



## Refugee families in a multicultural setting

Eva Nyberg

Research leader

Research & Development Unit Södertörn, Stockholm

### The multicultural area

Since about 1960 Sweden has received people from other countries, first as workers in our industry (they came mostly from Southern Europe), from 1970 mainly as refugees from all conflict areas all over the world.

1 of 10 families in Sweden, 10%, has ethnic roots in another country.

The newcomer's situation has always been special. Around the big cities have, during this 50 years, grown so called multicultural areas where foreign families live.

The concentration of foreign families in the multicultural areas around Stockholm can be so high as 80 - 90 %.

So if you, as a child from Iraq move to Stockholm with your family, there is little chance that your neighbours will be Swedish families. The chance is so much higher that your neighbours will be other people from Iraq, or people from Turkey, from old Yugoslavia, from Somalia and so on.

More than 60% of the children with roots in another country than Sweden live in a multicultural area.

As you already know, this has big consequences for the service in the area, for health care centres, for day care centres, for the schools, for buying food... The professionals in these areas, on the contrary, are usually Swedish.

The multicultural suburb is also an area with many children, the birth rate in most other areas of Stockholm is decreasing, but not in the multicultural suburb.

### The life in the multicultural area

What characterizes life in such surroundings?

1/ Some families experience these life conditions as supportive. You share your exclusion from the majority society with all the others.

With this experience you have no wish to leave this place. You make it your native place and your children, as grown ups, choose to stay when they marry and have their own children.

2/ Or, your experience is that you are deported to these areas as an intentional action from the majority society.

This is specially the case when the mix of nationalities means that you have to share the place with people who represent the formerly enemy from the home country.

Christian and Muslim families from countries in the Middle East, for example, live in the same house. Turkish and Kurdish families share the same laundry and their preschool children go to the same group in the daycare centre in the block.

This can become a motive for isolation and bitterness.

So, you can have positive or negative feelings, but seldom neutral, about living in such an area.

The view on the multicultural area from the majority society: it creates social problems

The practical consequences are the same, however, your contact with the majority society is restricted.

Our view on this way of receiving people from other countries is now that it has not supported integration. From the integration aspect it is a failure.

All problems that this kind of area can create, as for example idealising your life in the home country, problems to learn Swedish, a hiding place for criminal networks, has contributed to see immigrants

as people with problems, or as people that create problems for our society.

### **The Swedish research on migration has a problem focus**

The view on the immigrant as problematic is an important cause to the restricted refugee policy nowadays.

I think it also is the reason that the migration research is very much focused on migration as a problem. This research focuses school problems, psychiatric problems and unemployment.

A positive perspective, that the migration is a possibility to a better life, or sometimes the only chance to survive, has disappeared.

Perhaps that is why we don't know so much more about this life situation today than we did 50 years ago.

For example: missing is a theory about the meaning for young people to have roots in more than one culture, with respect to identity and personality development. Because some research results tell us about processes that probably are important for the personality development of children and youth.

### **Some migration processes within family life**

#### *The migration process – departure and uprooting*

One aspect of the migration process important for the life style in a new country concerns the ties to the family in the home country.

In studies as well as in clinical work you can see that families develop their relation to the rest of the extended family in the origin country in different ways.

This is the start of a process that I call THE EMOTIONAL UPROOTING.

Uprooting is a mental process and it stands for a change in your emotional ties to your extended family in the home country. Uprooting starts later than the departure.

I have found 3 different patterns in organizing your belonging to your origin family:

#### **I. The definite uprooting**

This means that you definitely decide never to return to your home country.

I see this uprooting pattern mostly among parents who have a personal motive for their migration. You can have the status of refugee in Sweden but your motive to move is personal.

The personal motive for leaving can have its roots in family problems: you have been ill treated in your family and have sisters or brothers who were your parents' favourite and you were never anyone's favourite. Or you belong to a nuclear family that has had a bad relationship to the rest of the extended family because your own parents did never get along with any one else.

