

Mobility capital: Somali migrants' trajectories of (im)mobilities and the negotiation of social inequalities across borders

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Abstract

Based on a case study of Somali migrants who have been living in Europe for at least a decade, this paper challenges the view that post-migration life is sedentary and pleads for a dialogue between mobility studies and migration studies. It explores the various cross-border mobility practices these migrants may undertake from their country of residence and how they can be transformed into social and economic advantages. "Mobility capital" consists of the ability to engage in cross-border mobility practices at particular times but also to remain immobile by choice. Social actors with high levels of mobility capital are in a position to articulate and benefit from local anchorage and mobility practices simultaneously and to control when and how they want to be on the move. There are two facets of mobility capital: the accumulation of past experiences of crossing borders; and the potential for future movements, or the unequally shared ability to be mobile again when it appears worthwhile to be so. The diachronic focus of the study shows that biographies evolve in response to external constraints and opportunities. Furthermore, migrants' control over their (im)mobility is shaped by their transnational social positions in their place of residence, but also in other places, including their place of origin. I argue that mobility capital is a neglected dimension of migrants' strategies to negotiate multiple and contradictory social positions in a transnational social field.

Keywords: Mobility capital; Transnational; Social inequalities; Somali migrants; Trajectory

1 Introduction

"If you move 200 times, then it's no big deal to move again".

"I would hate it not to be able to move. You just need to know that you can move, even if you don't actually use the possibility, or use it very rarely".

(Awa Sugaal, met in London in 2009 and 2011)

In recent years, the idea of "mobility" has gained visibility in migration and transnational studies. However, the concept is not always clearly defined, and it is often used as one side of a dichotomy in which "migration" stands for generally poor people who want to settle in a new country, while "mobility" refers to more highly qualified persons with no clear intention to settle permanently. This dichotomy tends to reflect, sometimes uncritically, states' legal categories, for instance EU distinctions between "mobile people", EU citizens who move between member states, and "migrants" who come from outside the EU to settle within its borders (Martiniello and Rea, 2014). These categories carry strong connotations: mobility is perceived positively, and even promoted, while migration is a subject of concern, framed in terms of integration and social cohesion, and needs to be controlled (Faist, 2013; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013).

This article addresses the concept of mobility, and its relationship with migration, theoretically. Building on the recent field of "mobility studies" (see for instance Cresswell, 2010; Kaufmann et al., 2004), I address nation-states' power to determine who can cross

which borders and at what time, but also what social actors do when confronted with differentiated access to mobility. Based on a case study of Somali migrants who have been living in Europe for at least a decade, the article discusses the relevance of analysing their social and geographic trajectories of (im)mobilities diachronically. It challenges the view that post-migration life is sedentary by revealing the varied forms of cross-border mobility practices in which some migrants engage after living in a given place for several years. While such movements may seem mundane, they often allow these migrants to access social and economic advantages otherwise unavailable to them. In developing this argument, I follow Beck's argument that "the resource and capacity of 'border use', that is: to cross nation state boundaries or to instrumentalize them for accumulation of life chances, has become a key variable of social inequality in a globalized world" (Beck, 2007). While regular cross-border mobility has often been seen as the privilege of highly qualified elites, I demonstrate that less privileged migrants, such as Somali refugees living in Europe, also move in a globalised world in ways that may be beneficial to them.

Over time, migrants may accumulate various levels of what I call "mobility capital": this capital is what allows some people to cross borders rather easily, to feel comfortable and carry out activities in different places, and to come back again. Having the ability to decide *not* to move is also part of mobility capital. It is thus constituted by, on the one hand, the accumulation of past experiences of movement and, on the other, the potential for future movements, or the unequally shared ability to be mobile again when it appears worthwhile to be so. I will argue that the articulation of mobility and immobility, and the control people exercise over them, are crucial to understanding migrants' trajectories.

The article also begins from the assumptions that migrants do not necessarily hold a uniform, coherent social status, and that it is useful to break down some of the facets of their "transnational social positioning" (Nowicka, 2013) if we want to fully grasp their trajectories. The empirical sections of the article reveal the connections between the social characteristics of the respondents and the development of specific trajectories of (im)mobilities. The migrants in the study are dark-skinned and Muslim, and they arrived in Europe as refugees: as such, they experience discrimination and stigmatisation in Europe. But they also arrived sufficiently long ago to have incorporated into their living environments in ways that recent migrants have not. The resources they have gathered in Europe over the years (education, skills, passports) can also be used to claim a higher social status in their place of origin. These different aspects influence their acquisition of mobility capital as much as they help explain their need to acquire it. Respondents' mobility trajectories started long before their move to Europe and have often involved many stops along the way, but I focus on their building up of mobility capital following their arrival in Europe and being granted the right to stay.

