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Migration and Unequal Social Positions in a Transnational Perspective

Editor

Thomas Faist

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Editorial

Introduction: Migration and Unequal Positions in a Transnational Perspective

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Abstract
How does spatial mobility influence social mobility and vice versa? Often, the 'objective' structural positions on the one hand, and the 'subjective' definition of social positions on the other hand, are not considered together. Yet this is necessary in order to gauge the consequences of mobility trajectories reaching across borders. This framing editorial asks how we can study the interplay of perceptions of one's own social position and one's objective social position to better understand how spatial mobility influences social mobility and vice versa. In short, this means an exploration of the nexus of spatial mobility and social mobility. Exploring that nexus requires attention to objective social positions, subjective social positioning strategies, transnational approaches to the study of social positions and self-positioning, and social boundary theory. Overall, the complexity of the nexus between social and spatial mobilities calls for a multifaceted research approach that covers various levels of analysis. Some of the contributions feature a mixed-methods approach that allows drawing a multifaceted picture of the interrelation between the perceptions of social positions and their structural features.

Keywords
migration; social inequalities; social mobility; social positioning; social positions; transnational social spaces

Issue
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1. Focusing on the Nexus between Social and Spatial Mobility: Ways to Conceptualise Social Inequality in Transnational Spaces

Who gains from migration and who loses socially? How does geographical mobility affect social class and status? These questions concern how inequalities are negotiated and reproduced in transnational spaces and across nation states (Faist, 2019). However, investigating empirically the nexus between social and spatial mobility is a complex task, and there have been few comprehensive attempts thus far (Faist, 2016). In the European context, for example, research has found that spatial mobility across borders indeed goes along with differences in people's life chances compared to the non-mobile population (Verwiebe, Wiesböck, & Teitzer, 2014). Scholars also find that the experiences of migrants are to a great extent unequal due to differences in people's country of emigration, their education credentials, occupational skills, and legal and citizenship status (Faist, 2014; Martin, 2009; Nohl, Schittenhelm, & Weiss, 2014). Mobility can be considered as "an element of social differentiation" (Moret, 2017, p. 2). The associated patterns of spatial mobility are diverse. Some leave their country of origin

and settle directly in another country, while others have multiple experiences of migration as well as settlement in several countries. Again, this diversity in migration patterns may make a difference not only for social positions but also social positioning. Contributing to such differentiation in stratification are, among others, processes of racialization and gender, which influence migrants' social positions and their evaluations in both origin and destination countries (Erel & Reynolds, 2017).

Transnational practices and their interrelation with social inequality are at the core of various studies (Favell & Recchi, 2011; Mau & Mewes, 2012; Recchi et al., 2019). By combining perspectives on social positions and social positioning, the research presented in this issue yields important insights into the processes whereby social inequality is linked to the creation of (trans-)national social spaces. While there has been ground-breaking research describing how structural inequalities are (re-)produced (e.g., Schneider & Collet, 2010), much less investigation has been made of mobile people's own evaluations of their social positions in interplay with (trans-)national social structures. In particular, there is only limited empirical work on the interplay of both the socioeconomic and political conditions that frame social and geographical mobility across spaces, and the subjective sense-making processes that people engage in in order to position themselves socially. Knowledge about the interrelation of migrants' own perspectives on social class and status and social mobility in and across different locations, and the structural factors that shape inequality across national borders, could contribute to a better understanding of migrants' mobility strategies, their plans for social mobility, and their potential success. Such an endeavour enhances our knowledge of how mobility shapes lives and life choices, and how mobility affects the reproduction of social inequalities across national and local spaces. Here, mobility refers, in a very general sense, to movement in geographical space and captures patterns of both daily and more exceptional movement. Migration is used here to denote a more specific kind of mobility across the borders of national states.

2. Social Positions, Social Positionings, and Social Class

Attention is given in this issue to the largely unmentioned potential ambiguity between two facets of social positions: a person's socio-economic position and the perception and evaluation of that person's socio-economic position. Social position is, in general, understood as a person's place within a given social hierarchy and the tasks and prestige attached to that particular place. To analyse the diverse trajectories of migration in relation to individuals' social positions, as well as the way in which mobile persons interpret these positions, both 'objective' and 'subjective' social positions of mobile persons need to be considered. 'Objective' social position refers to someone's social position within a certain pattern of social stratification viz. social hierarchy, as measured by standardized indicators (e.g., the EGP scheme by Erikson, Goldthorpe, & Portocarero, 1979). The 'subjective' dimension of social positions—social positioning—relates to evaluations and interpretations derived from the individual's points of view.

How an individual evaluates his or her own position and the associated changes in that position over time may not match the position assigned to that person based on standardized socioeconomic indicators. It is important to consider both dimensions of social positions, because the objectively determined positions can indicate only the social hierarchy, not how people position themselves within it (Lindemann & Saar, 2014).

Social hierarchies are usually understood to exist within nation states. Transnational scholarship, however, emphasizes that the links between people and flows of goods and ideas lead to the emergence of transnational social spaces (or transnational social fields) characterized by the transformation of borders, social relations, and heterogeneities. Therefore, migrants often occupy social positions in the regions of both origin and destination simultaneously (Nowicka, 2013; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995), which can lead to status paradoxes in transnational social spaces (Erel & Ryan, 2018; Nieswand, 2011). Having simultaneous locations in transnational social spaces suggests that evaluations of social positions are framed not only by the immigration country but also by experiences in the emigration country and eventually the transnational social space as such. Thus, the contributions approach the issue of spatial mobility and social position(ing) within transnational spaces with distinct social hierarchies within which people are positioned according to different heterogeneities, such as the degree of mobility, transnationality, ethnicity, gender, and class. In accounting for how migration, together with other heterogeneities, produces unequal social positions, the articles provide valuable insights into the social stratification and the inequalities in life chances of various populations.

In processes of social stratification, various heterogeneities play a role. It is important to point out that the contributions to this issue do not give priority to certain differences viz. heterogeneities between individuals and groups, such as class. Here, class is treated as social class in the Weberian sense, as opportunities and positions associated with market processes (Weber, 1922/1968). It is thus a marker of difference along with others, such as gender, ethnicity, race, or religion. The articles in this issue also explicitly take into account patterns of migration and the degree of transnationality as heterogeneities to be considered because previous research has established that the degree of cross-border interconnectedness does play a role in the (re)production of social inequalities (Faist, Bilecen, Barglowski, & Sienkiewicz, 2015).

3. Operationalising the Study of the Nexus between Social Status and Mobility: Boundaries, Social Comparison, and Capabilities

Two concepts are important in approaching the theoretical and empirical analyses presented in this issue: boundary making and social comparison. The articles in this issue all use in different ways a transnational perspective and a boundary-making approach and/or social comparisons that allow the use of both actor-centred views on social position and structural perspectives on social inequalities (e.g., Lamont, 1992). The article by Eichsteller (2021) introduces, in addition, Sen's capability approach in suggesting ways in which the analysis of the nexus between social stratification and geographical mobility could take place.

The practices of symbolic boundary making (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, based on Barth, 1969) are important objects of analysis here because they allow accounting for the creation of boundaries that justify the inclusion and exclusion of migrants in society—for example, on the basis of ethnic origins or migration status. Most specifically, Lamont and Molnár (2002, p. 3) defined symbolic boundaries as the differences that people themselves draw in order to categorise and situate themselves and other people, things, and practices within social hierarchies. Lamont (1992) distinguishes three different groups of symbolic boundaries: socioeconomic boundaries, cultural boundaries, and moral boundaries. These boundary-making processes are dynamic and dependent on the power relations and interests of different groups in society. In particular, Stock and Fröhlich (2021) and Stock (2021) use boundary theory in order to analyse how migrants make sense of their social standing vis-à-vis others in society. Implicitly, the ways in which migrants deal with outside evaluations of their economic, social, or cultural positions are also dealt with in the articles by Salamońska and Winiarska (2021), Lévy and Li (2021) and Waldendorf (2021). They all show that subjective status evaluations often do not mirror outside ascriptions, but rather incorporate very personal and subjective aspects which help to portray the responding migrants' subjective positions in a positive light compared to others. Boundary theory appears thus to present interesting avenues for exploring this interplay between objectively ascribed and subjectively experienced social positions.

In order to establish their position in relation to others, mobile people and their immobile significant others may also recur to the practices of social comparison (see Sienkiewicz, Hapke, & Faist, 2016). Earlier research found, for example, that cross-national comparisons frame the experience of social inequalities, such as relative (dis-)advantage, which can lead to situations of losing face, of conflict, and of frustration within families and beyond (Faist et al., 2015). The relevance of such comparisons to social interactions and to evaluations of justice, fairness, and (in-)equality is key (see the classic studies by, e.g., Blau, 1964). Although Panning (1983, p. 329) mentioned the crucial role of "political, cultural, geographic, and institutional" heterogeneity in the development of frames for comparisons as long ago as the early 1980s, attempts to empirically investigate how such heterogeneities correspond with the way social comparisons are deployed have been fairly recent. For instance, recent studies have shown that differences in class (Sachweh, 2013) and in gender (Kruphölter, Sauer, & Valet, 2015) are factors that people take into consideration when comparing and evaluating equality and justice. Research has also revealed that migrants create "transnational spaces of comparison" (Sienkiewicz, Sadovskaya, & Amelina, 2015, p. 280, in which, for example, informal social protection is evaluated and distributed differently in the national context, meaning that the receiver of formal protection in a national frame may be the provider of informal protection in a transnational frame. However, the ways in which these frames of comparisons are shaped by migration are yet to be investigated. Thus, there is a need to determine the criteria upon which the selection of comparisons differs among different types of mobile persons by considering that frames of reference may be directed toward different countries. Stock (2021), for example, shows how comparisons are context dependent and directed at varying types of people, within and across borders, which, in turn, leads people to evaluate their own social position as either better or worse than the social position of those with whom they compare themselves. Salamońska and Winiarska (2021) contribute to this discussion by analysing the multiple frames of reference that Polish migrants use in order to make sense of their social standing after various migratory spells in different settings.

Eichsteller (2021) contributes a potentially useful third conceptual tool to investigate the nexus between transnational inequalities and migration. She builds on Amartya Sen's capability approach to conceptualise migrants' embeddedness in the framework of social inequalities and explores the relationship between individual choices, resources, and entitlements. The author suggests that Sen's conceptual approach provides innovative insights into migration experiences and opens up new avenues for the discussion of migrants' social justice.

The three conceptual approaches that are discussed in this thematic issue thus point to some of the innovative ways in which migration scholars could engage with the literatures in such diverse fields as social psychology (social comparison), cultural sociology (boundary making), and economics (capability approach) to find new ways to engage with the intellectual puzzles that the nexus between social inequality and migration are representing.

4. Methodological Challenges in the Study of the Nexus between Migration and Social Inequality

One of the methodological difficulties of using both social comparisons and symbolic boundary approaches

to explore the nexus between migration and social inequality relates surely to the complexity of analysing the interplay of multiple processes of comparisons and boundary-drawing that people engage in. This challenge needs to be confronted by adapting and combining available research methods and methodologies.

Ultimately, research needs to draw on both quantitative and qualitative methodology to gain a better understanding of social positions and social positioning, and the relation between these two dimensions. Accordingly, this issue features several articles addressing boundaries and social comparisons with mixed-methods to contribute new and valuable insights for the understanding of social positions and positioning (Salamońska & Winiarska, 2021; Söhn & Prekodravac, 2021; Stock & Fröhlich, 2021). Beyond that, innovative ways to challenge methodological nationalism (Faist, 2012) and to go beyond mono-dimensional heterogeneities, such as ethnicity (and ethicising) are presented in this issue. Tucci, Fröhlich, and Stock (2021) employ a mixed-methods approach, based on data-driven grouping of migrants, migration trajectories, and cultural capital. Such an approach helps to study and understand symbolic boundaries in a multifaceted way. In these ways, this issue contributes to establishing the study of social positions and social positionings as a promising venue for further research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Migrants' Social Positioning Strategies in Transnational Social Spaces

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Abstract

This article examines the nexus of spatial and social mobility by focusing on how migrants in Germany use cultural, economic and moral boundaries to position themselves socially in transnational social spaces. It is based on a mixed-methods approach, drawing on qualitative interviews and panel data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Survey. By focusing on how people from different origins and classes use different sets of symbolic boundaries to give meaning to their social mobility trajectories, we link subjective positioning strategies with structural features of people's mobility experience. We find that people use a class-specific boundary pattern, which has strong transnational features, because migrants tend to mix symbolic and material markers of status hierarchies relevant to both their origin and destination countries. We identify three different types of boundary patterns, which exemplify different ways in which objective structure and subjectively experienced inequalities influence migrants' social positioning strategies in transnational spaces. These different types also exemplify how migrants' habitus influences their social positioning strategies, depending on their mobility and social trajectory in transnational spaces.

Keywords

Germany; migration; social class; social inequality; social mobility; symbolic boundaries

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly mobile world, it is worthwhile asking if spatial mobility holds the promise of social mobility and for whom. Migration scholars have demonstrated, for example, that while some groups of migrants definitely gain in occupational or economic terms from the possibilities of freedom of movement between EU member states, this is not the case for everyone, because structural factors of inequality such as class, gender, ethnicity or citizenship continue to impact on migrants' social status before and after migration in different ways (Favell & Recchi, 2011). Other scholars have drawn attention to the 'contradictory class mobility' (Parreñas, 2000) of migrants by comparing changes in migrants' social prestige and economic standing in both origin and destination countries. They found that while migrants often achieve higher incomes through migration, they may nevertheless experience a loss of social prestige and standing in either origin or host countries, leading to a so-called status paradox (Kelly & Lusis, 2006; Nieswand, 2011; Nowicka, 2013; Parreñas, 2000; Rye, 2018). This indicates that material and symbolic markers of social status may not be easily transferable across national borders. It also confirms that social status mobility cannot be reduced to economic aspects alone, but also involves cultural and social features of prestige and recognition in both origin and destination societies.

Investigating the nexus between migration and social mobility thus points to more general sociological questions regarding the political, economic and cultural mechanisms that shape social inequalities in transnational

spaces (Faist, 2019). Migration scholars have investigated the make-up of social hierarchies that function beyond the nation state and theorised about the mechanisms of their reproduction. In particular, they have used Bourdieu-inspired approaches to study cultural features of class reproduction and inequality which combine economic concepts of class with the analysis of political, social and cultural aspects of social standing in order to investigate migrants' social positions across national boundaries (Cederberg, 2017; Erel, 2010; Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010). In this article, we build on work in this tradition, where the emphasis has been on uncovering the impact of mobility in people's social status trajectories over time and in different places. Our interest lies in particular with those research perspectives that aim to uncover how the functioning of social hierarchies in transnational social spaces is embedded in localised and national status hierarchies.

The central intellectual puzzle in this context concerns the question of how far structural features of inequality, like class, 'race,' age or gender, influence migrants' perception of social status and are contested or reproduced by them in their origin and destination countries. This article contributes to these debates by focusing on the influence of class on migrants' subjective views of their social status. By class we mean here, in line with Bradley (2014, p. 432; see also Cederberg, 2017), "a social category which refers to lived relations surrounding social arrangements of production, exchange, distribution and consumption." However, in addition to these material aspects of class, we also include in our definition symbolic aspects of class performance, such as lifestyle, educational experience and patterns of residence. So, while we see class as closely connected to people's position in the labour market and in their relation to the means of production, it also involves the social status associated with those relationships (Cederberg, 2017). The focus on subjective sense-making strategies helps to uncover which values and discursive tools form the basis for people's conceptions of social status and belonging and how their structural positions in social orders influence these conceptions (Eichsteller, 2017). Such a conception of class allows us to describe the heterogeneity of positioning strategies for migrants in greater depth (Cederberg, 2017). This approach links theoretically how structural inequalities like class function across national spaces and are related to individual actions.

Our analysis, which draws on empirical data from migrants in Germany, reveals how structural conditions and individual actions are merged in people's strategies for making sense of social status, resulting in an assemblage of norms and values derived from both origin and destination societies' social contexts. Our empirical material also suggests that the ways in which people are able to assemble norms, values and boundary processes to construct their social status across national borders demonstrates a specific and dynamic pattern. We argue that these dynamic positioning strategies can be explained if the specific and changing nature of the transnational spaces within which migrants' lives are embedded is taken into account.

In the first part of the article, we briefly introduce the theoretical framing of our argument, which is derived from social boundary theory (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Sachweh & Lenz, 2018). In the second part, we summarise the mixed-methods design we used. The third part discusses some of the qualitative and quantitative findings of our empirical study. The conclusion points to the importance of incorporating both pre-migration status and mobility trajectories into the investigation of migrants' subjective status-positioning strategies.

2. Conceptual Framework: Boundary Making in Transnational Social Spaces

Cultural sociologists such as Lamont and Molnár (2002), Sachweh (2013) or Jarness (2017) have used Bourdieu's theories of social status (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 1990) to understand how both objective and subjective processes of social positioning work interdependently through the boundary-making processes of different groups in society. Their work demonstrates that studying people's and groups' boundary-making processes allows us to uncover the social construction of social-status hierarchies and their acknowledgement by different groups of society. Lamont and Molnár (2002, p. 3) define social boundaries as objective visible forms of social inequality, which are expressed through unequal access to material resources and recognition by others. Symbolic boundaries, by contrast, are defined as the differences that people themselves draw in order to categorise and situate themselves and other people, things and practices within social hierarchies (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). This definition of social and symbolic boundaries thus depicts a self-reinforcing process whereby social identities are not only defined in boundary-making processes of the self-vis-à-vis the other but are also always simultaneously influenced by what is ascribed by others (Sachweh, 2013).

When looking at symbolic boundary processes, it is therefore important to consider how people's boundary-making practices are influenced by social practices of discrimination. In line with Bourdieu's theories on social status, we understand discrimination as a practice which stigmatises others through collective prejudice. Discriminatory practices are those whereby the cultural tastes, values or economic assets of a dominant group or social class are projected negatively on groups or classes they consider inferior. While discrimination presents itself as a cultural attitude, it is organised and sustained as a structural effect with legal, social and economic consequences (Lemert, 2006, p. 146). Symbolic boundaries are here understood as tools that social actors use to negotiate and define the criteria of their own position in the social order and in boundary-making processes with the 'other' (Bail, 2008; Lamont, 1992; Sachweh, 2013). They are means that social actors use to make sense of

both stigmatisation and prestige and help them to situate themselves in social-group hierarchies. Following Lamont (1992), we distinguish three different groups of symbolic boundaries: socioeconomic (determined by criteria such as financial assets, social origin or membership in exclusive circles of society), cultural (determined by criteria such as artistic, scientific or cultural knowledge, education or other relevant knowledge which can be used to distinguish oneself from others) and moral (which draw on particular value and character traits, such as honesty, solidarity or ethical practices). It is important to note that the different types of boundary processes should not be seen as self-excluding elements but rather as interdependent parts of a broad range of boundary-making patterns that social groups use in social positioning processes (Sachweh & Lenz, 2018, p. 370).

These boundary-making processes are dynamic and dependent on the power relations and interests of different groups in society. In this sense, Lamont's (1992) study on French and American workers and Sachweh's (2013) as well as Sachweh and Lenz's (2018) work on German workers all show that there is a systematic and class-related (and in Lamont's case also racialised) pattern of distinction by which people draw specific moral, economic or cultural boundaries. While people from higher social positions tend to evaluate their social standing with reference to their privileged material conditions and their cultural and symbolic capital, people with lower social positions are more prone to distinguish on the basis of moral value judgements. This pattern can be explained by drawing on social identity theories, which stipulate that people are generally keen to establish themselves in a positive light when defining their social belonging to particular groups in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). This demonstrates how certain resource endowments, which are distributed unequally between social groups, can lead to a (re-)production of social inequality by means of subjective status evaluations.

In this article, we build on these insights but broaden our focus to ask how far cross-border mobility influences migrants' subjective processes of boundary making. In particular, we are interested in investigating how class-related factors in social hierarchies in both origin and destination countries are understood, modified or reproduced in migrants' subjective evaluations of their social positions. In this way we contribute to a better understanding of how structural inequalities (such as class) that people experienced in their origin country remain relevant factors for their subjective evaluations of social status even across national boundaries and over time. At the same time, we find out how far the constellation of new social, cultural, economic and political fields in the destination country also comes to significantly shape migrants' objective and symbolic social positions.

Research on transnationalism (Faist, 2019; Levitt, 2001) has contributed ample evidence that for a great number of migrants, leading transnational lives involving their social, cultural, economic and political participation in more than one national or local social space can be an important strategy of survival and betterment (Faist, 2000, p. 200), helping them to improve their living conditions and quality of life in the short and long term (Levitt, 2001). Thus, migrants can be thought of as living in transnational social spaces, which can be defined as relationships between people, collectives, institutions or organisations that persist across the borders of two or more nation states (Faist, 2000, p. 197). The existence of observable structures of transnational social spaces in migrants' lives also indicates that social hierarchies and social differences between groups are not always best thought of as operating only within the boundaries of single nation states (Weiss, 2005) but may also contain a transnational dimension. We can therefore assume that the form and perception of transnational social spaces that migrants inhabit, as well as the social structures of inequality that are working within them, influence the ways in which people subjectively make sense of their social standing. In this article, we contribute with empirical material to substantiate this claim.

3. Methods

This article is based on a mixed-methods approach in which the main research question is predominantly guided by an interpretative approach to social enquiry. The quantitative data are used to test how the qualitative findings can be linked with the survey data to learn more about the use of symbolic boundaries by migrants. Based on the migration sample from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) in Germany from 2015, we drew an interview sample of migrants stemming from different socioeconomic groups—upper service position, lower service position and manual working position—and with different mobility experiences (single and multiple; Sienkiewicz, Tucci, Faist, & Barglowski, 2017). We subsequently conducted 37 semi-structured interviews, which aimed to elicit migrants' mobility trajectories, as well as their subjective evaluations of social positions in general and their own positionality in particular, focusing on the different contexts in which they had lived. The interviews included narrative elements, visual photo-eliciting exercises and life-course graphs. The visual photo-eliciting exercises were ranking exercises in which we asked respondents to establish a hierarchy of occupations in their country of origin and in Germany with the help of 20 photos, depicting people of different age, gender, ethnic origin and class, undertaking a range of occupations (from manual and low-skilled to high-skilled types of occupation).

The analysis of the interview material was inspired by social scientific hermeneutic methods (Soeffner, 1989). By focusing on the social comparisons people were drawing between themselves and other migrants, we were able to form a typology of three different types of migrants who distinguished themselves above all by their boundary-making practices and the social positions they identified with (see Stock, 2021). The typolo-

gy is used here as an analytical tool to compare cases—migrants with different mobility and social status trajectories. However, it is worth mentioning that the 'types' presented here cannot be observed empirically in the pure form. Respondents who were classed in each type had varying degrees and also overlap of resemblance with the overall type. Nevertheless, the categorisation into different groups enabled us to translate our findings into quantitative indicators which allowed us to analyse the link between social positions, mobility and symbolic boundary-making processes through quantitative forms of enquiry (for further details on the methodology see the Supplementary File).

4. Interviewees' Subjective Evaluations of Social Mobility Trajectories

We can describe the social-position-specific boundary-making practices in transnational space by characterising migrants' boundary-making practices in three types. We call them the 'choosers,' the 'achievers' and the 'modernisers.' The names of these types are based on ways in which some of the interviewees described themselves in contrast to other migrants during the interview. The typology illustrates how symbolic and social boundaries which were relevant to determine one's status in the origin country retain a certain value for migrants' subsequent social positioning strategies in the destination country. However, the value they attach to certain symbolic and social boundaries is sometimes adapted and changed on the basis of the new societal context, particularly if this helps to enhance their social standing, at least discursively. The types we describe below thus demonstrate different kinds of transnational positioning strategies which are grounded in the structural inequalities that migrants have been subject to in different national contexts during their past and present lives.

4.1. The Modernisers

People who could be characterised as 'modernisers' in our interviews often came from working-class backgrounds and originated from middle—or low-income countries outside the EU (in our case countries like Bolivia, Uzbekistan, Nepal, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine or Serbia). They therefore had limited legal opportunities to migrate to Germany for work, study or family reasons and experienced difficulties in accessing residence and work permits. Many of the respondents we classified in this group originated in rural or marginalised areas in their country of origin. Often, when they had completed a professional or university education there, the qualification was not recognised on the German labour market. Several respondents in this group had not finished school or professional training before leaving. Some respondents had already experienced marginalisation and discrimination before coming to Germany because they were members of ethnic and/or political minorities in their countries of origin, were physically impaired or otherwise disadvantaged. Interestingly, people in this group often indicated that, while they also had experienced discriminatory treatment in Germany because of their origin, they did not experience the same level of discrimination in Germany as in their country of origin. The vast majority of respondents in this group had never been to Germany before, did not have any social contacts in Germany and did not speak the language prior to migrating. Thus, respondents in this typology relied on limited cultural, social or financial capital in their origin countries and were only partially able to convert these resources into valuable capital in Germany.

They often perceived an upward change in their status even if they maintained manual working positions or lower service positions in Germany. Most importantly, the moderniser type appeared to stress the fact that they had 'evolved' towards a more independent, secure person because of their migration to Germany. One woman from a Central Asian country with a physical handicap explained the change that migration brought to her life like this:

> First, from a moral standpoint, somehow, I have become a lot more self-confident because of what I have experienced in Germany and I have learned to deal with administrations, with laws and I am very proud of that, because many acquaintances, friends, they still ask me for assistance and also, as a woman, as a person, I felt a lot better here [in this country]….Because, as I said before, my physical impairments, what I have, in my [origin] country, people are different, well, they do not know how to deal with handicapped people. As I said, I can do everything, sometimes even better than other, healthy women. Only because I look a bit different, they pointed at me with their fingers and even in the capital [of my country of origin], I always had this feeling of being pointed at.

For this woman, coming to Germany meant that she felt more included in society than in her home country. In later parts of the interview, she stressed that living in Germany had enabled her to participate in public and private life in ways which were not possible for her before, stressing particularly the assistance she received to find a job and the fact that she was able to marry, something which had seemed improbable in her origin country because of her physical handicap and her rural background.

People of the moderniser type frequently described their pre-migratory selves in negative terms, such as 'naive,' 'underdeveloped' or as 'lacking knowledge of the real world.' One respondent from an indigenous minority in Bolivia explained that he had developed more self-worth after coming to Germany, because in Bolivia in the 1970s and 1980s, when he was young, the regime was keen to keep the rural indigenous population as iso-

lated from social life as possible, particularly by excluding them from political and economic participation and by downgrading their cultural beliefs and traditions. He felt that he had been ignorant of many things before coming to Germany and saw his migration above all as an opportunity to learn and improve his knowledge of the world—on both professional and cultural levels.

The positive evaluation of their social status in Germany, despite their often lower-middle class incomes and occupations, can possibly be explained when considering that many of the respondents in the moderniser group were able to gain valuable 'new' cultural capital through their migration to Germany by learning a new occupation and/or language that enabled a lower-middle class lifestyle, which they did not have access to in their home country. For them, knowledge, education and cultural capital that are valued in Germany were thus key for social status acquisition.

Persons in this group predominantly made reference to cultural and moral value boundaries which (in their own opinion) were important in German society to distinguish themselves from other migrants or from people in their origin country. Thus, several respondents in this group made a point of explaining that they were in a higher social position than other migrants because they worked hard, were punctual, put effort into everything they did, followed the rules and regulations and adapted to the ways of life in Germany. They considered that active participation in democratic structures and learning the German language were vital for social recognition and acknowledgement in German society. A Turkish respondent expressed this when talking about why he considered that his Turkish neighbours had not succeeded in becoming fully integrated into German society and moving up socially:

> You know, they keep on the margins, they do not want to get involved….They do not go to vote….Me, for example, I try as far as possible to participate in the elections, or to participate in surveys like this one, why not? Because I feel, this is common here [in Germany], I feel that I have an obligation, a responsibility so to say.

The modernisers displayed boundary-making patterns that were similar to those of the working-class Germans whom Patrick Sachweh (2013) interviewed, in that they based their boundary-making processes on moral values that were also important to German citizens for status acquisition and disregarded the importance of socioeconomic boundaries to distinguish themselves from others. However, in contrast to the non-migrant German working class, the modernisers took into account in their status evaluations how they were seen by their friends and family in their origin countries, and used this as the frame of reference for socioeconomic and social boundaries that they drew between themselves and other people in their origin country in order to convey their social mobility. The young woman from Central Asia, for example, explained how her social status had risen in the eyes of her families and friends back home:

> Through my university degree, the fact that I have a job now, a car and a husband. And my family has always…looked at me with pity. And now they respect me and they talk to me differently…before, they even insulted me and stuff. Not any longer. I enjoy that [laughs] and I tell them what I think yes, and no one insults me if I don't let it happen.

The combination of moral and cultural boundaries which are relevant in German social hierarchies and socioeconomic boundaries which are relevant for boundary making in their country of origin make up a boundary-making strategy which describes how certain migrants in Germany subjectively experience upward social mobility despite only limited occupational and income changes after migration.

4.2. The Choosers

Respondents who belong to the 'chooser' type stressed that their decision to come and live in Germany was the most advantageous choice at the time out of a range of options that had been available to them. The extract from of a German-Greek psychologist below illustrates very well how his move to Berlin is framed as a choice, rather than a necessity:

> And at some point—around 2007—the situation in Greece grew worse and worse. Not related to the economic crisis, but…simply general problems in society, like the new rich, these vulgar ways of showing off…all that bothered me a lot. And…[my wife and I] we said, look, this is too provincial for us, let's try something different….As my job is linked to language…and my English is not bad but not as good as my German….America—I did not want to live there. England, London and all that, I knew it and I was not keen. So, Germany, but if Germany then either Berlin, Cologne or Hamburg.

Choosers often stressed that the ability to choose their destination and the option to migrate or not differentiated them from other mobile people whom they classified as migrants, because the latter were pushed to move abroad due to the lack of socioeconomic or other life options in their country of origin. These attitudes may be rooted in the fact that people in this group had very good possibilities for legal migration because they came from countries in the EU, the USA, Australia or Switzerland. In general, people of the chooser type did not perceive great risks of downward social mobility in their origin countries. This was either because they originated from countries in which people were generally protected from risks to downward social mobil-

ity through inclusive welfare systems and/or because they had a well-endowed socioeconomic family background which they could rely on for their social protection through informal mechanisms in case of need. Some of the people in this group had acquired German university degrees or a good command of the German language and/or good contacts in Germany even before they migrated. If not, then they could count on university degrees and professional qualifications which were recognised in Germany and/or sought after on the job market. Many knew the country and its people from prior travels or short stays, university exchange programmes or family connections. Some of them had had a German partner for several years before deciding to come to Germany to live there.

All this characterises a type of person who possesses a range of financial, cultural and social capital which could be easily converted into useful capital in the destination country after migration. Consequently, choosers belonged to the group of respondents who did not experience any noteworthy downward social mobility in socioeconomic terms when they migrated to Germany and often could maintain their occupational and income levels. In this sense, choosers' mobility experience did not significantly impact on producing or reinforcing any middle-class downward mobility anxieties. Respondents of the chooser type did not mention negative discrimination by the German population. Instead, several members of this group even pointed to the fact that their 'foreignness' was 'exoticised' by the German host population through positive stereotypes regarding their origin countries or their supposed ethnic identity. For example, a Spanish respondent explained how she receives positive comments on Catalan culture because she was from Barcelona, a holiday destination many Germans cherish. Others mentioned that because of their nationality, Germans tended to assign highly valued cultural characteristics to them which 'upgraded' their foreignness in the eyes of the host population. A Dutch respondent told us that people generally associated Dutch people with sympathetic individuals, which worked in her favour. These perceptions may explain why the chooser type rarely used symbolic boundaries in the interviews to differentiate between themselves and the German population, but rather to position themselves above or below other people in general—independently of their nationalities or their ethnic origin. In other words, their citizenship and national origin did not seem to matter to the choosers in the same way in connection with social mobility as it did to those migrants whose opportunities to work, study or live in Germany were closely related to their passport.

They tended to identify with the upper-middle class and ranked themselves accordingly in both their origin country and Germany. Choosers like the Greek psychologist already quoted determined their privileged social position in relation to economic and cultural boundaries, such as income, prestige and social worth. When asked why he positioned himself as upper-middle class, he answered:

> Well, because, I have a job that I like—not always but most of the time…and I am doing something worthwhile. I mean, according to these criteria here [points to some cards we used in the interview in order to rank the types of work which are considered prestigious in Germany]. And I can afford to buy stuff. In the sense that I have a good quality of life.

However, many respondents in this group also recognised that they experienced moments in life when they had to start from scratch, mostly because of the migratory experience. They often stressed that they were successful in overcoming setbacks because of their privileged financial situation and their life skills and educational credentials. A respondent from Spain with academic qualifications and work experience in the event management industry, who came to Germany because of her German partner, explained that even though she had experienced short periods of unemployment in Germany, she had always been successful in finding a job quickly. In order to give emphasis to her job seeking autonomy, she referred to her interaction with counsellors at the job centre where the unemployed in Germany are required to seek advice to show that they are actively seeking employment. Apparently, the counsellor told her each time that she did not need any job counselling advice because 'someone like her' would find a job anytime without great effort.

In this way, choosers draw mainly socioeconomic and cultural boundaries between themselves and those of the working class in their country of origin and in Germany. In their perception, they distinguished themselves from others not only because of their higher financial capital and their professional success but also because of their embodied and objectified cultural capital. For the choosers, the ability to freely choose the best option from several different possibilities was the privilege of the socially upwardly mobile population, a group which they considered themselves to belong to.