Your bad feelings about your native place can be about something else than the family, about how you were treated in school or at work. Shortly, you are a violated person and the violation has cost you much pain. It seems as your pain is the push-factor that makes you prepared to leave.

I know Mabel, a young woman from Nigeria, who is a good example of this uprooting pattern. When Mabel was 9 years old her parents gave her away to an aunt who could not get children of her own. Her aunt treated her very badly, with her parents knowledge, and in spite of their knowledge she was not allowed to come home again. Not until she was 16 years, when she went to her grandmothers house and refused to move back to this aunt.

Mabel tells me that she has dreamed of going far away during all these years of suffering with this cruel woman.

When she was 24 years old, Mabel met a man who lived in Sweden but visited his home country for a short time. She decided to follow him to Sweden. By this time Mabel was a hairdresser with an own saloon and a few employees. Economically she was well-off.

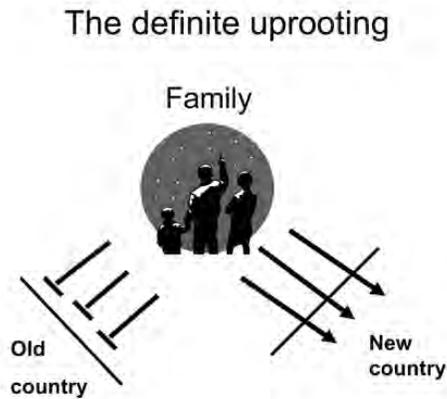
Mabel left her hairdresser saloon to a cousin and moved to Sweden. In Stockholm Mabel found herself totally dependent on a man she hardly knew. The marriage did not turn out well and to get a possibility to think over her situation she returned to Nigeria and her family after about one year in Sweden. She took her newborn son with her.

Back with her family she found that her old conflicts with her parents, and her feelings of being a foreigner in the family, still were the same. Once more she left her home town, now with the strong conviction to stay in Sweden forever.

Just now Mabel is married for the third time, expecting a new child, and has serious problems with the Immigration authorities. She cannot, of course, be accepted as a political refugee. She is unemployed since her arrival. But, she is still convinced to stay in the country. And I am sure she will.

You can say that THE DEFINITE UPROOTING develops out of disappointment and anger.

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### *The children and the definite uprooting*

For these parents, the children are a part of your Swedish project. Your expectations are that they shall adjust to the new surroundings very fast, without problems.

But your parent expectations function as an emotional constraint for the children. They try not to show fear, to show that they miss persons in the home country, they try not to show that it is difficult with the language, or with school mates.

## **II. A resting attachment**

I find this pattern, a resting attachment, in young families who live in a most involuntary exile. They have a political motive for their migration.

The nuclear family in exile leaves behind them strong emotional ties to many people. They lose practical help with the household and emotional support as parents.

There is an agreement that the exile will be short and temporary between those family members who leave and those who stay. Usually this will not be the case but everybody act as if. For the young family in Sweden this agreement is important as a guarantee for still being a part of the family at home.

Parents in this situation have much to lose but, at the same time, they have an ambition and plans for their future in their new life situation. Often they have been active and successful in whatever they did at home.

The wish to still belong to the family they have left and to form a new life in the new country is often

hard to connect and realize. The projects you start are, in fact, tied to a future in Sweden.

You can find examples of this pattern of uprooting as I call A RESTING ATTACHMENT among many young Irakian families that have arrived to Sweden during the last years.

These families have not been away from home for a long time before they start to think about how they can organize a meeting with the family at home. A visit back home is impossible.

### *Building participative, empowering & diverse communities*

But quite often they manage to arrange a visit for a family member here. The visitor is often a person that earlier has been deeply involved with the children, not seldom a grandmother.

