dogan 2015). The father of Hafize's grandmother migrated to Turkey at the age of seven-eight. Hafize describes herself as the fourth generation in Turkey. Even if, according to Hafize, the parents wanted their children to be Turks, it is evident in her narratives that she perceives the Circassian experiences as important. One might even speak of a kind of emotional habitus mediated by her parents in terms of ethnic background, belonging, and a complex life situation.

Together, the intersecting aspects of ethnicity and gender, and associated emotions are included in the story Hafize tells about her educational journey, but not primarily as obstacles. Ethnicity, as a category, can be understood as a concept through which meaning and boundaries of the categories themselves are problematised (McCall 2005). Although Hafize's parents play down ethnicity, Hafize herself often spoke about it in relation to her view of gender, education, how to behave, and not least in relation to her view of the state and the individual. The latter, the relationship between the individual and society, becomes in Hafize's case relevant when the state prohibits the wearing of headscarves in educational institutions and in other official services. Here, Hafize's religious convictions clashes with the opportunity for education in officially secular Turkey – an issue, which again has to do with feelings. The general ban by the government on headscarves in education and other public services Hafize describes as the worst *turning point* in her educational journey. It was the year 2000 and she had to stop her teacher training at the university; to take off her *hijab* was not a choice: "it would be the end of my life". 'Turning points' can have both negative and positive aspects (Hodkinson and Sparks 1997). Mobility biographies can comprise what Denzin (2001) calls "critical incidents", "epiphanies", and "life-changing learning events" (cf. Antikainen *et al.* 1996; Lindgren and Lundahl 2010). For Hafize a very positive turning point will come later on, but her religious convictions are essential all the time.

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Religion Related to Education: A Turning Point

For Hafize her religious belief is very important. The whole family are Sunni Muslims, but this does not mean that they go to the mosque regularly. When Hafize talked about this she again emphasised that her family is special in the sense that "the family is very individual"; "We don't mix with many people. I have a few friends, that's all."

At one point three of Hafize's sisters, like herself, decided to become more active as Muslims, which, among other things, meant that they have chosen to wear the headscarf. Hafize emphasised that this choice was precisely a personal choice.

> "…it's religious and it is my personal choice. I have a right to wear what I want. If it was praying or fasting I think I would react in the same way. I think I have this kind of personality. It's *my* religion and it's *my* dress. It's *my* area, it's *my* body. When you see me you understand that I am a Muslim. I am a woman; maybe I am a feminist [laughter]."

It was when Hafize started her teacher training at a university in northern Turkey that her choice to wear a headscarf became a problem. During her fourth semester the government imposed a general ban on headscarves.

Hafize:	I came in 1998 – I passed the university entrance exam in Turkey for education – I would be a primary school teacher. I started, but at that time…my university was in northern Turkey. And then I started, during my first year – in Istanbul this headscarf ban had already started. But in my university city there was still time, we were able to enter.
Interviewer:	It was more relaxed?
Hafize:	Yes, and during my fourth semester they adopted the ban.
Interviewer:	Oh, yeah.
Hafize:	After that I couldn't enter the university – they put soldiers in front of the gate, so you couldn't enter – even on the campus they had guardians.
Interviewer:	So you couldn't continue your studies?
Hafize:	Yes, I quit. This was at the beginning of 2000; in my fourth semester they imposed the ban. It was February or March, I am not sure which. It was *Eid* [*al Fitri*], I remember that. And then I went back home to Sinop. Then I was looking for some chance to go abroad, but I couldn't find one. My father, he is just a worker. And the salary is…we are eight siblings. I am the eldest.
Interviewer:	Oh, I see. You are the eldest.

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Hafize: Everything was hard – my city is very traditional, very conservative. A very small city. And you can't even go out as a girl alone…. But I was doing that, but it seems as if there is social pressure, the neighbourhood and everything. I couldn't find any way to go abroad. And in Turkey I wouldn't take my *hijab* off – it's my choice.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Hafize: And then until 2006, I think, I stayed at home. I did nothing

When the ban on the headscarf was introduced and Hafize stayed at home, her parents saw how sad she was. Her mother even told her to take off the headscarf and continue with her studies if she wanted to. Her father also supported this. Other relatives suggested to her to marry after she quit the university and could not get a scholarship to go abroad; her aunts and uncles even discouraged her.

> "They say: 'You can do nothing. What are you waiting for? Get married. There is no option for you. Take off your *hijab*, after your education you can wear it again. It's not correct but….' But if I took off my *hijab* it would be the end of my life."