4.3. The Achievers

The achievers presented an interesting mix of features of both choosers and modernisers and were the most numerous groups in the qualitative sample. The premigratory socioeconomic profile of the achievers was very similar to that of the choosers: They could predominantly count on university degrees, knowledge of English or another foreign language and relatively well-endowed family backgrounds which led them to feel socially protected against possible crises. They had also often lived in big cities and urban centres before coming to Germany. However, there were also important differences which linked them more closely to the moderniser group. Most of the achievers came from countries in which the eco-

nomic or political system presented a higher risk of downward social mobility for the middle classes—particularly because of crisis-prone economic and political environments and/or the pervasive application of neo-liberal economic and occupational policies which made it hard to secure long-term employment contracts or satisfactory pay in both the private and public sectors (our respondents came either from middle-income countries outside Europe like Mexico, India or Ukraine, or from certain Eastern European countries like Poland, Romania or Bulgaria). Like the modernisers, many of them had only limited mobility options to come to Germany because their origin country had become a member of the EU only just after they had migrated or was not an EU member state at all.

One of the most distinctive features which differentiated achievers from both choosers and modernisers was the fact that they considered they had experienced discrimination in Germany because of their origin, whereas they had not experienced discrimination in their country of origin according to their own accounts. The experiences of discrimination the respondents referred to concerned unfair treatment in public life because of their inability to speak German correctly, difficulty in renting accommodation because of their origin, or stereotyping behaviour by others. Many of them had also experienced professional downward social mobility immediately after migrating but were often able to recover their occupational status later. This may be related to the fact that many of the achievers had no or only limited knowledge of the German language before coming to Germany. Often, their university qualifications were not recognised or only partially useful for the German job market. Therefore, many had to change jobs. Thus, in contrast to the choosers, the achievers considered that they had fewer opportunities to advantageously convert their social, economic and cultural capital after migration to Germany with regard to their social positioning strategies.

This difference may also explain this group's distinctive boundary-making strategies. The achievers bear similarities to the group of middle-class migrants which has been described by authors such as Scott (2006) and Mapril (2014). However, rather than locating their life-course goals within the cultural context of their country of origin, as is often implied in the literature on migration as a middle-class strategy (Hussain, 2018; Kawashima, 2018), the achievers in our study considered life goals that embodied a mix of cultural middle-class ideals characteristic of both German society and their origin societies as relevant for their status evaluations.

In contrast to the choosers, who portrayed their mobility experience as a conscious choice, achievers often depicted their migration experience as something like an accident: many achievers had actually thought of migrating temporarily for study or work, but did not necessarily want to end up in Germany or did not plan to stay. However, in the end they did so because the opportunity arose or because they simply fell in love with a German national. Others came because they were fleeing persecution. In their narratives, they stayed because they wanted to use the opportunity to achieve something in terms of socioeconomic status. When asked how she had imagined her life in Germany before coming, one Polish respondent replied:

> When I came in 2004, I imagined that I would stay a year…er, go back, and, er, brag about my German language proficiency and…when I finished the internship, people [in Poland] would say: Hey, an internship abroad! Wow! And the moment I also got a job here, I thought: Wow, in Poland, I am now a mighty demigod. Well, I didn't plan all that—it just happened that I stayed here.

Like the choosers, the achievers tended to use socioeconomic and cultural boundaries to distinguish themselves from others, such as their income, their educational achievements or their prestigious jobs. In contrast to the choosers, however, these were expressed in referring to their financial success, their career achievements in Germany, their good social contacts with Germans and self-perceived 'German' intellectual and cultural values. An Iraqi respondent stressed how he was selected over many Germans for his current job, because of his distinctive work ethic, which distinguished him from the Germans (putting his heart and soul into his work) and indicated his ability to fit into the German standards of work:

> Well, I have learned from the Germans not only to be on time, but to be there even before the agreed time. I have to start work at 7 am. But often I am already there at 6.40 am. And not only just one day. It's two years now. And, thank God, I have never called in sick.

In contrast to the choosers, this group tended to also use moral boundaries to distinguish themselves from other migrants and the German host population. Often, these moral boundaries built on symbolic capital that they had accumulated in their origin countries. The moral boundaries were based on stereotypical cultural values that they assigned to their national identity. When we asked the Iraqi respondent (who was in his fifties) why he had ranked older people very high in the social hierarchy of prestige even though they did have not much money, he answered:

> It has nothing to do with money. Well, if I talk about my culture, the elderly, they are respected. And in Germany, when I see an old man—they have done so much for us to enjoy all these benefits here, but we haven't worked for it. They have done it for us. But the Germans do not think like that.

Several respondents would stress the superior norms and values in their origin countries, such as respect for

the work and merit of those members of society who do not contribute directly to the wage economy, such as the elderly, housewives and mothers. They would also defend the value of having children or religious moral values which they considered were not given much importance in German society with regard to perceptions of social status. Respondents were thus able to use these self-constructed differences in values between themselves and others to justify their subjective assessment of their high social position in Germany in contrast to other migrants or Germans, even if their socioeconomic status was not that high. Because of this, achievers were more prone than the other two groups to identify positively with their 'origin culture,' which they nevertheless often depicted in stereotypical terms.

5. Translating the Qualitative Typologies into Quantitative Indexes for Further Analysis

The types we identified in the interviews provide evidence for the claim that boundary drawing shows a class-related pattern influenced by the specificities of the mobility experience and the transnational spaces that migrants inhabit.

Our findings suggest that people like the choosers, who possess a middle—or upper-middle-class status in their country of origin, and whose cultural, social and financial resources could be transferred to the country of destination, also maintain a good socioeconomic position after migration. They are more likely to use socioeconomic criteria to distinguish themselves from others. By contrast, migrants like the modernisers, who perceived they belong to lower status strata in their origin countries (because of class or racialised categorisations) but who were able to achieve a lower-middle-class or working-class status in Germany, are more likely to draw moral and cultural boundaries between themselves and others. Often, these boundaries are based on moral and cultural values of relevance in the destination country. In addition, however, this group also draws on economic boundaries which are relevant in their origin countries to claim prestige positions for themselves. Modernisers are more likely to perceive themselves as being upwardly socially mobile in Germany because they see the possibility of being socially more included in the host society than in their origin countries—even though they may experience discrimination in Germany. Similar findings have been observed in research that has been conducted with highly qualified migrants—the so-called 'cosmopolitans' or 'Eurostars' (Favell, 2008; Weiß, 2006) on the one hand and low-skilled migrants on the other.

However, the most numerous group in our sample is connected to a third type: It concerns those who share similar pre-migration characteristics with the highly skilled migrants, but who were less able to convert their existing resources into valuable capital in the destination country. This group experienced various degrees of downward mobility just after migrating and are not always able to recuperate their social status. The so-called 'achiever' type is likely to refer to moral and cultural boundaries related to values in their home country in order to position themselves socially in a positive light, often by referring to national stereotypes that depict their own origin culture in a particularly positive light. However, they also value economic markers of prestige as status-relevant because income and possessions appear to play a dominant role in these people's evaluations of social status. This is particularly so when these prestige markers are part of culturally sanctioned life-course goals, such as buying a car, building a house or marrying and having children. We find that this group of migrants bears resemblance with research undertaken on the social standing of middle-class migrants in many parts of the western hemisphere (Garapich, 2012; Hussain, 2018; Kawashima, 2018; Mapril, 2014; Scott, 2006), which is, however, still predominantly qualitative in nature and difficult to investigate through quantitative methods because of the multiple ways in which migrants negotiate their social status trajectories in different cultural, social and economic contexts and spaces across nations.

In order to link these findings with quantitative data in innovative ways, we choose indicators in the SOEP data set which could be applied to represent the modernisers and choosers typology in an index form (Table 1).

While the index-indicators do not measure respondents' income levels or occupational situation before migration, the variables we chose among those available to us through the SOEP data allowed us to characterise respondents in the SOEP sample as belonging in various degrees to the moderniser or chooser type. Unfortunately, it was not possible to build an index for achievers because we could not find appropriate indicators for achievers that differed statistically enough from choosers and modernisers and at the same time showed distinctive boundary-making strategies when measured through survey data. However, our findings demonstrate how transnational social spaces, mobility trajectories and class patterns could be used in quantitative studies to map migrants' positioning strategies.

The SOEP participants tend to score on average on the lower end of the moderniser and chooser index (see Figure 1). Around 350 people in the SOEP sample did not fulfil any criteria of the moderniser typology and around 150 score at least six from eight points. With regard to the choosers, the quantitative analysis reveals that around 140 people in the sample do not fulfil any criteria of the chooser typology while 105 score at least seven points. While this shows that the moderniser and the chooser type could be found in the quantitative data set on migrant populations in Germany, it also means that both appear to be rather rare types within the overall migrant population. The low numbers are correlated with the qualitative findings which revealed that most interview participants also tended to belong to the mixed group of achievers, rather than to either the moderniser or the chooser group.

Table 1. Relevant variables from the SOEP data set for Chooser and Moderniser Index.

Variable	Chooser	Moderniser
Own education	University degree	Primary and secondary education
Education father	University degree	No university degree or vocational training
Occupational status	Upper and lower service position	Non-skilled worker or agricultural helper
Training applies to occupation	Yes	No training
Country of origin	Northwest EU and high-income countries	Third country nationals (except upper middle income countries)
Residence during childhood	(Medium) city	Smaller city or in the country
Experience of discrimination in past 24 months	None	Seldom or often
Came to Germany as student or learner	Yes	—
Current evaluation of German proficiency	(Very) good	—
German classes before coming to Germany	Yes	—
German knowledge before migration	—	Poor or not at all

The index is a first step to operationalise our qualitative findings with quantitative data and in this way also to link the typology to other socio-structural indicators, such as (household) income or occupation. Due to the limitations of our available dataset as well as word limits, we cannot develop our ideas about these possible connections in more detail here. However, our approach holds a promise for future use by drawing on longitudinal panel data like the SOEP to investigate the relative stability of our typology and the factors that condition people to move from one category into another.

6. Travel as a Specific Boundary-Making Device: Evidence from Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

In the section that follows we apply our findings empirically through both quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to show how the index can be used together with qualitative interview material to investigate in more depth how different types of migrants construct symbolic boundaries of different value around similar social status indicators. In our example, we relate our

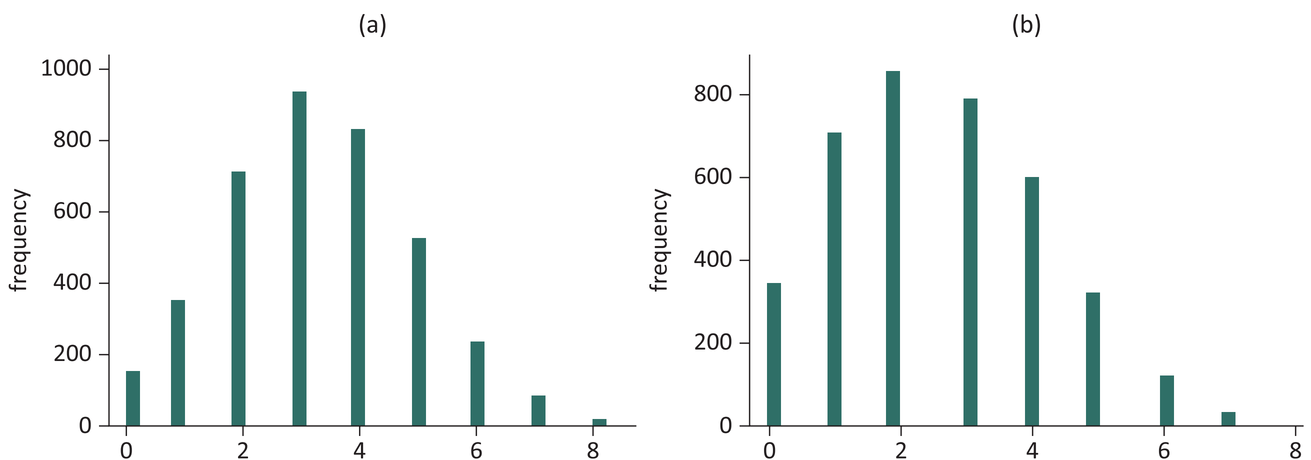

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents within the chooser (a) and moderniser (b) typology index. Source: SOEP (2019), own calculation.

migrant typology to the social value that our respondents attribute to travel as a form of short-term mobility.

Because there are no direct measures of symbolic boundaries in the SOEP or in other surveys, researchers need to use indirect measures—such as the importance ascribed to some activities or objects (in accordance to preferences and tastes in a Bourdieusian understanding)—to study social boundaries in quantitative surveys (see also Sachweh, 2013). We used the importance respondents ascribe to travel as one indirect measure because the SOEP offers a variety of information about survey respondents' attitudes towards travel and holiday activities. Travel—as short-term, voluntary and leisure physical mobility—can be understood as an expression of social status—in the German context as a middle-class person—and a self-positioning strategy to friends, relatives and colleagues (Pappas, 2016) and in this way also as a symbolic and cultural boundary-making device to distinguish oneself from others (Crang, 2014). Research on travel frequently finds that social class, lifestyle and/or cultural capital are highly related with leisure mobility (O'Reilly, 2006; Pappas, 2016). Particularly for Germany we can see that social class and social milieu strongly interrelate with choices of holiday (Georg, 2002). We have seen that all types tend to identify in their boundary-making strategies to some extent with both origin and destination countries' social hierarchies and cultural preferences and that it is therefore to be expected that travel is also a marker of distinction for those counting themselves in a particular class in Germany.

When we compare the mean values for choosers and modernisers in four categories of importance of travel we see a clear pattern (see Figure 2). The mean values in the variable assessing the importance of travel are higher for the chooser typology in comparison with the modernisers. People who score higher on the chooser value also tend to evaluate travel as being more important to them. This tendency goes in the opposite direction for people who tend to be more 'moderniser.'

The interviews showed that modernisers recognised travel as a marker of status in the German social structure. However, they rarely considered travel to be an important factor in differentiating themselves in from others the social hierarchy. Modernisers' restricted economic resources may not allow them to travel frequently. It is possible that they therefore do not value short-term mobility as a status-enhancing indicator. The example shows that modernisers are selective in adapting moral and cultural boundaries relevant in German society for their self-positioning strategies. The fact that travel does not figure prominently in their boundary-making strategies appears to indicate that they tend to orient themselves on the moral and cultural boundaries of the lower classes in Germany, rather than those used by the upper-middle classes.

The interviews with the choosers showed a different pattern: choosers frequently mentioned travel as an important category to indicate a cultural and socioeconomic social position. In the interviews, choosers tend to imply that the ability to travel is a distinctive feature of the upper-middle classes. A respondent likens her own long-term cross-border mobility experience in the same way as short-term mobility to the acquisition of cultural capital which is acquired through travel, and indicative of a certain social position:

> And since my husband also grew up in Europe, he is also an American, but his father was at the embassy, it was important to both of us that our children experience it as well, culturally. Because most Americans don't have a passport and don't need foreign languages and don't necessarily travel, because the USA is big enough. So I only think about living with the family in Europe or having enough money to be a tourist, but otherwise travelling here [in Europe] out of curiosity is not so common.

In the case of travel, then, choosers use a similar pattern of social boundary drawing as described in the ear-

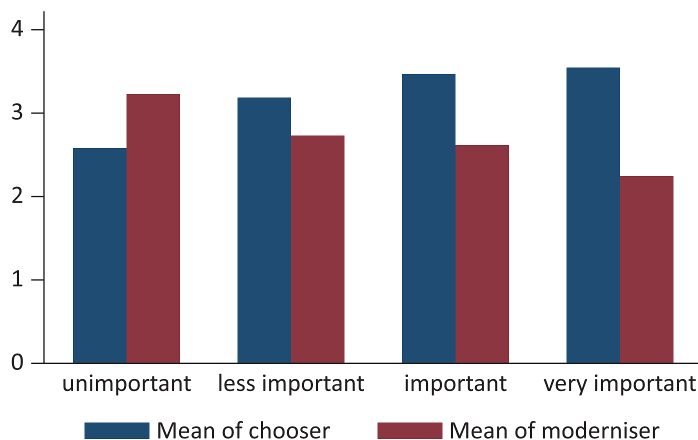

Figure 2. Mean values scores for choosers and modernisers within the four categories evaluating travel (unimportant, less important, important, very important). Source: SOEP (2019), own calculation.

lier paragraphs. They use cultural and socioeconomic boundaries to position themselves in travel. Achievers also recognised the symbolic value of travel as a status symbol in German society. However, in contrast to choosers, who adopted travel as an important cultural asset for themselves, achievers were more critical about the value of travelling as a status symbol. One respondent justified his social ranking of a woman with a camera who was interpreted by our interviewees predominantly as a tourist in this way:

> So the woman who takes photos looks like this, I don't know, it could be that she's also on a trip around the world. But, in that case, she has an easier life, it looks like it from her clothes and so, she is a tourist who has an easy life and not such a difficult life as these people here, the workers here.

The interviewee explained the lower social position of the tourist by recourse to moral values (her easy life) which sanction an 'easy life' as opposed to one of 'hard work' and effort. Workers are also placed high because they were considered beneficial for others, as in this extract from another achiever discussing the tourist picture:

> She has the money, the means to travel and an expensive camera….So here next to the people who make money. So in my mind, people who make money are very well regarded, although the question here is more 'social'? For me someone would be a doctor, a teacher, people who do something for society. But somehow here I find that many think it's about productivity.

This mixture of socioeconomic and moral boundaries indicates that achievers may also be more oriented towards other forms of visible socioeconomic success and values of their home countries.

7. Conclusion

This article has shown how migrants use symbolic boundaries for social positioning strategies. Like the boundary-making patterns of those without mobility experience, the boundary-making patterns of migrants display class-specific features. However, our data also shows that the transnational social spaces in which migrants are enmeshed influence the form that the symbolic boundaries take and how they use them to distinguish their social position from that of other groups within society. Thus, it is both migrants' perceived social position before migrations and also their social standing after migration that influence the ways in which they situate themselves in status hierarchies across national spaces. In line with others before us (Erel, 2010; Nohl, Schittenhelm, Schmidtke, & Weiss, 2006) we also find that migrants' subjective evaluation of their social status in both origin and destination country is also influenced by the transferability of cultural, economic or social capital in the transnational social spaces they inhabit.

These findings contribute to studies on the transnationalisation of social stratification (Hout & Di Prete, 2006; Weiss, 2005). However, rather than investigating to what extent the operationalisation of national stratification patterns can be transferred or generalised to international realms beyond the nation state (Banerjee & Duflo, 2008; Hout & Di Prete, 2006) we can show how the specific shapes of transnational spaces that migrants are exposed to condition their subjective social positioning strategies in multiple ways. In this context, it is important to note that the transnational social positioning strategies we have described here should not be conceptualised as deterritorialised and detached cultural representations of identity and belonging (see also Faist, 2000, p. 211) in which social hierarchies have merely symbolic meaning. Our data rather suggest that there are distinctive patterns of transnational social-positioning strategies and that these are firmly embedded in the experience of material and symbolic inequalities on national and local levels that condition migrants' lives in origin and destination countries. Our findings are therefore a good example of how actors' individual sense-making strategies and practices interact with structural constraints and enabling factors in different national and transnational social spaces, such as the labour market, citizenship policies, cultural values and education systems. While highlighting the importance of a transnational perspective in inequality research, these results also suggest that national borders retain importance for the production and reproduction of different sets of social inequalities in migrants' lives (Faist, 2000; Pries, 2008).

Our findings indicate that the structural inequalities in which migrants' lives are embedded in both origin and destination countries retain a long-lasting influence on the subjective positioning strategies of mobile populations and shape the transnational social spaces they inhabit. This may also explain the factors according to which migrants orient their life goals by assembling different cultural, moral, social and economic features that shape different national and local contexts in which they live their lives, thus creating unique and new markers of social status that are relevant for their specific experience of transnational lives but which may differ from those considered relevant by non-mobile populations.

All in all, our findings contribute to a more subjective approach to stratification (Sachweh, 2013) which is often overlooked in quantitative and qualitative approaches to the analysis of social inequalities (Cederberg, 2017). Frequently, research designs in both the quantitative and the qualitative paradigms do not include the history of migrants before migration in their analysis of social inequalities or analyse migrants' life worlds as pertaining to 'national' identities in either origin or destination countries. This article has attempted to go beyond such an approach by describing the transnational dimen-

sion of boundary-making practices in migrants' subjective positioning strategies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Insights into the Use of Social Comparison in Migrants' Transnational Social Positioning Strategies

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Abstract
This article discusses the role of social comparisons in the processes through which migrants make sense of their own social position from a transnational perspective. Migrants are often involved in transnational forms of life which influence their forms of belonging, their economic strategies, their moral values and their political actions. There is also evidence to suggest that migrants use transnational frames of reference to evaluate their social positioning within their origin and host countries. In this article, we offer a methodological approach to the study of social positions in transnational spaces which aims to account for the interplay between the markers of objectively verifiable social positions and their subjective assessment by migrants. Concretely, we focus on social comparison as a mechanism for symbolic boundary-drawing processes, which help migrants to make sense of their (often differing) social positions within host and origin countries. Social comparisons help migrants to evaluate how they are seen and positioned by others and subsequently bring these assessments into line with their own social categories and evaluations of their social position in different places. These findings highlight the importance of social comparisons as a tool to investigate the interaction between social and spatial mobility.

Keywords
migrants; mobility; social comparison; transnational social position; social mobility

Issue
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1. Introduction

While mobility becomes more and more valued and accessible for certain groups of people, global securitisation policies and migration controls contribute to increasing restrictions on the mobility of others. For migration scholars, it has therefore become increasingly important to ask what kind of spatial mobility holds the promise of social mobility—and for whom.

One way to approach these complex and multifaceted questions of the relationship between social and spatial mobility is to focus on the influence of political, social and economic structures in both receiving and sending states on migrants' own perceptions of status mobility in host and origin countries. The advantage of this perspective is that it allows us to acknowledge the transnational dynamics in migrants' lives and how they shape social positions across national boundaries (Anthias, 2001, 2002; Nowicka, 2013; Rye, 2018; Weiss, 2005).

A better understanding of migrants' own views of their social status also offers insights into the mechanisms by which people are categorised by others and fit into social hierarchies that function beyond state levels. This is because subjective perceptions of social status are often reflections of the categorisations imposed on us by others (Dannenbeck, 2002; Jenkins, 1996). Thus, studying social status perceptions may help us better understand how structural and individual factors influence one another in the reshaping and reproduction of social hierarchies in transnational spaces. They may explain which type of migrants are more prone to perceive themselves as socially upwardly mobile and why and in which contexts.

This article seeks to advance academic debates about which methodological and conceptual approaches would enable us to better investigate and understand how social inequalities across borders are experienced and made sense of by people themselves. It aims to contribute to this debate by focusing on the practices of social comparison. Social comparisons are understood as a tool people use to connect social and symbolic boundaries in their own processes of making sense of social positions. In line with Lamont and Molnár (2002, p. 3) we define social boundaries as objectified forms of social difference, manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities. Symbolic boundaries, on the other hand, are understood as tools which individuals use to come to agree upon definitions of reality. In this understanding, social boundaries are therefore both symbolic and real because boundary-drawing processes have the power to both reproduce and transform existing social boundaries between and within groups. In other words, here we look at social comparison as a mechanism used by migrants to situate themselves within objectifiable social and ethnic boundaries in a given society—which are mostly drawn upon by the majority population.

The article starts from the premise that the process of social comparison in itself is conditioned by social structures which become visible in different forms in local and international contexts, such as racialised, gendered or citizenship structures of inequality. In this vein, migrants may well reproduce invisible social structures of inequality when articulating their subjective assessment of their social position, or, alternatively, create new social boundaries between themselves and others through the enactment of specific symbolic boundaries which they establish during the process of comparing and distinguishing themselves from others. In this sense, processes of comparison are inherently part of localised processes of exclusion and inclusion on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender or citizenship that migrants are subjected to. In this article, the focus lies particularly on the role of social comparison as a social mechanism (Faist, 2019) employed by migrants to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and others.

The article is based on data from 37 qualitative interviews with migrants in Germany who originated from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, working positions and countries of origin, and who had differentiated educational achievements. The interviews were part of the mixed-methods research project "Transnational Social Positions in the European Union" at Bielefeld University (for more details see the Supplementary File). In the first part of the article, we define and operationalise the concept of social comparison in the context of boundary theory. After this, the methodological design of the study and challenges in its application in practice are addressed. Here, the focus lies particularly on the benefits of qualitative approaches to reconstruct people's own frames of comparison. Challenges inherent to such interpretative approaches are also addressed; particularly those related to the classification and organisation of comparisons. The remainder of the article is dedicated to some preliminary findings in order to show how social comparisons can be used to explain the nexus between social and spatial mobility. In particular, the analysis shows that focusing on social comparison in migrants' narratives may be a good way to uncover how people make sense of ethnicised and gendered social and symbolic boundaries in transnational social spaces. Furthermore, the findings indicate that transnational social comparisons appear to serve people to portray themselves in more advantageous social positions than it might seem to outsiders.

2. Transnational Social Positions, Boundary Theory and Social Comparison in Migration Research

2.1. Transnational Social Positions

When talking about transnational social positions or social mobility in transnational spaces, we are drawing on the concepts of social status, originally developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1990) in his theory of cultural class struggle. Bourdieu recognised structural conditions such as people's relation to the means of production as determinant forces of class, but he also recognised cultural, symbolic and social components as important in reproducing class privilege. Migrant scholars have expanded Bourdieu's original theories in order to account for migrants' shifting social status dynamics from a transnational perspective (Nee & Sanders, 2001; Nowicka, 2013; Weiss, 2005). In particular, specific emphasis has been placed on the role that different types of social, symbolic and cultural capital in the origin and destination countries may play for migrants' ability to obtain and maintain a certain social status in their home and host countries (Cederberg, 2017; Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010; Rye, 2018; Zontini & Reynolds, 2018). These authors suggest that migrants' evaluation of social status differ from Bourdieu's original and quite nation-focused understanding of social status, because in their subjective evaluation of social status migrants consider how symbolic, economic, cultural and social capital can be converted or adapted *across* national boundaries and within transnational social spaces.

By transnational social spaces, we refer here to the international webs of social, political and economic relationships between countries of origin and destination in which migrants are often embedded. Transnational social spaces emerge when pre-migratory ties and linkages are fostered by migration and congeal in economic, political and social patterns (Faist, 2000, p. 199). It has been ventured that the specific role that transnational frames of reference play in migrants' evaluation of their status mobility may be due to the fact that migrants often experience status paradoxes (Nieswand, 2011; Parreñas, 2000; Rye, 2018) when they change their geographical

and social location through migration. In other words, they may experience particular challenges in becoming included in the new social group hierarchies they encounter in their host societies, while at the same time forming new and different connections to the social, cultural and economic fields in their country of origin after having migrated. This also suggests that migrants' social positioning processes may be based on a complicated interplay between both structural and individual factors which interact in transnational spaces (Anthias, 2001, 2002).

2.2. Social Comparison and Its Link to Social Positioning Strategies and Boundary Theory

In this article, it is argued that social comparison can be used as a tool to empirically document these dynamic processes of social positioning that migrants are engaged in. White (2012, p. 3) rightly observes that "social comparison is best treated as an interpretative heuristic, a way of making sense, in idealised form, of how others in turn make sense of the social world." Thus, methodologically, social comparison may be studied successfully through interpretative forms of enquiry as a way to make visible how people understand, transform and/or reproduce social hierarchies, thus shaping exclusionary and inclusionary group formation processes.

Only a few studies (Louie, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995) have used transnational frameworks to study social comparisons. Faist, Bilecen, Barglowski, and Sienkiewicz (2015) found that migrants' comparisons of different types of formal social protection offered by different nation states shape the exchange of informal social protection between migrants and their families and friends abroad. Not only did these comparisons reveal who received what kind of protection, but they also indicated a broader connection: social comparisons appeared to contribute to the perception of upward social mobility in terms of formal protection, income and career chances compared to migrants' situation in their region of origin. However, when migrants compared themselves with the standards of the destination countries, they perceived their social rank more towards the bottom of the social status scale, possibly because their educational and occupational qualifications from their home country were not (fully) recognised.

These different studies indicate that mobile people (and their immobile significant others) may develop transnational frames of reference for comparisons that pattern their self-positioning in transnational social spaces (Faist & Bilecen, 2015, p. 290). There is initial evidence that cross-national comparisons frame the perceptions of social positions and concomitant experiences, such as relative (dis-)advantage, which can lead to situations of losing face, of conflict, and of frustration within migrants' families and beyond (Faist et al., 2015). However, we still do not know if all migrants engage in social comparisons in the same way and, if not, how this is related to social mobility dynamics and their geographical trajectories. How far can social comparison be understood as a social mechanism responsible for processes of making sense of inequality structures in transnational spaces? This is what we shall focus on in the subsequent parts of this article.

In this article, social comparison is understood in line with Festinger (1954) as a universal mechanism, which people use in every situation in which they need to position themselves and where no 'objective' scales/measures (such as weight, height or age) for comparison and consequent positioning are available. We know from social psychology that social comparisons can be used to mediate the link between fear and affiliation (Schachter, 1959), or in the process of constructing the self in relation to the social group one is referring to (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Buunk and Gibbons (2007), for example, have shown that social comparison is frequent when people are unsure about their own standing, or when they lack confidence or are in competition with others. At the same time, analysing comparisons is useful to learn about people's perceptions of social positions in general. Social identity theory has found, for example, that comparison allows people to evaluate their own group favourably to others through in-group/out-group comparison. Comparisons are also used by members of social groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from one another (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Migration is often a life-changing experience which involves a great deal of uncertainty and the need to orientate oneself towards new social norms and groups. Therefore, understanding the practices of social comparison is potentially fruitful to analyse how mobile persons make sense of their social positions in the different social environments of the places they migrate to.

While social psychology has mostly been concerned with comparison as a mechanism of boundary construction between groups and with the mechanisms of the permeability of symbolic and social boundaries, sociologists have paid attention to comparisons when looking at processes of collective identity (Dannenbeck, 2002; Jenkins, 1996). They focus on how internal (in-group) and external (out-group) definitions of identity are conditioned through changing ties of solidarity between group members. They find, for example, that group identity is always changing and ambivalent, and often conditioned through gender, social relations and social boundaries. These findings on group identity also suggest that the way in which migrants are perceived as 'Others' in a given society interacts with the way they perceive themselves as 'different.' This interactive process of the constitution of 'difference' impacts on the frames of reference migrants use to evaluate their own status mobility because it is difficult to evaluate one's status within a group if one perceives that one is excluded from it. Evaluations of status mobility are thus not only dependent on social and symbolic boundary-drawing process-

es which emanate from migrants themselves, but also from the people they interact with, namely the origin and destination societies. By focusing on social comparison as a tool for symbolic boundary-making processes for in- and out-group comparisons, we may therefore be able to tease out the categories which are relevant for migrants to position themselves in different scales or hierarchies, and on national, transnational or local levels (White, 2012).

The above suggests that boundary theory plays an important role when assessing the transnational particularities in migrants' self-evaluations of their social positions in localised or nationalised social hierarchies (Anthias, 2002; Wimmer, 2008, 2013). Lamont and Molnár (2002, p. 168) have defined boundaries as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices and even time and space" which are expressed through processes of evaluation and serve as a medium "through which people acquire status and monopolize resources." Cultural sociologists who work in this tradition (Lamont, 1992; Sachweh, 2013) have found that people's use of symbolic boundaries depends upon their social position. While upper-middle-class respondents tend to draw boundaries on economic and cultural criteria, lower-class respondents are more inclined to use moral boundaries to distinguish themselves from others. While boundary theory has been applied in migration research, most studies so far have focused on the boundaries drawn by the host society in relation to migrants or 'ethnic others' (Alba, 2005; Bail, 2008; Parzer & Astleithner, 2017; Wimmer, 2013). This type of research has been important in shaping our understanding of how host societies draw symbolic boundaries to construct the migrant as 'the Other,' and through this process 'ethicise' other social boundaries. In this article, however, we are more interested in looking at the ways in which migrants draw boundaries between themselves and others in order to negotiate and evaluate their own social positions within a given society and how they transform and reproduce their social positions in transnational space.

3. Methods for Studying Social Comparisons

In order to analyse the diverse trajectories of mobility in their relation to individuals' social positions, and how mobile persons interpret their social position, there is a need for a research design that allows us to relate the symbolic boundary-making processes that migrants are subjectively engaged in to objectively existing social stratifying structures. In this respect, it is acknowledged that processes of migrants' sense-making regarding their social position are shaped by their social, symbolic and cultural resources and their 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990), and are best studied with qualitative methods that reveal patterns of meaning (White, 2012).

In social psychology research on social comparison, data is usually empirically generated through the use of semi-experimental, quantitative research methods. This means that frames of comparison as well as the social environment in which these comparisons occur are artificially constructed by the researcher (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). However, understanding how people construct frames of comparison and in which moments they are used is crucial for the study of boundary processes because the frames of comparison highlight the social dimensions of life in which people experience a need to draw lines and distinctions between people or objects in order to make sense of processes of exclusion and inclusion.

In the qualitative interviews, this problem was addressed by choosing topics of conversation and questions related to the definition and subjective experience of social hierarchies and social status. Furthermore, a variety of visual methods were used during the interview process (like photo-ranking exercises and life graphs) in order to facilitate respondents to engage in comparisons and establish relationships between abstract concepts (see Supplementary File). While a detailed description of these methods is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to signal that they enabled the respondents in the ensuing conversations to situate themselves within the social hierarchies they had themselves created. Crucial for the success of the interviewing method proved its loose structure which enabled respondents to use their own words and ways of explaining while at the same time allowing the researcher to collect stories of social trajectories which could later be grouped into different categories with recurring patterns of comparisons.