The next section discusses the theoretical implications of using concepts from the field of mobilities studies to understand migrants' lives. It is followed by a description of the context and methodology of the study. The empirical part of the paper consists of two illustrative biographies of (im)mobilities as well as a more general diachronic analysis of respondents' trajectories. In the conclusion, I argue that mobility capital is a neglected dimension of migrants' strategies to negotiate multiple and contradictory social positions in a transnational social field.

2 Analysing migrants' lives through the prism of mobilities studies

The so-called "mobility turn" or "new mobilities paradigm" has emerged as a critique to the tendency of the social sciences to treat stability as normal and mobility as problematic (Sheller and Urry, 2006). In the relatively new field of mobilities studies, "mobility" is a concept rather than a descriptive term. For Creswell, for instance, mobility is not only about

physically moving, but also about the representations linked to different movements and the experienced embodied practice of movement (Cresswell, 2010).

Perhaps surprisingly, given their interest in people moving across borders, migration scholars have shown a “somewhat muted enthusiasm for mobilities research” (Hui, 2016). I contend that a (critical) use of the concept of mobility can add to our understanding of migration, transnationalism, and integration processes in at least two fundamental ways.

First, a mobility perspective makes it possible to go beyond an exclusive focus on international migration, which is often assumed to be the most important event in migrants’ biographies and mostly a unique and unidirectional movement. The sedentarist bias has also pervaded migration studies, particularly in regard to disadvantaged migrants (see Malkki, 1992 for the specific case of refugees): it is as if the only alternative to settlement and integration into a new place is return to the place of origin, with both options characterised by immobility. This bias reflects the logic and categories of nation-states, in particular those for which border control and the management of migration have become increasingly important (Dahinden, 2016; Hui, 2016). Thanks to the transnational perspective in particular, empirical evidence has demonstrated that some migrants engage in other types of multi-directional movements as well (see for instance Hugo, 2013; Jeffery and Murison, 2011). The literature on return (see for instance Black and King, 2004; Hansen, 2007) and the debate regarding migration and development (among others De Haas, 2010) have highlighted the importance of circulation between countries of origin and countries of migration. Migration scholars have also recently paid attention to migrants’ onward, or secondary, movements within Europe, whether regular (Ahrens et al., 2014; Mas Giralt, 2017) or not (Schwarz in this issue). However, we still lack studies that investigate the interplay of different types of (cross-border) movements undertaken by migrants. This study intends to fill this gap by building on a central objective of mobilities studies, that of bringing into a single analysis different types of movements (Sheller and Urry, 2006). A trajectory approach examines a migrant’s biography diachronically and focuses on the interplay between moments of mobility and moments of immobility (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014).

An epistemological implication of the mobility perspective is that the event of migration becomes one movement among others in a migrant’s social and spatial trajectory. At the theoretical level, this perspective has led some scholars to contend that international migration could be perceived as one type of mobility among others (Amelina and Vasilache, 2014; Favell, 2007), an argument that has been challenged (see for instance Skeldon, 2015). I have decided to treat the migratory move to Europe as the point of departure of my analysis not because it is these migrants’ only or most significant border crossing, but because of the critical impact of that migration on their lives. By going to Europe, these individuals became migrants in the eyes of the receiving states and confronted migration-related policies (immigration, asylum, integration, naturalisation, etc.).

The second advantage to bringing the concept of mobility into the study of migrants’ lives is that it sheds new light on the issue of social inequalities in transnational social fields. The mobility turn has been critiqued for celebrating and romanticising mobility, as well as for downplaying social inequalities in an uneven global world (Faist, 2013; Franquesa, 2011; Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). Following calls for a more political reading of mobility, one especially promising aspect of mobilities studies is its understanding of mobility as an element of social differentiation. The “politics of mobility” (Cresswell, 2010; Massey, 1994) emphasises how mobilities participate in the (re)production of unequal power relations alongside other markers of differentiation (see also Beck, 2007). Scholars have explored the issue of power and social inequalities by being attentive to the complex dialectics between mobilities and immobilities as well as to the role of states or supra-state institutions in shaping who is allowed to move where, when, and how.

While I will argue that mobility capital is an element of social differentiation, I do not claim that mobility is necessarily positive. Franquesa (2011) convincingly argues that “power is not

so much located in the pole of mobility, as an intrinsic attribute of it, but rather in the capacity to manage the relation between mobility and immobility” (1028). In other words, social inequalities do not ensue between two predetermined categories of people, the privileged mobile and the unprivileged immobile. Rather, it is the ability to control one’s mobility that is at stake in the politics of mobility (Massey, 1994). Being in a position to decide for oneself – and for others – whether to move or not, and under what conditions, is a determining factor. This implies that it is necessary to focus on both migrants’ movement and lack of movement, whether chosen or forced, and on the interplay between the two (see also Schapendonk and Steel, 2014; Van Hear, 2014).

Furthermore, control over one’s (im)mobility may be shaped by the transnational social positions that one holds with regard to places and states other than those in which one resides. Anthias (2016) argues that “belonging has become a term that can no longer be linked to a fixed place or location but to a range of different locales in different ways. [...] People might occupy different and contradictory positions and have different belongings globally” (183). Migrants’ social positions are linked to how their economic, cultural, and social capital (in the sense of Bourdieu, 1986) are evaluated in different contexts, but also to local hierarchies based on ethnic, racial, and religious categories.