Hafize indeed saw the interruption at university as a critical incident – as a negative turning point stopping her teacher training:

> "When I quit the university, it was the biggest and worst one [turning point]. My life was destroyed totally. I lost everything in a moment and I had not done anything wrong. I know about the [secular] Constitution, but the majority is Muslim and that doesn't count. Muslim or non-Muslim country, I have a right to wear what I want. Like HRs [Human Rights] or Women's' rights. Before, no protests, but afterwards some protests. I was a successful student, respectful to my lecturers and I was dreaming of serving my country. I was dreaming of going to a small village in the east of Turkey. To help the children, braid their hair and repair the old school. And then they lost me. Maybe I could have saved the lives of 50 children and they would have been good people."

The interruption not only meant a break in Hafize's professional career, but also in her social commitments. She had imagined carrying out an important teacher mission in a very poor part of Turkey. It was also important for Hafize with regard to what she believed she could convey in terms of values to other people – in her case to the next generation. Various emotional issues were at stake. As Christie (2009: 134) puts it:

> "…it's not enough to claim that there is a connection between emotions and transitions to university: it's more valuable to understand the

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particular connections between certain sorts of beliefs about what is valuable and important and how these come into play in specific instances."

"Doing Nothing" Leads to a Positive Turning Point

Hafize said that for a period of six years she was "doing nothing", but she had not abandoned her desire to continue to study. However, it is altogether not correct that Hafize "has not done anything for six years". What she refers to is that she had not participated in any extensive formal education during this time. Rather, she was studying at home on her own and she took part in some short courses. One day a friend told her about universities online and Hafize began exploring various options:

> "Six years....I did nothing. I attended some courses, unnecessary courses, like...believe me [laughing]. Then in 2006 one of my close friends told me 'there are some online universities, American universities, maybe you can attend for the sake of getting an education, a diploma'. I searched for an online university, and I applied. I think it was 2006, I started a course on 'human behaviour'....The course was in Turkish, so it was not a problem. Then I finished, and I graduated from that. It took two and a half years; middle of 2008 I graduated in that subject. But it's not accredited in Turkey, so I can do nothing with this diploma.....At the branch in Istanbul they allow the headscarf – they couldn't apply for the accreditation at my university.....It was not accepted in Turkey because of that. Then there was nothing to do. And I couldn't even find any job wearing my headscarf. As a secretary, I took one secretarial course....There was nothing to do. I was thinking maybe if I saved some money I could go abroad, if I worked for 2–3 years."

Hafize is back at a dead end. But suddenly, a positive turning point appears, when her parents decide to sell their house in order to release funds to enable several of their children to continue their studies. This decision is not easy for the parents – as we shall see, they will lose some of their symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1985, 1997). However, there will be an opening for Hafize to resume her university studies, but not in Turkey, where there still is a ban on headscarves. Again she explores various study options online – she explores various universities in Kenya, South Africa, Greece, and Bulgaria. Then suddenly one of her brothers asks: "Why not try Malaysia?" Hafize was surprised.

Hafize: And then one day my brother, number three, he told me it's easy....We call an elder sister *abla* – "*Abla*, why you don't you think of Malaysia?" I said: "where is it?" [laughing!]

Interviewer: [laughing!]

Hafize: [continuing laughing] He had applied before me, but he couldn't get the acceptance from here. I was thinking of applying for the

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undergraduate course, not the masters, I couldn't think that they would accept my undergraduate course from Turkey. And then I found somebody here – online – one of the Turkish girls here we are in contact with. Again I didn't know anybody in Malaysia. This is an Islamic university; I didn't know that – I knew nothing. I was just thinking…it was as if I was blind. I was just thinking I must go to university and get an education. That was all! And then…

Interviewer: I see…

Hafize: That's all. Then I came here – it's like a dream. The first year my friends said: "You are not walking – you are flying"! They didn't know my history but when they saw me they were thinking: "she is flying".

Thus it is the family, a tightly knit social unit, that is central to Hafize and her siblings for the future. The parents decided to use their economic capital, but at the same time put their symbolic capital at stake. But education as cultural and emotional capital is of the utmost importance for the whole family. Hafize describes the time she lost from her studies as "a time spent just crying in my bedroom", and she had gastric problems. Her brothers also had problems with some restrictions. Hafize explains:

> "I couldn't find a job. Then, I don't know what happened, but my family decided to sell our house.…My parents saw that I was almost 30 years old and my brothers also had problems. They had graduated from religious high schools; there were also restrictions for them. The marks from examinations in a religious school were being cut, so they could not enter university. Especially one of my brothers, number two…he is so clever, so good. We had many problems, all the siblings wanted to study and we had no money. And then my family decided to sell our house in Sinop."