In order to facilitate the systematic coding and analysis of the great diversity of comparisons we found in the data, a conceptual model from White (2012), which schematises the many different dimensions of social comparisons that may exist, was adapted (see Table 1). To construct this grid, insights from social psychological literature were included, such as Merton (1968) and Runciman (1966) on reference groups for comparison, as well as Albert (1977) on the temporal dimensions of comparisons. According to this model, frames for social comparison can be differentiated along two main axes: on the first dimension, we differentiate the criteria for comparisons which determine what exactly people are comparing and why. Here we can distinguish between, for example, comparisons of economic, cultural or social resources, as well as comparisons of moral values. These comparison criteria are related to the types of symbolic boundaries that people are drawing (Lamont, Pendergrass, & Pachucki, 2015). These comparison criteria map the economic, social or cultural capital that people recognise as being relevant for one's social position, as well as the symbolic capital they perceive as necessary for achieving or maintaining a certain social status.

We can distinguish here particularly between instances in which people referred to capabilities or skills and socio-economic resources when making com-

Table 1. Two dimensions of comparisons.

Criteria for comparison (1st dimension)	Capabilities, resources (socio-economic boundaries) Values and tastes (moral boundaries) Rules and regulations (social and cultural boundaries)	
Reference for comparison (2nd dimension)	Subject of comparison	*I* *We* *He/She*
	Person or group of comparison	*Socially close (family, friend)* *Not socially close* *Imagined* *Societal or symbolic (ethnic group, gender, age group, migrants, etc.)*
	Value	*Normative* *Relative*
	Time	*In the past–now* *Now–future* *Counterfactual*

parisons (representing socio-economic boundaries), values and tastes (representing moral boundaries) and rules and regulations to which people considered they adhered, or were able to transgress in comparison with others (representing social and cultural boundaries). The second dimension of differentiation describes the form that the comparison takes. Here, we can distinguish the reference group that people are comparing themselves with, the timeline and the value (either normative or relative) given to their comparative efforts. The distinction between normative and relative values is the difference in comparisons of what 'should be' with what is, or of 'what was' with what is, respectively. It is also possible that they use fictive personalities or essentialised group notions for comparison, such as 'the Germans,' 'women,' 'children,' 'a Turkish migrant,' or 'a young foreign student,' etc. Others directly compare their own experience with the experience of people they know. The grid was used to construct thematic codes for each dimension and sub-dimension that was retrieved in the interview data. According to the types of comparison that were used subsequently by respondents, different forms of symbolic boundary-making processes could then be described and analysed through sequential and hermeneutic analytical coding procedures.

4. Comparisons as a Way to Talk about Ethnicised and Gendered Social and Symbolic Boundaries

When respondents were asked to rank and compare the social positions of people with different occupation, gender, ages or ethnic origins in countries of origin and settlement during the photo-eliciting exercise, they frequently engaged in comparisons of social status between abstract groups, such as 'civil servants,' 'old people,' or 'people in offices.' People particularly from middle income countries emphasised, for example, that employment status (civil servant or private sector employee) more than occupation itself influenced social status differently in their home country and in Germany. Some would say, for example, that while employment in the public sector was probably less well paid in their origin country, it offered job security and access to networks which protected them from economic risks and unemployment in an otherwise volatile economic environment. In these people's eyes, this was crucial for maintaining a good social position in their origin country, but less important in Germany where the risk of unemployment and lacking social protection was less pronounced.

This indicates that respondents recognised globally operating structural inequalities such as occupation and pay as defining elements of social hierarchies, but that they evaluated their importance with reference to localised contexts. While many respondents valued the importance of different markers differently in origin and host country, they all ordered social positions according to the level of formal education, occupations, salaries and age—irrespective of the national context they were referring to (either Germany or their origin country). Gender and ethnic origin were also incorporated into the rankings of social positions but did not play a superior role in the ranking order of the photos. Thus, it appears that institutional cultural capital (as in formal education), economic capital (as in occupations, assets and financial security) and age are recognised as 'universal' markers of social status for the migrants we interviewed, since our respondents recognised their importance in all national contexts they were referring to during the interviews. Gender and ethnic origin, by contrast, appeared to be considered as rather dynamic status-determining variables. Concretely, in their narratives, respondents related both aspects to symbolic capital, in that both were thought to enhance or devalue other forms of capital in particular social fields, such as in the family or in com-

munity relations. This may suggest that, for our respondents, the primary importance of occupation, education and economic capital for social positioning strategies is a product of the centrality of economic relations in capitalist societies (Meisenhelder, 2000, p. 92).

However, the fact that gender or ethnic origin were not explicitly named in the same way as education, occupation or age as status determining features is also very likely due to the fact that racialised and gendered differences are, together with class, part of interlocking social stratification processes which create social positions. How each individual occupies a social position within such interlocking structures of social hierarchies is described by the term intersectionality (Hill Collins, 1995, p. 492). Conveying the complicated interplay of these structures and the effects they have in people's lives requires carefully crafted methods. It is likely that in our case, the photo exercise in itself was not able to bring out in depth respondents' own experiences or feelings in relation to this intersectional powerplay. This is probably because the ranking exercise focused on photos which depicted people acting out different occupations. This may have triggered respondents to focus on occupational status as a marker of social standing during the ranking exercise rather than on other intersecting social status markers, such as the gender and ethnic origin of the person performing the tasks in the pictures.

While the photo exercise was not able to show if migrants perceive ethnicity or gender as objective social boundaries in the same ways as occupation or pay, the analysis of the comparisons people engaged in during the exercise did provide important clues about the ways in which they conceived of gender and ethnicity as status relevant. This was because through comparisons, respondents were constructing ethnicised and gendered reference groups for determining their social standing in relation to others.

Research has shown that people's concept of their own social standing is only in part shaped by the perception of material inequalities such as jobs, pay or working conditions. In addition, people tend to construct their own personal vantage point from which to view social status hierarchies and their place within them by sampling their social setting. It has been shown that in order to do so, people tend to draw mentally on reference groups in their family, among friends and co-workers. As these reference groups tend to be fairly homogeneous, people are thus able to position themselves in the middle of their mentally constructed social hierarchies of equals (Evans & Kelley, 2004, p. 6). In our case, too, respondents' justifications to explain why they positioned themselves in certain ways within the social hierarchies they had created through the photo ranking exercise were based on a number of comparisons with different reference groups. The three reference groups below were those with which respondents most compared themselves and others in order to position themselves socially:

1. Other migrants from other countries of origin who live in Germany.
2. People who share the same country of origin.
3. Perceived 'ethnic' Germans.

In contrast to the above mentioned research with non-mobile people by Evans and Kelley (2004), the reference groups our respondents used were not necessarily homogeneous. Instead, the three reference groups constituted important in- and out-group references during the interviews and are all identified on the basis of 'ethnic' origin. This may indicate that ethnicised boundaries are recognised as important symbolic boundaries of social status in Germany—at least for the migrants whom we interviewed.

In fact, in the process of describing their own social position, our respondents often referred to social comparisons between ethnicised reference groups in order to convert ethnic social boundaries of exclusion into symbolic ones of inclusion, thus allowing them to enhance their own social status in the process of narration. This happened, for example, in direct comparisons between respondents and Germans, which were used to convey how the respondents attempted to mitigate the fact that their different cultural values impacted their ability to 'fit into' the German social hierarchies. In these instances, the comparisons with Germans reveal how respondents perceived the downgrading of their cultural and moral values by German society as unjust. The comparisons were thus a cognitive manifestation of an aversion to any situation that could result in downward mobility (Burleigh & Meegan, 2013).

In the example below, an Iraqi woman explains why she considers early marriage an asset and ascribes it a high cultural value, despite knowing that this idea and the corresponding gender roles are no longer valued by mainstream German society because it conveys the idea of the dependent woman who is worth nothing socially without being married to a man. Through the comparison she uses in the interview, however, she is able to convert her own value system into one that is superior to the 'German' value system:

> You rarely hear about marriages between Germans, or Europeans in general. It is mostly foreigners who marry....Germans don't recognise the positive sides of marriage for our daughters. Here, on the other side of the road there is a [German] family with many daughters. I think they have five children. Four are girls. And these girls, 18 or 20 years old, they carry babies around with them, without fathers. My daughter, by contrast, she married when she was 18 years old and she has decided to go to university and she does not want to have children just yet. So these [German] girls, they admire that a woman is worth so much, and that she could have such a big wedding and so many presents and a car and this and that. She has a different value and why? These girls, they are more beauti-

> ful than my daughter. But when a young man can have a woman without respecting any rules, without taking responsibilities through marriage, why not? Why get married if everything is possible? Even some foreigners have learned this from the Germans. That's the way it is. Unfortunately.

This example shows how comparisons are useful to understand the different moral and social symbolic boundary making processes between themselves and the host population that people engaged in. In addition, the analysis of the comparisons used during the photo ranking exercise show how ethnicised and gendered differences play out in people's perceptions of social positions, even though respondents did not perceive these aspects as being as directly determinant for social status hierarchies as education, occupation and age. In the remainder of the article, we will concentrate on these types of comparisons and relate them to migrants' socio-economic characteristics.

5. Social Comparison in Migrants' Narratives: Mechanisms to Convey Contradictory Social Positions in Transnational Spaces

Despite the existence of the above-mentioned seemingly universal social markers for social status, respondents had difficulties in positioning themselves socially with reference solely to their educational qualifications, economic assets, or the type of paid work they were doing, in either the social hierarchies they had created for Germany or for their origin country. Instead, they often indicated that they saw themselves as neither included nor excluded fully in either their origin or host societies, which made it difficult for them to establish clearly what social position they occupied within their host and/or origin societies when we asked them to. One respondent solved the problem of not being able to position herself within the photo collage she had created by picking four different photos and saying: "This is me, all this together in one person. And I am somewhere here in the middle."

Following Festinger (1954), this may be a good example of migrants' feeling of cognitive dissonance, meaning the unease felt when people are unable to evaluate their abilities or achievements by use of a variety of objective standards. However, the reluctance to position themselves in the social hierarchies of both origin and host countries may also be related to differences in amounts of knowledge. According to social psychologists, people see themselves in a wide range of situations and roles. Therefore, self-knowledge is organised around multiple roles, activities and relationships. Thus, evidently, people vary in the number and diversity of selves that they believe they possess (Smith & Mackie, 2007, p. 102). This is connected to the theory of self-complexity (Linville, 1985) which stipulates that people differ in the degree they perceive themselves to have diverse self-aspects. According to Linville, self-complexity can thus be measured and expressed with high or lower values. It may be that mobility influences people's measures of self-complexity positively because they are living in complex and transnational contexts which require them to consciously act out a diversity of 'selves' in different social contexts. Some of the respondents effectively explained their reluctance to position themselves due to their ambivalent position in both origin and host societies. They explained, for example, that they felt to a certain extent like a 'foreigner' in their country of origin and simultaneously thought that their social environment did not consider them to be a full member of the host society either. As a result, a great variety of respondents indicated that they did not feel themselves 'either here or there' and that this made it difficult for them to position themselves within the social hierarchies of each country.

The fact that the respondents did not fit into national social hierarchies of social status did not, however, mean that they were not able to position themselves socially at all. Instead, they appeared to combine different national frames of reference regarding symbolic capital in order to construct a transnational 'assemblage position,' which reordered the values of their acquired economic, social and cultural capitals in a subjectively experienced, transnational social hierarchy of social positions, which included the differently localised reference groups they perceived as relevant to them. In the remainder of the interviews, respondents used different types of social comparison to convey this ambivalent positioning to the interviewer, in order to make sense of their places in the social hierarchies of both host and origin countries. Whenever respondents evaluated their own social position in Germany, for example, they tended to engage in comparisons between themselves and other (often essentialised) migrant groups in Germany, or between themselves and the German host population. In these instances, however, Germans were usually considered as 'out-group.' One woman from the Philippines described how she experienced 'Germans' as opposed to 'foreigners' when she first arrived:

> I found the Germans were so unfriendly, so unlikable…and…when I was in the language school, I was always very happy that there were so many foreigners there…and we always said things like: "Oh, the Germans" [rolls her eyes]…and I thought, my God, it will be difficult here. It is all, I mean, it is all so different in my home country. Germans are disciplined, with a totally different culture. They are kind of civilised.

When respondents were evaluating their social position in their home country, by contrast, they often compared themselves with people in their country of origin who had similar professional or social backgrounds or with members of their family and other, socially close people. These were considered 'in-group.' These comparisons often occurred without the interviewer's inter-

vention. We could see that these types of comparison were frequently used to define processes and criteria of inclusion and exclusion in origin and host societies. This squares well with social psychology literature which has found that comparisons are generally used by people to evaluate their own group favourably to others through in-group/out-group comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Festinger (1954) found that a lack of objective measurements leads people to compare themselves with others on a more subjective and individual level. In these instances, people tend to compare themselves with people who are similar to them or with whom they compare as an in-group.

Comparisons with people from their home country, other migrants or the German host population also occurred in the context of conversations about the factors that respondents considered relevant for their social mobility. These comparisons generally focused on socially constructed, cultural, moral and economic markers of difference. They were therefore indicative of symbolic boundary-making processes that respondents were engaging in when positioning themselves over time and in transnational contexts. In this context, it is interesting that almost all respondents indicated that they considered themselves to have experienced upward social mobility in comparison to their situation in their origin country before migration. However, when we compared these subjective evaluations of their social mobility with the respondent's occupational and financial status before and after migration, we generally did not see great variation with their pre-migratory lives. The social mobility that migrants perceived was certainly more related to the fact that they perceived themselves to have accumulated symbolic capital in both their host and origin countries through the migratory experience. As mentioned above, the fact that migrants perceive themselves in the middle stratum of social hierarchies is in itself not surprising, because it squares with research that demonstrates that people in general appear to position themselves socially in the middle of society (Evans & Kelley, 2004). However, what is interesting here is the justifications that our respondents gave for their assessments.

Respondents argued their views with reference to transnational frames of reference regarding social status mobility (Anthias, 2002). Frequently, they argued that even though they were not earning a lot of money in their current job in Germany, they considered that they had achieved other important social status markers, such as having a family and children, a house or good social contacts and friends—which they would not have been able to obtain if they had not migrated. Others argued that they considered their social status higher than in their country of origin because they had achieved more scope for choice to do what they wanted in life and generally perceived greater opportunities for their future. Others argued that their social status had not changed at all.

Thus, the interviews showed that to understand migrants' evaluations of social status, it is important to acknowledge its multiple dimensions, which are composed of both economic and financial aspects, but equally contain moral, social and cultural facets. In this sense, the migrants' self-positioning strategies mirrored the Bourdieusian idea of social status (Bourdieu, 1990) when comparing different dimensions of their social standing before and after migration. Interviewees weighted these different status indicators by comparing themselves with groups they felt they belonged to or else by comparing themselves with groups of people they wished to distinguish themselves from. In difference to non-mobile people, migrants appear to refer to reference groups for social comparisons that are located in different national contexts, thus creating transnational frames of references for comparisons of social status positions. The differences in the types of comparisons that people were using to distinguish national social hierarchies and their own position within them indicate that personal status evaluations may be shaped not only by subjective evaluations but also by how people are perceived by others and by those groups they most identify with (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

6. Conclusion

This article has shown how social comparison can be used as a tool to investigate migrants' subjective views on social status mobility through qualitative methods by conceptually linking the study of symbolic and social boundaries with practices of social comparison. The empirical data show that migrants—like non-migrants—experience social status positions as composed of both subjective assessments of social difference and the societal norms and values related to what determines social difference and standing in any given society. In short, migrants appear to build their assessment of social position on how they feel included into social groups by others as well as by themselves. However, in contrast to non-mobile populations, migrants are often made aware that these two assessments do not necessarily overlap, particularly when one changes national contexts. In line with Bourdieu, it can be argued that this can be explained when one considers that what counts as symbolic capital, necessary for social standing in any society, is a process of negotiation which includes powerful and less powerful groups in a given social space. Migration reconfigures the composition of the social spaces into which people are incorporated and changes the rules and norms that define symbolic capital formation (Reed-Danahay, 2017).

This article has shown how migrants respond to this situation with strategies of self-positioning which compensate for perceived or potential status loss. People use social comparison to make sense of contradictory social positions in origin and host societies. By comparing themselves socially with others through transnational frames of reference, they transform social boundaries of exclu-

sion into symbolic ones of inclusion, in an effort to thus enhance their own social status—at least in their own perception. This finding is in line with social psychology literature on social comparisons more generally, which has found that the mechanism of social comparison is used frequently by people in order to locate their group membership (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Tajfel, 1982) or their position vis-à-vis others in a more positive light than it might appear to outsiders (Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995).

The processes of migrants' subjective positioning strategies show that assessments of social position are not necessarily bounded by a social space framed by the nation state. While the state is recognised in migrants' narratives as an important structuring factor of social space, it is not the only or most important one. Social relations spanning across countries enable migrants to situate themselves in transnational spaces in which status hierarchies are reconfigured through cultural, social and economic forces that are not exclusively shaped by state forces.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Exploring the Nexus between Migration and Social Positions using a Mixed Methods Approach

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Abstract
Using a mixed methods approach, this article analyses the nexus between migration and social positions drawing on recent survey data on migrants who have arrived in Germany after 1994 from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), as well as qualitative interviews with 26 respondents to the survey. Drawing on a Bourdieusian forms-of-capital approach (Bourdieu, 1986) and applying the method of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to the SOEP survey data, we highlight two dimensions structuring the nexus between migration and social positions in Germany: (1) capital related to legal status and multiple migration and (2) (trans)national cultural capital. Through a cluster analysis based on the MCA results, we then identify and describe four profiles of migrants characterised by distinct configurations of cultural capital (social class background, education and linguistic skills before and after settlement), legal status (citizenship and status at migration), experiences of multiple cross-border movements and social positions: the 'foreign working-class,' the 'foreign middle-class,' the 'adapted German migrants,' and the 'young highly educated urbans.' The complementary analysis of the qualitative data allows us to go further in understanding some of the factors that may play a role in shaping migrants' social position(ing) in the four clusters. In particular, we show that resources such as determination and perseverance can be crucial for some migrants to counter structural constraints related to their legal status in transferring or accessing cultural capital, and that linguistic skills are also used by some migrants as a marker of social distinction.

Keywords
cultural capital; Germany; mixed methods; migrants; migration; mobility; social positions; SOEP; social stratification; symbolic capital

Issue
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1. Introduction

The relationship between migration and social inequality is a complex one and migration literature has been able to demonstrate extensively that a range of factors influence the socio-economic incorporation of migrants into the country they settle in, e.g., education and language skills (Kogan, 2011), social networks (Wrench, Rea, & Ouali, 2016), duration of stay and discrimination (van Tubergen et al., 2004), national origin (Drinkwater, Eade, & Garapich, 2009) and class (van Hear, 2014). One dominant pattern of the studies based on quantitative data is their interest in explaining outcomes such as labour market participation, looking at the effect of different migrants' characteristics. A more qualitative strand of research pays particular attention to the trajectories of migrants of a specific origin, their lives between 'here and there' (e.g., Nieswand, 2011; Nowicka, 2013) and

their social position, but many single out only one part of the social hierarchy in which migrants are positioned at destination, i.e., the least privileged migrants in specific sectors of the labour market (e.g., Friberg, 2012; Parrenas, 2020) or highly skilled migrants (e.g., Favell, 2008; Weiss, 2005).

Only a few empirical studies take a more 'global' perspective by looking at how different types of spatial mobility (experiences of living in several countries, legal status, etc.) and the individual resources migrants had before migrating (education, class background, language skills) structure migrants' social space, understood as the "space constructed on the basis of principles of distribution and differentiation" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724). Rare too are empirical studies that identify types or profiles of migrants, not according to their country of origin as is frequently done in research, but according to a set of social and cultural characteristics as well as characteristics related to the kind of migration they experienced. By this, we mean the legal, economic and social characteristics of people involved in cross-border movements, as well as the specific transnational spaces that migrants are embedded in through movement. We assume that these different types of migrants are characterised by distinct social positions in the destination society. Our approach allows us to account for the 'combination' (Vandebroeck, 2018, p. 363) of different forms of heterogeneities among migrants and resources or constraints related to cross-border movement and to think in terms of social differentiation.

Drawing on a mixed methods project, we use recent survey data on migrants who have arrived in Germany after 1994 from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), as well as qualitative interviews with migrants who were also respondents in the survey. Using the method of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) we investigate which dimensions shape what we call the space of migrants' social positions, i.e., the space structured by characteristics related to migration and to diverse resources, in particular cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Hierarchical clustering based on the MCA results allows us to identify four profiles of migrants characterised by different configurations of heterogeneities and social positions: the 'foreign working-class,' the 'foreign middle-class,' the 'adapted German migrants,' and the 'young highly educated urbans.' The mixed methods design we use has at least two advantages: It allows us (1) to link a 'global' perspective on social differentiation among the migrant population with more fine-grained information on cases and (2) to overcome the gaps of quantitative surveys that only provide minimal information about migrants' strategies, their aspirations, their resources and the obstacles they encountered.

The article is divided into four parts. After a presentation of the state of the art and the theoretical framework, we present the data and methods. The third section is devoted to the quantitative findings, in particular to the description of the central lines of differentiation characterising the population of concern and of the four profiles of migrants identified. In the last part, the qualitative data is used to analyse how individuals in each profile achieved their social position in Germany, with a focus on opportunities, constraints and individual strategies in transferring education and accessing training in Germany. In addition, we draw on the qualitative material to show the meaning of language proficiency for social positioning and social distancing.

2. State of the Art and Theoretical Framework

The research questions pursued in this article address the link between migration and social positions at destination, and in a broader sense between spatial mobility and social stratification. Spatial mobility is a complex concept that has led to various discussions and debates and can be thought of in various ways following different theoretical or disciplinary considerations (Kaufmann, 2017; Scholten & van Ostaijen, 2018). Following Moret (2017), we consider mobility as "an element of social differentiation" (p. 2). Migrants are, by definition, mobile persons and their patterns of spatial mobility are diverse. Some leave their country of origin and settle directly in another country, while others have experienced multiple migration as well as settlement in several countries. While a strand of research centres its attention either on the least privileged migrants, highlighting the link between different mobility pathways and socio-economic mobility (on Filipino domestic workers see Parrenas, 2020) or the role of the 'work culture' assigned by the majority to a specific group (on Polish construction workers see Friberg, 2012), another strand of work focuses on highly skilled migrants, some of them being more privileged in their options to move (Favell, 2008) but not always in social positions at destination that correspond to their level of qualification (Weiss, 2005). Some authors have highlighted the status paradox some migrants experience when they gain prestige in the origin country by being looked at as successful migrants and, at the same time, loose social standing as immigrants in the destination country (on Ghanaian migrants see Nieswand, 2011). In this article we adopt a 'global perspective' for the analysis of the link between spatial mobility and social positions. We do not focus on a group of migrants with a particular geographical origin or social position at destination; instead, we account for the diversity of the internationally mobile population, as far as possible, with the aim of identifying which combination of characteristics related to cross-border migration and forms of capital (in particular cultural and symbolic capital) structures migrants' social positions, contributing to a socially stratified migrant population.

Many empirical studies in migration research mobilise Bourdieu's (1986) approach to capitals in order to draw out how structural forms of inequality like class, together with individual resources, like social networks, come to form peoples' position in social hierarchies (see, for example, Oliver & O'Reilly, 2010; Ryan, Erel, &

D'Angelo, 2015). A large body of research focuses on the significance of cultural capital, such as formal education (Weiss, 2005) and the process through which migrants can or cannot acquire valuable cultural capital like formal education or language skills (Erel, 2009). The transferability of cultural capital in the country of destination is the aspect that has received the most attention in research on migrants' positioning on the labour market. Here, researchers have identified the strategies used by migrants to transfer cultural capital (Koikkalainen, 2014) or signalled the importance of perseverance and support from family and friends when looking for professional opportunities (Nohl, Schittenhelm, Schmidtke, & Weiss, 2014). For their part, Nee and Sanders' (2001) concept of migrants' 'human-cultural capital' enlarges the perspective on cultural capital to other human competences related to migration such as host destination language proficiency. Many works indeed provide evidence on the influence of language skills on labour market outcomes (e.g., Kogan, 2011; Schuss, 2018). While most of the research looks at cultural capital in the form of qualifications or language skills, the role played by the embodied form of cultural capital, i.e., that constructed through the socialisation process in which class background plays a role (Bourdieu, 1986), is less researched. Recently, Engzell and Ichou (2020) showed that migrants' educational rank in the country of origin influences labour market outcomes at destination. But their study only considers education and not social background. This form of cultural capital, which is inherited through parental social class and determines the acquisition of "the valued characteristics that facilitate access to a range of social spaces and positions," has rarely been studied as an indicator for the social positions mobile persons occupy after moving (Cederberg, 2015, p. 36). As to language skills, they can be considered as institutionalized cultural capital due to the delivery of certificates to migrants after having passed the test following the integration course, for example, but also as a form of embodied capital where speaking "dialect—and accent-free German" is evaluated positively and plays a part in blurring social and ethnic boundaries. It is worth noting here that embodied cultural capital also includes practices, codes and norms that can have inclusionary or exclusionary effects in the settlement society (Cederberg, 2015, p. 33).

However, alongside the importance of cultural, economic or social capital for migrants' social positions, the specificities of migration itself also influence mobile people's place in social hierarchies (Parutis, 2014). This is because migrants' administrative and legal status at arrival influences the public perception of the group they are assigned to (Schmidtke, 2013) as well as their ability to negotiate the value of their cultural capital (Erel, 2010). EU migrants benefit from free movement and their cultural capital (their credentials, their language of origin or their practices) tends to be valued positively, depending also, however, on the national origin as shown by Basilio, Bauer, and Kramer (2017). Resettlers were granted German citizenship once they had migrated back to Germany and benefited from specific aid and integration programmes (Groenendijk, 1997). Other migrants have more constraints, so that we can argue that the degree and type of capital created through moving also depends on the migration status at entry, on the context of origin, and on the regulations related to administrative status at destination. Migrants from a range of middle- and low-income countries outside the European Union have limited opportunities to access a German visa that allows them to work and settle in the country, often also due to their limited economic resources and the devaluation of the specific forms of cultural capital they bring with them (e.g., origin language, diplomas). Thus, migration status can be analysed in Bourdieu's terms as symbolic capital that acts as "a signal that may trigger discrimination" (Gerhards, Hans, & Drewski, 2018, p. 674) or have inclusion effects. In Bourdieu's sense, symbolic capital is thus a mechanism able to (de)value other forms of capital (Erel, 2009, 2010; Huot, 2017) because it depends on classification schemes operating in the destination country and on the judgement of others who have incorporated these schemes (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 161). Consequently, the type of mobility individuals experience in terms of legal migration and settlement status also influences the type of symbolic capital they are endowed with, and impacts on how their cultural capital and other skills can be transferred and will be judged.

We consider symbolic capital as a key concept when analysing migrants' social positions. Citizenship, religion and language, for example, have become central markers of ethnic boundaries in Germany (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). As such, they not only shape objective opportunities and constraints, but may also express themselves in practices of symbolic boundary making (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), creating social boundaries that include and exclude migrants from certain ethnic origins or on the basis of their migration status. In this article, we look at the combined effect of cross-border movement and citizenship status (as expressions of symbolic capital) and migrants' cultural capital (as expressed in formal education, class background and linguistic skills) on the social differentiation among the migrant population.

3. Data and Methods

The article is a mixed methods study involving quantitative analyses based on the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample, focusing on migrants who arrived after 1994 and 26 qualitative interviews with SOEP respondents (for more details see Supplementary File 1 and Sienkiewicz, Tucci, Barglowski, & Faist, 2017). The data analysed is that of the year 2015 (N = 1945 respondents): 43% of all respondents were born in Poland, Russia, Kazakhstan or Romania, 15% are resettlers, 38% were EU citizens when they migrated to Germany, 8% arrived as asylum seekers and 40% are classified as 'other foreigners.' This last category groups migrants from non-EU countries (69%) or

who arrived before their country became an EU member state (31%). The survey data is linked with the qualitative interviews through a consented record linkage.

MCA is an appropriate analysis method for our research aims because its epistemological anchoring is not probabilistic but instead follows the information provided by the data (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010, p. 2). As a form of principal component analysis applied to categorical data, it aims to explore and summarise data in order to identify respondents with similar answers and the information most structuring the population of interest. The theoretical foundation for this approach is the idea that migration-related heterogeneities are not randomly distributed within the migrant population but rather structured by different dimensions to be discovered using MCA. The MCA results, i.e., the ten first dimensions structuring the data, are then used, as continuous factors, to perform hierarchical clustering in order to identify clusters or profiles of individuals based on similarities and distances between them from a multidimensional perspective (Husson, Lê, & Pagès, 2017).

In MCA, active variables contribute to the construction of the dimensions structuring the data. The choice of the included variables is grounded on our exploratory analyses of the qualitative interviews as well as on our theoretical approach (see Table 1). Those vari-

Table 1. Variables included in MCA.

Active	Supplementary
Type of migration	Sex
Resettlers, Eastern Europe	Marital status
EU citizens	Partner/married
Refugees, asylum seekers	Single
Other foreigners	Age
Migration experience	18–35 years
Single	36–45 years
One transit country	46–55 years
Multiple migration	56 years and more
German citizenship	Immigration year
No	EGP
Yes	Service position
Highest educational level father	Routine non-manual workers
No vocational/university	Skilled workers
Vocational	Non-skilled workers and agricultural workers
University	Monthly household equivalent income
Highest educational level mother	
No vocational/university	
Vocational	
University	
Education level	
General elementary	
Middle vocational	
Vocational + A-Level	
Higher education	
Region of origin	
Rural area/small town	
Medium) city	
Place of education	
Germany	
Abroad	
Current German proficiency	
Very good	
Good	
Fair	
Poor/not at all	
German proficiency *before* moving to Germany	
High	
Low	
None	

ables relate to migration-specific legal-administrative and socio-cultural heterogeneities. Parental education is included as a form of pre-migration cultural capital. Supplementary variables do not contribute to the construction of the axes. We use them to assess whether certain categories of respondents share specific socio-demographic characteristics. Our focus here is on social positions that are operationalised using the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) class scheme reflecting their current or former occupational position (see Supplementary File 1) as well as using monthly equivalent household income. Summary descriptive statistics of the sample are available in Supplementary File 2.

The mixed methods design of the article is a fully mixed sequential dominant status design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) in which the quantitative findings are given more weight. The analysis of the 26 qualitative interviews complements and deepens the quantitative findings. It enables us, among other things, to show how individuals deal with structural or legal constraints to position themselves socially, i.e., to look also at strategies of social positioning, which is hardly feasible with quantitative data.

4. Dimensions Structuring the Space of Migrants' Social Positions

Cultural capital is unequally distributed within the mobile population. We want to analyse how this form of capital, together with legal-administrative heterogeneities, structures the migrant population that has arrived in Germany since the mid-1990s and whether groups of migrants sharing similar characteristics and social positions can be identified. Figure 1 shows how the modalities of the active variables are distributed in terms of coordinates on the first two identified axes that are the most relevant for the emerging data structure. For example, respondents who have experienced multiple migration in their life are located on the right, positive side of the horizontal axis and on the negative side of the vertical axis.

If we pay attention to the first two axes identified though MCA (see Figure 1 and Table 2), the first axis (horizontal) runs from those whose parents have no vocational or university degree to those whose parents have a university degree, as well as from those who originally came from smaller towns and rural areas to those from urban areas. In addition, the positive right side of the horizontal axis is characterised by individuals with a (very) good

Figure 1. Variables' modalities on the two-dimensional space identified through MCA.

Table 2. Contributions of the (active) modalities to the first two dimensions.

	(Trans)national cultural capital (horizontal—axis 1)		Legal status and multiple migration (vertical—axis 2)	
	Negative side	Positive side	Negative side	Positive side
German citizenship			No	Yes
Type of migration			EU citizens	Resettlers
German proficiency	Fair	Very good		
Education mother	No vocational or university degree	University	University	
Education father	No vocational or university degree	University	University	
Own education	General elementary	Higher education		
Region of origin	Rural or small town	(Medium) city		
Experience of mobility			Multiple migration	
Place of education		Germany		Germany
German proficiency before migration		High		

knowledge of German before migration and being proficient in German at the time of the survey interview. This axis can be interpreted as an axis regarding the level of (trans)national cultural capital that migrants possess.

The second axis (vertical) runs from those, at the bottom, without German citizenship to those, at the top, who are Germans, as well as from individuals who came in the context of EU migration, from highly educated families or those having experienced multiple migration (bottom) to those who came as resettlers or those who were educated in Germany. This axis can be described as legal status and multiple migration.

In our case, supplementary variables enrich the interpretation and enable linking the dimensions to social positions. The positive side of axis 1 groups significantly respondents working in service positions, those aged 18 to 45 and frequently women, while the negative side concentrates skilled and unskilled manual workers, typically men, and respondents aged 45 or older. On the positive side of axis 2 one can find respondents aged 45 or older, who are single; often they are in different types of social positions except in service positions that are located on the negative side of this axis. Here we find younger respondents, often partnered. Immigration year is only correlated, negatively, with axis 2 (0.47), meaning that migrants arrived more recently are located on the negative side of this axis. Household income, our second variable measuring social position, is only significantly and positively correlated with axis 1 (0.31). At this stage, the results indicate a structuration of social positions towards the top of the social hierarchy through multiple cross-border movements, high cultural capital in different forms, and a favourable status as migrants who are EU citizens and immigrated more recently than other migrants.

5. Profiles of Migrants and Social Positions

A hierarchical cluster analysis based on the MCA results suggested a four-cluster solution (see Figure 2). Each cluster is described in the following.

5.1. Cluster 1: The Foreign Working-Class (34%)

The (trans)national cultural capital dimension contributed negatively and significantly to the formation of this cluster. Three-quarters of respondents in this cluster migrated directly to Germany as ‘Other foreigners’ or as refugees/asylum seekers (see Table 3). Eighty percent of all sample respondents who came as asylum seekers belong to this cluster. Only 18% in this cluster are German citizens. Two-thirds could not speak German on arrival in Germany and only a very small proportion declared they spoke very good German (8%). They came largely from low-educated families. Half of them have only elementary education and roughly one-third have a middle vocational degree. Men are more represented than women. Individuals in this cluster belong mostly to the working class: 47% are semi or unskilled manual workers (see Figure 3) and only 8% are in a service position. This cluster has the lowest monthly household income (1304 EUR) and 31% of them live below the poverty level (60% of the median household income).