Nowicka (2013) argues that “transnational social positioning” emerges from the conversion of economic, social, and cultural capital that are circulated transnationally. I follow a similar transnationalised way of analysing social inequalities to assess how Somali migrants’ mobility practices may allow them to negotiate such status discrepancies to their advantage. Theoretically, the article is thus critically situated in a Bourdieusian theoretical framework on capital and social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). However, the focus on mobility and the politics of mobility helps illuminate how global inequalities play out in the lives of migrants who are socially situated in more than one nation-state. The article thus contributes to the literature aiming to de-nationalise theories of social inequalities by going beyond static and statist analyses of social class.

3 Context and methodology

The empirical data consist of qualitative interviews undertaken with women and men who arrived in Europe at least a decade ago and who were living in Switzerland or Britain at the time of the interview(s). All of them were first-generation migrants originally from Somalia or Somaliland. The choice to include only long-term migrants is justified by my interest in the different types of cross-border movements some of these people undertake *after* migrating to Europe and living there, and *from* their country of residence.

This choice, like any other sampling choice, induces a selective bias in the respondents’ profile. They mostly belonged to the first waves of refugees to arrive in Europe from war-torn Somalia from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. As in other civil conflicts, people with more resources were among the first to leave the country and reach industrialised countries. But despite their belonging to rather privileged and educated groups, in most cases they could not organise a flight and were confronted by restrictive entry policies that forced them to use irregular routes to arrive in Europe (Kleist, 2004). This led many families to be dispersed, a fact that is reflected in their often wide transnational networks (Horst, 2006, 2007). This also means that they lost many of their assets when they fled and in most cases could not validate their education and work credentials, thus experiencing strong deskilling in Europe. Yet most of them were able to obtain a stable legal status, generally through naturalisation, in their country of residence. They are able to access resources that were less available to subsequent waves of Somali refugees. Yet, as Africans, former refugees, and Muslims, they are often confronted by collective stigmatisation, exclusion, and marginalisation in Europe (Eyer and Schweizer, 2010; Kassaye et al., 2016; Open Society Foundations, 2015; Valentine et al., 2009).

Britain and Switzerland differ in regard to Somali migration and national and local legislation. In Britain, Somalis constitute one of the largest ethnic minorities. They are roughly estimated to number between 95,000 and 250,000 (Hammond, 2013), and most live in London and hold a British passport. Unlike Britain, Switzerland is not a historical country of migration for Somalis, since the two countries have no colonial links. More than 10,000 migrants of Somali origin are estimated to be living in Switzerland (reference removed).

I conducted qualitative interviews between 2009 and 2011, including semi-structured and narrative interviews, as well as some group interviews and informal discussions, with migrants of Somali origin in Britain and Switzerland. The Swiss sample consists of 18 people (half of whom are women), and the British one of 19 people (12 of whom are women). In total, I conducted 38 individual interviews and seven group interviews. I met about a third of all respondents more than once (up to five times), sometimes in different data-gathering contexts, for instance in individual and group interviews or during informal encounters. These “multiple sequential interviews” (Charmaz, 2006) allowed me to deepen my understanding of some respondents’ lives, but also to see the evolution of their trajectories over the course of the fieldwork.

The sample was theoretically constructed, and I strived to include people corresponding to the categories (in this case of mobility) that were emerging (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). To access potential respondents, I multiplied and diversified the “entry points” – the contact persons or organisations – as much as possible, as well as, to a lesser extent, spontaneous meeting places such as restaurants and shopping malls. I used personal contacts as well as gatekeepers active in diverse types of associations in both Switzerland and Britain. I also used (transnational) snowball techniques, asking research participants to refer me to other potential respondents.

4 From mobility as a practice to mobility capital: Two trajectories of (im)mobilities

The diachronic focus on trajectories makes it possible to understand not only the dialectic between mobility and immobility (Paul, 2015; Schapendonk and Steel, 2014), but also the interconnections between different types of mobility at different moments in these migrants’ lives. The empirical section opens with two biographies. Awa Sugaal and Nuur Caali were among the most mobile people in my sample; they had also accumulated high levels of mobility capital and were mobilising it actively at the time of our encounters. I chose their biographies not because of their representativeness, but because they highlight the processes involved particularly well. I conducted two interviews with Awa and five with Nuur, and I maintained informal contact with them even after the fieldwork was completed.