Capitals, Exchanges and Relationships

From what we have heard of Hafize's story, her family can clearly be understood as a tightly linked social unit, an active 'agent'. We can further view this 'agent' through the theoretical lens provided by Bourdieu and Coleman. Both are concerned with the links between individuals and families and wider social organisations and institutions. Bourdieu also focuses on generational socialisation within families in his thinking about social capital and other kinds of 'capital'. Bourdieu (1997: 47–51) regards social capital as "made up of social obligations (connections)…[it] is the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." All the members of Hafize's family

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enjoy social capital, since they possess actual and potential resources, which are based on an institutionalised relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition. The advantages of this social capital are very important as far as the overarching educational project of the family is concerned. The family demonstrates a great deal of internal cohesion and acts as an economic and cultural unit producing the next generation and socialising it into a set of common social values of which one of the most important is educational achievement. Parental interest in, and support for, their children enables Hafize and her siblings to increase their cultural capital through acquisition of an education (cf. Allat 1993). *Trust* is an important aspect of social capital as well as of emotional capital and can be attributed to the dynamics of the interactions and exchanges pertaining to Hafize's family. Trust is, in our case, specifically an important resource, as it constitutes an essential prerequisite for the ability of Hafize and her siblings to avail themselves of scarce resources for educational purposes. This confidence is also combined with obligations, expectations, and strong norms of reciprocity (Edwards *et al.* 2003). Hafize reports that the family members are now meeting an obligation to underwrite the education of all of them.

Material and symbolic exchanges that produce obligations and mutual recognition of family membership are built up over time and are transmitted over generations. This also involves emotion-as-practice where feelings are transferred intergenerationally, and as part of the socialisation process (Sheer 2012: 218).[6] Coleman further identifies social capital as a resource for the family that is inherent in the structure of intergenerational relationships between parents and children. Its values lie in the fact that it facilitates the actions of individuals to realise their interests and goals (Coleman 1990: 302; see also Coole 2005; Griffiths and Scarantino 2008).

Serial Reciprocity: Norms and Bonding

As we have learnt, Hafize had to interrupt her university education in Turkey when a ban was imposed on wearing the headscarf in public institutions. But after six years of "lost time" in terms of formal education, a turning point appeared when her parents decided to sell their house. This meant that the family, notably the parents, lost symbolic capital, especially in relation to their neighbours. Unlike economic capital, symbolic capital is not boundless and its value can increase and decrease according to the cultural context in which it

[6]It should also here be noted as Holt, Bowlby and Lea (2013: 35) do on Bourdieu's theories of capitals, fields and habitus, that these "do not fully address how and why individuals and collectives accept their location within particular fields and embody capitals as habitus." They argue that Judith Butler's (2004) conception of subjection and recognition, and her exploration of the psychic operations of power, offers a greater understanding of *how* habitus becomes inculcated. These remarks, however, concern more studies of emotions at the micro level, which is not what we have focused on in our research this time.

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was accumulated. There is obviously a considerable difference in Turkey between owning a house and renting one. As Hafize puts it:

> "And my family, they didn't want to live in our home city in a rented house, so because of that we moved to Konya….You know, that's the neighbours – you have a home, then you don't have your own home. They couldn't take it. And because of that we moved."

This drastic measure, however, secured the financial means to promote a resumption of Hafize's project of higher education. It was a really positive turning point for her and indeed the entire family, since it subsequently triggered off a chain of economic exchanges for all the children based on *serial reciprocity* underpinned by very strong emotions. According to Sheer (2012: 214) 'emotions' are perhaps most obviously 'practices' when they are involved in communication, i.e. as means of exchange. For Hafize it meant that she could become a transnational student and go to Malaysia for four years of study.

Hafize's family has the essential prerequisites for long-term commitment to their educational project, since it constitutes a bonded primary network, i.e. it is closed, inward-looking, and homogeneous (Coleman 1990: 302). Furthermore, in accordance with Coleman, there are obviously strong expectations, obligations, and norms underpinning the project – in Hafize's words:

> "We now help each other according to our financial ability, as we always have done. We have to facilitate our education – that's a very essential obligation for all of us, regardless of how different we are in other respects."