5.2. Cluster 2: The Foreign Middle-Class (28%)

This cluster is characterised by a high proportion of migrants from EU countries and ‘other foreigners.’ They arrived on average in the year 2005 and 19% experienced multiple migration before moving to Germany. They are on average younger than respondents in Cluster 1.

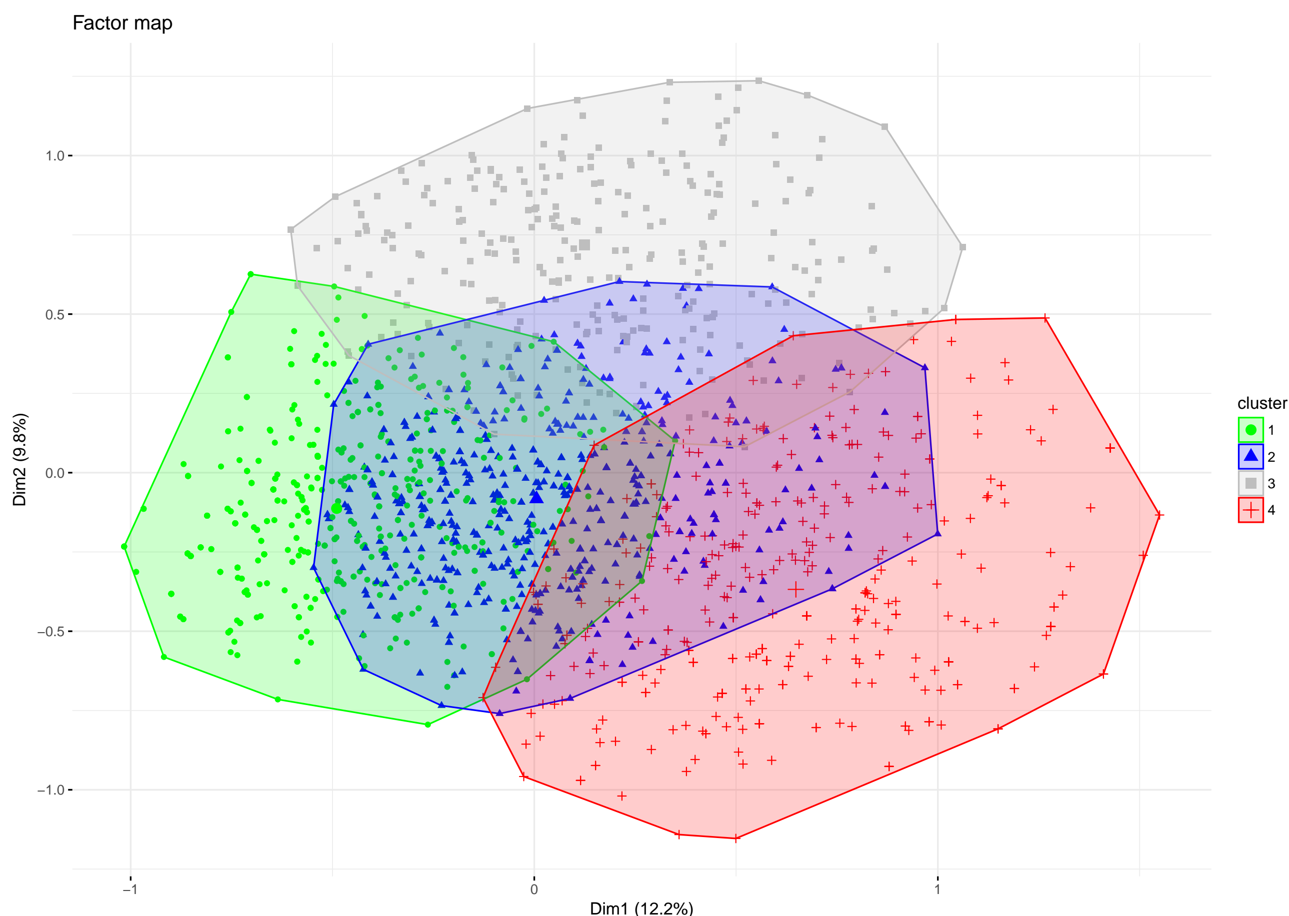

Figure 2. Cluster solution. Notes: Cluster 1 = 'foreign working-class,' cluster 2 = 'foreign middle-class,' cluster 3 = 'adapted German migrants,' cluster 4 = 'young highly educated urbans.' Source: SOEP (2019, survey year 2015).

German citizens are a minority among them (6%). Their parents have on average a higher educational level than migrants in Cluster 1. 27% of respondents reached higher education, 29% a high vocational degree. They mainly acquired their degrees outside Germany. Compared to respondents in Cluster 1, they come often from urban areas, more often declared having a (very) good knowledge of German, also before they moved to Germany. In terms of social position, 24% had reached a service position but they are also numerous in unskilled manual and non-manual jobs. The mean household income is significantly higher than in Cluster 1 (1582 EUR) and 71% of respondents have an income at the middle-class level for Germany (see Niehues, 2017).

5.3. Cluster 3: The Adapted German Migrants (18%)

Dimension 2 (legal status and multiple migration) contributed positively and significantly to the formation of this cluster. Migrants in this cluster came mainly directly to Germany (91%) and 93% are Germans. Almost two-thirds came as resettlers. Predominantly they live in a relationship (84%, which is above average). Women and men are equally represented. The majority of their parents have a vocational education (62% of fathers and 46% of mothers) and they often come from rural areas (63%). (Very) good German proficiency is a characteristic of this cluster (85%); only 21% had no knowledge of German before migration. They have a slightly lower educational level than respondents in Cluster 2. One-third of them were educated in Germany or both in Germany and in the country of origin, which is also a characteristic of this cluster. 23% of them have reached a service position, and the proportion in skilled jobs is higher than for Cluster 2. Their income level and position are not significantly different from those of respondents in Cluster 2.

5.4. Cluster 4: The Young Highly Educated Urbans (19%)

Dimension 2 contributed negatively and significantly to the formation of this cluster, while dimension 1 contributed positively. This group is composed mainly of 'other foreigners' (62%) and EU citizens (30%), coming from urban areas. 28% of respondents have multiple migration experiences (16% for the entire sample) and respondents without German citizenship are overrepresented (75%). The gender ratio is nearly equal and the cluster consists of predominantly young people (half are aged 35 or younger). Their background is characterised by highly educated parents (78% have a father and 65% a

Table 3. Description of the clusters (column percentages).

	Foreign Working-Class	Foreign Middle-Class	Adapted German Migrants	Young Highly Educated Urbans
Type of migration				
Resettlers, Eastern Europe	1.31	1.50	64.24	3.45
EU citizens	21.22	48.47	2.56	29.80
Refugees, asylum seekers	26.35	1.54	4.18	5.08
Other foreigners	51.11	48.48	29.02	61.66
Migration experience				
Direct to Germany	80.49	71.84	91.33	62.96
One country before Germany	6.97	9.23	2.87	9.36
Multiple migration	12.54	18.93	5.80	27.68
German citizenship (Yes)	18.16	5.68	93.20	25.31
Highest educational level father				
No vocational/University	74.58	5.57	30.11	9.57
Vocational	16.62	88.02	62.47	12.89
University	8.80	6.41	7.42	77.54
Highest educational level mother				
No vocational/University	95.50	26.31	47.80	20.24
Vocational	3.91	71.19	46.32	15.15
University	0.59	2.50	5.88	64.61
Education				
General elementary	54.06	8.29	12.79	0.33
Middle vocational	30.19	35.96	38.15	11.12
Vocational + A-level	5.29	28.84	25.53	5.22
University	10.47	26.90	23.53	83.33
Place of education				
Germany	7.72	6.93	23.47	13.76
Abroad	92.28	89.87	65.56	65.89
Both	0.00	3.20	10.97	20.35
Region of origin				
Rural area small town	56.73	41.67	63.15	25.06
(Medium) city	43.27	58.33	36.85	74.94
Current German proficiency				
Very good	7.77	16.17	35.63	45.68
Good	41.20	45.65	49.54	34.03
Fair	37.96	31.23	13.72	13.22
Poor/not at all	13.07	6.95	1.11	7.07
German proficiency before moving				
High	6.46	9.90	23.94	25.86
Low	27.62	43.45	55.09	40.18
None	65.92	46.64	20.97	33.96
EGP				
Service positions	7.97	23.64	23.18	64.02
Routine non-manual workers	18.78	27.26	22.91	21.37
Skilled workers	22.96	15.79	24.12	8.46
Non-skilled workers	50.29	33.31	29.78	6.16
Mean monthly household income (EUR)	1304	1582	1561	2105
Percentage singles	32.27	39.21	16.19	33.95
Percentage women	37.43	46.43	54.12	44.11
Immigration year	2000	2005	1999	2006
Mean age	42	39	45	37

Source: SOEP (2019, survey year 2015), weighted results.

mother with a university degree). Migrants in this group are themselves also well educated (83% have a university degree). They declared they spoke (very) good German (80%), and more than average (which is 14%) spoke German before arriving in Germany (26%). The dominant type of employment in this cluster is occupation in service positions: 29% are in higher and 35% in lower managerial positions (see Figure 3). They have the highest household income level (2105 EUR) and 28% of them have more than 150% of the median household income so that they appear to be located in the upper (middle) class.

The presentation of the four clusters above highlights the heterogeneity of the migrants who have arrived since the mid-1990s in Germany in social and cultural terms. At the same time, respondents in each profile share characteristics that are significantly linked to social positions. Citizenship, social class origin and education are important criteria of social differentiation within this population. Multiple migration plays a role in all four clusters, though at different levels. The 'adapted German migrants' have the lowest and the 'Young Highly Educated Urbans' have the highest incidence of cross-border movements. Cluster 4 highlights the role played by multiple migration for higher social positioning when it is combined with high education levels. Nevertheless, multiple migration pays off for all respondents: a multivariate analysis we performed indicates that having lived in different countries before moving to Germany is significantly and positively correlated with being in skilled jobs, even after controlling for education and other relevant characteristics (see Table 2 in Supplementary File 2).

The four clusters are structured at the crossroads of different levels of (1) (trans)national cultural capital and (2) capital related to legal status and multiple migration. The qualitative interviews allow us to address these structuring dimensions for each profile in a more detailed manner, contributing with information on how migrants 'compose' their social position against the background of their cultural capital, structural opportunities, constraints, and related individual strategies.

6. Understanding Migrants' Social Position(ing) further

We were able to locate each participant in the qualitative study within the social and spatial mobility space designed with the MCA (see Figure 4) and to associate them with one of the four clusters: three respondents (FWC); seven respondents (FMC); five respondents (AGM); eleven respondents (YHEU). See also the Supplementary File 1 on the project methodology.

In the following we will focus on two aspects related to the structuring dimensions identified with the MCA: The first one deals with access to state support that some migrants benefit from due to their legal status on migration into Germany. The second one addresses how language skills contribute subjectively to social positioning and, at the same time, how they are used by

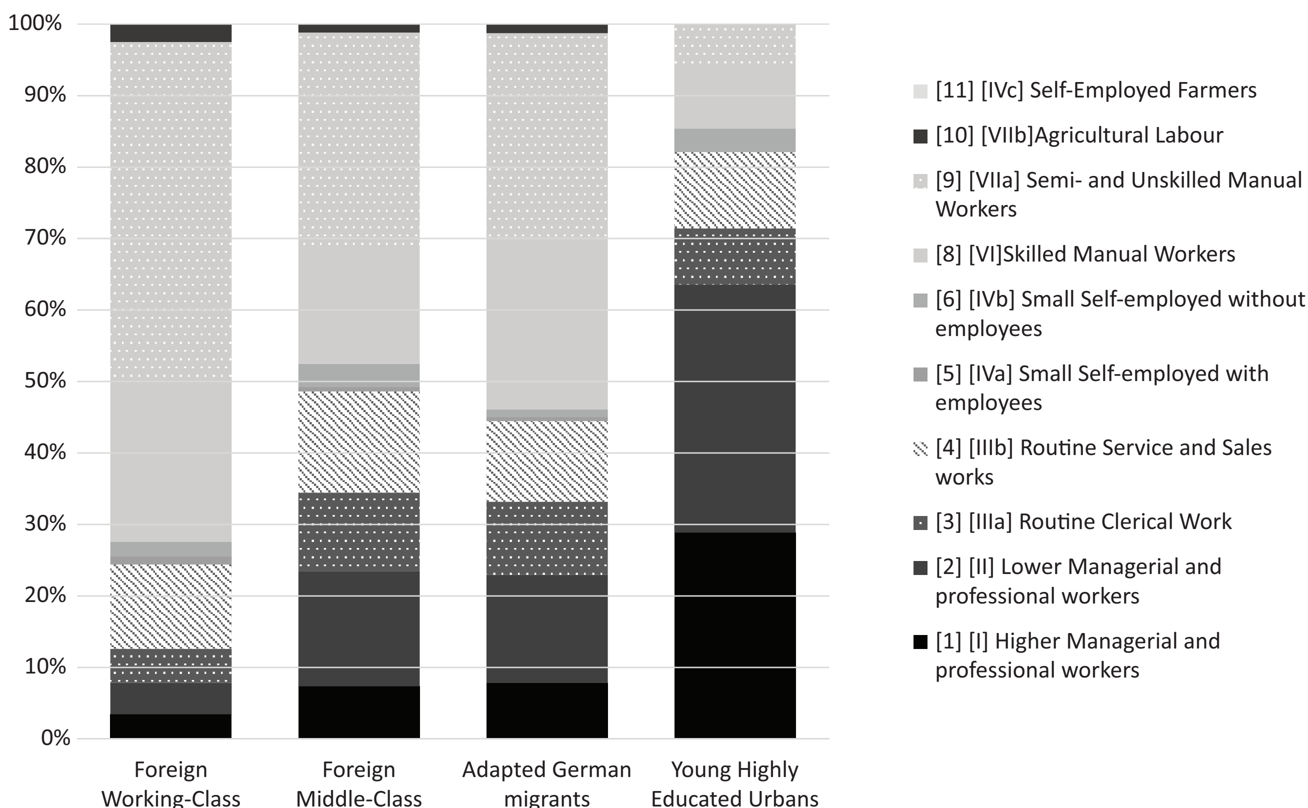

Figure 3. EGP by cluster. Source: SOEP (2019, survey year 2015), weighted results.

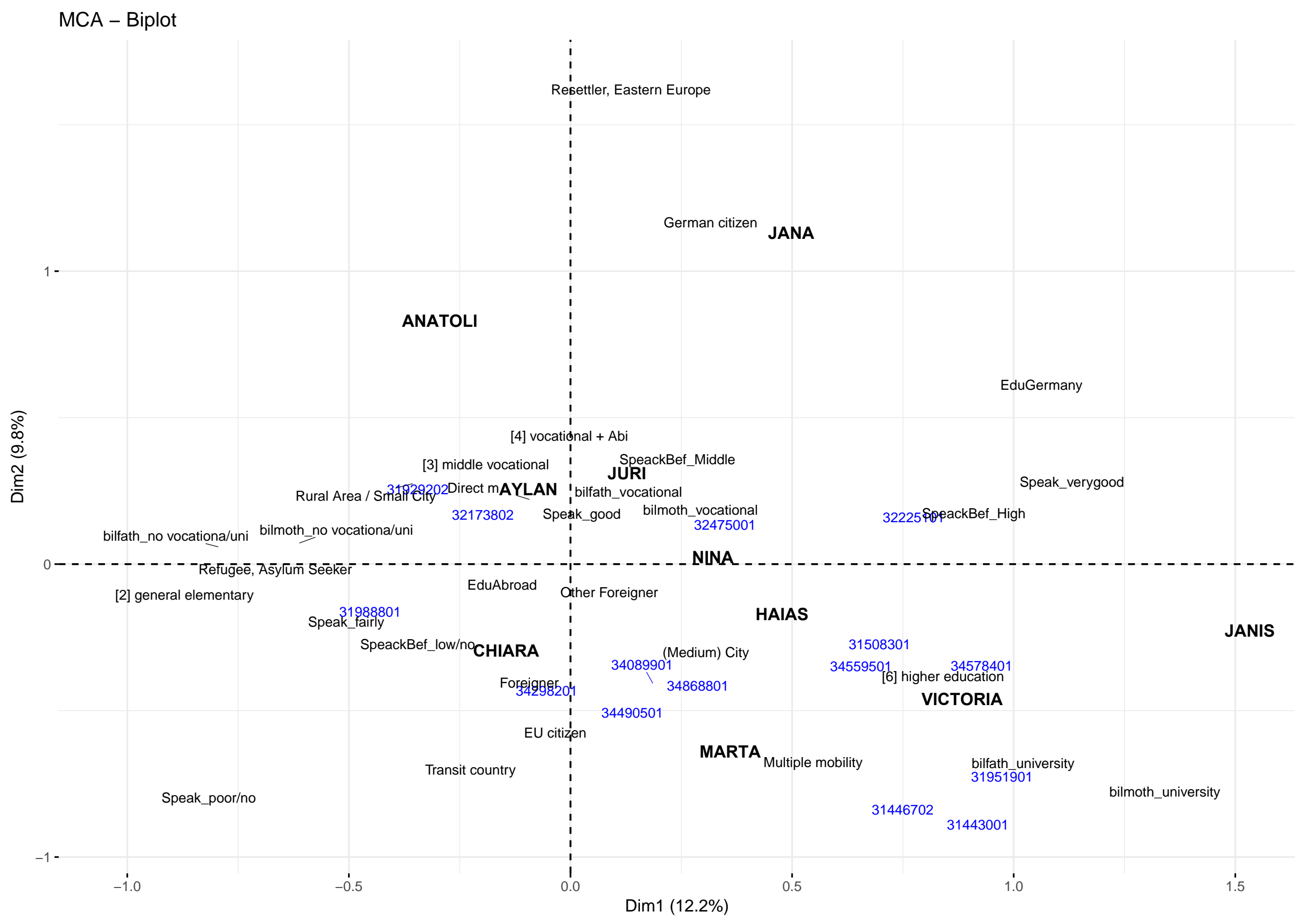

Figure 4. Positions of the 26 SOEP respondents. Source: SOEP (2019, survey year 2015).

migrants with multiple migration experiences and highly valued cultural capital to distance themselves from other migrants.

6.1. Opportunities, Constraints and Strategies Transferring and Accessing Cultural Capital

All respondents in the qualitative sample recognise that education is a valuable asset to secure a comfortable social position in Germany and that the ability to convert existing capitals into valuable resources in home and host countries is relevant. Between-clusters disparities as to the proportion of those working in the occupation they were trained for are significant: This concerns only a quarter of respondents in Cluster 1 (foreign working-class), almost the majority of those in Clusters 2 (foreign middle-class) and 3 (adapted German migrants), and two-thirds of migrants in Cluster 4 (young highly educated urbans, see Figure 5). Interviewees in Clusters 2 and 3 differ only slightly in terms of social position (EGP and household income), despite the higher education level and social background of migrants classified as 'foreign middle-class' compared to 'adapted German migrants.'

The qualitative material tells us also that Clusters 2 and 3 differ in the opportunities, constraints and means migrants had to reach their social position in the middle class in Germany. Due to their specific status, resettlers (who represent a large proportion of migrants in Cluster 3) got state support rapidly after their arrival, in the form of publicly funded training, language courses or adapted aid for the recognition of educational credentials (Groenendijk, 1997). This is the case for Juri and Anatoli (see Figure 4), who both came from Kazakhstan as resettlers. Juri was trained as a locksmith and received further specialised qualifications in Germany as a lathe operator and milling cutter. Anatoli for his part worked as a lorry driver in Russia but had a training as a painter in Germany. But state support does not guarantee an occupation in the field of training. Juri was never able to secure a stable job in his new training field and Anatoli never worked as a painter either but found stable employment in a fluids management company. In both cases, the job training did provide them with valuable German qualifications which were decisive when securing their future employment contracts, even if they did not match completely the work they were hired to do.

Those who came as resettlers at a relatively young age to Germany could successfully start university or vocational training after some years of schooling, as in the case of Jana who came at age 18 from Russia. She was encouraged by her teachers to pursue further studies when she arrived in Germany and this contributed to her

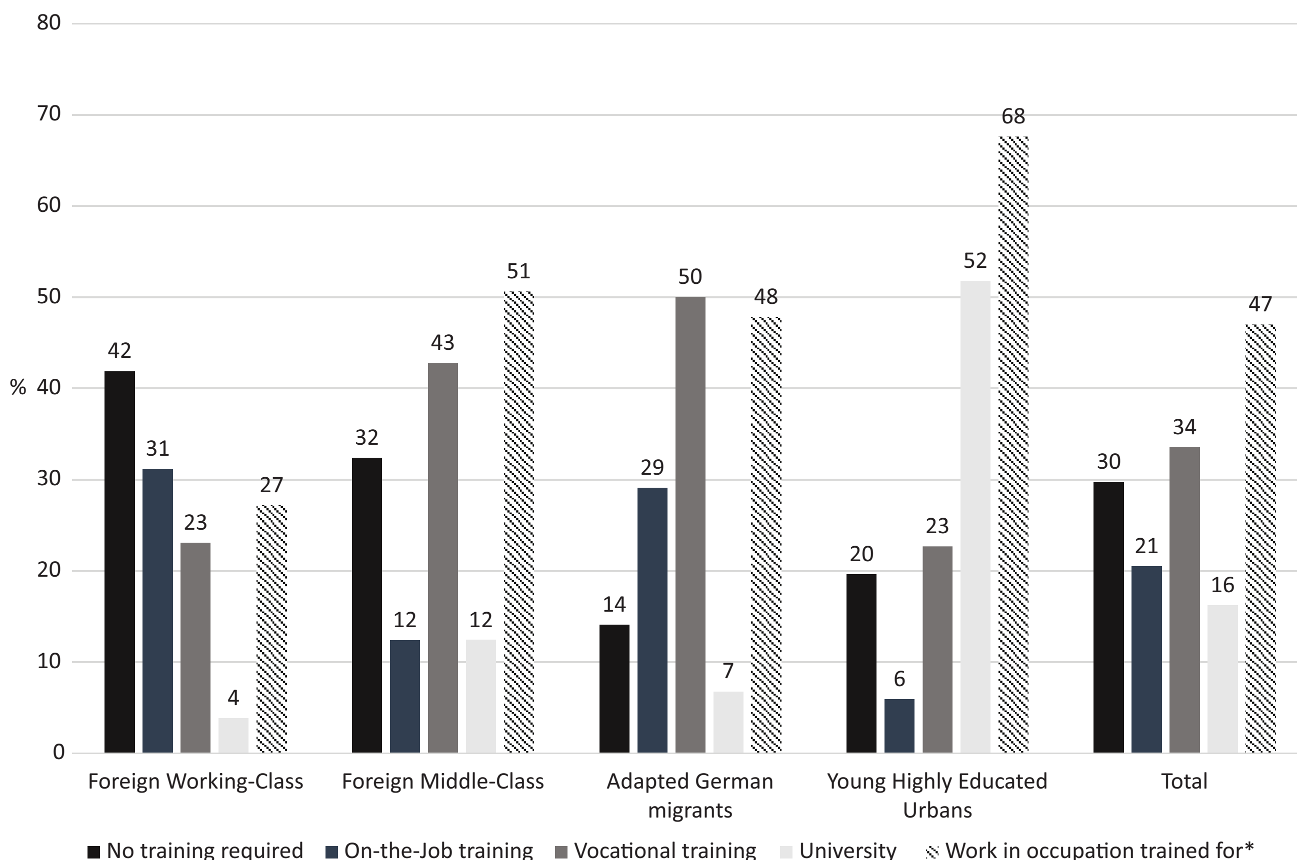

Figure 5. Training required and proportion of those with an occupation corresponding to training. Note: *only respondents with training. Source: SOEP (2019, survey year 2015), weighted results.

perseverance in learning German and excelling in school. She finally became a dental assistant although her excellent school grades could have enabled her to go to university and become a dentist. In her case, vocational training was described as having been a more secure career option than going to university and undertaking long and costly studies. She considered this a too risky alternative in light of the limited economic capital that she and her family possessed in the first years after migration. Family circumstances and preferences at some point in the life course also play a role in shaping social position after migration, in particular for women: In the interview, Jana explained that she considered several times taking up university in the years after her apprenticeship, but after having given birth to two children, she further postponed this wish, considering her family responsibilities incompatible with her wish for further qualifications. However, in contrast to other migrants in different clusters, Jana's narrative shows how she portrayed her professional and educational decisions as her own choice rather than the outcome of migration related, restricted opportunities.

In contrast to resettlers who were privileged in terms of obtaining work permits and residency status as well as state support upon their arrival in Germany right away, Aylan's story illustrates the type of obstacles some migrants face when they do not have these advantages. Aylan is of Turkish origin but he is a German citizen and belongs also to Cluster 3. He arrived in Germany aged 27, after completing military service and a tourism management degree at a Turkish university. He was not able to convert his degree into a corresponding degree or occupation in Germany and therefore asked the employment agency for financial support to undertake training as a specialist for warehouse logistics. In contrast to the resettlers, who appear to have received support often without greater problems, Aylan had to argue his case with determination in discussions with the employment agency official, who did not encourage his efforts in the slightest:

> So I said, "Then I need to get a new qualification." "Oh," she says, "You can't do that so easily." Yes, that lady there. Then I was angry, and I said, "Please give me the number of your manager, or where can I find it?" After an hour or so, she says, "Come and make your application, it's approved."

Aylan's story is somewhat similar to that of some respondents in Cluster 2 who generally did not receive a great deal of state support. Chiara, for example, wanted to convert her economics degree from an Italian university into a suitable asset for the German job market. She paid for German courses in a private language school to bring her German skills up to standard. She also secured an internship in a human resources department with the help of

contacts of her German husband in order to gain some German work experience. This enabled her to work for temping agencies before being able to get more stable job offers. She had in fact to wait for her first phase of unemployment to benefit from a training course in SAP management paid for by the employment agency which enabled her to later secure a job as a bookkeeper in an international firm.

It appears that determination and perseverance are an essential precondition to be successful in applications for state funded occupational support which is suitable for the specific career situation of the person in question. This is illustrated by Nina's example (Cluster 2). Nina was trained as office clerk in a South American country and could not get her diploma recognised in Germany. She began working in low skilled service jobs, among other things driving small school buses. When her contract expired, she had to negotiate the financing of her bus driver's licence at the employment agency. To do so, she decided to bring a declaration from her former employer stating that he would give her a new contract if she obtained the bus driver's licence:

> Then I said, "But then I want it in black and white that I can work here again." Then he signed that declaration for me, and I went to the job centre and said, "Sorry, I'm unemployed now, these are the conditions, if I get my bus driver's license, if you help me pay for it, then can I work again and I don't have to have Daddy State on my pocket."

Nina's strategy of coming with proof that getting a bus driver's licence would enable her to get rapidly back to work and not take money from the state, like Aylan's determined strategy of refusing discouragement in achieving his goal and the devaluation of his learned ability, contrasts with the more systematic support resettlers received on their arrival in Germany. Also being a German citizen, as in Aylan's case, gives some confidence in asking for state support, which can be more difficult for non-Germans who might consider themselves illegitimate.

In Cluster 1, the 'foreign working-class,' we find respondents, mainly foreign citizens, who mostly work in unqualified jobs (42% do not require any training in their job, Figure 5). As seen in the quantitative part, many of them only have elementary education and come from families with a low social background. They often migrated directly to Germany. Irina for example is from Croatia. She came to Germany at age 18, without any qualifications, fleeing the civil war in the 1990s and leaving her child with her family back in Croatia. She lost contact with her husband who had also fled. As her legal status was insecure for over eight years, she did not have any opportunity to ask for state support and worked mostly in bars, restaurants or bakeries to support her family back in Croatia. Her low wages and long working hours prevented her from taking German classes or vocational training. When she eventually married a German national and became legally resident, she considered that any further occupational training would be useless as her level of German as well as her general level of formal education was simply not good enough to successfully obtain any vocational qualifications at her age.

The first three clusters contrast with Cluster 4, which has a high proportion of migrants working in occupations requiring tertiary education (52%, Figure 5). Participants in the qualitative study belonging to this cluster were often trained in occupations which could often be undertaken by someone from anywhere in the world, e.g., software engineers, English teachers, translators, journalists, etc. In some cases, recognition of credentials and a licence are required to pursue a profession. This is the case of Janis, a man from Greece who came to Germany with very good knowledge of German and a psychotherapist's diploma: He engaged a lawyer to achieve this objective.

As we see here, different strategies are employed by migrants who do not benefit from a specific state support. Those strategies are strongly dependent on the resources migrants have before they move, on the necessity to start working rapidly or engaging in short vocational training to avoid a costly and long training, but also on the opportunities some of them have to use their knowledge of German and other languages as an asset to achieve objectives in terms of social position.

6.2. Language Skills, Social Positioning and Social Distancing

Similar to the 'adapted German migrants' (Cluster 3), a large proportion of the 'young highly educated urbans' (Cluster 4) declared they spoke very good German at the time of the SOEP interviews. Interestingly, the 'young highly educated urbans' tend to use language as a marker of distinction between themselves and other 'foreign migrants,' in particular newly arrived refugees or migrants whom some of them consider unwilling to adapt to their environment. Haias from Iraq is one of the few respondents who came as a refugee in Cluster 4. His father went to university and his mother has no qualification. After stopovers in Turkey and Greece, he arrived in Germany in 1995 and later obtained permanent status. Like many other interviewees in this cluster, he considers language central for social positioning and social mobility ("key to every success") and distances himself from newly arrived refugees:

> Some refugees think if they stay here, they can do everything without the language. But the thing is [laughs], it's a catastrophe if you think like that.

Language can also mark a boundary charged with the symbolic value of respect:

> The most important thing for me was to learn the language. I can't understand some people I know here,

> foreigners who've been here longer and can't even put two sentences together and expect other people to make allowances for them. I couldn't do that, I think it is disrespectful. (Victoria)

High proficiency in German and, in many cases for members of Cluster 4, knowledge of a third language due to their experience of multiple migration, increases the already high cultural capital they possess, giving them also a dose of positive symbolic capital, a marker of distinction over 'other migrants.'

In contrast, migrants from Clusters 1 and 2 often have to invest a lot personally and financially (and this despite their lower economic capital on average) in learning German to reach a better social position and regret the obstacles in this domain. For some interviewees, lower proficiency in German fully explains their position in lower status jobs. This is the case of Marta, a young woman who arrived directly from Poland and who works as a sales worker despite her high education level in a totally different field:

> Yes, I'm a sales worker, but it's due to the language, because I was trained as a social pedagogue.

Like Marta, many interviewees in Clusters 1 and 2 more frequently have to renounce occupations they were trained for because of their low German skills and the interviews indicate a strong investment in language learning which is often self-financed and 'improvised,' as Aylan's case illustrates:

> You have to learn the language. I really stepped on the gas at home, four or five hours at home, I wrote, read aloud and later I took a German course, I paid for it, more than 1,500 DM.

Generally, non-European migrants wishing to obtain residency status or citizenship have to participate in an integration course upon arrival, which is funded by the state and seen as a measure to provide migrants with knowledge of the language and the basics of the German administrative, political, and cultural context. Some respondents stressed that these kinds of measures are insufficient and that a lot more personal initiative is required in order to be successful in Germany.

The qualitative data highlight that resources such as determination, perseverance and investment can be crucial for some migrants to counter structural constraints in transferring or accessing cultural capital and that strategies for reaching a subjectively adequate social position differ according to those resources. Also, while linguistic skills are determining for reaching a better social position, language is also a marker for distancing oneself socially from other migrants. This last point also emphasises the importance of symbolic capital for understanding the nexus between migration and social position(ing) at destination.

7. Conclusion

This article provides an analysis of the nexus between migration and social positions in a social differentiation perspective using a mixed methods approach. It shows that two main dimensions contribute to the social differentiation of the migrant population that has settled in Germany since the mid-1990s and before the most recent migratory flow of asylum seekers in 2015. The first dimension, (trans)national cultural capital, emphasises the role played by social class, education and linguistic skills. This supports the idea that migrants' social status before migration needs to be considered to understand post-migration outcomes (Engzell & Ichou, 2020). Existing research gives evidence on the link between linguistic skills and social positions (Kogan, 2011; Schuss, 2018) and our findings add to this literature the role played by the linguistic capital migrants bring with them as they move. The second dimension, legal status and multiple migration, indicates a clear line of division between those who have German citizenship and those who are still in an administrative foreigner status as well as the role played by multiple cross-border movements for reaching high social positions.

The socio-economic profiles of migrants before migration and the cultural, social and economic contexts they live in shape their social positions at destination. Likewise, the type of migration also shapes social position in the destination country. The combination of those different forms of structural and individual heterogeneities leads to a social differentiation along four profiles of migrants characterised by distinct positions in the social hierarchy in terms of EGP and household income. The 'foreign working-class,' characterised by more insecure legal status, foreign citizenship, low social-class origin, low education and unqualified occupations form the largest migrant groups within the space of migrants' social positions in Germany. The 'foreign middle-class' and the 'adapted German migrants' seem to share social positions in the middle of the social hierarchy but, as the qualitative analysis indicates, the difference between them in terms of occupational level is related to the different opportunities they had in transferring or accessing cultural capital. Finally, even if we observe a clear distinction in terms of income and occupation between the 'young highly educated urbans' and the other three profiles, we cannot conclude that the 'young highly educated urbans' form a transnational upper class (Sklair, 2000). Like other studies (Agrawal, 2016; Szewczyk, 2016), our results show the potential benefits of multiple migration for social mobility and support the argument that multiple migration is a significant dimension for "middle-class distinction" (Scott, 2006, p. 1110). It pays off, independently of the educational level migrants have and of their social class. This finding contributes to the analysis of the role played by multiple migration among migrants located "in the middle" (Salamońska, 2017, p. 19), confirming the finding

that mobility-related capital is not a privilege of highly skilled migrants but rather an asset that other types of migrants also use in order to maintain or upgrade their social standing (Moret, 2017; Parrenas, 2020).