4.1 Awa Sugaal: “Going back and forth has shaped people’s identity”

Awa was a teenager when she arrived in the Netherlands with her family in the early 1990s. In this country, she studied, worked as a teacher, and became a Dutch citizen. In parallel to living in a city she still considers “home”, she started being mobile after a few years, visiting in particular her country of origin, Somaliland, a few times for short-term professional projects. A two-month visit in the early 2000s led to her decision to leave the Netherlands and take up residence in Britain. She recalls:

And then... just one day, I thought I just don’t want to be here. I went to Somaliland, came back, [...] and it [the Netherlands] was a totally different country. [...] I think you adopt a distance. Because, you know, it’s just routine. But when you leave, even if it’s for two months, you come back and you think, “What’s this all about?” And then I thought, “I’m going to leave after one year”, then I thought, “no, after six months”, then “three months”, and I thought, “why not now?”

Like many other Dutch Somalis (Ahrens et al., 2014; Van Liempt, 2011) Awa undertook a “secondary” or “onward” migration, using her right to intra-EU mobility. During one of her interviews, she indicated that she saw the post-9/11 Netherlands with different eyes and felt less free to live the life she wanted for herself. But, as the quote reveals, she was also clear that having been elsewhere temporarily contributed to changing her views on her living environment and her decision to start new projects based on mobility. She moved to London, where she felt “comfortable” at the time of our meetings. There, she found a new job and became very active in diverse associational projects, mostly in relation to migration issues and/or Somali(land) populations.

In parallel, she retained strong practical and emotional ties with the Netherlands: she has close friends there, but also professional connections she still mobilises for some of her activities, even those based in Somaliland. While she is based in London, she visits the Netherlands several times a year. The decade she spent there allowed her to gather significant local resources: apart from economic capital, she accumulated cultural capital, in the form of linguistic and professional skills as well as European educational credentials; social capital she still mobilises transnationally; and legal capital, in the form of a Dutch passport, which allows her to cross many borders and settle in another EU country legally. She mobilised these resources to opt for other forms of mobility: regular visits to Somaliland, but also her onward migration to the UK. These resources have remained available to her even after she left the country, partially because of her regular visits to the Netherlands.

In the years after her move to London, Awa’s trips to Somaliland became more frequent, as she committed to different political and development projects there. These reinforced mobility practices have constituted the basis for further changes in her priorities:

I think the last eight years that I’ve been working here and there, especially the last two or three years that I have been going more often, I have felt a sense of injustice dumped on these people. So I think that has influenced me a lot. [...] I think that going back and forth has shaped people’s identity.

Regular return visits may foster new identification processes with what Awa and others call the “homeland”. New connections are (re)created with a place they left a long time ago but where they feel they have a role to play. Awa’s two quotes emphasise the decisive impact of physical presence there in these changes of perspective. By being in a place, people can meet with old friends or family members or create new contacts; they can evaluate the local situation and assess opportunities, for instance for work, business, and real estate investments, and to contribute to the country’s development. They see things in a different light. In Awa’s case, the knowledge, skills, and networks she has secured through her successive dwellings and multiple moves have led her to receive regular requests to participate in various projects in Britain, the Netherlands, Somaliland, and elsewhere.

4.2 Nuur Caali: “The Swiss passport, they can take it away from me”

Nuur arrived in Switzerland as a teenager with his family after they had lived in the Middle East for a few years. Like Awa, he acquired some education, a stable skilled job, and a new passport. While he was mostly sedentary after first arriving in Switzerland, he started crossing borders regularly when, after eight years, he obtained the legal status granting him the right to do so. He developed what I call “star-shaped mobility”: the centre of the star is his place of residence, while the points are the different places he spends shorter periods of time in. While maintaining his full-time, yet flexible, job, he is away regularly. Nuur conducts multiple activities while on the move: from (mostly informal) business trips to political meetings; from family gatherings to the development of a humanitarian project in his region of origin. His mobility is based on the stable resources acquired during times of relative sedentarity – a secure legal status, a good job, and particularly financial means. But being mobile now also allows him to acquire new assets. In particular, crossing borders has allowed him to expand and reinforce transnational social networks. By going to Britain, the USA, Dubai, and Syria, he has been able to meet with business partners, participate in family

gatherings where important decisions are made, and take part in political meetings involving his region of origin. His case illustrates the convertibility of mobility capital from and into other forms of capital (see Bourdieu, 1986 for a theoretical discussion on the convertibility of capital; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

These transnational ties eventually allowed him to access people and knowledge connected to a country he has almost never lived in. A few years ago, thanks to previous network-building trips, he returned to Somalia for the first time to check on the humanitarian project he is involved in and attend a conference intended to set up a local government in his region of origin. Before this trip, he told me that he was looking forward to meeting “very renowned and very influential people” there, highlighting his high expectations regarding the networks he would access and his own position within them.