Cooperation and expectations of "sticking together" in an often "heartless world", that Hafize describes, manifest themselves in economic support for all the siblings who are currently studying at various universities. Structurally, this amounts to a series of open-ended, one-way transfers, with each transfer considered a serial return for a preceding transfer. So "Brother 5", who studied at an open university and worked part-time as a typographer, sent remittances to Hafize while she was pursuing her Master's studies in Malaysia. "Brother 2", then in New Mexico, USA, studying political science, received money from "Brother 3" [studying for a MBA in Izmir as well as also being a part-time typographer] as well as from "Brother 5". Now, "Brother 5" is a PhD student in Taipei, Taiwan and getting a modest salary as a research assistant, he reciprocates by sending some money to "Sister 4", who is in her last year studying Arabic. "Sister 6" is still in secondary school and "Sister 7" has been accepted as a chemistry student at a university on the Black Sea, but is not willing to go there on her own. About this Hafize says: "If number six - Sister 6 - *inshallah* - passes her exams, they will go together". And she adds: "Maybe my family can go there;

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we moved to Konya, so we can go to Sinop. Since Sister 4 will graduate this year, the family can then move to Sinop."

From the transactions outlined above, most of Hafize's siblings are really engaged in serial reciprocity linked to various salient types of capital. The siblings reciprocate for what they have received, both from the previous generation, their parents, as well as from their siblings. They provide the economic means for higher studies to "a third party, regardless of whether a return is also given to or makes its way back to the original giver" (Moody 2008: 132). In this way the family is also deeply involved in *bonding*, with long-term economic implications based on trust, expectations and norms of obligation (Coleman 1990; see also Edwards *et al.* 2003). There is also an "information potential" supported by close social relations which provide social capital and a flow of information. This enables the family members to act and counteract possibilities and obstacles during the siblings' educational trajectories in a rational manner (Coleman 1990). Serial reciprocity further links this family together through as Moody (2008: 315) puts it: "cognitive connections of expressed meaning – for example telling someone 'you are being helped because I was helped by others in the past', and can reinforce the importance or cultural awareness of reciprocity obligations." Not least, Hafize has this awareness and urgently feels this obligation after having been supported by her family for some years abroad.

Malaysian experiences: On Being a Transnational Student

Hafize spent four years in Malaysia, studying for a Masters in Sociology, a discipline which she has chosen, as she puts it, "in order to understand my people." On the whole, Hafize was very positive about her studies, not least in the beginning. As she recounted "I did not really have so many expectations; if you are so hungry [for studies] you can't choose." Again Hafize speaks of emotions as a superior driving force; feelings that serve as internal guides (Barbalet 2001).

One thing that really surprised Hafize at the beginning was the dress code, because, as she said, she did not know that she was going to a Muslim university: "Here you have to put on the headscarf – and I have suffered so much!" The dress code was really one of many examples of contextual meaning. For Hafize, as for all international students, the transnational space during her studies was a space of trans-local meanings, territorial specificities, juridical control, and personal relations, all articulated in transnational cultural, political and economic flows. As, for example, Rizvi (2010: 169) notes, there is reason to see the complexity of the situation of being an international student:

> "Certainly, this is a dynamic space of personal rewards, but equally it is an uncomfortable, contested and even traumatic space that should not be

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> romanticized in the ways in which some cultural theorists do, but recognized for what it is – full of constraints as well as opportunities."

Space – Progress – Obstacles – On the Move

The Malaysian university in many ways provided Hafize with a predominantly positive and enriching opportunity, a 'Third Space' with a profound impact on her trajectory as a student. The four-year period provided a mental respite, which stimulated her intellectual and religious development. She also acquired greater self-reflexivity leading to a more liberal view on, for example, Muslims belonging to other denominations and indeed on non-religious persons; an ability to engage competently with 'Otherness'. When looking back on her experience in Malaysia, Hafize even speaks about it being a turning point.

> "Amazing! It was *a turning point* because it changed my character quite a bit. I became more open-minded. I couldn't have an atheist friend before, but now I can. Because of lecturers, international students and the environment in Malaysia – three big religions and three races, and they live in peace in a small country. Malaysia changed me a lot – I know that if I had gone somewhere else it wouldn't have changed me so much. I was living in a small world. In Sinop you couldn't go to a coffee shop as a girl [ten years ago]....In the beginning it was like an electric shock. Then accepting everybody...in peace. It's a wonderful thing. You feel comfortable and relaxed and then...friendly with everybody. I love it."