Furthermore, multiple migration combined with a privileged social background leads to the formation of a profile of migrants with specific ways of positioning themselves in relation to other migrants who not only have lower educational levels but also fewer resources that are easily convertible in transnational spaces. In this respect, the 'Young Highly Educated Urbans' clearly distinguish themselves from the other three types of migrants, which might be explained by the pre-migration habitus they possess through their parents' and their own education. Only a few works have considered this aspect as constitutive of the pre-migration habitus that mobile persons bring with them to a new social space (Reed-Danahay, 2017). However, our contribution indicates that some migrants maintain the value of their pre-migration cultural capital. Their higher social class origin and educational qualifications are positive signals in the country of destination which confer positive symbolic capital. This is so despite their lack of German citizenship and may be related to the particular resources that this group of migrants acquires through multiple cross-border movements, such as adaptability to new cultural norms or some other features of a certain 'cosmopolitan habitus.' However, this hypothesis would need further investigation. Our qualitative data showed that language proficiency too should not only be seen as cultural capital that furthers socio-economic integration, but also as a source of social differentiation within the migrant population because it functions as a strong symbolic boundary marker that expresses itself in the devaluing assessments that highly educated migrants (and many Germans) make about 'other foreigners' with low German proficiency.

Finally, there is a need for further research on the transnational reproduction of social inequality, accounting for the multiple cross-border movements some migrants experienced before settling in a country, gender differences in this respect as well as the subjective meaning attached to these movements. Secondly, a new research step would be to locate the four profiles of migrants within the larger German social structure in order to link those findings to the issue of social stratification in German society. Finally, we are aware that the qualitative results presented here constitute a small piece in the jigsaw puzzle of factors that makes up the dynamics of the nexus between migration and social positions. Other aspects such as social networks, racism and discrimination (Wrench et al., 2016) certainly shape these dynamics and need to be looked at more closely.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Bridging the Gap: Making Sense of the Disaccord between Migrants' Education and Occupation

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Abstract
Social mobility is a central topic of interest within sociology and whilst it has been theoretically linked to spatial mobility, there is still little empirical research on the interplay between the two. Using a subsample of highly educated family migrants from a German mixed-methods project, this study qualitatively analyses the impact of geographical mobility on objective social position and on its subjective perception. Six qualitative interviews are analysed and supplemented with descriptive quantitative data from the German Socio-Economic Panel to firstly, reconstruct the spatial mobility trajectories of the individuals and secondly, determine their social position in Germany and ascertain whether they experienced occupational downgrading. These two analyses are integrated to explore how respondents experienced their change in social position. Across the board, respondents migrated as young adults, before or shortly after labour market entry. Five of the participants experienced occupational downgrading. Strikingly, this objective downgrading, whilst acknowledged, was not perceived negatively. The participants constructed a narrative that employed three legitimation strategies to cast their current social position in a positive light: (1) emphasising the rights, stability and security that they experience in Germany, (2) drawing attention to the economic improvement that they experienced and (3) displaying an inner attitude that is marked by modest life aspirations and a high regard for leisure time. By drawing on multinational frames of reference and thus drawing comparisons between their home country and Germany, participants highlighted the experienced benefits.

Keywords
family migration; Germany; highly educated migrants; mobility; social mobility

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1. Introduction

Studies on social status and social mobility are a central topic in sociology. Different strategies may be used to change one's social position. One strategy can be to use spatial mobility in the form of cross-border migration to increase one's social position as it "holds the promise of upward social mobility" (Faist, 2019, p. 65). However, the idea of using spatial mobility to be socially mobile does not always translate into reality. Chiswick, Lee, and Miller (2005) found that migrants in Australia experienced a "U-shaped pattern of occupational mobility": A drop in occupational position after migration, followed by an increase again over time (Chiswick et al., 2005, p. 348). Whilst this U-shaped pattern of occupational mobility has also been found in the United States (Akresh, 2008), migrants in other countries, such as Spain (Fernández-Macías, Grande, del Rey Poveda, & Antón, 2015; Simón, Ramos, & Sanromá, 2014) and Italy (Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2019), have been found to expe-

rience downward social mobility without a subsequent increase in occupational position, which possibly reflects structural differences in labour markets.

The strength of this decline and potential subsequent increase in occupational position depends on several factors. For example, the path of entry into the country of destination, the level of skill and the transferability of skills—economic migrants and more skilled migrants (here skills also refer to language skills) experience a smaller decline in occupational position (Chiswick et al., 2005, p. 348). Education (Akresh, 2008; Fernández-Macías et al., 2015; Vidal-Coso & Miret-Gamundi, 2014) and language (Akresh, 2008; Esser, 2006; Henkelmann, 2012) have been found to play a mitigating role: People with higher levels of education and language skills are less likely to experience downward social mobility. However, some studies also find that spatial mobility leads to downward social mobility, despite someone's high level of education (Jungwirth, 2014; Liversage, 2009; Nohl, Ofner, & Thomsen, 2010; Vianello, 2014). This is due to, for example, qualifications not being recognised or valued (Nohl et al., 2010, pp. 74–75), resulting in downward social mobility. Thus, there is both evidence that especially highly educated individuals experience a decline in their social position and evidence that education protects against downward mobility.

Family migration, which is said to favour occupational downgrading (Chiswick et al., 2005, p. 348), is distinct from other forms of migration as the structural and personal conditions are likely to be different. For example, Liversage (2009, p. 136) finds that the women she interviewed struggled to combine their family oriented migration with their high-skilled careers:

> If such women [who migrate to be with their partner] subsequently face grave labour market difficulties, these difficulties spring from the intersection of the spheres of family and work—of trying to rebuild careers in a place to which they came only for family reasons.

Someone who comes to a country through family migration has a different access to the job market and different barriers than someone who comes with a job contract. Furthermore, the personal situation of migrating for family reasons suggests that one has obligations towards family members and cannot act in isolation but has to take into account partners and perhaps children when making decisions.

Thus, there are different factors that potentially influence one's social position after migration. It is often overlooked that one person can embody more than one of these characteristics. As Eleonore Kofman (2012, p. 65) argues: "Skilled migrants are studied through the prism of labour migration whilst the world of family migration is categorized as social, in which skills would seem irrelevant and of little interest." The combination of family migration and being highly educated provides an interesting, potentially conflicting combination: What happens when one person is both a family migrant and highly educated?

Moreover, when considering the social mobility of migrants, it is important to pay attention to the international framing of social position and relativization. Rather than comparing oneself to others in the receiving country, comparisons may be made based on one's own previous situation in the sending country (e.g., Favell & Recchi, 2011; Vianello, 2014). Therefore, although migration might result in an objectively lower social position in the receiving country, it might not be perceived as such due to the frame of reference being the sending country. Hence, taking a closer look at how these two different characteristics—being a family migrant and being highly educated—impact the objective social position and its perception deserves further attention.

This study examines the social positions of university-educated men and women who migrated to Germany for family reasons. Specifically, migrants' social positions are analysed from two perspectives: Their occupational class position as well as their subjective perceptions of their current social position. Focusing on these two perspectives offers a complementary view on spatial mobility and social mobility.

In order to do so I analyse qualitative interviews from the mixed-methods project "Transnational Mobility and Social Positions in the European Union." This analysis is supplemented by descriptive data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP). The class position of six highly educated family migrants in Germany is determined by using the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) scheme. The current EGP value is then contrasted against the participants' university level education and their own perception of their social position, which is garnered from the qualitative interview material.

The following section describes the data and methods used. After introducing the six participants, the general characteristics of their spatial mobility trajectories are described. Subsequently, their social position in terms of social class is determined. The section ends with an analysis of their perception of their social position and the legitimation strategies they engage in.

2. Methods

This study uses data from the "Transnational Mobility and Social Positions in the European Union" project. The project was conducted at Bielefeld University with Professor Thomas Faist as the principal investigator and funding from the German Research Foundation. It ran for three years (2016–2019), with data collection taking place in 2017. The project's objective was to analyse spatial mobility trajectories with respect to different heterogeneities and to consequently link these trajectories to objective and subjective social positions (Sienkiewicz, Tucci, Barglowski, & Faist, 2017). A key feature of the data is the record linkage between the

qualitative and quantitative data: SOEP respondents were sampled for the qualitative interviews. This linkage of longitudinal survey data with qualitative survey data is a unique feature which allows the use of both sources of information. The qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews that included narrative elements as well as participatory exercises (see Supplementary File). The quantitative data stems from the migration sample in the SOEP (v34) in Germany, which is a representative annual household survey (Kroh, Kühne, Goebel, & Preu, 2015; Wagner, Göbel, Krause, Pischner, & Sieber, 2008).

Six participants were selected from the thirty-seven available qualitative interviews based on two criteria: moving to Germany for family reasons and having a university degree. Importantly, migration for family reasons here refers to the subjective reason for migration as stated in the interviews, rather than being admitted to Germany for family reasons. The latter refers to the legal grounds for residence in Germany. The former sample selection criterion was used because the interest of this research is in the experience of migration and subsequent class position of those whose migration was motivated by family reasons.

Secondly, highly educated persons, defined as those who have a university education, were selected. The information on the level of education also stems from the qualitative interviews. Additionally, the spatial mobility had to have taken place as an adult to take into account the effect of educational credentials that have been obtained abroad as well as potential labour market experience obtained outside of Germany.

Eleven respondents fit these two criteria. Of these, six interviews were selected based on whether the interviewee discussed his or her occupational life and career in the interview. These six interviewees, while being homogeneous in their motivation for migration and their educational level, vary in their origins (from within or outside the European Union) as well as being able to migrate freely or being forced to flee from their home countries. This way, the interviews provide insights into the diversity and commonalities of the experiences of highly educated family migrants in Germany. Despite this heterogeneity in the participants' backgrounds, common patterns can be identified, indicating that a certain level of theoretical saturation has been reached. All six participants were in a heterosexual relationship when they migrated.

A secondary analysis of the six interview transcripts using open coding was conducted. The process of open coding as described by Strauss (1987, pp. 28–32) was taken as a guideline and adapted to reflect the nature of the present data. The qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (Version 18.2.0) was used to code the interview material. Descriptive coding was used to enable the reconstruction of the spatial mobility trajectories and to determine class position before migration. All data has been anonymised and pseudonyms are used. Both the level of education and the occupational position were available in the SOEP data.

The respondent's class is determined using the seven-class variation of the EGP scheme, which is a categorical class scheme that determines someone's class on the basis of their occupation (Erikson, Goldthorpe, & Portocarero, 1979). The seven classes are: the service class, routine non-manual workers, the petty bourgeoisie, farmers, skilled manual workers, non-skilled manual workers and agricultural labourers (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, pp. 38–39). Drawing on Weber, a distinction is made between positions in the labour market based on a "labour contract" and positions that are based on a "'service' relationship" (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, pp. 41–42). The former is a rather direct, short-term exchange of labour for wages whereas the latter is more long-term oriented, and labour is provided in exchange for wages as well as job stability, independence at work and other benefits (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, pp. 41–42). Service class positions include, for example, "professionals, administrators and managers" whilst routine non-manual workers are, for example, "sales personnel" or "other rank-and-file service workers" (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, pp. 38–39). Groups of occupations are delineated based on similar work environments and working conditions, as opposed to the income or prestige that a certain occupation is linked to (Erikson et al., 1979, p. 416). By focusing on objective working conditions that characterise the occupations in different classes, the classes distinguished by the EGP scheme affect individuals' long-term life chances. Furthermore, those with the same class position share common social and economic interests, contributing to class formation also in a subjective sense in a way that is not captured by hierarchical measures of socioeconomic status (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 31–32).

Although this article uses a qualitative approach it also includes some descriptive quantitative data, for example, to reconstruct the spatial mobility trajectories. The data stem from the questionnaire which the participants filled out in their first year of participation in the SOEP, in this case either 2013 (participants from migration sample 1) or 2015 (participants from migration sample 2). Their migration history data was retrospectively collected using the questions from the section "How You Came to Germany" in the SOEP data (TNS Infratest Sozialforschung, 2014, pp. 6–8, 2016, pp. 72–77). This section includes questions about the country of past moves and stays abroad of periods of three months or more and the month and year of these moves (see Supplementary File).

The information on the EGP position of each individual is included in the SOEP as a generated variable that indicates the last reached EGP value. This means that the SOEP has coded the information on occupational position provided by the respondents and correspondingly determined the EGP value by also drawing on information on income and education (on how the

EGP value is created see SOEP Group, 2018, pp. 22–23). The International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) value is also generated by the SOEP and made available in its dataset (SOEP Group, 2018, pp. 18–19). Both the ISEI and the EGP are generated on the basis of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO).

3. Description of the Participants

Mariam is a middle-aged woman from Iraq who migrated at the end of the 1990s in her early twenties, passing through Turkey and staying there for an extended period of time. Her husband, who is Iraqi, had fled to Germany several years earlier. She completed her degree in Iraq before moving to Germany. She has held various positions in Germany.

Zlata moved to Germany from the Ukraine after marrying her husband, who is German, in her late twenties. She has now lived in Germany for close to 20 years. She is employed in the field of early childhood education, which is also the field of her degree, yet she is employed at a markedly lower level.

Maja moved to Germany in her late twenties from Poland to be with her Polish boyfriend who lived and worked in Germany. She has lived in Germany for just over five years. Although she and her boyfriend have split up, she has decided to stay in Germany, where she works as a shop sales assistant.

Balian moved to Germany from Turkey in his mid-twenties to live with his Turkish wife who was living in Germany, over twenty years ago. He worked in different fields in Germany before gaining vocational training in a different field and is now a logistics manager.

Toma was born in Bulgaria and has experienced multiple moves between different countries. His first migration took place in his late twenties. In his mid-thirties he followed his Romanian wife, who had a job in Germany, to Germany, where he has lived for less than 5 years. He has held various jobs, all of which were not in the field of his university degree. Currently, he is a manual labourer.

Matei was born in Romania and has lived in several countries. He moved to another German speaking country in his mid-twenties, where he lived for several years. Less than five years ago, when he was in his mid-thirties, he moved to Germany to be with his Romanian girlfriend, who was employed in Germany. He has a degree in information technology and is employed in this area.

4. Description of Spatial Mobility Trajectories

Knowing the spatial mobility history of a person and reconstructing their previous movements is important for trying to understand their class position. For example, Jungwirth (2014, p. 220) points out that many of the women she interviewed migrated as young adults when their careers were still being established. Therefore, the spatial mobility trajectories of the six participants were reconstructed based on the descriptive information provided in the qualitative interviews and the available SOEP data. The spatial mobility trajectories can be described according to three characteristics: The duration, the timing and the space of the mobility. It is important to bear in mind that all the participants were sampled as family migrants, meaning that they moved to Germany to be with their partner, not because they had a job offer. This may negatively impact their occupational position despite being highly educated (e.g., Liversage, 2009).

Regarding the duration of the spatial mobility experience three aspects stand out. Firstly, for half of the participants, the move to Germany is the first and only cross-border move, thus signalling the long-term orientation of the move. Secondly, the move was nonetheless not seen as final and irreversible. Thirdly, in a number of cases pendular spatial mobility (meaning going back and forth between two countries) was engaged in prior to the actual cross-border move, thus there was a gradual increase in spatial mobility leading up the move.

Two aspects stand out regarding the timing of becoming mobile. Firstly, the initial migration from one's country of origin occurs in early adulthood. Strikingly, in all cases the first move occurred when the person was in their twenties, shortly before or just after labour market entry. This mirrors the findings of Jungwirth (2014) and Nohl et al. (2010). In the case of Toma and Matei there is some spatial mobility later on, yet it still occurs in their early to mid-thirties. Noticeably, all but one of the participants were childless at the time of their first spatial mobility. The age of migration is crucial for the migration decision in relation to their career, family planning and children, and the amount of sacrifice involved (i.e., what capital they have accumulated and would potentially need to give up when they become mobile; see, for example, Fernández-Kelley, 2008; Nowicka, 2013).

With regard to space, all the participants move from an economically weaker country to Germany, an economically strong country. It was also important whether someone migrated to an urban or a rural space. According to Matei and Toma, urban spaces offer more professional opportunities. In contrast, Maja and Mariam highlight increased freedoms in relation to their gender by describing the prevalence of traditional gender norms (getting married and having children) in smaller towns and rural areas, compared to urban cities.

5. The Contradiction between Education and Occupational Position

There is a visible gap between the formal level of education and the occupation held. Considering the tertiary education that all participants have completed, it is striking that the majority of participants neither work in their field of education, nor hold an occupational position that could be expected for someone with their level of education. Only one of the participants (Matei) works in

the field in which he trained and holds what could be described as an occupational position that reflects his level of education. The other participants either work in an entirely unrelated field (Mariam, Toma, Maja, Balian) or in the same field of work but at a markedly lower level (Zlata).

To understand class position in comparison to education, the position of German born people with a university education can be used as a reference. In 2017, 74.6% of native-born Germans with a university education and no migration history were employed in a service class occupation (as mentioned above, these are, for example, "professionals, administrators and managers" (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 39). 13.6% were employed in routine non-manual work, for example, "sales personnel" and "other rank-and-file service workers" (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 39) and only 3.5% in skilled manual work, for example, "lower-grade technicians" and "supervisors of manual workers" (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992, p. 38; own calculations using SOEP, 2019, survey year 2017). Thus, a service class level occupation can be seen as typical for someone with a university education. However, of the six participants, only Matei is employed in a service class occupation. Mariam, Zlata, Maja and Balian are employed in routine non-manual work occupations and Toma is a skilled manual worker (this classification is based on SOEP, 2019, survey year 2017). This mismatch between the respondents' education and occupational position holds when a different measure, the ISEI (which is a measure of social-economic status; see Ganzeboom, de Graaf, & Treiman, 1992), is used. ISEI values range between 16 and 90 and a low value represents a lower social position and a high value a higher social position. Whilst native born Germans with a university education had a mean ISEI value of 59 in 2017, the ISEI value of the participants ranged between 25 (Mariam) and 52 (Matei; own calculation using SOEP, 2019, survey year 2017). Thus, both the ISEI and the EGP values of the participants are below what might be expected. Maja is a trained social worker and works as a shop sales assistant (EGP = routine non-manual work; ISEI = 43); Zlata is an early childhood educator, which is on the same level as a teacher in her home country, and works in the field of child care (EGP = routine non-manual work; ISEI = 43); Mariam has a degree in German and has worked in the field of care work (EGP = routine non-manual work; ISEI = 25); Balian has a degree within the field of tourism and works as a logistics manager (EGP = routine non-manual work; ISEI = 32); Toma has a degree in finance and works as a manual labourer (EGP = skilled manual worker; ISEI = 33). Only Matei works in IT, the field in which he has a university degree (EGP = service class; ISEI = 52). These positions are lower than what would be expected, thus they (with the exception of Matei) experience an objective occupational downgrading.

This quantitative finding of occupational downgrading is mirrored in the qualitative interview material. All three women and also Toma describe the experience of occupational downgrading. All four describe the experience of not working in a position that corresponds to their level of education or equal to the position that they once held in their country of origin (if they were employed before moving to Germany). Thus, it is not just an objective, external analysis that occupational downgrading occurred; the interviewees are conscious of the fact that their class position has changed, as the following quote from Zlata demonstrates:

> Also, for me that [was] difficult, back then I had to accept it, I had to slide down, change my social level, I was higher, but different also cannot be.

Balian is the only person who does not describe this experience of occupational downgrading despite objectively undergoing it. He nonetheless engages in and uses the same legitimation strategies employed by those participants who do (initially) observe a downgrading.

To understand the subjective perception of the objective downgrading it needs to be located in a transnational context by considering the class position and social background of the individual in their country of origin before migrating, not just their achieved level of education. Only Zlata, Maja and Matei were employed in their field before migrating. In contrast, Balian and Mariam migrated immediately after having finished their studies, so they did not enter the workforce in their home country. Toma left his field of work whilst still in his country of origin. Maja and Zlata emphasise their downgrading the most and they are also the ones who experience the sharpest contrast because they were the only ones who had worked in their field in their home country. Balian does not subjectively experience occupational downgrading because he did not work in his field in Turkey. He therefore does not experience it as a 'loss' to not work in his field in Germany.

Two factors can be identified as contributing towards the experience of occupational downgrading: Firstly, language proficiency and secondly, the labour market environment in Germany, especially the (lack of) recognition of qualifications. In addition, adaptation difficulties that are not directly related to one's occupation are encountered and may potentially hamper achieving one's expected occupational position, at least initially.

This occupational downgrading is in line with previous studies that indicate that particularly highly educated migrants are liable to experience occupational downgrading, due to, for example, qualifications not being recognised (e.g., Jungwirth, 2014, p. 217; Nohl et al., 2010, pp. 74–75). It is only Matei who is protected from occupational downgrading, but this is due his "highly transferable skills," rather than his education per se (Chiswick et al., 2005, p. 348). The prohibitive factor of language proficiency is also not surprising and mirrors the findings in the literature (e.g., Akresh, 2008; Esser, 2006).

6. Legitimation Strategies to Compensate for Occupational Downgrading

In light of the downgrading that objectively takes place, it is interesting to see how the participants perceive this downgrading, what meaning they attach to it and how they frame it. Strikingly, they are aware of their objective downgrading but do not appear to mind. They tell a story that focuses on the advantages that they have through having been mobile. Although they do mention the downsides, including the sacrifices they have made and difficulties they have faced, they nonetheless see themselves as being better off for having been mobile. This is especially vivid in the case of Zlata:

> Well that is not so high level. Let me put it this way….My thirty years I have in other country spent, and I can't expect that I have here the same position as in other country. Of course luck may play a role, but, yes, I am content.

Though she knows that she has a "not so high level," she is content. Similarly, some of the participants (Maja, Balian) emphasised that they could or would move back to their home country if they did not like it in Germany. Yet they remained in Germany, signalling a beneficial position in Germany. Despite the disaccord between their education and their occupational position in Germany—and their awareness of this—they decided to stay in Germany: "I—actually I like here, right. If I'm so bad, then I go back to Poland, right.'' (Maja) This constructs a narrative of agency and self-determination: Maja *chooses* to stay rather than having no choice. The fact that they stayed in Germany while potentially having the possibility to migrate back to their home country underscores that Germany provided them with something that they could not achieve in their home country that is more important to them personally than their class position. Moreover, it must be considered that their framing of their position is based on their family life: If they were to migrate again it would affect not just them, but also their partner and their children. Three different legitimation strategies are employed to bridge the gap between the objective occupational downgrading and the subjectively perceived improvement of their position.

6.1. Rights, Security and Stability

One legitimation strategy is centred around the benefits that are experienced in Germany, in particular the rights and newfound security and stability that several participants enjoy in Germany. By comparing their current situation in Germany to their previous situation in their home country, they emphasise the great benefit of having certain employment rights:

> [In my home country] When you say, hey, insurance, then he [employer] says 'Here you go, there are hundreds waiting outside the door, either or.' So that, for example, I became aware of, [here in Germany] I can speak out, if it is wrongful, if it does not suit me, so I somehow have more rights, for example annual leave, that wasn't the case, right. Oh, suddenly I have annual leave, I can go away. Or when I am ill, nothing happens to me, no one will throw me out. (Balian)

Similarly, Toma describes being "allowed" to be ill, which clearly demonstrates the great freedom and security provided by having more employment rights in Germany. This makes it worthwhile to stay in Germany. Mariam explicitly states that she would very likely have a higher class position in her home country and consciously engages in a trade-off to be able to enjoy the right of free speech in Germany. Zlata uses the example of pensioners in Germany to highlight the experience of having increased rights in Germany. She explains that pensioners are well off because they can rely on receiving support if they are ill. Thus, there is a trade-off between working in one's occupation and securing rights that cannot be obtained in one's home country.

Additionally, the interviewees believe that Germany provides a meritocratic system in which individual effort and hard work is rewarded, something which both Matei and Toma emphasise. The idea is that one knows that if one works towards something and achieves a certain level, then one can be confident that one will be able to have a certain position. In contrast, in their home countries of Romania and Bulgaria respectively, the position one has is determined by political party membership (Matei), social contacts (Matei, Toma) and corruption (Toma). Thus, Zlata, Mariam, Toma, Balian and Matei all address the possibility of having more rights, stability and security in Germany.

Similarly, Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi (2019, p. 2545) show that migrants are satisfied with their jobs "if basic decent working conditions are guaranteed." Although their analysis is not limited to highly educated migrants, it is nonetheless in line with the experience of employment rights enabling the participants to perceive their subjective position positively.

Nation states provide an important structuring element of people's lives by providing certain "public goods" that benefit everyone favourably (Weiss, 2006). Germany as a nation state provides the participants with a stable political system and a welfare state system that imbues its members with certain rights. This has a positive effect on the participants, independent from their own occupational (and financial) position.

6.2. Economic Improvement

A second legitimation strategy relies on the emphasis of the improvement in one's economic situation. Toma, Balian, Matei, Maja and Zlata all construct a narrative which points out their economic improvement. There are two sides to this: Germany provides higher wages than

the home country or living costs are lower in Germany, thus the purchasing power is higher, and a different living standard can be achieved with the same income. This allows someone to work in a different occupation yet still have a higher standard of living. Working in one's occupation is 'sacrificed' because Germany provides a context in which the money earnt in a lower position is still more than sufficient. Toma emphasises: "I am more satisfied due to [the fact that] I have more money, and I can, how to say, simply live a normal life." Germany also offers better job prospects according to Toma, Zlata and Balian.

When considering the economic situation of the participants it is important to take their partner's economic situation into account and thus to consider the household level. For example, Zlata herself does not earn a lot of money in her part-time job but this is offset by her husband who is the breadwinner. The information provided in the interviews and the answers in the SOEP regarding income show that the participants do have a certain economic security. Maja, who is the only person who is single, also has the lowest household income, yet she still says that she has enough money to save a little bit every month. Therefore, the participants' narrative of being economically better off in Germany is supported by the information on their financial situation.

The economic improvement experienced is due to the local differences in the value of resources that become apparent in the comparisons that migrants draw between the country they are living in and their home country. They compare the value of goods in both of these contexts. This is what Weiss (2002, p. 3) calls the "spatial relation" (translation by author) of the value of resources. The value of a resource varies depending on the context in which it is appraised, the quantity of the resource and the role that it plays in the given environment (Weiss, 2002, pp. 4–5). In short, the same good is valued differently in one country compared to another. By drawing comparisons to their home country, the participants demonstrate how the same resource, in this case money, has a different value in different spaces, in this case different nation states. Maja exemplifies this using the example of her income in relation to the cost of living: "But normally—now I am alone and I can pay for everything by myself. And in Poland that is impossible. Then everything that I can earn I must spend on my flat. Everything." Balian and Matei also compare the costs of consumption goods in Germany and their home countries. Not only do the participants have more money, but what they can purchase with it is also different.

The partner's position is a unique characteristic of family migration that needs to be taken into account to understand the positive narrative of the participants' subjective position. The participants moved to Germany to be with their partner, who was already established in Germany, and in most cases had a secure job. This played an important role in deciding which partner was to migrate for Toma, Matei and Zlata. For example, Matei describes how once the decision that either he or his wife would migrate was made, they actively discussed their respective employment options in their partner's country before deciding that Matei would move to Germany because of his favourable employment prospects there. Thus, employment opportunities, which are linked to one's economic future, are taken into consideration.

Cederberg (2014, p. 144) also finds that migrants who have experienced occupational downgrading do not necessarily perceive this negatively and argues that the positive perception of their position can in part be due to having a partner from the destination country. As described above, the fact that there is a second person who is already living in the country of destination (regardless of whether they have that nationality or not) is a central characteristic of family migration. This is made explicit in the economic considerations of the participants and also the negotiations of which partner is to migrate to which country. This is a unique characteristic of family migration: There is another person in the household who can contribute towards the household income and who the migrating person can fall back on in case of difficulties. Maja recalls that her boyfriend at the time "helped me a little bit" when she came to Germany. Even though they are no longer together, this likely helped her gain her footing in Germany. The presence of a partner in a stable employment (and thus economic) situation makes the positive subjective position both possible and plausible. Without the support of a partner the spatial move and its consequences may have been very different.

6.3. Modest but Hard-working Family Oriented Inner Attitude

A third legitimation strategy expresses an inner attitude that is based on modest life aspirations and that highly values leisure time and time spent with family—parallel to a strong work ethic. The participants emphasise that they are currently content. Whilst found important, hard work is decoupled form the content of the work: Wanting to work is highly regarded in and of itself. Thus, there is a re-orientation away from defining oneself through one's professional life towards focusing on other aspects.

Rather modest life aspirations are put forward. Toma, Balian, Zlata, Maja and Mariam all make it clear that they do not require a lot to be happy. As Zlata states:

> So when internally [I] am happy already with something small, then it is already good. So I am not jealous when other people have a little more or so, I really don't care. What I have—so what at all in my eyes what have people, that doesn't need to be a lot. We have food, we can go to the doctors und we also have a house, we are not outside, also in general I think in country there is no war or so, what more do we want.

The other participants have similarly modest desires. They are happy being able to afford small items, such as a pair of trousers or a jacket (Balian), make-up and clothes

and going for meals with friends (Maja). One important dimension of leisure time is the possibility to go on holiday (Maja, Balian, Toma).

A further dimension of leisure that is important is family time. Maja combines her desire to go on holiday with visiting her family and describes it as a "luxury" to be able to spend time with them. Toma explains that only in Germany has he had the possibility to have a family life. Mariam even goes so far as to say that she is happy to forfeit her own income and incur financial restrictions in order to be able to be there for her family. Family life and time spent with their children is accorded a high priority. This opportunity is afforded to them in Germany because they have the financial basis to do so. The importance of family is already reflected in their migration for family reasons.

In addition, as outlined before, respondents emphasise hard work. Toma and Mariam draw attention to the fact that despite not working in their trained occupation, they nonetheless work hard and this reflects positively on their evaluation of their social status. This is especially visible in the critique of people who do not want to work and are not willing to educate themselves further (Balian, Zlata) and describing phases of unemployment as "the worst" (Toma) and "a catastrophe" (Maja). Further evidence for this high recognition of hard work is revealed in the participatory exercise in which different photos depicting different occupations have to be ranked. When determining the class position of the person and the respective occupation shown in different pictures, Mariam, Maja and Matei consider whether the job involves hard work or not in order to determine their position. Mariam explains this as follows: "They are all at the top for me [laughs]. All do good work. I cannot think anything else, the harder his work is, the more value it has for me. (unclear)….They need to fight to get this position. They need to really fight."

This legitimation strategy can be seen as what Eijberts and Roggeband (2016, p. 135) term a compensating strategy: The participants try and compensate for their lower social class by placing the focus on working hard and stressing their good family life and thus elevating their perception of their position. This is a strategy that other migrants have also been shown to engage in. Both Moroşanu and Fox (2013, p. 448) and Vianello and Toffanin (2020, p. 11) find that when faced with stigmatisation or difficulties in the labour market Romanian migrants focus on the individual level and their hard work. This is also a strategy employed by family migrants interviewed by Cederberg (2014, p. 142) in Sweden. Cederberg (2014, p. 144) warns that there are "social pressures, including precisely the concern to present the self as a 'good migrant,"' which may play a role here.

7. Conclusion

This article set out to investigate the class position of university educated migrants who have engaged in spatial mobility to be with their partners and also includes their subjective perception of their position. Five out of the six participants were found to have experienced an objective occupational downgrading and most are aware of this. Surprisingly, however, this objective downgrading is not perceived negatively and instead a narrative is constructed in which one's life in Germany is cast in a positive light. Three different legitimation strategies are employed. These strategies are a manifestation of the social-spatial nexus: Whilst the experience of occupational downgrading is due to the spatial move it also provides the participants with different frames of reference which provide the opportunity to construct legitimisation strategies that negate the occupational downgrading. Comparisons are drawn between Germany and their home country, which allows them to see their new position positively, despite its objective decline.

Consequently, using occupational measures to measure class position may not adequately capture class position. It is unclear whether the shift away from defining one's class position through occupation and instead turning towards the private sphere occurs because the desired status cannot be reached in the occupational sphere and is thus sought elsewhere. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that migrating for family reasons already signals an orientation away from occupation and thus forms a specificity of family migrants. Future research is necessary to pinpoint the mechanism at work—whether the shift away from defining one's position through one's occupation is because of the occupational downgrading experienced or due to a general family orientation.

Additionally, the present study highlights the importance of considering not just the individual level but also the household level by taking into account the position of the partner in cases of family migration. A possible reason for family migrants to perceive their social position positively despite their downward occupational mobility is due to the presence of a partner who is already employed in the country of destination and provides a stable economic base. Without considering the family aspect of highly educated migration an important facet of spatial mobility is obscured. Thus, mobility research needs to be sensitive to the ways that migrants are categorised and be aware of the simultaneity of different categorisations and the impact that this may have.

Multiple other areas for future research can be discerned. Firstly, the spatial mobility within the country of destination after migration deserves further attention. This includes paying attention to the type of region which one migrates to—whether it is rural or urban. Several of the participants indicated that there is a difference between the two, which warrants further investigation. Secondly, this article has only investigated the impact of spatial mobility on social mobility, but the opposite also deserves attention: How does class position impact spatial mobility? Who migrates and who remains immobile?