Nuur is strongly embedded in both local and transnational networks and activities. Apart from his job, he is a local politician in his city, is active in civil society, and has children who go to the local school. He has integrated into Swiss society in the ways expected by the authorities, but he is also highly mobile. His regular mobility practices are the central resource allowing him to not only carry out local and transnational activities in parallel, but also benefit from their synergy. It is in this sense that mobility becomes mobility capital, converted from and into other types of resources. Yet, despite this apparent success story, Nuur, like Awa and most other respondents, feels increasingly uncomfortable in a Europe that targets foreigners, migrants, and Muslim minorities. He said:

I feel somehow that whatever I do, ok, I am tolerated, I am naturalised. But I always say, “I am Somali”, and then, if people ask, I add, “yes, I am also Swiss”. I find it hard to immediately say “I am Swiss”; it is as if I’m sticking something to myself. I am proud to be Somali and I tell myself, I have a Somali nationality, no one can take away this nationality from me, I was born with it, it is mine. But the Swiss passport [he snaps his fingers], they can take it away from me. It only takes a decision from the Swiss parliament that says, “We are taking away the passports of naturalised people”, and they take it away. [...] And when I hear other [Somalis] who say that they are only Swiss, I tell them, “but wait, before you became Swiss, who were you? What is that [he shows the skin on the back of his hand]? That is not Swiss. You are first African, and then...”.

Nuur is aware of the limits to his formal membership in the Swiss nation, making evident through the reference to his skin colour and his African origin that race is a relevant marker of differentiation in Switzerland (Lavanchy, 2015). In the context of an uncertain future in his country of residence, mobility capital becomes particularly significant: having accumulated enough of it opens up and solidifies options in more than one place. Through his mobility, Nuur has acquired the knowledge and networks – and perhaps even the financial means – to seize opportunities elsewhere, should he want to do so.

5 Accumulating mobility capital and making sense of diverging transnational social positions

The glimpse into the lives of Awa and Nuur demonstrates two fundamental arguments in the transnational literature. The first is that of simultaneity: some people can be incorporated into different places and networks at the same time (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). The second is that transnational activities and dwelling in one’s main place of residence do not necessarily contradict each other and can even be synergetic (see for instance Bivand Erdal and Oeppen, 2013; and Hammond, 2013 for the specific case of Somali migrants). But the diachronic focus of this study also highlights the centrality of time beyond simultaneity. Biographies unfold and evolve over time, also in response to the external constraints and opportunities that arise, and to the resources at hand at different moments in life. Awa and Nuur, as well as other participants in the study, have accumulated some mobility capital over

the years. But this process, still on-going, takes time, and is characterised by moments of sedentarity as well as different types of movement at different moments.

In this section, I want to go beyond Awa and Nuur's individual biographies to address some key moments in migrants' trajectories and their importance to the accumulation of mobility capital.

5.1 Arrival in Europe and the accumulation of local resources, including legal access to mobility

As the methodological section described, when the respondents arrived in Europe, in most cases they applied for asylum and were granted full refugee or an alternative status. Most were adults (unlike Awa and Nuur, who were still teenagers), and most also belonged to privileged social classes in Somalia. However, they lost many of their economic resources during the war and found it difficult to valorise their other assets in Europe. Because they came from a less economically and politically powerful country to more powerful ones (see Beck, 2007 on this aspect; Weiss, 2005), and because they could not carefully plan their move, they faced obstacles in validating their professional or educational credentials. They also had limited social relationships they could mobilise to access social and economic advantages. Over the years, however, they created local connections, acquired some education, learnt the local language and possibly also others, entered the labour market, earned money and joined pension schemes, created associations, became politically involved, and acquired the nationality of their new place of residence. Unlike more recently arrived (Somali) migrants, their long-time residence generally allowed them to create a stronger relationship with their living environments, other people and institutions located there, and the state.

These resources, which have been acquired in a particular place, are valuable in anchoring these migrants to their country of residence. But they also constitute fundamental building blocks for those migrants who want to access cross-border mobility. Crossing borders requires financial means, time, and skills – for all of which a stable socioeconomic situation is a precondition. Such a situation, in turn, is based on investing in education and integration into the labour market. Strong anchorage is also needed because people on the move need to ensure that their professional and/or domestic activities in their country of residence are taken care of while they are away.

Similarly, becoming a citizen of the nation-state in which one resides has important implications for local incorporation, but also for mobility capital. For Somali migrants, a new passport increases their ability to cross international borders. Al-Sharmani (2006) explores this idea through the concept of "legal capital". Naturalisation grants access to the specific rights and duties of citizens, including mobility rights, which are somewhat neglected in the literature. Mobility rights extend beyond the rights to migrate and settle in a new country: they also include the rights to leave a country, to enter others without (too many) administrative hassles, to come back legally, and to receive protection when away.

Nation-states differ in their political status in the international hierarchy (Beck, 2007), which affects their citizens' mobility rights. For instance, while a British passport grants entry without a visa to 156 countries and a Swiss one to 155, a Somali passport allows visa-free entry to only 32.¹ Nuur's ability to organise last-minute travel to take advantage of opportunities in different places relies on the right to extended mobility granted by his Swiss passport. Similarly, Fahrhan Mahamoud, a man who has practiced pendular mobility between Switzerland (where he works) and Britain (where his wife and children live) explained how naturalisation meant the end of the "trouble of always having to ask for visas". The same is

¹ Global Passport Power Rank 2017 (<https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php>).

true of Awa's secondary move to Britain, which would have been more difficult, if not impossible, without her EU passport.