So the studies and the transnational sojourn in Malaysia provide latitude for self-development that could not be offered in Turkey. Hafize talks about how her exposure to other cultures on a daily basis led to the advancement of her intercultural understanding and a vision of the harmonious co-existence of people from different backgrounds. "Malaysia changed me a lot", she says. Among other things, tells Hafize of increased gender awareness – she even says that "she has become a feminist" through her stay in Malaysia.

The stay in Malaysia can be seen as a possibility passing borders, changing boundaries of knowledge, and offering a 'Third space'. The latter not least when it comes to Hafize's self-development. In her master's thesis she writes about "the headscarf issue", in which she sought to problematise the situation in Turkey as an issue of identity formation linked to a hegemonic society, with borders and boundaries difficult to transcend (cf. Brandell *et al.* 2015). Her position as a transnational student also provided her with better instructional quality. She moreover acquired proficiency in English[7] and, intellectually, she felt for the first time that she was accepted as a member of an academic community. Her cultural and emotional capital merge with the content of the curriculum

[7]Malaysia has to a large extent an English-medium higher education system.

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which was of great significance for her intellectual and moral development. However, her stay in Malaysia also involved situations in everyday life that were not very easy to handle. Hafize tells that she experienced marginalisation, notably in her daily contact with Malaysian officials at the university. The social and cultural capital from the Turkish context, in terms of resources linked to partnership in a durable network, were not always relevant or 'exchangeable'. Hafize ascribes this to the widespread and ingrained stereotypes about international students embraced by, for example, the ushers at the *mahallah* [the campus dormitory where she lived]. These and other Malaysians working at her university believe, according to Hafize, that all international students are wealthy ("walking bank accounts") and therefore it is not reprehensible for them to, for example, demand fines for various alleged "offenses". Thus, friendships and feelings of trust were occasionally hard to come by. Due to such circumstances Hafize sometimes came to occupy a liminal space. However, there were also many positive experiences, notably in numerous interactions with, for example, fellow students from various parts of the world.

As a transnational student, Hafize thus experienced both personal leeway, which enabled her to pursue and advance her eagerly desired educational trajectory, as well as some restrictions, albeit, she says, by no means as severe as those encountered in her own country. An emerging sense of cosmopolitanism is another asset that she acquired while studying in Malaysia, which had an impact on her plans to obtain a PhD degree abroad. Like other students encountered in the *Transnational Student Mobility in Higher Education in Asia* project, she is able to imagine a wider set of professional trajectories.

After completing her MA studies, Hafize returned to Turkey and her family for several reasons. But she remains ready to travel to a new country if she can obtain a place in a PhD programme. She may even consider returning to Malaysia if she can get a scholarship, but that has not happened so far. As she told us when we met in Istanbul, she is trying very hard to validate her education from both Turkey and Malaysia and at the same time trying to be accepted in a PhD programme. It turns out that she has difficulties getting both her internal and external education validated. The Higher Education Council in Turkey does not recognise her MA degree in Sociology from Malaysia. Hafize says: "Back home I am only a high school graduate. The future is really bleak". Not being able to get a job, which she has also tried to do, means that she cannot, at least for the time being, be engaged in serial reciprocity, which has been crucial for herself and for her siblings in their pursuit of higher education. Where Hafize is heading in the future she does not really know. In any event, the studies and experiences in Malaysia have been a very important 'stop-over' in her continuing educational trajectory. Most of the students we have met talk about the importance of studying abroad – no matter where they are heading. For Hafize, as for several other students, it can be said that their professional identities are in a state of 'becoming' rather than 'arrival' (cf. Rizvi 2010).

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Concluding Discussion

By examining Hafize's intersectional and relational educational story we have focused upon various reflexive identity projects, in which Hafize – like other students – relate both to a broader context and to other people. The personal narrative is clearly something much more than a single individualised story. The narratives of the students belong in a wider and social cultural context, which they and we all refer to. The link between the individual and society, between structure and agency, has repeatedly been highlighted and "selves that emerge from our narratives are not, as Mason (2004: 177) argues: "'selves in relation', but relational selves". A bottom-up perspective has allowed for an analysis of international students' agency – their way of making sense of the world and negotiating their identity (Lomer 2014; see also Coole 2005) – in which young people can be seen as a transnational and political category in relation to social spaces and structures. Like Rizvi (2010: 169), we argue that the transnational "students are highly sensitive and self-reflexive about the complexities of transnational formations as they inevitably have to negotiate competing pressures emanating from a wide variety of sources." We have focused on narratives – as an intersecting story – and processes of relating, where also different kinds of capital, 'connectedness', and intra-familial exchange have been emphasised.