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Upward, Lateral, or Downward? Multiple Perspectives on Migrants' Educational Mobilities

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Abstract
Education is a major component of individuals' social status in terms of self-positioning and economic opportunities. Migrants' qualifications from abroad are often devalued by employers or state institutions. One option to react to such a lack of recognition is the gaining of institutionalized cultural capital in the receiving society. Comparing levels of education attained before and after migration, migrants may move in an upward, lateral, or downward direction. Our study investigates the vertical dimension of transnational educational mobility from multiple perspectives. First, our quantitative analysis of the NEPS (the German National Educational Panel Study) relates the levels of pre- and post-migration education. We critically reflect on how respective results on educational mobility depend on how respondents sort their foreign education into the German system of educational categories and hierarchies used in the survey questionnaire. Second, our qualitative analysis sheds light on several dimensions of migrants' subjective views and how their educational biographies interact with institutional settings in the receiving society. Exemplarily presented in-depth interviews focus on migrants who pursued educational programs in order to be able to return to the occupations (nursing and economics) they had been trained for abroad, but for which they were denied recognition in Germany. Our findings emphasize that post-migration education is highly ambivalent in terms of in- and exclusion. Individual migrants are caught in the structural tension between academic education as a rather globalized institution and nationally specific educational programs and hierarchies which are often incompatible across borders.

Keywords
educational mobility; educational participation; mixed methods; migration; non-recognition; post-migration education; vocational training

Issue
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1. Introduction

How is migration across national borders linked to social positions with regard to both the migrant's 'objective' social status and to their 'subjective' status, that is, according to their own perceptions and evaluations? This broad question aims at one of the core objectives of this special issue. Our article seeks to contribute to answering it by focusing on education. Social stratification theory views education as an intrinsic part of adults' social status and a strong influence on occupational status and potential income within the labour market (e.g., Di Stasio, Bol, & van de Werfhorst, 2016). Usually, full-time education biographically precedes entry into the working life. Some migrants, however, take the detour of going back to school with the intention of reaching their occupational goals thereafter. With Germany as the receiving country in our case study, this article's general research question looks into this phenomenon of post-migration educational participation: When individuals who migrate

as adults, and hence beyond the age of compulsory education, decide to attend an educational program in the immigration country, how do their pre- and post-migration education relate to one another? How does transnational educational positioning function?

Post-migration education as such—participation in, e.g., tertiary education, full-scale vocational qualification programs, or non-formal occupational training courses—is experienced by a substantial minority of about one in four adult migrants in Germany (Liebau & Romiti, 2014, p. 14; Söhn, 2016, p. 206). Among educationally active migrants, as we call them, 29% gained a university degree, 51% finished an apprenticeship and 17% a vocational school program (Liebau & Salikutluk, 2016, p. 737; on recent refugees in Germany see Bonin et al., 2020, pp. 88, 101, 120).

One major reason for adult migrants investing in education within the receiving country is the devaluation of their credentials gained abroad and the economic and occupational downward mobility encountered or feared due to this non-recognition (e.g., Adamuti-Trache, 2011). This is the group this article particularly focusses on. Other migrants use new educational opportunities they did not have in their home country due to war, discrimination, or under-developed educational institutions. Yet others simply continue their educational career in the new country as planned (Szewczyk, 2014). Post-migration education hinges on prerequisites: Advanced knowledge of the official language is usually a basic condition for attending mainstream educational programs. In addition, previous research has shown that factors increasing the likelihood of post-migration education include: pre-migration academic or upper-secondary school education, having been educationally active shortly before migration, being young, being a recent arrival, having favourable legal status, not having children, aiming to work in the health sector, and having a higher household income (Adamuti-Trache, 2011, p. 75; Söhn, 2016, p. 207; van Tubergen & van de Werfhorst, 2007, p. 890).

Adult immigrants who participate in education not only in their country of origin but also in the receiving country (and possibly others too) display, as we define them, transnational educational biographies (using 'transnational' for migrants' point of view and 'international' for that of nation states like Faist, 2016, p. 235). The mobility of such migrants from one national educational system into another, both of which display a stratified structure, necessarily has a vertical dimension. Speaking in the very abstract, this move between two hierarchies has to be either upward—as in the idea of an actual educational 'career'—lateral, or downward, i.e., there are three basic subcategories of vertical mobility. We refrain from starting with a fixed assumption when transnational educational mobility 'objectively' shows an upward, lateral, or downward direction. Instead, we will theoretically and methodologically reflect on which and whose perspectives evaluate and construct positions in educational hierarchies—especially that between tertiary education and non-academic vocational training—and their relation in partly contradictory manners. These multiple frames of reference regarding sending and host societies (Faist, 2016, p. 325; Rye, 2019) as well as globalized institutions (Schofer & Meyer, 2005) are differently embedded in the quantitative and qualitative data we present here. Given this conceptual thrust of self-reflection in our article, the empirical analyses serve as an exemplary opportunity to demonstrate this multiplicity of perspectives rather than to comprehensively study the phenomenon of transnational educational mobility in its entire historical and institutional complexity.

As a unique quantitative-empirical contribution, we use retrospective life course data from the NEPS (the German National Educational Panel Study) to relate the levels of pre- and post-migration education. What assumptions do we as researchers apply when we reconstruct the vertical dimension of migrants' transnational educational mobility this way? The qualitative part of our empirical analysis zooms in on specific groups of migrants who—by the definition applied in our statistical analysis—fall into the subcategory of lateral educational mobility. We will analyse in-depth interviews with migrants who participated in (1) a course for nurses, a licensed occupation requiring non-academic training in Germany, or (2) a further training course for migrants with a tertiary qualification in the non-regulated field of economics. How did migrants themselves perceive the vertical nature of their transnational educational mobility? How does the way their foreign qualifications became devalued relate to the program they attended, to their educational biographies, and their occupational ones?

After this introduction, Section 2 theoretically elaborates on the nexus of migrants' educational trajectories with educational and labour-market institutions in the country of migration, the frequent mismatch between different, hierarchically stratified national educational systems, and the institutional specifics in the case of Germany. Section 3 juxtaposes the different migrant cohorts of our quantitative and qualitative samples. We critically discuss the difficulties of constructing a mixed-methods model in which a qualitative sample of migrants was actually nested into a qualitative one. Section 4 describes the quantitative database, the operationalization of levels of pre- and post-migration education and their relation and presents the respective descriptive findings. Section 5 switches to qualitative results and the interviewees' perspective on their transnational educational biographies.

2. Theoretical Reflections, Previous Findings and Institutional Structures of the German Case

2.1. Non-Recognition of Migrants' Qualification from Abroad as a Driver for Post-Migration Education

Educational certificates are often a precondition for accessing specific occupations and corresponding

positions within the income hierarchies of firms and in the labour market more generally. The meritocratic ideal in modern societies in fact legitimizes the correlation between a higher level of education and higher socioeconomic status (Themelis, 2008, pp. 429–431). Empirically, the strength of the link between education and occupation attained is not absolute but depends on the occupational field and varies substantially within and across countries. In international comparison, Germany features a relatively tight education-occupation linkage (DiPrete, Eller, Bol, & van de Werfhorst, 2017).

For many migrants, this linkage is fragile, if not broken. Being over-educated (Aleksynska & Tritah, 2013; Davia, McGuinness, & O'Connell, 2017) as well as becoming and remaining unemployed (Reyneri & Fullin, 2011) is much more widespread among migrants than natives. While migrants without formal qualifications bear the double burden of migration- and education-related disadvantages, many qualified migrants are faced with a lack of or insufficient worth being given to their foreign educational certificates and work experience. In Bourdieu's terms, native employers, state institutions, and/or professional self-organizations may not recognize the value of the institutionalized and embodied cultural capital accumulated in migrants' countries of origin (Nohl, Schittenhelm, Schmidtke, & Weiß, 2014, pp. 42–47). This devaluation takes place in an asymmetric power relation with native actors in a superior position to the individual migrant. Such processes are inherently embedded in a world of nation states with nationally constituted education systems, global hierarchies between rich and poor countries, as well as control of migration through national citizenship and migration policy (e.g., Schittenhelm, 2018).

In reaction to such experienced or feared downgrading, migrants may attain new cultural capital in the country of migration, hoping to 'mend' the linkage between education and positions attainable in the labour market (Adamuti-Trache, 2011, pp. 75–76; Nohl et al., 2014, pp. 25–26, 33; Söhn, 2016, pp. 198–199). Certificates handed out by native institutions should be more readily appreciated by sending productivity signals (Spence, 1973) which employers decipher more easily or more willingly than foreign credentials alone. Indeed, post-migration education substantially increases prospects within the labour market (Kanas & van Tubergen, 2009).

The risk of non-recognition and the corresponding potential need to go back to school varies according to several institutional logics: First, some skills, such as those linked to inherently national occupations (e.g., teachers for national history), are hard to transfer (Weiß, 2005, p. 716) or are simply not needed (e.g., fishery in a country without access to the sea). Second, a high grade of occupational regulation implies occupational closure—a generator of social inequality, as conceptualized already by Weber (1922/1980, pp. 23, 202). Occupations which are closely bound to government functions such as the juridical system, the police, educational or health professions require state licenses (Haupt, 2016). Migrants with foreign training in an occupation which is licensed in the receiving country either have to take obligatory courses or exams to be allowed to pursue their profession. Or, third, laws declare the foreign training as equivalent to the native one, as is the case when EU-citizens work in other EU countries (see Adamo & Binder, 2018). For instance, nurses trained in EU-member states may, with few exceptions, practice their profession without that extra hurdle (BMBF, 2020, p. 30). The problem of (non-)recognition of foreign credentials thus has a strong political component.

2.2. Moving from One Stratified Educational System into Another: The Vertical Dimension of Transnational Education Mobility

Educational mobility, like occupational mobility, has two dimensions: a vertical and horizontal (Sacchia, Kriesib, & Buchmannca, 2016, p. 11). Referring to the division of labour, the horizontal dimension differentiates content or specialization, e.g., psychology versus linguistics. In this article, we cannot systematically deal with this horizontal dimension of switching educational fields but dedicate the remaining elaborations to the vertical dimension.

National educational systems are intrinsically stratified, with elementary education at the bottom and university education at the top with vocational training usually located below the latter. Vocational training, including apprenticeships, is here defined as non-academic, i.e., not part of higher, tertiary education. This categorical educational hierarchy is enshrined in scientific—but also politically negotiated—classifications developed for international comparisons, such as the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which in essence presumes a rough equivalency of these abstract educational categories across countries and their particularities (Bohlinger, 2012).

Now, if the educational hierarchical structure in country A and B were identical and mutually acknowledged as such, determining the vertical direction of migrants' educational mobility would be fairly unproblematic—as it is for natives moving within their own national education system. Obviously, this is not automatically the case. Two structural characteristics make Germany's education system a rare type, with only Austria and Switzerland showing strong resemblance: first, the secondary-school system with early selection into stratified school types, second, the non-academic vocational training system. As we will show, individual migrants bear the brunt of the institutional mismatch between countries.

Many countries have comprehensive secondary schools and require additional tests or entrance exams to begin tertiary education. But in Germany, only the baccalaureate (*Abitur*) attained in upper-tier secondary schools gives general access to universities. If migrants only have an upper-secondary school degree attained

after 11 rather than 12 or 13 years as in Germany, and if they have not yet started tertiary education in their home country, German educational authorities will classify such a school degree as not equivalent to a German baccalaureate. They would have to attend a preparatory course before moving up to higher education (Schammann & Younso, 2016).

As to Germany's full-scale vocational training, most of these highly standardized non-academic programs take place in the so-called dual system of apprenticeships. Apprentices are employed by companies (for a small salary); learning alternates between on-the-job training within the firm and in a vocational school, over three years (Protsch & Solga, 2016). The same applies to, e.g., health-related occupations requiring non-academic training which is formally called 'school-based' in Germany but also involves long internships, e.g., as nursing students in hospitals. As most other countries in the world have only school-based vocational training or merely informal learning on the job, most migrants with non-academic vocational qualifications cannot prove that their formal training includes sufficiently long periods of in-firm learning as is typical in Germany. Due to this institutional incongruence, German institutions take their occupational standards as their yardstick and often refuse to recognize such foreign vocational degrees as fully equivalent (Sommer, 2015, p. 277)—more often than they do foreign academic certificates (Kogan, 2012, p. 78). This German institutional perspective is mirrored in controversies about how the international ISCED categorizes national educational programs: Germany repeatedly complains that its vocational training in the dual system is categorized as too low, namely only as post-secondary non-tertiary, and hence is placed below 'real' tertiary programs (Bohlinger, 2012, pp. 18–19).

In contrast to nationally specific vocational training systems, university education has become a globalized institution and norm, as Schofer and Meyer (2005) argue. This globalized norm includes the idea that individuals with tertiary education are meant for high occupational positions (Schofer & Meyer, 2005, pp. 900–917), higher positions than those of persons with, e.g., 'only' vocational training (for the corresponding strong empirical correlation regarding income see Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2018, p. 205). The European Bologna Process explicitly aims at a (formal) standardization and mutual recognition of Bachelor and Master's degrees across state borders. However, this transnational recognition is mainly limited to moving within the system of higher education—a close linkage to occupational positions in other national labour markets is not guaranteed.

There is only little empirical research about migrants' vertical educational mobility. Upward mobility regularly takes place between academic programs, e.g., from a master's degree gained in the home country to a PhD in another. Such biographies are well embedded into the institutions of the Bologna Process and thoroughly planned by the individual (on Polish graduates in the UK see Szewczyk, 2014). Downward educational mobility is close to unheard of among natives. Yet, migration research has highlighted such cases, such as the academically trained engineer attending a course on IT administration (Nohl, 2010, p. 162; on a Bosnian journalist going back to Swedish secondary school see Povrzanović Frykman, 2009). Immigrants experience this as humiliating but still prove their tenacity by passing through respective programs. Bonin et al. (2020, p. 89) show that one in five refugees who participated in vocational training in Germany had already gained a vocational degree before their flight.

3. Transnational Educational Mobility Analysed with Quantitative and Qualitative Data: Challenges of Mixing Methods

We refrain from calling the quantitative and qualitative data presented here a proper mixed-methods research design. Ideally, the qualitative sample for in-depth interviews should be drawn from a representative survey, as Tucci, Fröhlich, and Stock (2021) show with the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), which offers this unique opportunity. In the context of our larger research project, we first chose the nationally representative NEPS because it contains more encompassing retrospective life course data in the field of education (and on further occupational training in particular) than the SOEP. With this choice of quantitative data necessary for the research topic, other constrictions follow. We use the scientific use file (SUF) of first survey wave (2009–2010) and new participants of the third wave (2011–2012) of Starting Cohort 6 (SC6, "Adult Education and Lifelong Learning"; see Blossfeld, Roßbach, & von Maurice, 2011).

The NEPS, like the SOEP, gathers retrospective life-course data the first time interviewees take part. Despite subsequent panel waves, the first wave with that first interview remains the relevant one here. In order to study the first six years in Germany, the survey participant has to have immigrated at least six years before the first interview. Thus, the immigration cohorts studied are, unavoidably, historically 'old.' The years of arrival stretch from 1963 to 2006 (mean: 1991; all means and percentages reported from this section onward are statistically weighted results of our quantitative analysis). Two-thirds came from Eastern Europe, one fifth from outside of Europe.

In contrast, our in-depth interviews, conducted between 2016 and 2018, aimed to get hold of migrants during their educational participation with correspondingly fresh memories about what led them there and how they perceived it. As post-immigration education typically takes place within the first few years of arrival (see Söhn, 2019, p. 51), members of our qualitative sample unsurprisingly had come to Germany only between 2000 and 2016 (from a range of EU- and non-EU countries).

Hence, there is little historical overlap between the immigrant cohorts analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. But, without downplaying historical changes, the structural problem of institutional incongruence between the German system of education and that of most other countries of origin, as explained above, has remained essentially the same. Such mismatches and the proclamation or denial of educational achievements' equivalency are at the heart of the methodological self-reflection in the course of presenting empirical results.

The qualitative data puts individuals' perceptions of educational positions and social status at the forefront. Their educational biographies—as social positioning in action (Deppermann, 2015)—results from individual strategies intertwined with institutional regulations and actors of, e.g., educational institutions, public administration, and the labour market. Going beyond previous qualitative insights into transnational educational biographies (see last paragraph of Section 3), our qualitative analysis will investigate the complexities behind cases of seemingly 'lateral' mobility: Migrants visited an educational program located in the same occupational field as that in which they had been trained for before coming to Germany. This type of educational participation has become increasingly likely due to the *Law to Improve the Assessment and Recognition of Professional and Vocational Education and Training Qualifications Acquired Abroad* (the full title of the Federal Recognition Act) adopted in 2012. Holders of non-German certificates who get a partial recognition of equivalency with German diplomas have the right to—and have to—attend an educational program that leads to full recognition, often subsidized by the public employment service (e.g., Sommer, 2015). It is important to note, however, that this legislative package only gives the right to have non-German qualifications examined for equivalency—it does not automatically provide full recognition.

4. Re-Constructing the Extent of Migrants' Upward, Lateral, and Downward Educational Mobility with Quantitative Data

4.1. Operationalizing Education in the Context of Migration Critically Reflected Upon

The target population of educationally active immigrants (N = 313) is defined as individuals who spent at least one month in full-time education within their first six years in Germany and who migrated as adults, with 26 years on average—an age when most natives have already transitioned to work. Information on the pre-and post-immigration level of education stems from the last episode of education reported prior moving to Germany and the first episode of education following arrival. We chose the first educational episode in Germany rather the final degree attained because, regarding the problem of non-recognition, it is relevant how much migrants had to move down the educational ladder.

Using survey data about the kind of education after migrating is methodologically unproblematic, as the participants recognize the label of 'their' program or certificate in the questionnaire from their own educational participation in Germany. Post-migration education covers any kind of academic training, non-academic full-scale vocational training as well as shorter full-time further occupational training leading to a 'license' (e.g., welding, IT administration; see Kruppe & Trepesch, 2017, pp. 11–13), pre-vocational programs and secondary-school education.

Regarding the educational career outside of Germany, immigrated respondents of the NEPS and any national survey must try to fit the education attained abroad into the survey's standardized answer categories, which mirror the German education system. As data users, we have to accept how survey participants resolve this 'transnational' sorting. Hence, the quantitative analysis takes on the migrant's view of educational equivalency rather than that of German institutions or employers which actually deal with or could potentially deal with an evaluation of foreign qualifications.

Our variable of the pre-migration level of education used for Figure 1 simplifies and thus smooths out numerous educational subcategories by only distinguishing (1) secondary-school education at most, (2) non-academic vocational qualifications, and (3) tertiary qualifications as the highest level (college, university, PhD). In order to determine the vertical relation of pre- and post-migration levels of education, we used much more differentiated information than these three levels. For instance, four migrants with a PhD started studying again at a German university and were categorized as downwardly mobile. Three people with only low-secondary schooling were upwardly mobile by attaining a mid-level secondary school degree. Illustrating lateral mobility, 37 individuals who attained a non-academic vocational degree abroad started an apprenticeship after migrating. If information on the content of further occupational training was available and could be related to pre-migration information, this was also used to determine the subcategory of vertical educational mobility. For instance, an experienced cook attending a nutrition course was labelled laterally mobile; a vet learning tiling took a downward trajectory. Cases with no such information were sorted into a fourth category: further occupational training with an undetermined direction of vertical mobility.

The NEPS allows a small, yet unique double-check of how respondents fit their foreign education into the German category system: Among respondents from the former Soviet Union in our NEPS sample, 51 chose a questionnaire translated into Russian and answered the additional question about their pre-migration level of education according to the former Soviet education system. Cross-tabulating these answers with our regular three-category variable of pre-migration education, we see, for instance, that fourteen individuals gained the certificate

of an ex-Soviet "school for continuing vocational training, Bachelor" (LIfBi, 2016, p. 686, as translated in the English version of the NEPS). In the 'German' operationalization of pre-migration education, seven of these fourteen are categorized as having attained vocational education, four as only being school-trained, and three as being academically trained. In comparison to this seeming randomness, nine out of ten people who reached tertiary education in the former Soviet Union end up in the 'correct' corresponding German category. In conclusion, the institutional incongruence of national educational systems cannot be solved by standardized surveys, but a 'valid' perception of transnational equivalency seems more easily achievable for academic training. This underlines the notion of tertiary education as a globalized institution (Schofer & Meyer, 2005).

4.2. Quantitative Results

Before arriving in Germany, 37% of educationally active adult migrants studied with the NEPS had attained secondary education at most, 34% non-academic vocational qualifications, and 30% tertiary education. 78% finished their last educational episode before migration with a formal certificate. Within the observed first six years in Germany, the migrants spent 26 months in education on average, and it took 20 months (mean) until the first educational episode, most often transitioning *from* non-employment and *into* work thereafter (see also Söhn, 2016, p. 203). 18% started programs at universities, 27% vocational training, 13% pre-vocational programs, 5% secondary schooling, and 36% further occupational training of various sorts.

Relating pre- and post-migration levels of education, Figure 1 summarizes the main results on the vertical dimension of transnational educational mobility: 28% experienced transnational upward mobility, 28% lateral mobility, and 25% downward mobility, with the remaining 19% participating in further training courses for which we could not determine the vertical direction. This distribution varies tremendously when differentiated by the educational level attained abroad. For migrants without qualifications beyond secondary education, it was very common (62%) to move up by starting any kind of post-secondary qualification. On the other end of the spectrum, academically trained migrants have few upward steps remaining (e.g., a PhD) but can fall quite deeply: 44% of them moved down the educational ladder by, e.g., beginning an apprenticeship; 38% studied a new subject at a German university (lateral). Migrants with non-academic vocational qualifications from abroad are situated in between, but they more closely resemble those with tertiary education, especially regarding the fairly small percentage of the upwardly mobile (11%). The largest subgroup (47%) within the vocationally trained migrants experienced a lateral move.

Among all migrants who showed lateral mobility—the group the ensuing qualitative findings will focus on—41% had attained tertiary education before migration and 56% non-academic vocational one. The types of educational program attended in Germany were distributed evenly across tertiary education, full-scale vocational qualification, and further occupational training.

Compared to the average distribution across the types of vertical educational mobility, lateral and downward mobility is overrepresented among migrants arriving between 1997 and 2006 by eight and six percentage points, respectively. This is not a proper projection onto more recent migrant cohorts. But in all likelihood, these phenomena still exist—as they do for respondents in our qualitative sample.

5. 'Lateral' Mobility as Seen by Subjects Navigating within Institutional Frameworks—Qualitative Results

5.1. The Methodological Choice of Occupation-Specific Educational Programs: Contextualizing the Selected Cases

Within the context of our larger research project, we recruited interviewees attending occupation-specific educational programs. These programs systematically varied by the academic versus non-academic level (according to the German categorization) as well as by whether practising the occupation required a state license or not (for an overview of the whole qualita-

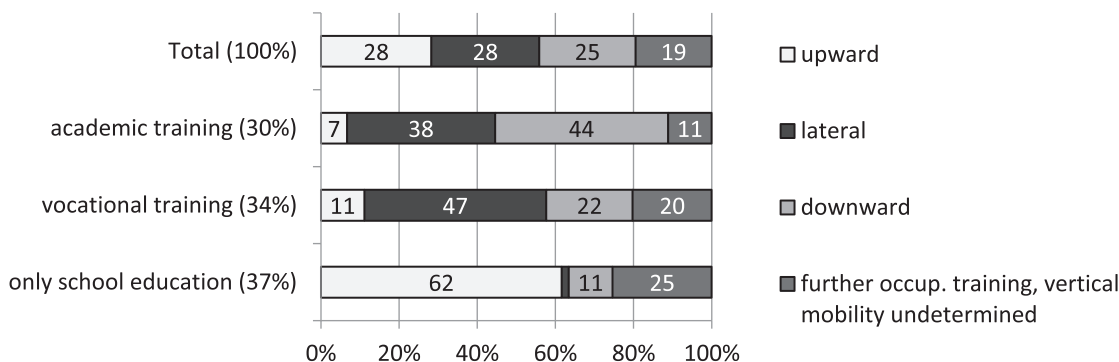

Figure 1. Vertical direction of transnational educational mobility by pre-migration level of education. Source: NEPS (2020). Notes: authors' calculation; N = 313; weighted percentages.

tive sample see Prekodravac, 2020; on licensed academic professions like doctors see also Nohl et al., 2014, pp. 77–83). In the following, we present exemplary cases of (1) nurses and (2) economists.

Nursing in Germany requires training categorized as non-academic which leads to the obligatory license to practice. Qualifications from non-EU-countries require formal evaluation of equivalency (BMBF, 2020, p. 30). In our interviewees' cases of partial equivalency, they were obliged to attend a 1-year recognition course (*Anerkennungslehrgang*) which included theory lessons on nursing and internships, and which lead to a full professional license as nurses.

Tertiary degrees in the field of economics and business administration offer access to a wide range of occupational positions in Germany, which are usually non-licensed and are on the managerial level. The one-year preparatory course (*Brückenkurs*) our interviewees attended targeted migrants (from both EU and non-EU countries) who had gained academic diplomas in this field abroad. The course aimed at easing labour market entry by teaching soft skills and the German cultural specificities of this occupational field.

Both programs explicitly referred to 'foreign qualifications' and addressed migrants who were not yet working in their original profession. Similar to the NEPS, implicit selection criteria came into play. The interviewees' German had to be sufficient (linguistic levels B2 to C1) and they needed a secure residence status in order to participate. Given their age at migration to Germany (between 25 and 42), many already had prior work experience within their profession, yet some (among the economists) did not, having only worked in precarious jobs or having come to Germany immediately after finishing their education.

We recruited our 27 interviewees by first contacting the educational institution which then gave permission for us to ask participants to volunteer for an interview. Using a narrative-biographical approach, we asked interviewees—with a special but not exclusive focus on education—to tell us about their lives before they migrated, their experiences in Germany, and future plans. We analysed the interviews using reconstructive methodology (Deppermann, 2015; Rosenthal, 2018). The following section offers some exemplary snapshots of four (anonymized) biographical narrations in order to illustrate aspects relevant for this article's research questions.

5.2. Differing Institutional Sorting: Vocational versus Academic Qualification

A participant of the nursing recognition course, Rafaela, attained a Master's degree in Brazil and became a nursing-ward manager in a penal institution. Rafaela moved to Germany in 2015 because of her German husband, who encouraged her to continue her career as a nurse. Rafaela attended counselling on occupational recognition and received information on her options and the course. She describes this situation as emotionally devastating: "I was very sad." She underlined that her previous education was "not an apprenticeship, it's a university program." Rafaela faced formal devaluation of her academic studies because German regulations categorize nursing as requiring non-academic vocational training (for this conflictual phenomenon from the point of view of non-academically trained native nurses in German hospitals see Pütz, Kontos, Larsen, Rand, & Ruokonen-Engler, 2019). Had Rafaela participated in the NEPS and categorized her pre-immigration education according to her own understanding, she would have fallen into the category of downward mobility. By contrast, her case appears as one of lateral mobility from the German institutional point of view due to her having remained within the same occupation.

The problematic relationship between a foreign qualification and the German institution of 'dual' vocational training came up in the narratives of the economists, too. Ana had attained a Master's degree in economics and informatics in Bulgaria. As she could not find employment in her professional field, inspired by an acquaintance, she went to Germany in 2014. There, she only managed to get a job in the logistics sector, far below her qualification due to informal devaluation of her credentials within the labour market. She learned about apprenticeships but insisted in the interview that her Bachelor's degree alone took one year longer than an apprenticeship in Germany. She implicitly appealed to international standards of educational ranking as Rafaela did. Yet, she also considered that her lack of an in-firm internship back in Bulgaria was a hurdle in the German labour market because such on-the-job learning is an integral and highly valued part of Germany's dual vocational training. Ana countered the symbolic downgrading of her credentials in the labour market by attending the preparatory course explicitly aimed at immigrants with academic training. Still, there is the potential that courses such as these might unintentionally stigmatize participants as holders of devalued foreign degrees, despite their intention to overcome this very problem of non-recognition.

The categorization of academic versus German-type vocational training functions as a crucial point of reference but with different impacts—informal and institutionalized devaluation in Ana's and Rafaela's case, respectively—depending on the occupation aimed at after arrival.

5.3. Differing Tasks: Downgrading of Occupational Content within an Occupational Field

Mrs. Miler finished vocational training in nursing during the 1980s in the Soviet Union. She worked in what is now Ukraine for several years, then went to Libya where she practised her profession for three years. The transnational cultural capital attained helped her to find a highly prestigious job in a private clinic back in Ukraine. There, she met her partner, who lived in Germany, and decided

to follow him in 2008. Nine years after her arrival, having attended several German language courses and having taken care of her German-born child who suffered from a chronic illness, she finally attended the recognition course for nurses.

Given that both her qualification from abroad and the course in Germany refer to non-academic vocational training, the operationalization used in the quantitative analyses and German authorities would categorize Mrs. Miler as a clear case of lateral mobility. Yet, underneath this label and in addition to the insufficient recognition of year-long work experience as a trained nurse, she had to undergo a subtler downgrading. Mrs. Miler became confronted with the fact that, compared to nursing in her country of origin, this occupation entailed less autonomy regarding medical decisions and the scheduling of one's own duties in Germany. Furthermore, she learned that nurses in German hospitals were expected to perform physically demanding tasks such as washing and feeding patients. Activities which had been reserved for nursing assistants in her country of origin and were judged as being 'below' their qualifications by Mrs. Miler and other participants of the recognition course. They experienced differences in nationally specific institutional structures: Regarding tasks, the occupation labelled as 'nurse' is sorted differently into the occupational hierarchy across countries, in this case into a lower position in Germany than the country of origin.

5.4. Necessities and Motivations for Attending the Educational Programs

While the recognition course was obligatory in order to work as a nurse again, the preparatory course for economists was voluntary. Tatyana gained a Bachelor's degree in Management in Latvia. She moved to Germany in 2014 and found badly paid work as a cook, a non-academic occupation she had been trained for before attending college. Applications for positions as an economist remained unsuccessful, and so Tatyana became determined "to do more" and to go back to school. At one point, she wanted to start vocational re-training as a business clerk (i.e., accepting educational downward mobility), yet the public employment service denied financial support. Later, she successfully fought the administration and had them pay the fees of the preparatory course she attended when we met her. Tatyana's motivation to take part was driven by a wish for improvement on different levels: First, she wanted to overwrite her previous qualification as a cook and make her academic training salient for potential employers. Secondly, she saw a need to acquire tools to assert her skills vis-à-vis employers as well as the employment service.

Participants of both types appreciated the 'side effect' of practising and improving their German by attending the programs. The occupational know-how of participants, however, appears to have remained essentially unchanged. The main motivation of attending the program was to eventually symbolically translate existing occupational knowledge into a real opportunity to put it into practice in a workplace. The chances of reaching this final goal varied. The nurses were aware of the high demand for licensed nurses on the German labour market and hence of good occupational prospects after finishing their course successfully. The economists' preparatory course only led to a non-formal certificate of attendance. Despite the participants' efforts to demonstrate their commitment to economic integration, there was a lack of certainty over whether employers would indeed interpret their participation in the program as a positive symbolic signal.

6. Conclusion

Our contribution on education attained before and after migration started with the observation that education is an inherent and influential part of individuals' socio-economic status. Indeed, we have been able to show that educational participation after arrival can be a strategy of social positioning which seeks to prevent "declassing" (Rye, 2019, p. 36) and economic marginalization due to insufficient recognition of foreign credentials. Post-immigration education aims at 'mending' the link between educational attainment and occupational positions—a link which the modern ideology of meritocracy (Themelis, 2008) promises but the devaluation of foreign credentials often breaks (Nohl et al., 2014).

Our research questions on how pre- and post-migration education relate to one another and how this relation is re-constructed, perceived, and valued from different perspectives in our quantitative and qualitative data have led to answers on two levels: first, one of methodological meta-reflection on categorizing positions in educational and occupational hierarchies when one must take into account multiple (national) frames of reference; and the second, which relates to the level of empirical results.

As to the first, the multiple perspectives on the vertical dimension of transnational educational mobility included the views of migrants who filled out a standardized questionnaire or narrated their educational experience in in-depth biographical interviews, of native institutions evaluating foreign certificates, and of the researchers who operate with educational classifications or deconstruct seemingly obvious educational categories. Overall, there is no 'objective' way to determine educational equivalency or the vertical direction of mobility, but research should be transparent about the underlying reference.

As data users of the standardized German NEPS, we had no other option but to accept the immigrant respondents' perceptions of how they thought their educational attainment from abroad should be sorted into the system of German educational categories, which cannot be entirely matched with those of other coun-

tries. A unique cross-check with a survey question on Ex-Soviet educational schooling for some respondents from this region made it possible to reveal that it was only respondents with pre-migration tertiary education (but not those with less schooling) who were easily able to choose the 'correct' educational category in the German classification system. This transnational 'validity' of academic training as a globalized institution (Schofer & Meyer, 2005) also became apparent in our interviews when both an economist with a university diploma from Bulgaria (which was not valued by the German firms she had applied to in vain) and a nurse with a Master's Degree from Brazil (whose training had been devalued by German institutional regulations). Each insisted on the academic level of their original training. These migrants implicitly referred to the global superiority of tertiary education over non-academic vocational training as it is indeed scientifically enshrined in the educational hierarchy within the ISCED, an educational classification meant for international comparison. The analytical evaluations of transnational educational equivalencies mirrored in both the NEPS and the interviewed migrants' own perspective contrast with the real-life downgrading by native-German actors as reported in our in-depth interviews and, e.g., Sommer's (2015) institutional analysis. As "the location of migrants in the spaces of class" are characterized by "multilocalities, inconsistencies and instabilities" (Rye, 2019, pp. 29–30), so do migrants' educational positions and the value given to their cultural capital vary with space and time.