For Bourdieu (1986), accumulating capital presupposes investing time. The study shows how time-consuming it is to acquire language skills, education, work experience, social networks, financial means, and legal capital. It also shows that time is not sufficient: some kind of immobility is also required. As Dahinden (2010) argues, building up mobility capital paradoxically involves the need to "sedentarise". Immobility is a prerequisite for obtaining the legal documentation necessary to access mobility rights later. Naturalisation policies always include residence requirements, including a minimum number of years of presence in, and explicitly excluding long absences from, the country in question.

5.2 Early experiences of mobility

After some time, those resources that have been acquired in the new place of residence may come to be mobilised in order to make mobility practices beneficial. At some stage in their life, some migrants may find that some local resources have a "transnationalisable" character: they have the potential of gaining value by being circulated and invested in other places. Nuur, for instance, developed a discourse about wanting to transfer the professional and political skills he has gained in Switzerland to the regional administrative and political apparatus currently developing in his region of origin in Somalia. He thus started to expand his social networks, partially by visiting different places in the world, and strived to acquire a good position within these transnational networks. I also met female respondents who realised that the good reputation they have acquired among local Somalis could become profitable if they thought of their travels more strategically: their visits to family members elsewhere in the world became opportunities to circulate gifts, money, and information for others who could not be mobile themselves. Some even started informal businesses based on the cross-border circulation of objects, clothes, or food sold within those immobile networks (references removed).

In most cases, early experiences of mobility are not intended to be economically or socially rewarding, at least initially, but they can constitute a first step towards the accumulation of mobility capital, for two reasons. First, mobility opens up a window onto a new set of opportunities to diversify resources. Post-conflict situations, for instance, often create work opportunities for migrants who have a Western education and work experience along with cultural and linguistic knowledge related to their region of origin (Oeppen, 2013; Sagmo, 2015). While new communication technologies increasingly facilitate contacts across borders, physical presence is often also indispensable for learning about new opportunities, gathering information, drawing inspiration for further projects, expanding social networks, and creating trust. As Jawahir Farah, a Swiss-Somali female respondent, told me about the development project she was thinking of initiating in Somalia:

I need to go there. Oh yes, I need to go, to go into the field. Because if you want something done, do it yourself. I think that if I send people, it's always, "You know, I didn't get to go there, I didn't find the time, I had to meet with relatives" and all that.

Various forms of cross-border mobility practices may also lead to new encounters so significant that they later become social relationships that can be mobilised for specific economic, political, or associational projects.

Second, these (early) cross-border movements also show that additional resources are needed to take advantage of these opportunities. In many cases, it is through visits to family or friends that the respondents discovered niches they can fill thanks to their background: upon their return to their place of residence, they started to develop concrete projects and acquire the resources needed to carry them out, for instance a specific education or language skills. In some cases, further mobility projects are actively developed in order to

acquire these assets. More frequent movements can be motivated by the need to solidify social networks in different places. Similarly, a few respondents explained their move from another European country to Britain by their desire to learn English, which, as Fatoumo Ahmed, a Somali-Norwegian woman living in London, stated, is “a very international language that you can use everywhere you go”.

5.3 Re-creating connections with the place of origin

Nuur's story illustrates particularly well how, for migrants who have been away from their place of origin for a long time, re-creating the necessary connections takes time. Having been unable to return for a long time (often because of long periods of legally imposed immobility), migrants' membership in the nation may be challenged. Many respondents expressed a wish to “contribute”, but people who never left the country may dispute mobile migrants' intended aims, and even their claims of belonging (Horst, 2015; Kleist, 2008). The study demonstrates that mobility practices are an essential element of migrants' attempts to manage these contested claims of membership. Regular return visits are necessary for those who want to participate in the economic, political, social, or cultural development of their place of origin. Back and forth movements (rather than definitive return) constitute a central strategy for those migrants who want to contribute to their region of origin (Black and King, 2004; Hansen, 2007).

The study further shows that cross-border mobility to third countries can contribute to migrants' ability to develop a privileged position in their place of origin. Nuur has used his travels to, among other places, Britain, the Netherlands, Dubai, and the USA to actualise and reinforce his social relations and strengthen his own position, reputation, and visibility within those networks. Only after visiting these countries did he start making return visits to Somalia. Star-shaped or pendular mobility have been crucial for some migrants' access to specific social networks and their claim to belong.

Finally, being mobile is also what allows these migrants to travel back to Europe and maintain or further develop the assets they have there. Black and King (2004) argue that “in order for their return to be sustainable, returnees need to retain continued access to the wider international professional and social world in which they have worked and lived”. It is in large part because they are (also) localised in Europe that the migrants in the study can develop projects and enhance their social status elsewhere.