In listening to these narratives we developed our theoretical understanding by looking more closely at the different forms of capital, where social as well as emotional capital were of particular interest. We have furthermore been interested in family relationships and different networks, where intersections of ethnicity and gender have been highlighted. The results in terms of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, along with the significance of the family and serial reciprocity were not so surprising. However, more surprising was the heavy emphasis put on emotional capital, and emotions as a strong driving force. Many of those we have interviewed in the larger project – as well as Hafize – recurrently spoke of different kinds of emotions that they experienced at various stages during their lives and in the course of their studies. Through our rich empirical material it became obvious that emotional capital can be viewed as a meaningful cultural activity of ascribing, interpreting, and constructing an event. As Sheer (2012: 193) puts it: "Practices not only generate emotions, but emotions themselves can be viewed as practical engagement with the world." Moreover, emotions are inherent to rationality and rational decision-making – feelings serve as internal guides (Barbalet 2001) – not least for educational studies. Thus emotional capital can be seen as a stock of emotional resources built up over time within families and which children can draw upon (Reay 2005). We also used the term habitus in relation to emotions – emotions emerge from bodily knowledge and can be seen as a kind of practice (Scheer 2012: 204–205). The parents have a major role in transferring emotions and not least the mother who often spends the most time with the children; thus further engendering the narrative.

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Although our contribution does not involve a systematic theorisation of the emotional underpinnings to choice-making processes at the micro level, Hafize's story shows clearly that emotions are forms of power that operate in specific social and cultural contexts (cf. Barbalet 2001; Christie 2009). In Hafize's intersectional narrative it was somewhat surprising to find that ethnicity was so strongly loaded with emotions, even though according to her, the parents never advocated anything else than being a Turk and not Circassian. Hafize recurrently used ethnicity in the explanation of gender issues, but also in the view of social life and studies and the relationship between the individual and the state. At first we were not quite aware of the specific role Hafize ascribed to ethnicity. However, it is possible, as we have discussed, to view ethnicity from an intracategorical approach as a category that splits into different perspectives depending on what is being highlighted (cf. McCall 2005). Regarding the concept 'Third Space' we have drawn attention to that idea that the stay in Malaysia can be considered to be such an experience for Hafize, which offered the opportunity for self-development that was not available in Turkey (cf. Rizvi 2010). However, Hafize also experienced exclusion to some extent and that various forms of social and economic capital that worked in Turkey were not readily exchangeable in the new socio-cultural context. As for borders and boundaries, Hafize emphasised that Malaysia has changed her a lot. She spoke of her increased gender awareness and that she became more open-minded – she couldn't have an atheist friend before, but now she can, she says. In Malaysia she sees "three big religions and three races living in peace" and "it's a wonderful thing". In terms of borders and limits, it can be said that through her educational journey, Hafize passed through not only physical frontiers but also mental internal borders consistent with Yuval-Davis' and Stoetzler's term of "boundaries" when referring to "limit-lines of collectives" and "borders" when referring to "legal/territorial ones" (2002: 330). Finally, we would like to return to the idea that narratives are not only intersectional but relational and contextual, including the relationship between the individual and society. It is important to pay attention to the fact that stories are constructed through relationships the students have and connections they make with other people – but not exclusively those whom they regard as family and kin. These stories are part of the past in the present, but also visions of the future (e.g. Andrews *et al.* 2013; Mason 2004). In a time where higher education is often discussed as a global marketplace[8], it is important as Lomer (2014: 82) points out, to see students not as "merely vectors of money; they are people with backgrounds, aspirations, family ties, feelings and futures." For Hafize, as we have noted, the stay in Malaysia can be viewed as a stop-over, visiting an important "transit lounge" for salient

[8]As for economy and payment for master studies, it can be added, in Hafize's case, that her Islamic University is sponsored by a number of Muslim countries, with the result that the fees are relatively low.

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experiences along the life route (cf. Doherty and Singh 2005). As regards the professional identity on the move, as Rizvi (2010: 167) puts it, this identity is "best understood as a dialectic of embedding and dis-embedding which over time, involves an unavoidable encumbering, disencumbering, and re-encumbering of the situated self."

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article as well as the editors of this issue.

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