However, receiving a visitor from home turns out to be more complicated than you have expected. This visitor has eyes and ears and she tells what she sees. Often she finds the situation bad for the young family, she finds them isolated and lonely, they have problems to find an apartment, problems with unemployment. Often they have to study many years again, despite a long education in the home country.

So the young parents find that they have to defend themselves: it is not so bad, it will be better when we know the language, etc. And, above all, it does not matter because we will come home soon.

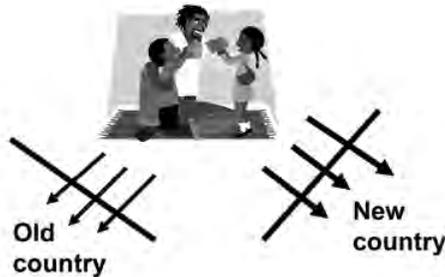
You welcome the visitor at her arrival but even feel released when she returns home. The visitor is a threat against your own positive but fragile, picture of your struggle in the new life situation.

When she leaves you feel free but also abandoned. THE RESTING ATTACHMENT is an uprooting process followed by a great deal of ambivalence.

An illustration of this process is that you keep weak roots in your native country while you at the same time start to plant new roots in the exile country.

## The resting attachment

### Family



#### *The children and the resting attachment*

Also in this case you are part of your parents project to stay close to the culture, traditions and persons you have left, and at the same time to look forward to a successful future in Sweden.

It is not easy to live with both these ambitions. It often results in conflicts between children and parents. The parents find you are too little interested in the home country, or too little ambitious in the Swedish school. There often grows a culture conflict at home.

### III. The absent uprooting

The third pattern of change of the relationship to your origin is NO CHANGE. Practically it means that you try to avoid changes in relation to your extended family. You do that by collecting part of the family around you in the new country. This is known as CHAIN MIGRATION. The contacts with family members at home take the form of an invitation, in which you stress the possibilities of a good life in Sweden.

As a RECEIVER of family members from home you get a very important role in the family, as an expert on Sweden. You become an adviser for the newly ARRIVED family members in all sorts of questions for a new immigrant.

#### *The receivers*

For the receivers, the reunion of part of the family functions as a vaccination against the feeling of change of the relations. You try to rebuild the life style from the home country.

When you try to form the family life as it was at home, you do that through an intense social life, by sharing the daily life with the newcomers. You do not present Sweden as something interesting at all.

Shortly, as an illustration you can say that you try to live with long roots, to keep your roots in the native country and, in fact avoid to fasten any roots at all in the ground of the new country.

A chain migration divides the family into two settlements in two different countries.

In the long run, that gives the family members special possibilities of moving and travelling between these two settlements. I have not seen any ambition to gather the whole family in one place. We have examples of chain migration among Assyrians, people from Chile, from Turkey and other countries.

## The absent uprooting

### Family



#### *The newcomers*

If we, instead, focus on those who arrive: they are dependent of those who already have lived in the new country for some time. As the receivers are quite dominant the arriving families develop a life style that can be called an agreed no-change. This means: With not much of a chance to do otherwise, you agree to try to live as you did at home. You spend much time together with the receivers. You discuss with them every step you take in the new country, and you get a lot of advice how to act and what to say in different meetings with the majority society.

#### *The extended family in the new country*

When you take a close look at the first years of the extended migrant families in the new country, you find some contradictory matters.

1/ It does not seem that a member of the extended family feels any restrictions in his/her contacts with Swedes. If you show a deep engagement in your family your seem to be free to see your school-mates how much you want to, if you are a child, and you are free to have private contacts with Swedish

colleagues, Swedish neighbours and so on, if you are an adult.

Therefore the private contact with the majority society varies a lot between the members of these families, parents as well as children. Some of them never see a Swedish person, some have many contacts.

2/ When arriving in Sweden, you count upon help from those who arrived earlier. But what kind of help do you get? It has often surprised me that the help is not a practical one, rather it is a verbal support: you get advice, instructions and information.