5.4 Confronting stigmatisation and “reactive mobility”

A final facet of respondents' transnational social positioning needs to be discussed: despite having been in Europe for more than a decade, the migrants in the study are members of stigmatised groups in Europe, and they mostly remain low in local socioeconomic hierarchies (Open Society Foundations, 2015). This has important implications for migrants' development of mobility capital.

Building on Yuval Davis (2006), Brubaker (2010) distinguishes between the formal and informal politics of belonging, in other words between legal membership, on the one hand, and feelings of inclusion and belonging to the nation, on the other. I contend that both facets impact on mobility practices, but in different ways: while obtaining citizenship in one's country of residence is crucial for developing mobility capital, discourses regarding who “really” belongs and who does not, whatever their formal legal status, also shape mobility practices and their effects.

The narratives of both Nuur and Awa include references to obstacles to belonging fully. The “narrow-mindedness” Awa experienced in the Netherlands played a significant part in her decision to move to the UK. Similarly, engaging in business, political, humanitarian, or professional activities in their country of origin is a way for some migrants to escape the limitations experienced in all those fields in their countries of residence. Nuur, for example,

believes that his right to remain in Switzerland (through formal citizenship) is unguaranteed, while his Somali nationality “cannot be taken away from [him]”, and this belief influences his decision to participate in political developments in his place of origin. In developing a relationship with their place of residence over the years, Somali migrants need to negotiate these practices of othering, based on (representations of) their national, ethnic, racial, and, increasingly, religious background.

Some authors refer to the transnational practices and identifications prompted by experiences of discrimination or racism in the place of residence as “reactive transnationalism” (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Snel et al., 2016). Similarly, my study shows that migrants’ (perceived or real) lack of opportunities and the feeling that they are not accepted as full members of their place of residence have a strong impact: they may motivate their decision to develop mobility capital and gather or activate resources in other places, where they may become more economically or socially valuable (see also Ahrens et al., 2014 for a similar argument). In this sense, mobility takes on a “reactive” character in some instances.

6 The two facets of mobility capital

This article develops a case for the theoretical relevance of mobility capital. The methodological and conceptual focus on migrants’ trajectories highlights my core argument: mobility capital is what allows people to opt for specific cross-border mobility practices, which they are able to transform into advantages for themselves or their families – or to remain immobile by choice.

While mobility may be a practice or a strategy that many people “do”, it is also, for some people under certain conditions, a type of capital, i.e. something that they “possess”. Drawing on Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and on mobility scholars working with his ideas (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2006; Kaufmann et al., 2004), this article highlights the convertible nature of different forms of capital: having accumulated diverse mobility experiences and skills, migrants can capitalise on them by converting their cross-border practices into other types of capital, and vice versa. As I show here and elsewhere (references removed), migrants may build on their other assets (economic, cultural, social, and legal capital) to develop “productive” mobility practices. In turn, mobility capital is activated to obtain various types of resources in different places, transfer them, and convert them to their advantage.

Concretely, I argue that two equally important dimensions are constitutive of mobility capital – past experiences of mobility and the potential for future movements. Awa’s opening quotes, based on common sense and a high degree of perceptiveness, make exactly these points: moving makes further movements easier; and the knowledge that one can move is at least as important as movement itself.

The first facet of mobility capital is the accumulation of past experiences of mobility. Through movement, migrants (and others) accumulate technical and cognitive skills that are useful for crossing borders again, or rather to cross them in an increasingly fruitful manner. Over time, it becomes increasingly easy to plan, organise, and implement different types of movements. Fundamentally, the accumulation of experiences makes it possible to undertake further moves without losing what has been acquired in the place left. The “cost-benefit” balance becomes positive.

This facet of mobility capital has been partially explored in the literature on migration, in particular through the concept of “migration capital”, which is mostly used to refer to the abilities and resources migrants mobilise or acquire during their migration trajectory or which relate to their migration experience (see for instance Kōu and Bailey, 2014; Paul, 2015; Ryan et al., 2015; Suter, 2012). Some scholars acknowledge the relevance of direct or indirect past experiences of migration in shaping further (im)mobility decisions, for instance an

onward (internal or international) movement, a return, or a settlement (see for instance Kōu and Bailey, 2014; Massey, 1990). The concept of mobility capital developed in this article, however, goes beyond the idea of migration-specific forms of capital: theoretically, at least, any person, whether migrant or not, can accumulate mobility capital. Furthermore, mobility capital continues to develop *after* the initial migration trajectory. Finally, mobility capital cannot be understood outside of its second facet, which has been insufficiently explored in migration studies.

This second facet consists of the potential for future movements, or the unequally shared ability to be mobile again when it appears worthwhile to be so. Drawing on mobilities studies has been very helpful in illuminating this particular aspect of mobility capital. “Potential” implies that people are able cross borders should they want or need to do so, but also, and crucially, that they have the option of not moving as well. Again, Awa made this point: “I would hate it not to be able to move. You just need to know that you can move, even if you don’t actually use the possibility, or use it very rarely”.