Provided that the potential and possibly more 'restrictive' perspective of German institutions on the NEPS respondents' pre-migration level of education remains unknown, longitudinal life-course data of the NEPS gave us the exceptional opportunity to relate the levels of pre- and post-immigration education. We presented respective first-time results on migrants who had arrived as adults until the mid-2000s and participated in education within their first six years in Germany. Upward mobility was most often experienced by the large majority of those with only a pre-migration education up to secondary school level. Immigrants who step up the educational ladder should get more attention in an overall assessment of migrants' societal participation. In contrast, almost half among those with foreign vocational training remained on the non-academic level of post-secondary education. The largest subgroup among migrants with tertiary education from abroad moved downward to non-academic vocational training in Germany. This very strong correlation—the higher the pre-migration level of education, the greater the risk of educational downward mobility among migrants—is remarkable, particularly given that educational downward moves are virtually unheard of among natives.

Furthermore, migrants remaining on roughly the same educational level (the lateral subcategory) may often enrol in a program because of previous institutionalized or informal devaluations of their foreign educational credentials and work experience. In our qualitative study, this was clearly the case for both the nurses (with academic or vocational training from abroad) and the economists (with foreign tertiary degrees). Both groups participated in courses in order to remain within their fields and to find adequate employment. In addition, their narration disclosed subtler occupational downgrading. Nursing in Germany is categorized as requiring only non-academic vocational training and, in international comparison, is located at a relatively lower position in the occupational hierarchy regarding tasks, authority, and autonomy in the workplace. Hence, the nurses had to deal with more menial tasks (washing and feeding patients) which they would have delegated to nursing assistants in their countries of origin. A participant with a Master's in economics was told in her previous unsuccessful job search that not having done an in-firm internship, a highly valued integral part of the German dual vocational training system, was a major hurdle. Her soft-skill course, aimed at holders of non-German tertiary degrees, did not include an internship.

Apart from being able to practice and improve their German language skills in educational programs and gaining some knowledge of informal cultural norms within their occupational field, the participants' substantial occupational expertise seemed to have remained essentially unaltered. The main purpose of educational participation is the symbolical translation of their cultural capital into the German context. For nurses, it eventually led to a full nursing license, but in the case of the economists, it only led to a non-formal certificate of attendance—a much less clear signal for future job applications. Altogether, post-migration educational participation comprised a high ambivalence of in—and exclusionary elements.

Due to data limitations, we could not explore the horizontal dimension of changes between educational-occupational fields (e.g., from miner to auto mechanic) in transnational educational biographies. Furthermore, there is a lack of published qualitative pretests on how immigrant respondents actually perceive and fill out standardized questionnaires including questions on education and occupation in regular surveys. Finally, our analysis was clearly limited in case numbers and in giving a historically comprehensive empirical picture, as a historical gap in the immigrant cohorts under analysis could not be avoided with the separate qualitative and quantitative samples. An ideal mixed-methods design should draw a qualitative sample, on conceptual grounds, from a large-scale representative panel study on recently immigrated individuals including comprehensive retrospective and current information—a challenging but worthwhile endeavour for future research.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

New Horizons? Comparisons and Frames of Reference of Polish Multiple Migrants Worldwide

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Abstract
Building on the literature on transnational social fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) and the research agenda on pluri-local transnational studies (Pries, 2001), in this article we examine the processes of Polish migrants' social positioning. Nowadays many migrant trajectories are more complex than moving just from one place to another, involving repeated migration spells, returns, and onward mobility. In particular, multiple migration routes involving more than one destination expand the horizons lived by migrants and hence the frames in which they can position themselves. We adopt an actor-centred approach to better understand how highly mobile individuals negotiate social comparisons concerning the contexts they have engaged in during their multiple migration spells. This article draws on qualitative data from the MULTIMIG project that examines Polish migration worldwide. The analysis is based on a qualitative panel study with 70 Poles living abroad, who have the experience of multiple migration (who have lived in two countries outside of Poland for at least three months in each). The interviews shed light on how Polish migrants make social comparisons, and in particular, which frames of reference they adopt.

Keywords
frames of reference; multiple migrants; Polish migrants; social positioning

Issue
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1. Introduction

The concept of social comparison has evolved in the social science literature, from being understood as a human need, a source of knowledge about individual strengths and weaknesses to putting more focus on the tendency to evaluate, used by individuals to increase their positive self-image, especially via downward comparisons (White, 2012). Adopting a transnational lens adds some new questions to the analysis of social positioning, concerning, inter alia, the reference frames used for social comparisons. Transnationality, with its potential of simultaneous membership in different countries, offers a broader, comparative cross-border framework for such comparisons (Faist, 2014; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). At the simplest, migrants can assess their similarities and differences compared to those who are not mobile (both in the country of origin and destination) or to other mobiles, both from their own migrant community and others. These sets of comparisons may further extend for those who wish to move further, to onward destinations, measuring current life chances against those expected in the subsequent stopping place. Last but not least, social comparisons can extend beyond the places of origin and destination, towards supranational and global perspectives. It is these different frames of reference used for comparisons with regard to locations and social relations that we are mostly interested in here.

In the article, we present some results from the MULTIMIG project, a unique study of Polish multiple migrants (people who have lived in at least two different countries abroad). The project is aimed at tracking the international trajectories and personal experiences of these Poles. The empirical material comes from two waves of semi-structured interviews conducted within a qualitative panel study (QPS). The interviewees have collected life experiences and built social networks across several contexts, potentially making them 'comparative experts,' drawing on resources of past international mobility. Hence, we ask: What kind of comparisons do Polish multiple migrants make? What are the most explicit dimensions of these comparisons? In the following sections, we look at different frames of reference and social comparisons made in relation to various significant others—embedded in different socio-spatial contexts. We explore the notion of 'normality' in the context of mobility, move on to imposed comparisons versus personal aspirations and finally acknowledge the global power dynamics and reference frames noticeable in Polish multiple migrants' narratives.

2. Social Comparisons, Frames of Reference and Multiple Migration

2.1. From Sedentary to Mobile Lens in Migration Studies

Already in the 1990s, Malkki (1992), analysing the dominant discourse in migration and refugee studies, wrote about "a powerful sedentarism in our thinking" (p. 31), taken for granted and going almost unnoticed. Others, including de Haan (1999), Scalettaris (2007) and Ghorashi (2017), followed with the sedentary bias criticism. Sheller and Urry (2006) broadened this sedentary diagnosis to 'a-mobile' social science more generally. In particular, Urry's (2000) contribution was to push the static-versus-mobile debate towards a focus on the latter. His work has, in many aspects, been eye-opening, highlighting some less-studied phenomena. He used the example of automobilities, along with mass international travel, to describe corporeal mobilities. Urry underlined that not only people travel but objects as well, including consumer goods and values associated with them. The Internet and popular TV, in turn, open possibilities for 'imaginative travel.' The 'mobilities turn' in the social sciences carefully re-directed our attention elsewhere, to all these different and multi-directional flows making up social life.

Although literature on migration and mobilities is rarely brought together (see, e.g., Moret, 2017), migration literature to some extent recognises this 'mobile' element, especially in the analyses of non-permanent, temporary migration (for an overview see Górny & Kindler, 2016) and even 'liquid' migration (Engbersen, Snel, & de Boom, 2010) or so-called 'enfolded mobilities' (Williams, Chaban, & Holland, 2011), including visiting friends and relatives (Williams & Hall, 2000). The virtual mobility of migrants has been occupying the research agenda for quite some time now, as migrants seem to be the most natural Information and Communication Technology (ICT) users, which are often indispensable for them to stay in touch with friends and family elsewhere (in relation to Polish migrants see, e.g., Bell, 2016; Burrell, 2011). Other parts of the literature, however, remain predominantly focused on migration as a one-time move turning into long-term settlement in the destination country and its resulting processes of migrant integration into various spheres of society.

2.2. Social Comparisons: From Binary to Broader and Multi-Faceted Frames of Reference

Traditional research on migration has not only studied how people move along two-way corridors between the place of origin and destination but also how comparisons made by migrants are locked within these two contexts. In studies of labour market incorporation, Piore's (1979) birds of passage were understood to accept working in the secondary labour market of their destination country because the main point of reference for them was the place of origin. The dual frame of reference described by Waldinger and Lichter (2003) looked at migrants assessing their conditions in the destination by standards they knew from the origin. Similarly, in analyses of social inequalities and social protection, the main comparisons drawn seem to refer to "*relative (dis)advantage*" between places of origin and residence (Faist & Bilecen, 2015, p. 290, emphasis in original). International migration can entail migrants' upward or downward social mobility from origin to destination, or both, as in "contradictory class mobility," referring to financial and occupational status (Parreñas, 2015, p. 26). A study by Nowicka (2013), drawing on work by Bourdieu (the notion of capital) and Hradil (the concept of social position), draws attention to the directions of social positioning among Polish entrepreneurs in Germany. Nowicka distinguishes between three directions of migrant social positioning (single space, bi-local, overlapping) as well as migrant connections to localities and social networks. Additionally, her analysis is dynamic, allowing the tracking of shifts in social statuses along the migration trajectory. These transnational social positionings, however, are locked into the origin (Poland) and destination (Germany) binary. One case in particular, the trajectory of a Polish entrepreneur in Germany who regularly carries out construction work in Italy and Austria, raises questions about broader frames of reference and the possible impact of capital flows from multiple countries on individual social positioning.

Hence, we turn to transnational literature which has embraced how migrants' lives are embedded in multi-layered and multi-sited transnational fields (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Levitt and Glick Schiller highlight the simultaneity of migrant incorporation in the destination and the concurrent keeping of transnational connections

to family and friends at the place of origin and elsewhere, with the social field defined as "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organised, and transformed" (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1009). Direct and indirect connections which cross borders become transnational. Pries (2001) pushes this concept of transnational social space even further to explicitly recognise how it may be 'pluri-local,' in particular in the ever-growing presence of new ICT and mass migration. However, what Pries proposes is not exactly a well-defined paradigm but rather a research agenda for studying social realities consisting of practices, artefacts and symbols, which still seems to be an underdeveloped approach in the study of international migration. With a pluri-local focus on individuals who have moved repeatedly to various destinations, the horizons for comparisons seem to broaden, and we focus on these comparisons especially concerning social relations and locations in which these relations are based.

Research on migrant domestic workers highlights how mobile individuals measure and compare the pros and cons of various places, ranking them one against another (Parreñas, 2015; Paul, 2017). Paul (2017) describes cognitive maps of the world made up by her informants, which give a sense of how they select future destinations and reflect their desire for upward social mobility. Predominantly female Indonesian and Filipino domestic workers remain on the move while bound by limited sets of resources in this highly mobile labour market segment. The mappings of multiple locations involve considerations of social mobility (see Fielding, 1993, writing about escalator regions) with escalator effects referring also to various life spheres beyond economic factors, including lifestyle and self-confidence (see King, Lulle, Parutis, & Saar, 2018). Favell (2008) described the 'social spiralism' of migrants regarding blocked opportunities back at home. Movers in the European Union, particularly women, take the risk of jumping on the 'escalator' and building an alternative life project to the well-structured and predictable life trajectory of those left behind at their place of origin.

Related to the above discussion is the notion of 'mobility capital' (introduced by Moret, 2017) as a new element of social differentiation. Drawing on the case of Somali migrants, Moret exemplifies how mobility capital is made up of both past mobility experiences as well as the potential for future mobility and how it can be converted into other forms of capital. It is also a way through which migrants can negotiate divergent social positions in the place of origin and, more broadly, in Europe, since the mobility capital concept transcends single nation-state borders and provides a focus lens on social inequalities in transnational perspective. In particular, Moret draws attention to the movers' race, ethnicity and religion in the context of global inequalities, and the consequent vulnerability of rights. Representation or experience of movement by Blacks and Muslims will differ from the privilege of cross-border mobility of white Europeans.

Another facet of the power relations in Europe has long been the symbolic dichotomy between 'East' and 'West' which is in itself a socio-cultural construct sustained through discursive practices and social imaginaries (according to Buchowski, 2006, as cited in Manolova, 2020, p. 522; see also, e.g., Lulle, King, Dvorakova, & Szkudlarek, 2019). Migration originating from post-socialist countries, driven by experiences both of material deprivation and limited social rights may highlight a relative disadvantage in comparison to places perceived as better-developed in this respect. This, in turn, can lead to defining a desirable 'normality' in the destination, based on comparisons with one's situation in the past outside of the present country of residence (see, e.g., Galasińska & Kozłowska, 2009; McGhee, Heath, & Trevena, 2012). Also, as mobilities may involve lifestyle as well as work-related choices (Krings, Moriarty, Wickham, Bobek, & Salamońska, 2013), these comparisons may be made on various material as well as non-material dimensions. The notion of 'normality' has been explored in the literature concerning migration from Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries. It has been developed as a normative concept, where 'normal' life is associated with, to quote Manolova (2019, p. 78):

> i) a sense of stability and order that makes life predictable and controllable; ii) a basic level of social and moral justice, which implies a dignified life for every individual regardless of their identity, belonging or connections; and iii) a dignified status of labour….

In other words, the concept of 'normality' is related to seeking comfort both in the economic sphere, where one can afford a preferable lifestyle, and in the socio-public sphere, where one can express their preferred identity (Polkowski, 2017).

2.3. Why Research Comparisons and Frames of Reference Used by Multiple Migrants from Poland?

In this article, we focus on multiple migrants whom we define as persons who have moved internationally more than once to more than one destination. Sequences of multiple migrations may differ, involving a series of onward and return migrations (to the place of origin or a previous destination). Multiple migration can also involve short and/or long term spells, and various geographies, like intra- or inter-continental (Salamońska, 2017). Among multiple migrants we can find movers holding various sets of resources, those migrating at the bottom (Paul, 2017) or at the top of the labour market (Beaverstock, 2005; Bhachu, 1985). For these different groups, migration may lead to upward social mobility (on 'escalator migration' see Hugo, 2008; on 'stepwise migration' see Paul, 2017) or constitute a career development strategy (Beaverstock, 2005). What is more, research

on international students highlights how the aspiration for onward movement after graduation may be linked not only to global career prospects but also to self-exploration and personal development, as well as a feeling that they could fit in anywhere (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). While a highly differentiated group in terms of their motivations and international trajectories, multiple migrants offer an interesting case to explore more deeply the social comparisons at work across multiple national contexts. First, they can potentially provide more evidence on a wider variety of frames of reference. Faist and Bilecen (2015), in their analysis of social positionings and social inequalities in transnational spaces, enumerate possible frames of reference, from the emigration and immigration side to onward destinations and global perspectives. As we add the pluri-locality lens, we understand social comparisons as made and remade between past and present, highlighting different places and meanings associated with them (see also Ghorashi, 2017).

We focus on migration from Poland, acknowledging the socio-political context of the country of origin and the broader region, which is Central Eastern European/post-socialist space. This specific context may influence migrants' aspirations and their perceptions of desirable outcomes that drive mobility in certain directions—most often 'the West' (Drinkwater & Garapich, 2015; Kaźmierska, Piotrowski, & Waniek, 2011; Manolova, 2020). After the fall of the 'iron curtain,' Poland has been undergoing political and economic transition since 1989 and joining the European Union in 2004 resulted in mass migration moves to other member states of 'old' Europe due to free-movement rights and the opening of labour markets (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2009; Lulle et al., 2019). To date, many people perceive the labour market, welfare and lifestyle opportunities accessible in these countries as a desirable goal—in reference to the concept of 'normality' evoked earlier in this text. This agrees with the notion of European 'mental space' which "provides horizons of competitive or emulative comparison between achievements in terms of the standard of living in different European nations and in terms of chances for biographical plans and undertakings" (Fritz Schutze, as cited in Kaźmierska et al., 2011, p. 141). The economic recession of 2008 did not impact so greatly on emigration from Poland (the country was largely spared the economic crisis) but it did have effects on those Polish migrants who were already resident in the European destinations affected by the recession, triggering some return and onward mobility (Krings et al., 2013).

For the analyses in this article, Poland matters as a place of origin of migrants, but we also draw attention to the specific places of settlement along the migration trajectory along with 'structures and opportunities' present in these local contexts (Bivand Erdal & Ryan, 2018). We take as the case study Polish multiple migrants because they allow tracking of a heterogeneous group in terms of socio-economic status, resources possessed, migration motivations and trajectories of mobility spanning across countries. This diversity of individual characteristics and destinations provides a good starting point for probing about comparisons and frames of reference.

3. Data and Methods

This article draws on qualitative data from the MULTIMIG project "In Search of a Theory of Multiple Migration. A Quantitative and Qualitative Study of Polish Migrants after 1989" that examines Polish migration worldwide via three waves of interviews of a QPS. The QPS started in 2018 (wave one) with semi-structured interviews with Poles living abroad who have the experience of multiple migrations (i.e., people born in Poland who have lived in at least two countries outside of Poland for three months or more in each). Wave two was conducted in 2020 and wave three is planned for 2021. The interviews conducted up to date shed light on how Polish migrants make social comparisons and, in particular, what frames of reference they mention when making sense of their international trajectories so far as well as future plans.

MULTIMIG followed a purposive sampling strategy aiming to collect a variety of experiences from males and females at various points in their life course, with different levels of resources (economic, social and cultural capital, education, qualifications and occupations), diverse family situation and different multiple migration trajectories. In this respect, our sample may be described as 'super-diverse' in terms of the complexity of socio-demographic characteristics, location and settlement strategies of Polish migrants (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2019). Researchers reached informants via, among others, extended social networks, general use and career-oriented social networking platforms, and expatriate blogs. According to the QPS methodology, subsequent waves of interviews are conducted with the same sample of informants where particular themes are explored repeatedly while others may differ. The main aim of such an approach in migration studies is to capture "change and continuity through time and space" (Winiarska, 2017, p. 5). Wave one of the QPS started in September 2018 with an initial sample of 70 informants. Wave two, which started in December 2019, managed to retain 62 informants out of an initial sample of 70. Interview length ranged between thirty minutes and two hours and thirty minutes.

There was a fair gender balance in the achieved sample. Among informants, over two-thirds held third-level education. The QPS participants were aged between their early twenties and early sixties and had migrated at various points of their life (majority as adults). Our informants were based in Africa, both Americas, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, but most resided in European countries and had lived in at least two countries outside of Poland. All informants were asked about the other locations they had resided in before the current destination, which in many cases included four, five or

six different countries, but some highly mobile people were unable to count the actual number of migration spells, as they circulated between these different places. Interviewees had resided in their current countries of settlement for various periods of time—ranging from a few months to decades. Moreover, some had moved from one country to another in between the two waves of MULTIMIG interviews. Reaching such a geographically dispersed sample was possible thanks to Internet-mediated research using technologies such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Signal or phone (with researchers navigating these tools and multiple time zones). Interviews were conducted in the Polish language. The quotes in the empirical analysis section were translated into English by the authors. Each quote used in this article is accompanied by background information on the QPS participant, including gender, age group and countries lived outside of Poland (if the countries in the migration trajectory were rare destinations for Polish migrants and there was a fair risk of informant's identification, we also anonymised the country names—e.g., African countries). All names used when presenting informants' narratives are pseudonyms.

The data presented in this article come from two waves of the on-going QPS, with only synchronic analysis of collected material at this point. The first wave of interviews included questions about migration trajectory, future plans and notion of home. The second wave of interviews inquired about broadly understood change in informant's life since the wave one interviews, additionally covering topics such as travels, social networks and cultural diversity. The analysis offered in this article focuses on the comparisons and frames of reference used by migrants in their narrating of these topics. During the second wave of interviews, we asked about social comparisons that the informants make and who they compare with when thinking of their social position. Many of them found this question difficult and declared that they avoid comparisons altogether (although comparing to others was concurrently perceived as an 'inherent part' of human nature). In many interviews (both first and second wave) themes related to social positioning did, however, appear spontaneously, especially when talking about life satisfaction, plans for the future, and possible life trajectories if migrants had not chosen to move internationally in the first place. We will try to reflect on some of these narratives here to better understand how highly-mobile individuals negotiate social comparisons concerning multiple contexts.

4. Multi-Faceted Frames of Reference: An Empirical Analysis of Polish Multiple Migrants' Narratives

Social comparisons often involve complex and multidimensional intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Their outcome is dependent on the perspective adopted by the actor—e.g., whether based on individual aspirations or group affiliations and whether they are in-group or out-group. Moreover, social positioning will be influenced both by the starting point as well as resources held and acquired at different points of the life course. Some comparisons may be more objective while others appear more fluid and vague, based on material achievements, professional status, lifestyles or personal trajectories, for example. Although multiple migration may be driven by different factors and motives, the mobility itself remains an important point of reference for migrants.

4.1. Mobile versus Settled: Which is 'the Norm'?

In our analysis, we aim to unpack the various frameworks adopted by Polish multiple migrants when it comes to processes of social positioning. Our focus will be on different types of comparisons within social relations at different locations involved: to persons settled in the country of origin (Poles living in Poland), to persons settled (sometimes temporarily) in the host country (other Polish migrants, other migrants, both European and non-European, and the host population) as well as wider comparisons that have rarely been taken into consideration in existing literature to date.

When it comes to positioning oneself in relation to stayers in the country of origin, our interviewees made some typical comparisons concerning professional achievements, material status or family situation, which we leave aside as these have been researched more extensively (e.g., Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). A less-explored theme that we found especially interesting was the opposition between being rooted in one place contrary to being on the move from one place to another. The first may give a sense of stability, which mobiles often long for, but on the other hand, multiple migration may allow wider perspectives and opportunities for living a life perceived as more interesting. Our interlocutors reflected on this and positioned themselves in contrast to settled friends, taking into account their own independence and personal experiences. In this case, life trajectories become closely related to lifestyle which becomes an important point of reference when comparing one's position to others. Against a more traditional understanding of 'dual frames of reference,' here what makes a difference is quite intangible, a set of experiences, stories and dreams collected on the way. For example, Bartek, a mobile man in his late twenties, reflects:

> And I look at those friends of mine who have graduated from these great universities, making these great careers, but you know, they live in Poland, working in one place, you know, they haven't seen the world too much.....I can tell interesting stories and they...they don't have such interesting stories to tell. (Bartek has lived in the UK, Greece, Ireland and Norway)

Magda, a woman in her late thirties, raises similar issues in comparison to her best friend settled back in Poland:

> My best friend…has a husband and two sons. She has a very good job, she earns a lot of money. So she is very pleased. Sometimes I envy her, that she has been living in one place all the time. All her friends are there, and I have friends in Canada, I have friends in California, Chicago, I have friends in Brazil, Great Britain, all over the world…and I envy that she has everyone in one place, she keeps in touch with everyone. But on the other hand, I think that my life has been very interesting, I have experienced quite a lot. I have fulfilled my dreams. I have travelled quite a lot. (Magda has lived in the USA, UK and the Arab Emirates)

Social comparisons evoke the notion of 'normality' which can be considered a desirable goal and serve as a normative lens to defining what is acceptable in social life. If previous research on migration refers to normality, especially in the context of relative deprivation in post-socialist contexts (Manolova, 2019; McGhee et al., 2012; Polkowski, 2017), here, normality can also be analysed in the context of stasis versus flux. In such comparisons, normality and the specifics of a 'normal' life are subject both to controversy and discussion in the social experiences of migrants. Such controversy and discussion are the consequence of migration experience being normatively assessed both by those who move and those who do not move. Stayers tend to associate normality with the mundane, with everyday life, earning a living and fulfilling societal obligations. Migration experience, instead, is seen in opposition to being down to earth ("flying around"). Natalia, a woman in her late thirties, argues against this limited sense of what normality entails. She first builds the common ground for normality with stayers ("I also pay taxes"), going further and explaining how her normality is more challenging than living in the well-known context of the home country:

> Sometimes people say this about emigrants, oh, you're just flying around etc. And a friend once said to me that this isn't a normal life. I said 'How come this isn't normal? I also pay taxes, I have to worry about electricity, gas, different things. How come this isn't a normal life?' Sometimes it's even more difficult than living in your own country. (Natalia has lived in the UK and France)

This discussion resonates with the on-going reflection on rootedness versus mobility and building normative narratives through "intersubjective deliberations of contrasting positionalities" (Ghorashi, 2017, p. 2428).

4.2. Personal Aspirations or Imposed Frames of Reference?

Natalia's case exemplifies how social comparisons were sometimes forced on individuals by their social environment. This points to the observation that reference frames were used more often concerning social networks and evaluations made by others than personal images of oneself. In particular, the informants reported evaluations made in the country of origin. Here, gender power dynamics also come into play (cf. Bivand Erdal & Ryan, 2018) as it was especially women who perceived these comparisons as a burden, entailing negative pressure and related specifically to the Polish context, as opposed to the countries of migration. Krystyna, a woman in her fifties who started migrating after her second divorce, recalls a pressure related, inter alia, to physical appearance and signs of material status:

> In Poland, you live under pressure. You live under pressure because your friend has had her hair done, she has a trendy haircut. Another one has had her lips done, for example, a third one has had something else, and you don't have all that and you feel unhappy and you feel that you stand out. (Krystyna has lived in Germany and two different African countries)

Joanna, another woman in her early thirties, reports on the process of her changing perspective through migration experience, when she ceases to compare herself to others in a material sense. As her geographical horizons widen, her comparative horizons diminish:

> I come from a town where this mentality is a bit stupid, everyone is interested in everyone. I'm sure that a lot has changed in me, that I don't have this interest in someone's life, that he has this much and I want that much too, or that I would want to be better than him. And once it was like that, yes. I used to say: my friend has, I don't know, a nice job, I would like to have a job like that too, or she can afford something, I want that too. And now whatever I do, I do it for myself. Travelling has taught me that and the people that I have met in my life. (Joanna has lived in Italy and the USA)

But reflection can also go in the opposite direction, people met on the way can enhance comparisons that make you feel you are not as special as you previously thought when comparing to a different social environment. As in the case of other multiple migrants (see, e.g., Parreñas, 2015; Paul, 2017), Poles are often driven by aspirations of upward social mobility. However, depending on structural factors and power relations, the social position acquired in a new environment can be perceived either as promotion or degradation. In the latter case—which seems especially interesting in the analysis of migration narratives—such perceived degradation of social position may not necessarily refer to the material or occupational dimensions but to the value of acquired competences and resources that hold importance for social positioning and are appreciated in the actor's social networks, as in the case of Beata, a woman now in her early forties, who first migrated many years ago:

> I knew English, I felt very good in it and I was so…you know in Poland I thought 'great,' right? In every country, I will be somebody. Whereas I came here and damn, the people I knew, each of them knew three languages. And again I was….I felt so little. My God, me with my poor English, people here jump from one language to another and I only have this one [language]—English. (Beata has lived in the UK and Germany)

The informants' narratives also included more conventional distinctions between different types of Polish migrants, as already described in existing literature (e.g., Burrell, 2009; Krings et al., 2013). Social class and migration motivations (lifestyle versus employment) were at the heart of how our informants distanced themselves from other Poles, also migrants. Such motives were especially visible when it came to highly skilled professionals, as opposed to lower-skilled economic migrants. But also those with lower social standing distinguished themselves from migrants driven by lifestyle motives. Similar mechanisms could occasionally be observed in the narratives of multiple migrants settled in their destination country concerning newly-arrived Poles. This can be related to cultural and symbolic class boundary-making, as described by Manolova (2020) in the Bulgarian case of negotiating class identification and status attributes in a post-transition context. According to her analysis, those aspiring for status achievement will be careful to distinguish themselves from the 'ordinary migrant' as opposing idealistic 'free movement' to regular 'migration' based on purely materialistic motives.

4.3. Polish Multiple Migrants Situating Themselves within Regional and Global Power Dynamics

Finally, some Polish multiple migrants use wider points of reference and comparisons that involve global power relations. Writing about intra-EU migration (albeit largely limited to movements within the 'old' EU), Favell (2008) referred to the concept of spiralism to describe the social ascent via international mobility from often peripheral areas to Eurocities, along with the lifestyle aspects of such migration. A more nuanced and specific theme that appeared in the narratives of Polish migrants was—paraphrasing one of our interviewees—the post-socialist complex juxtaposed against the 'imaginary West' (as conceptualised by Manolova, 2019, pp. 62–63). Poland, having a history of communist regime, is still to some extent perceived as developing economically, still on the track to stable prosperity. Along with this, it is characterised by more conservative and closed attitudes, where intolerance towards various groups is commonplace, as opposed to 'the West.' In this sense, migration itself provides for some interviewees the opportunity to enhance one's position and be part of a bigger European project or even a 'cosmopolitan elite,' which is perceived here as a specific identity, useful in status boundary work. Mobility may thus give passage to entering a "superior symbolic collective" and a sense of belonging to western culture and citizenship (Manolova, 2020, p. 519). This echoes with the concept of 'escaping to' a place where self-expression and self-development, as well as the possibility to follow different cultural patterns, are perceived as more available, which exceeds other, more traditional migration motives (Kaźmierska et al., 2011, p. 149). As in the narratives of Andrzej (male), Dominika and Sylwia (both women), all in their thirties:

> Well, it's no secret that I always had some complex of coming from Central Europe, because these are post-communist countries. And I wanted to see how it…how this West, this famous West really looks like, and live here for a bit and breathe this air. So apart from this career, these challenges and international career, it was this desire to sort of define myself as a Pole in this European project and understand what this parallel [to Polish] nationality is, I mean the European one.…Although we have been functioning in it for 30 years, I still have the impression that we are in some kind of transformation phase, economic and…and social one, and probably also political, compared to the West. We are still less mature. (Andrzej has lived in Holland, Germany and Belgium)

> I left [Poland] with this [thinking]…to get in line…with these super attractive foreigners from the West, and not talk too much about how it is in our country. I think I kind of hid many things [then]. (Dominika has lived in Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Russia)

> There is this sort of international elite, which is international, cosmopolitan or whatever. And I simply joined it in a sense. Although I do not have the feeling of being submerged in the country I am in. (Sylwia has lived in Turkey and the UK)

Such narratives fit into the core-periphery framework, where motives of migrating to escalator regions, the engines of social climbing (see Fielding, 1993), are multi-dimensional, involving lifestyle, career and identity options as well (King et al., 2018). In this sense, countries of Western Europe and the USA are sometimes perceived and idealised in collective social images as lands of opportunity where a generalised 'other' can always make it (Kaźmierska et al., 2011; Manolova, 2019). Consequently, a Polish migrant's social position may at first be underprivileged but mobility in effect will lead to enhancing material and social status both in Poland and abroad. Paradoxically, this belief may also be perceived as a burden once the opportunity does not play out as anticipated, as in the personal experience of Marcin, a man in his mid-thirties:

> You know, I think that Poles have this thing when it comes to America, that they have to succeed. They

> are very ashamed if something goes wrong. This shame is something that they feel, it's their inside problem more than something that others around can see looking at these people. It is our stupid Polish ambition that we are so sickly ambitious that we are afraid to admit to failure….Because everyone in America has to succeed. That's how I see it here. Everyone wants to show off the car they are driving, everyone wants to show off how well they are doing. You must succeed because this is America! You understand….Even when there was this whole stock market crash, everyone was saying how wonderful it is here. But that was not fully true. (Marcin has lived in the UK and the USA)

On the other end of such comparisons were countries perceived as underdeveloped, defined widely as the global South, in the context of global power relations. One interviewee purposely constructed Africa as a frame for comparison to place herself higher on a social scale of consumption and lifestyle. The process emphasised her privilege in Africa in opposition to her disadvantaged status in 'the West.' This obviously recreates some wider power dynamics where Central-Eastern European origin situates Polish migrants between two ends of the global continuum. Again, Krystyna's narrative can serve as an example here:

> [In Africa] you can afford to take a plane, you fly where you want. You can afford to go on holiday. You can afford to buy cosmetics. You can afford to buy food….And I think this helps me, it is a plus, this kind of comparison. Because if in Europe you only see people who are better off, who [have] more than I do, then I feel so little, because I have nothing, right?

The excerpt above illustrates a theme present in recent migration literature concerning 'new' European migration. Polish migrants along with other 'new' Europeans should be seen as structurally and discursively embedded in historical power relations, where their position in social hierarchies, in relation to other migrant and host society groups, is often unequal (Lulle et al., 2019). In 'old' Europe or 'the West,' their position will often be deprived but when we expand the reference frame the perceived social status of these same people may quite automatically shift.

5. Conclusion

Polish multiple migrants constitute a relatively heterogeneous group in terms of resources, aspirations, and countries in which they have lived so far. What they have in common is a broader range of migration experiences in various locations than other mobile Poles. Focusing on narratives of Polish multiple migrants, we contribute to a call by Pries (2001) on a new research agenda on pluri-local transnational social fields. As we show, this multi-local perspective on migration challenges the sedentary ways of thinking diagnosed in migration and refugee research and criticised elsewhere (see de Haan, 1999; Ghorashi, 2017; Malkki, 1992; Scalettaris, 2007).

While literature on transnational social fields recognises that migrants can be engaged simultaneously in various contexts, empirical research tends to understand migrants as making comparisons between contexts of origin and destination (Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). We broaden the bi-focal perspective, linking to existing research on social inequalities which enlists other possible frames for reference, including onward destinations and global scale (Faist & Bilecen, 2015). In this article, we bring to the fore the non-sedentary aspect of migration and outline how the very experience of being mobile is used to construct comparisons concerning lifestyles and aspirations.

The place of origin can play different roles in these comparisons. On the one hand, it is only natural to compare with people left at the point of departure. Still, these types of comparisons often describe a considerable detachment in the ways that lives are lived (see Favell, 2008) and evoke reflections around 'normality' (examined elsewhere in the context of migration research, see, e.g., Galasińska & Kozłowska, 2009; McGhee et al., 2012). It is especially this notion of normality that provides an example of comparisons that migrants do not necessarily make themselves, but which are assigned to them by their social milieu—in particular by those settled at the place of origin, sometimes also including significant others. Both types of comparisons (produced by and forced on migrants) matter as they are brought up spontaneously when accounting their migration and life stories and experiences in the destination countries, as well as evaluating life choices and general satisfaction. The literature on repeated international migration involves many significant decisions along the way (see, e.g., Paul, 2017) and migrants sometimes reflected on what would have happened if they had taken another route, both geographically and individually, in their professional or personal life. This naturally induces comparisons with those whose decisions were different, to evaluate both actual and potential consequences.