The last arrived can easily understand this so that those who arrived earlier never had any problems, the advisers are so sure how to handle their life.

Ana gave me a good example of this when her 3 year old son started to go to the daycare centre. Ana's sister-in-law, who had lived in Sweden for about two years, advised her to leave the child there and begin to study Swedish at once after the arrival.

But the boy cried and did not want to stay in the daycare centre. At home, in the morning, he used to hide his shoes, which forced Ana to search for them all over the apartment. With the child's logic he hoped to be allowed to stay at home if the shoes disappeared.

With whom shall I talk about that? Ana asked me.

I suggested: With your sister-in-law.

No, said Ana, I can't. I am the only one in my family with problems with my children here in Sweden.

There can be different reasons why those who have arrived earlier don't say anything about their own problems and difficulties to their arriving family members. Perhaps

- a/ they don't want to frighten them
- b/ they don't want to talk about their own earlier difficulties because it is painful,
- c/ difficulties are normal, they are part of the migrant situation,
- d/ you can not prepare anyone by talking, it just doesn't help.

3/ To be successful in the new society seems to be of no importance for your position in the family. The family has its own hierarchy built on history in the old country.

For example, a teenager is guaranteed the same love and support, no matter his coping

with the demands from the majority society. High grades in school, or serious social problems in the new society, neither matters for your relationships to other members of the family. Here you can rely upon the family loyalty. It seems as your position in the family is based more on family-related behaviour than on society-related.

BUT: Finally, the extended family in a cultural setting were this life style is not the norm, is impossible in the long run. Following some such families in Sweden over a long time you can see that a fragmentarisation in smaller groups are not rare.

The children and the chain migration

The chain migration is very much an affair between adults. It is much more important to concentrate on inviting the family than to observe the children in the cultural aspect.

Perhaps this is a little surprise, but I find children with this uprooting pattern in the family more free, with less personal constraints, than the others. The chain migration allows children to play both with their cousins from home and with the children who are their new neighbours in Sweden.

*In the normal case*

*A complication: the concept of honour and shame*

If the family is an extended family with modern values it is a safe and good situation to have a big family around you. But if the big family import very traditional values that do not suit well the values and life style in the new country, this can create big trouble for the young people. One such phenomenon is early marriage arrangements.

Honour and shame is the social control in most home countries for the immigrants together with early marriage arrangements results in complications for young people demands new negotiations between families abroad and families in the home country

In some home countries of our refugees, there still is a connection between marriage arrangements and honour and shame, a combination that has brought violence between fathers and daughters to our country. Some young women have been murdered by their fathers or brothers lately in Sweden.

In my study of young women's experiences and thoughts about marriage in exile there was much talk about their choice of a husband.

If the arranged marriage is the norm in the society, you don't necessarily have any problem with that. You grow up with the knowledge who is going to be

your husband, perhaps it is someone that you have known all your life. Or if you do not know the man earlier, but you still want to be married to this man, it is no problem.

*But if one family moves to another country...*

But if there is a marriage arrangement between two families and one of them moves abroad, then the young people are brought up under very different conditions. Often not even the parents are inclined to hold on to such an old arrangement. They want a son-in-law, daughter-in-law, who they know that their son or daughter will be happy with and who suits well to their own family. Most parents do not want to force their children into an unhappy marriage.

And in that case, I have learned, very interesting things can happen. Some stories from young women in the study:

Fetiye came back to Sweden newly married after a summer vacation in Turkey with her parents. Her new husband came later when he got his permission from the immigrant authorities.

Fetiye told me that there had existed an origin arrangement with another young man, whose wife she was meant to become. But neither she, nor her parents, wanted him any more in their family. So Fetiye's mother, who was the best negotiator of the family, talked to the young man's grandfather and asked for a cancelling of the arrangement.