Having gained some degree of control over one’s mobility does not equate with being constantly on the move. Kaufmann et al. (2004) acknowledge that mobility as capital includes “the option of non-action”, or, as I would rather put it, of non-mobility. The lives of the mobile migrants I met are characterised by moments of immobility, chosen or forced, during which time and effort are invested in developing connections and acquiring resources locally. By considering mobility a type of capital, it is possible to investigate the ways in which social actors may be in a position to articulate and benefit from local anchorage and mobility practices simultaneously. This balancing act may include a high degree of mobility at one stage, very few cross-border movements at a later one, and a more mobile lifestyle again later. What is important is not whether people move a lot. In fact, when imposed, movement is often experienced as a burden and creates disadvantages (Sinatti, 2011). What matters is whether people are able to mobilise, in the future, the resources they have accumulated to be expertly and efficiently mobile.

7 Conclusion

While migration studies and the literature on mobilities are rarely brought together, this article demonstrates how doing so can shed new light on the lives of migrants. This article has been able to make these conceptual linkages because of its use of the trajectory approach and its focus on how migration and mobility processes evolve dynamically, depending on migrants’ positions at different moments in time (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014). Examining trajectories of (im)mobilities illuminates situations at specific times and in specific places, but above all how these different moments are interconnected – how they relate to the past (the first facet of mobility capital), but also to a possible future (the second facet).

While I have focused on examples in which (post-migration) mobility has empowering effects, my argument should not be confused with a normative celebration of cross-border mobility. The distinction between actual mobility and the accumulation of mobility capital is fundamental here: Nuur, Awa, and others are able to gain from their cross-border movements because they have acquired enough experience, knowledge, and other assets (economic resources, transnational social capital, education, and, crucially, legal capital) to transform mobility into capital. Social and economic advantages are pursued in different places, thanks to a high degree of control over individual cross-border movements and a strategic articulation between local anchorage and sedentarity, on the one hand, and diverse types of mobility practices, on the other. Mobility capital exists, in others words, only when “value is created” (Jayaram, 2016). If not, then mobility practices remain what they are: people moving across borders.

Mobility capital, like any other capital in a Bourdieusian sense, is a matter of accumulating resources that can be mobilised. It is not something you either have or you don’t. This also

means that it can diminish: people can lose some of their mobility capital because of personal circumstances (illness or disability, financial setback, marriage or divorce, etc.) or external changes. Brexit endangers the life prospects, but also the mobility plans, of many EU Somalis with connections to Britain, including Awa, who has made London her main place of residence. Similarly, Trump's recent controversial "Muslim ban" may diminish the opportunities of people of Somali origin, even those with multiple citizenships, to move and build mobility capital. Trajectories of (im)mobilities are therefore contingent on changing political landscapes.

Migration policies have become increasingly selective, with restrictions on irregular and family migration increasing more than on any other type of movement (de Haas et al., 2016). Thus, migrants who do not enjoy the right to move to and reside in the most powerful countries in the industrialised world are most impacted (see, among others, Schwarz and Kleist in this issue). This article demonstrates that mobility capital is not *only* a matter of legal documentation, however. To be sure, the legal right to move is certainly crucial. But all aspects of mobility capital – including the legal one – need to be seen in light of these actors' social position in various hierarchies. Nuur's feeling that he could lose his passport points to the "situational, conditional and unconfirmed" (Khosravi, 2007) character of his legal status, to his being "a quasi-citizen whose rights can be suspended in the state of emergency" (ibid). The vulnerability of these citizens' rights relates to their racial, ethnic, and religious background and to the wider global power inequalities shaping their social positions. They may be "legitimate movers" (Martiniello and Rea, 2014), but they are also Blacks and Muslims who are originally from Africa: because of this, their movements are not represented or experienced in the same way as when privileged white Europeans cross borders with the same passport.

This article illuminates the need to consider these social positions through a transnational lens (Anthias, 2016; Nowicka, 2013). In comparison to other European citizens, Somalis migrants living in Europe are disadvantaged ethnically, racially, and in religious terms. Simultaneously, the fact that they have been living in Europe for a long time and have acquired resources there allows them to position themselves favourably relative to other Somali migrants living in Europe, but also to the population in their place of origin. Under these specific circumstances, being mobile is a sensible strategy to negotiate these divergent social positions in different places. The practices of these mobile people illustrate the need to tackle social inequalities outside of the nation-state container, and to start "transnationalising" not only migration studies, but perhaps also social theories in general (Dahinden, 2016). While building on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital, this study contributes to recent efforts to de-nationalise his theories (Nieswand, 2011; Nowicka, 2013; Weiss, 2005). In an increasingly global and mobile world, social actors are not detached from local and national social, economic, or legal frameworks, and their social position may differ depending on where it is evaluated. But even more, social actors may build on these differences. Cross-border mobility constitutes a cornerstone of these migrants' strategies to negotiate those structuring frameworks and exert some agency in a global context in which they are not among the most privileged.

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