This grandfather showed his disapproval at first, Fetiye told, but he accepted the cancelling of concern with his grandson. He wished him something better than to marry a girl who did not want him.

When Zarah came back from a visit in her home city Beirut she told that her family had expected to celebrate her engagement with a boy there. Her parents had chosen him for her when she was a girl. Zarah knew that both families wanted them to become a couple. Zarah refused.

"My dad had to accept that", said Zarah. "I don't want to marry him. My dad told

his dad that I cannot have children. End of story."

"My brother married a girl from our village in Pakistan", told Ramisa. "But they didn't get

along well and she cried and her only wish was to return home. Her parents took her back. At home her parents told the rest of the family and the neighbours that she never married in Sweden."

Why are these girls' stories so interesting?

Because if you speak to young migrant women you find different ways of handling an old tradition that can complicate the life of the family. But the parents do not seem to be prepared to give it up. So when these parents thrive to show respect to the young man and his family they use a lot of strategies to help out the young couple of the old promise. There are a lot of migrant fathers who negotiate and use, what we call, white lies or innocent lies, to save their daughters from unhappiness.

And the most interesting is that these parents, mostly fathers, don't tell anything about this. If they did, perhaps the strategies would not work.

The conclusion is: Most parents do not try to force their daughters into unhappy marriages. But the picture of the migrant father in Sweden just now is that he is a demonic and aggressive oppressor to women and children.

*Parent support in groups - good for young immigrant mothers*

Often the young immigrants who are starting an own family in a new country have a hard time I think. Standing between contradictory values. Their parents have been more identified with the culture of the home country.

We have found that the parent education groups can be very useful for these young people.

Parent education is offered from Mother and Child Health Care Centre when you have your first baby,

This is a national programme since 30 years. 70% of all Swedish parents participate in this parent training program. But fewer parents in the multicultural areas attend this programme.

When we tried to intensify this work in one of the big multicultural areas outside Stockholm, we found some interesting results in our evaluation.

The focus of the parent group activities was:

- 1/ education about newborn babies,
- 2/ to make the parent feel more comfortable and secure in the area where they live.

*Evaluation of the parent training programme*

Mothers - no fathers

First: we managed to get mothers to the groups but not the fathers.

One conclusion is that the midwives and the child nurses who are the leaders of the groups must become better in inviting migrant fathers. So we

decided to start with the mothers and later on try to develop another strategy with the fathers.

*Contact between the participants in the group*

In the evaluation interviews I specially focused on the mothers' experience of the contact with the other participants in the group.

One mother said: "There I was, a Christian assyrian from Turkey, with three Turkey girls beside me, and after a while I didn't even think about that they are Turkish."

The statement is a good illustration of what happened in the groups generally. Religion, ethnicity and nationality disappeared.

*From the General Other to the Unique Person*

To create group situations in the multicultural area is a chance to transform people from the General Other to the Unique Person for each other.

That is what happens when you meet, you transform from being a representative for a group to a Unique Person.

*To focus on what the parents have in common*

Some of the women tied this good contact between the participants to what you have in common: the baby, the pregnancy, the delivery, your situation as a foreign parent.

If you bring up subjects that belong to the conflict history of the home country – that can arouse problems, the said. When you have your first child you have much in common.

*A chance to make a small revolution against tradition*

The young mothers had so many older advisers at home - or from phone calls with the family in the home country. Many older women in the family were inclined to tell them how to handle their baby. And the Swedish midwives and nurses gave their advices. The young women were tired of all advices.

They used the group as an arena to discuss this, and for creating strategies to get a chance to make more decisions yourself about family and child matters.

*The future – the children choose their playmates*

One aim for the future is that these parents will put less restraints on their children when the children choose their play mates. To learn to know their neighbours will make them more inclined to let the children choose their friends over the borders of religion and ethnicity.

*When the migrant family needs help: Family Group Conference as a possibility*

When social, psychological or relational problems arise in a migrant family around their children or teenagers the majority society has difficulties to help. The traditional methods offered in the social services or in child psychiatry have failed.

In one of our municipalities Family Group Conference (FGC) is used and developed during the last decade. FGC is a method to make decisions for a child or a teenager at social and psychological risk. FGC is tied to concepts as empowerment, participation, child focus and social network.

The Conference is a meeting between the social welfare and other professionals, on one hand, and the private network, the extended family, friends and neighbours on the other.

*The Family Group Conference process*

What is a Family Group Conference. It can be described as a process of different phases in a quite formal structure.

*Preparation phase: mobilization of the child's network*

The social worker and the family formulates what need to be changed in the child's situation - what questions shall the FGC meeting answer?

A coordinator from the FGC-unit is engaged to help the family decide whom to invite to the FGC.

The coordinator is the administrator of the whole process.

A network map is made to help the family decide whom to invite. The preparations takes about one month.

*The meeting: the coordinator is the host*

The meeting has three phases:

1/ Information to the family – professionals' opinions (social worker, teacher, recreation leader, psychologist etc). The professionals give their picture of the situation for the child. The family can put questions.

2/ Private session – the (extended) family confer – no professional presence: formulation of the plan for the child. This is what shall come out of the meeting: a written plan. Both professionals and family members can have tasks in the plan.

3/ Professional and private meet again – the family presents the plan for the social worker (for acceptance). The coordinator is the leader again.

The plan is the answer to the initial question: what changes and what support does the child need, and who is responsible for what?

#### *Follow-up meeting*

Same procedure as first meeting, but with focused on:

- is the plan put into practice?
- rewrite the plan if necessary

#### *Evaluation of FGC - the voice of the children*

We know from evaluations that the adults are satisfied with the method Family Group Conference. They think that their voices are heard about what is appropriate to do with a child with problems in the family.

But what about the children themselves? In an observation and interview study we asked 10 teenagers about their experiences of their own FGCs.

A short conclusion is that FGC offers an arena for the child to express himself/herself but he or she is not always content with the decisions.

What the teenager shows on the FGC arena is strength and vulnerability, at the same time.

So: what do they say in the interviews and how can their reactions be interpreted during the meetings?

#### *The main themes from the evaluation*

About positive changes after the FGC - Yes, it has become better, but this would have happened with or without the FGC.

As in many of our studies: Young persons reluctantly admit that anyone else but themselves is important for the change.

Nobody can help me - I myself is responsible for my problems.

But after the FGC, with reluctant delight: Our relatives call us all the time now, I don't know why.

About the absent father (more rule than exception for them) - bad idea to invite him to the FGC, he will not come anyway.

About big fear to become rejected: Who wants to come to my FGC?

About the FGC structural arrangements - Was there a plan? Perhaps Mom has it!

The young persons are quite uninterested in FGC as a method for social work. Their interest is to be listened to.

About their long contact with the social services - I hate all these meetings. But during the meeting: Why shall I sit here if you don't listen to me?

About being the demon of the family - my problems could be much worse!

You want to send me to a psychologist! Why only me, I am not the only one with problems in my family!

About social competence – some examples:

- no problems to make the practical arrangements themselves with a foster family for a temporary stay,
- no problems to call the Social Services and ask for help for the family.

About asking for help from the social worker - Why don't you call me back? Why does it take so long time to get help from you? Social workers and young persons' opinion of what is long and short time differ a lot.

About the adults' tendencies to start a discussion about youth in general today, it can be about drinking alcohol, about appropriate time to come home at night etc. – the answer to this exclusion is to stay quite, perhaps to take a nap.

#### *Summing up the evaluation*

The arrangements around a FGC allow the young person to step forward with his individuality. Perhaps that motivates FGC to be called, as it has been, a new paradigm in social work with children and youth.

With respect to a child focus we can say: The FGC is the best method we can offer - for now.