Perhaps quite surprisingly, this research also documents how broader horizons of multiple migration can work in two opposite directions for those involved. On the one hand, multiple migrations expand the possible range of experiences and, thus, the frames of reference broaden as well (for a comparison with the literature on onward migrants see Paul, 2017; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). In particular, Polish multiple migrants may position themselves against European and global perspectives. The post-socialist context may be seen as a burden, but not necessarily. Moreover, return migrants may discover that Poland has changed significantly since they first left the country. A need to compare with others may also be a reflection of the aspiration to position oneself

higher on the social hierarchy, like in the case of comparisons between different countries. On the other hand, another outcome of these diverse and multiple experiences can be that migrants no longer feel the need to compare themselves at all. This is the case when individuals consider the act of social comparing as a manifestation of a backward, small-town mentality, which they claim to have lost on their migrant journey.

Comparisons that appear in the narratives of Polish multiple migrants make the substantive topic of this article. Analytically, the research on which this article is based does not have a comparative group (e.g., stayers in Poland, one-off migrants). However, where possible, we make use of internal comparisons within the sample, making distinctions between the different groups of multiple migrants holding various sets of resources (assigned and achieved) and also geographical locations of migration. The fact that we focus on one case only, with Polish migrants as a single migrant group in this analysis, is a limitation of our research. Future research could address these points by expanding the focus on highly mobile individuals in general. While this study highlights selected links between repeated international migration directed at various destinations and social comparison, we are still missing the quantified picture. Also, more extensive qualitative research could address a wider range of migrant groups, with a more systematic selection of destinations in an attempt to understand these processes in comparative perspective.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Move Abroad to Move Forward? Self-Assessments of Chinese Students and Undocumented Migrants in France

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Abstract
Migrants' self-assessments refer to their perceptions of social mobility and positioning. These assessments are often ambivalent and counterintuitive for observers. To overcome contradictory first impressions, we propose a comprehensive approach to migrants' self-assessments that goes beyond the opposition between objective and subjective social mobility and links the transnational context, various social spheres, actors' migratory projects, and their reflexivity. The empirical materials in this article draw on two studies on Chinese migrants in France and confront the trajectories and viewpoints of undocumented migrants and international students. Beyond the differences between their experiences and their legal, economic, and social statuses in France and China, we highlight several common points: First, both groups considered migration a lever to improve their social status. Second, their evaluations link their regions of origin and destination as well as various social spheres. Third, in a transnational context, many factors at different scales influence migrants' subjective self-assessments of the success or failure of their migration. The migrants' assessments can vary according to their emphasis on professional, personal, or family trajectories, or on their choice of reference groups. They are shaped by the complexity of translations of status from one country to another and by rapid social transformation in China. Thus, many interviewees estimate that they are simultaneously in situations of social progression and regression.

Keywords
Chinese migrations; downward mobility; France; highly skilled migrants; self-assessment; social mobility; social sphere; social transformation; undocumented migrants

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1. Introduction

When we asked Mrs. Yu, an ex-factory worker in China of 45 years who has been earning a living as a sex worker since she arrived in France, if she regrets going abroad, she answered negatively. Even if she is ashamed of this job, she said:

> If I had not gone abroad to earn money, I would not have been able to afford to send my daughter to university. For me, this is the most important problem, and I have solved [it]. This is my greatest achievement!

On the opposite side, Mrs. Liu's answer was negative despite her valorised occupation as a sales manager in a French company and a good salary of €5000. This article draws on migrants' surprising assessments of their mobility. Does migration represent a positive evolution in migrants' lives? This answer is key to understanding actors' decisions and actions—their will to settle down in the host country, learn the local language, and adapt

to local social norms or, on the contrary, to remain on the margins of society or return to their home country. In this article, we compare the situations of two groups of Chinese migrants living in France since the beginning of the 2000s: international students and undocumented migrants. Beyond the differences of legal, economic, and social status in China and in France, which empirically shape very different migration experiences, we argue that the comparison of skilled and unskilled workers as well as legal and illegal migrants' trajectories and viewpoints is heuristic. It enables us to grasp common dynamics and gain a basic understanding of how constraints might affect the process of migrants' social mobility differently, but also how actors try to bypass these obstacles and exercise their agency.

The empirical materials in this article draw on two original ethnographical studies conducted by the two authors with Chinese migrants who arrived in France in the 2000s. After a discussion on the theoretical and methodological premises of our approach, we present the sociopolitical context of the new Chinese migrations to France. We then compare the Chinese migrants' subjective evaluations and discuss their main dimensions. We conclude with the strengths and contributions of our approach, which illuminate the complex process of migrants' assessment of their social mobility at the transnational scale.

2. Towards a Comprehensive Approach to Migration Assessment

Studying social mobility in migration is an aporia: How can we measure downward or upward social mobility when the change of positions occurs in the context of migration between two countries? This amounts to questioning two different and sometimes hardly comparable modes of social hierarchy. Thus, the conventional approach to social mobility presents several difficulties: It is centred on one unique geographic and social space and fails to consider the simultaneous integration of migrants in different countries. It is challenged by the multiplicity of social positions that they can occupy simultaneously in their country of origin and their host country; this classic approach is centred on professional positions (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997) and underestimates other social spheres and markers that play a role in the negotiation of status; It fails to shed light on the complex ways actors' positions evolve at different social scales; it also does not succeed in grasping the paradoxical mobility of individuals in a situation of upward mobility from a socioprofessional point of view, who yet consider themselves immobile or vice versa (Beaud & Pasquali, 2017). To overcome these difficulties, over the last twenty years, scholars have increasingly taken notice of the subjective dimension of social mobility and paid attention to the ways individuals live and explain their social trajectories (Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2001; Duru-Bellat & Kieffer, 2006). This enlarges the range of variables and includes in the analysis, for instance, models of social success, individuals' life expectations, and family or group values. It is, thus, heuristic to take the imbrication of objective and subjective dimensions of migrants' mobility into account (van den Berg, 2011). Our analysis draws on this emic viewpoint as we try to understand the various and intertwined social issues at stake in migrants' evaluations of their social mobility during migration.

The transnational approach takes the social spaces of the regions of origin and destination into account as well as the transnational social spaces emerging out of migrant communities (Faist, 2010). Thus, it is important to reconstruct migrants' trajectories across national borders (Bidet, 2018) and consider their status before migration (Engzell & Ichou, 2020). It helps to understand what is at stake in their social mobility or immobility (Grysole & Bonnet, 2020). Nieswand (2011) proposed a stimulating transnational methodological perspective to understand how migrants can improve their status in their home country while they remain at the bottom of society in their host country as well as how they take advantage of economic and social remittance to gain more power, wealth, or prestige in their country of origin. Several authors have analysed the complex processes of capital conversion across national boundaries (Bréant, Chauvin, & Portilla, 2018; Mahut, 2017; Nowicka, 2013; Oso Casas, 2005). Migrants maintain significant ties with their relatives back home and often continue to measure the success or failure of their migration through comparing their situation with the trajectories of their compatriots who remained at home (Lönnqvist, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Verkasalo, 2011; Nowicka, 2013, 2014). Thus, social comparison is an important element in the assessment of mobility, and we should pay attention to the relevant others with whom they compare themselves (White, 2012) and analyse their feelings of relative deprivation (Stark & Taylor, 1989).

Finally, we are in line with scholars who call for considering social transformations in international migration analyses (Aksakal, Schmidt, & Faist, 2016; Castles, 2010; van Hear, 2010). Social changes in countries of origin or destination may affect social hierarchies and blur migrants' status and social mobility. However, little work has focused on the impacts of social transformations in the home or host country on the experiences of migrants. Oso Casas (2005) showed that the economic advantage of Spanish migrants in France has been taken up by many sedentary Spanish inhabitants after the country's economic boom. Many Hong Kong emigrants to Western countries (Canada and Australia, in particular), after reunification with China in 1984, also found themselves surpassed economically by peers who stayed in Hong Kong (Sussman, 2011). China's rapid economic growth and increasing global prominence represents an emblematic case for studying the link between social transformations and migrants' social mobility. Very few studies have analysed how China's rapid social and economic changes have impacted migrants' experiences,

and we want to fill this gap. Within a few decades, market transition, industrialization, and urbanization have drastically modified the system of social stratification in China, and this situation tends to challenge the existing literature, which considers social classification systems relatively stable. It also modifies social mobility trends (Zhou & Xie, 2019). These structural changes in the home country undermine migrants' previously effective modalities of social mobility and old forms of identification (Li, 2020). For instance, international diplomas are no longer an open sesame to upward social mobility but are still important in the social reproduction of upper-middle-class families (Xiang & Shen, 2009). In this context, migrants may have difficulties converting their migratory experiences into upward social mobility in their countries of origin. Drawing on a qualitative and comprehensive approach, we try to understand the importance that Chinese migrants give to the issues of status and mobility and how their contextual assessment might evolve over time. Thus, the temporal experiences of migrants (Baas & Yeoh, 2019; Mavroudi, Page, & Christou, 2017) are at the heart of our analyses, as we link the biographical time of migration to the time of social change and underline the phenomena of synchronization and desynchronization between the tempo of personal life and social change.

3. Social Transformations in China and New Chinese Migrants to France

France is the main destination of Chinese migrants in Europe (Ma Mung, 2014), but since the turn of the century, the profile of new immigrants from China has changed drastically. Besides the old chain migration of peasants and small entrepreneurs from Zhejiang, we observe the arrival of individuals without pre-existing ties with migrants settled in France, and particularly large numbers of Chinese students on one hand and illegal economic migrants from Northern Chinese cities on the other. The emergence of these new flows is linked to changes in migration regimes in Europe and in China (Xiang, 2003), but it is also a consequence of the rapid transformations of Chinese society (Lévy, 2015; Pieke, 2007) since the end of the 1990s.

In China, this period was marked by a large set of economic and social reforms, which led to its inclusion into the global capitalist economy. The shutdown of many state-owned enterprises created an unemployment crisis; these ex-employees' belonging to a valorised urban "middle class" was challenged. To dispel the threat of poverty and social exclusion and to maintain a good standard of living for their families, some of them decided to go and remain (illegally) abroad. The collapse of the Maoist welfare system had tremendous consequences on the housing, medical care, and education systems, whose costs rose drastically (Rocca, 2006; Zhang & Ong, 2008). The increase of university fees since 1995 combined with youth unemployment has created anxiety about the future for the young generation as well as their parents. Education was considered an important social mobility lever. Chinese families have invested huge amounts of money in schooling fees and were ready to send their only children abroad to complete international studies. This strategy was considered an escape from the elitist and costly Chinese education system and a rational investment to meet the requirements of the Chinese labor market (Li, 2016). Thus, at the turn of the century, China experienced an "overseas departure fever" (*chuguo re*) among illegal migrants and international students.

These two groups of individual migrants arrived at the same time in France and have contributed to changing the face of local Chinese community, as in other countries (Pieke, 2007). There were an estimated tens of thousands of illegal Northern Chinese migrants in the mid-2000s (Gao & Poisson, 2005). From 1998 to 2003, the number of Chinese students entering France each year increased eightfold, from 825 to 7164, before stabilizing in the mid-2000s (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, 2005). In the first decade of the 21st century, student and irregular migrations were the two most important modalities of entry for Chinese citizens to France; they were also emblematic of highly desirable and undesirable migration, respectively, for French authorities and local public opinion. Thus, the French government adopted very different treatments toward these two groups of Chinese migrants: On one hand, a policy of repression of illegal flows and clandestine work, on the other hand, a policy of attracting international students (particularly Chinese ones), whose stay after graduation has been encouraged with facilitated access to the French labour market since 2006 (Li, 2019b).

4. Fieldwork: The Confrontation of Two Studies on Chinese Migrants in France

This article confronts the empirical material collected during two ethnographic studies realized separately by the co-authors for their doctoral dissertations.

Li (2016) focused on the professional integration of international Chinese students who graduated in France and live in the Haute-Normandie region or Île-de-France. Using a life-story approach, he interviewed 45 Chinese graduates during 2007–2016: 23 employees, five researchers, nine entrepreneurs and businessmen, and eight of other statuses (inactive, job seekers, working in liberal professions, etc.). Repeated interviews, observations, and informal contacts allowed the researcher to compare the self-assessment of respondents over time and to better understand their trajectories and subjective mobilities.

The students had migrated in their 20s to obtain higher education degrees in France. They arrived in France in the early or mid-2000s; 20 out of 45 were women. Some had completed university degrees before their departure from China. Their families were relatively

affluent, and their parents were civil servants, engineers, administrative staff, entrepreneurs, etc. It should be noted that most international Chinese students in France have no scholarships and rely entirely on their families' support to pay their education fees and living expenses abroad. At the time of the survey, the respondents were between 25 and 36 years old and the average length of their stay in France was seven years.

Florence Lévy's (2015) dissertation focused on the evolution of migration plans of undocumented economic migrants from Northern China living in the Parisian region. Speaking fluent Chinese, she carried out participant observations over the course of 10 years (from 2004 to 2014), collecting information through informal discussions in workplaces, dormitories, places of prostitution, flea markets, and other informal settings. After establishing trust with interviewees, she conducted repeated in-depth interviews in Mandarin with 82 migrants (60 women, 22 men). Seventeen were interviewed at regular intervals over a period of three to nine years to observe the evolution of their points of view. This ethnographic methodology and a qualitative and comprehensive approach provide a deep understanding of migrants' agency and rationality as well as their subjective points of view and emotions.

These undocumented economic migrants had migrated in their 40s. They arrived in France between 1998 and 2005 from big cities in Northeast China but also from Tianjin, Shandong, Henan, Hebei, etc. Women represented 70% of all migrants (Gao & Poisson, 2005). The educated urban residents highlighted their average living standards in China. They used to work in large enterprises as skilled workers, accountants, salespeople, managers, doctors, etc. As state-owned enterprise employees, they had access to a large welfare system. A majority owned at least one apartment. However, the shutdown of many public companies in the 1990s challenged their belonging to a lower urban middle class in China. Many interviewees explained their decisions to migrate based on fear of losing their jobs and concerns about providing a good standard of living for their families, especially paying increasing university fees for their only child. They decided to go abroad alone with tourist visas, leaving their families in China. They planned to work abroad for a short period before returning to China.

Although resources and statuses in China differed greatly among the two groups, comparing them reveals similar dynamics. All respondents emphasized being part of the urban middle class in China (and thus, its various segments). However, their valued personal or family positions were challenged by the rapid economic and social transformations. They regarded a short migration as a strategic option to resist economic and social competition and downward social mobility in China and to maintain their personal or family rankings in the local social hierarchy. Some even expected to take advantage of emigration to radically improve their social positions in China. The issue of social status and their desire to access social mobility were thus at the core of their migration projects before their departure.

5. Different Social Status and Common Dynamics

Exploring their experiences in France also revealed common dynamics between the two groups. These observations forced us to go beyond the statement of their divergent trajectories due to different legal statuses and cultural, economic, or social resources in France.

At the time of the survey, the students were in their early thirties and had graduated from French business schools, engineering schools or universities. They spoke French fluently and had good relationships with locals (friends, ex-schoolmates, neighbours, colleagues, etc.). The employees all had 5-year university degrees, either from a *grande école* or a university program considered to be of high value. They were digital service engineers, audit managers, accountants, or landscape designers, and most had permanent contracts with French companies. The researchers were all new PhDs or postdocs in natural sciences working in French laboratories. Some had opened their own businesses (Asian grocery, store, restaurant, boutique, travel agency, etc.).

These situations contrast with those of middle-aged undocumented migrants who did not speak French and had no acquaintances to support them upon their arrival in France. After their visa expiry, they became illegal migrants and settled on the margins of local society, relying on Chinese economic migrants' networks. Most of them were employed by Southern Chinese businessmen and families who had established themselves in France earlier. They worked illegally as domestic servants or in construction sites, restaurants, sewing workshops, or warehouses. Others turned to French employers as maids and nurses or worked in massage or beauty parlours, or even as independent ragmen and sex workers.

In both groups, migrants expressed significant disappointment with their living and working conditions in France. The examination of their various professional trajectories shows common impediments in their access to the French job market and professional interactions.

Once graduated, students reported major difficulties finding jobs in France and changing their student cards to professional work permits. During interviews, they explained having accepted wages and positions below their original expectations. Many had taken precarious jobs in small and middle-size companies. They often reported feeling marginalized at work and mentioned forms of everyday racism in their interactions with superiors, co-workers, or clients. Despite their technical qualifications, many female engineers were assigned to communication or customer service tasks, revealing a combined effect of gender and ethnic prejudices. Finally, many testimonies pointed out obstacles in professional advancement and access to management or leadership positions compared to their European colleagues, revealing the effect of a race-based glass ceiling (Li, 2016).

The undocumented migrants struggled to find resources in France; their illegal migration status barred access to expected jobs and income. They talked extensively about long working hours, low wages, and harsh working conditions. They often underscored important tensions with Southern Chinese employers, who looked down on their professional experience and diplomas from China. They experienced a reverse of the social hierarchy in migration, as they had become dependent on Southern employers, whom they used to disdain in China for their rural status and low education levels (Lévy, 2015). Male and female migrants faced a harsh deskilling and a gendered division of labour in the Parisian Chinese job market. They felt forced to accept unpleasant working conditions. Many tried to shun tensions in this ethnic labour market and work for French employers. Women also relied on gendered and ethnic skills in Chinese massage or beauty parlours. A minority of men and women worked in stigmatized economic sectors as independent sex workers or ragmen, scavenging in Parisian dustbins for goods to sell at flea markets. All interviewees considered illegality a major impediment and desperately tried to get resident permits and access legal and protected working conditions. To attain that objective, many women decided to marry French citizens (Lévy, 2019; Lévy & Lieber, 2011). Hence, in both groups, we observe processes of professional deskilling and racial, ethnic, and gender discriminations as well as symbolic violence during work interactions. Even if they have access to very different segments of the job market, their trajectories are both shaped by the combined effects of employer discrimination and institutional barriers to the French labour market (Li, 2019b).

6. Migration Plans and Mobility Assessment

Except for a few, most migrants had not anticipated these tensions before their departure from China. The sharp contrast with their expectations might explain their disappointment and leads us to pay closer attention to our interviewees' life projects and migration plans. Despite his high income and valued social status, Mr. Zheng, a 43-year-old engineer, had been torn by a feeling of downward social mobility. He left China to enter a highly competitive engineering school in France and boost his professional and economic career in China. During the interviews, he emphasized that in his family, his father, a senior engineer, and his mother, a general practitioner, had always repeated that "you should never be satisfied with yourself; you always have to improve yourself." During the first interview in 2008, he was very unhappy about working in a small company. He hoped "to enter a large company and go up step by step—first as a technical consultant and then as a project manager, step by step." Ten years later, he seemed to have fulfilled his ambition, having become a software engineer at a large, famous French company. His gross salary increased from 40,000 to 55,000 euros a year, and he enjoyed a comprehensive benefit package as an employee of a large company. Yet, he was bitter and highlighted that he had not been promoted since he joined the company in 2012, despite his tireless efforts. He stated that he would have liked to quit the company and work as a freelancer, but his wife disagreed with him, as she was afraid that it could destabilize the family now that they had children. Being unable to achieve a management position gave him a feeling of intertwined failures and marked a defect of his migration plan. For him, though, it was also a setback regarding his taken-for-granted life trajectory (Festinger, 1954); it represented underperformance regarding his family achievements, as his parents and siblings all had manager positions. The feeling of missing out on life caused an acute midlife crisis for him as someone over 40 years old: "Sometimes I wonder if I'm not too old to change jobs."

This case illustrates the importance of taking actors' migration plans and life expectations into account to understand their assessment of their trajectories. It also upholds the importance of paying attention to the underlying (and often unexplained) social norms that guide their evaluations. A range of qualitative information such as family values, dominant norms, and patterns of social success according to actors' life stages play major roles in actors' reflexivity. All these elements help to understand their counterintuitive evaluations of their mobility.

7. The Role of the Private Sphere in Mobility Evaluations

Whereas most quantitative studies on social mobility have focused mainly on professional positions and economic income level, the narratives of the migrants we met in France forced us to expand the scope of possible elements and fields involved in their assessments of their social status and mobility after migration. Actors do take economic indicators into account but also pay attention to a large variety of elements and connect very different social spheres in their assessments, highlighting professional, economic, legal, family, and matrimonial issues. We have also observed that they often compare their situations before and after their migration.

7.1. Family Issues

Many undocumented migrants complained about their degrading and exploitative working conditions, explaining that they were "forced to turn to demeaning means of survival" and to work in the sex industry or as ragmen. At the same time, they highlighted their pride in sending economic remittances back home to support their families. Mr. Dong, a former taxi driver in China, was ashamed of earning a living as a ragman in France. He felt very embarrassed when people looked at him while he inspected dustbins in the Parisian street. Still, he stressed his success in being able to purchase a new apartment for his son, who, thanks to this ownership,

had become a good match. In China, owning a personal apartment is now a prerequisite for entering into marriage for young men.

The harshness of migrants' lives or their downward mobility is less significant than the contrast between their objective trajectories and their subjective assessments of their migration. Taking into account family issues allows us to understand their paradoxical evaluations. For these interviewees, in their 40s, being able to be a good parent is a crucial issue, which was sanctioned by a good reputation in China. It is particularly important for migrant women, who run the risk of being labelled "bad mothers" or "careless women" who have left their children behind. Thus, the fulfilment of their social role in China weighs against the type of economic activities they have access to in France. This achievement from afar compensates migrants' feeling of deskilling and of harsh downward mobility abroad.

Highly skilled migrants also relied on the same logic of balancing different types of situations; they counterbalanced their limited individual achievements in the professional sphere with their good living conditions in Europe. Parenthood very often radically changed the migratory path of qualified Chinese migrants, who were considering henceforth settling in France. They took advantage of their parenting roles to compensate for their meagre career progress and change the meaning of their migration, pointing out that they could offer their children a better living environment in France. They stressed the lower level of pollution in French cities or the advantages of raising their children in a less stressful education system and shunning the high level of competition among students in China. Considering their situation through intergenerational lenses allowed them to reassess their individual migration in a more positive way; it represented a decisive step toward their offspring's future achievements. This long-term family mobility logic, which leaves some room for social mobility, is actually quite common for migrants. It echoes the strategies of North African migrants who face significant deskilling in France but expect that their children will realize their aspiration of mobility (Santelli, 2001). It has also been analysed in the cases of Chinese women who married rural men in Japan; these urban migrants felt stuck in the countryside but hoped that their children would soon move and live in big Japanese cities (Le Bail, 2013).

7.2. Matrimonial Issues

Migrants' concerns about their matrimonial status is also decisive in their assessment of their positions in France or China. For Chinese graduates who migrated in their 20s as singles, the speed of their transition to adulthood was a key element in their judgments and may explain their feelings of having been socially immobile. For them to enter adulthood means essentially to find a job and marry. Such is the case of a male IT engineer whose failure to find a stable female partner in France echoed his feeling of being stuck in his professional career. He compared his situation with those of his schoolmates in China:

> They already have a family, children….In fact, we [the Chinese overseas students] have no advantage over them.…We have the feeling that we have ruined our life—wasted our money [and time] in France without getting the slightest result. We are ashamed of ourselves by comparing ourselves with others.

To get married and settle down around 30 years of age represented a crucial challenge for graduate migrants of both sexes, a test of their ability to conform to the dominant biographical model in China: to graduate, find a well-paid position at a big company, buy an apartment, marry, and have a (male) baby soon after. The expectation to fulfil these normalized life sequences is also a source of distress for young adults in China, but our interviewees pointed out that living abroad represented an additional impediment. First, longer schooling and difficulties in gaining access to employment after graduation delayed their settlement in adulthood, compared to their peers in China. Second, there is a structural mismatch in the matrimonial market in France; skilled Chinese migrants generally sought younger and less skilled Chinese women. However, the gender relationship tended to change in migration situations: Graduated migrant women also had professional ambitions and did not wish to confine themselves to roles as wives and mothers. For both male and female migrants, living abroad made it more difficult to achieve an ideal marriage according to the recent dominant norms in China (i.e., a division of roles in which the husband is the economic provider of the family and the wife takes care of domestic tasks and the education of children; see Raymo, Park, Xie, & Yeung, 2015). Finally, whereas young people of both sexes felt pressure and frustration in their transition into adulthood, men and women related differently to age norms and non-Chinese partners. Male migrants claimed to have a hard time seducing European women, as the image of Asian men was associated with subordinate masculinity in Europe (Hibbins, 2005; Liu-Farrer, 2017). Chinese women, whose femininity was valorised, did not face the same problem, as they had been successful in the binational marriage market. However, female interviewees did speak about being threatened by the Chinese stigma of *shengnü*, or leftover women, who are unable to marry before the crucial age of 27. They received frequent international phone calls from parents or relatives who pressured them to find partners and marry. Female graduates, who were confronted earlier than their male counterparts with this injunction, had stronger feelings that migration delayed their entry into family life in comparison to their peers in China. These gendered impressions of failure in the private sphere influenced interviewees' assessments of their social mobility and explained their mixed feelings about their migration.

8. Self-Assessment in a Changing Transnational Context

In their self-evaluations of their trajectories, the migrants we interviewed asked themselves not only whether they had achieved their initial goals but also whether they were doing better than others. Depending on the context of interaction, migrants can compare themselves with various types of people and groups (White, 2012): citizens from the host country, compatriots and migrants of different origins in the host country, or persons living in their home country. We observed that even if they had lived in France for many years, the interviewees we met attached greater importance to their friends and acquaintances in China. Their relatives, childhood friends, former classmates and colleagues, or neighbours in China often continued to be their main reference groups. This finding is in line with research on social comparison and migration, which has shown that migrants often compare themselves with their peers in their countries of origin to measure the success or failure of their migration (Lönnqvist et al., 2011; Nowicka, 2014; Stark & Taylor, 1989).

It also corroborates that the graduates and undocumented migrants we met regarded migration as a strategy to better climb the Chinese social ladder and confirms that their initial migration project intrinsically included the idea of return. Therefore, throughout their stay in France, our interviewees constantly projected themselves into the social space of their country of origin. Thanks to communication technologies, migrants remained in contact with their original local communities during their stays abroad. Thus, drawing on comparisons with persons in the same social situations upon their departure, they formed rather precise ideas of their relative evolution (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). This development also enabled migrants to imagine the trajectories they could have developed if they had not left China.

However, testimonies revealed that comparisons with people who still lived in China were often a source of disappointment. Many graduates and undocumented migrants believed that their sedentary peers in China progressed faster than themselves and enjoyed more favourable living conditions. The gap with their peers was cruelly felt, especially when individuals had been in France for a long time. This feeling was not only due to the hazards of personal trajectories but also relied on objective reasons related to macrosocial processes.

8.1. Life in a Slow Lane?

One of the peculiarities of the China-to-Europe migratory movement is that the migrants come from a country undergoing rapid transformation. In the first decade of the 2000s, the Chinese GDP more than doubled, entailing consequences for Chinese people's life chances and social mobility. Graduate migrants often reported that their university classmates, who were earning modest salaries when they graduated, saw their incomes more than double within a few years or rose quickly into positions of responsibility; they also mentioned with envy that their schoolmates bought homes in major Chinese cities and became wealthy after a surge in property prices. Such rapid upward mobility could hardly happen in the French context due to a much lower growth rate. Graduate migrants find difficult to evolve in both professional and family domains in France. They have the feeling of being caught in a slow traffic lane. The difference in the paces of social change between China and France is large enough to have an impact on the social trajectories of Chinese migrants.

The rise of the Chinese middle class has occurred while the middle-class positions in developed countries were declining (Milanovic, 2016). This macroevolution between the two countries explains that the comparison between the social statuses of migrants and their non-migrant peers is now turning in favour of the latter, who have been able to take advantage of opportunities for work, promotion, investment, and entrepreneurship at home. Radical changes in education, employment, and housing in China are altering the conditions for reintegration of migrants in their home country and their prospects for return. This situation is very clear in Mr. Zhou's trajectory. In 2003, he came to France to study landscape design, a skill that was extremely rare and in demand in China. After graduating, however, he decided to postpone his return to wait for his wife to finish her studies in France. In 2013, when he wanted to return to China, he found the conditions had changed dramatically. His skill was no longer sought after, as the specialty was being taught in China. The remuneration for a work project had fallen by 80%; during the same period, the price of real estate had soared in his city, and it had become extremely expensive to buy an apartment. Mr. Zhou believed that he missed the right time to return to China. He explained that he had lost all hope of competing with his former college mates who never left China, as they had already obtained director positions and had higher incomes. Thus, he gave up his project of returning to China and has decided to work in France, hoping to someday be able to create his own architectural firm there.

8.2. The Difficulties of Returning Home Triumphantly

At the same time, Chinese international students' mobility strategies have been eroded by the rapid devaluation of Western diplomas in China. Such students have bet on the prestige of international diplomas and expected to bypass the fierce competition in the Chinese job market to immediately get managerial positions in large local or international companies in China. During their studies abroad, though, the situation changed in their home country. Over the past 15 years, with the expansion of the Chinese university system, diploma inflation, and the subsequent employment crisis, a foreign degree is no longer sufficient to guarantee an elite position

for foreign-educated Chinese graduates. Some young Chinese returnees from overseas study are unable to find jobs (Hao & Welch, 2012; Xiang & Shen, 2009).

Finally, China's modernization has led to the trivialization of "foreign things." Scholars have shown that with the intensification of the exchange of goods and information between China and the rest of the world, development of mass tourism, and increase in international migratory flows, the Chinese middle classes no longer look at overseas Chinese with the envy and wonder of yesterday (Trémon, 2018). Western living conditions abroad are no longer a desirable prospect for urban and affluent youth in China. Consequently, this new perception of migration and migrants has changed how Chinese migrants evaluate their own trajectories. Hence, many graduate migrants expressed that their trajectories abroad were no longer a source of pride. They reported self-shame and a deep feeling of being stuck and immobile for years. Some were even confronted with identity crises (Li, 2019a).

Many undocumented migrants also reported a feeling of failure in comparing themselves with their acquaintances in China. The value of their earnings in France had declined with the drop in exchange rate between the euro and the yuan, which fell from 10 to eight in a decade. This global context explains that both graduates and undocumented migrants are challenged by the devaluation of their symbolic and economic capital acquired abroad. We observed that they experienced relative deprivation, underlining their feelings that they had missed opportunities in China and that their hard-won progress in France seemed ridiculous compared to their peers' spectacular achievements in China.

Migrants' self-assessment of their social mobility can have a strong impact on their life plans and migration decisions. It might explain the various decisions of undocumented and graduate migrants regarding a possible return to China. The former keep thinking that they will retire in China, while the latter tend to settle down in France. According to them, their progression does not allow them to return to their country of origin triumphantly. Even if they maintain ties with their friends in China, receive moral and financial support from their parents, and make regular trips to their country, they have difficulty transferring their achievements from France to China. In fact, the educational and cultural capital acquired in France cannot be converted into social advancement without their physical return to China. In addition, as young and highly skilled professionals, these Chinese migrants may integrate into French society more easily than undocumented migrants. They do not face language barriers in France, they have many professional and private contacts with locals, and many of them finally build their family lives in France. Gradually, the feeling of losing one's place in the country of origin leads them to focus increasingly on their lives in France (Li, 2020).

9. Conclusion

In this article, we have developed a transverse approach for understanding self-assessments by skilled and undocumented migrants of their social mobility and status. If the experiences of migrants of various legal and social categories have often been studied separately, we point out that beyond the obvious differences in their migration trajectories, they are confronted with similar dynamics, which are less visible either in their country of origin or in the host country.

The first contribution of our article is to develop a qualitative and comprehensive approach that allows us to go beyond many preconceived ideas on migrants' downward or upward social mobility. We bring to light the fact that migrants often have feelings of experiencing upward and downward mobility (or even immobility) simultaneously. The comprehensive approach helps to go beyond the first impression of actors' paradoxical assessments of their migration and social mobility during migration. Their points of view should be understood according to the specific context of enunciation and depend on the reference groups, spheres of life, and social spaces that migrants considered at the time of the interviews.

The second contribution of our article is to consider simultaneously the reflexivity of actors on their trajectories, the transnational context and various scales of analysis, and the various dimensions and elements involved in the interviewees' evaluations of their migration. We discussed three aspects that reveal the complexity of migrants' assessments: (1) They are carried out in connection with actors' migration projects and based on diachronic comparisons of the ego's situations with living conditions in the past, (2) they intertwine various social spheres (professional, marital, family, residential, legal, etc.) and (3) they put the spaces of the countries of origin and arrival into perspective.

Third, we insist on the need to pay attention to the temporal dimension in the analyses of mobility and migrant assessments. The crossing of the diachronic and synchronic points of view provides a deeper understanding of migrants' self-evaluations that seems contradictory at first. The relationship between time and migration can be seen from several angles: the life cycle and migration path, the transition to adulthood, or the question of rhythm in the transnational context. In the case of Chinese migration to France, migrants are confronted with unequal speeds of social change in the origin and host countries. We suggest that part of migrants' feelings of downgrading may result from this temporal dissonance. This finding implies that time does not extend homogeneously in migrants' transnational social space; this transnational space can be characterized by an increasing desynchronization between the tempo of mobile migrants and the pace of social life in their country of origin. This situation might shape both the migrants' trajectories and their subjective evaluations of mobility.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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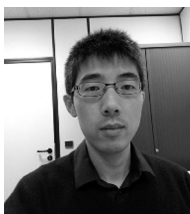

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Article

Migration as a Capability: Discussing Sen's Capability Approach in the Context of International Migration

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Abstract

Migration is a form of spatial and social transplant from one local and national context to another. Migration trajectories often expose the underlying intersections of social relations and social hierarchies that underpin cultural and social national environments. Migrants who encounter those complex structural inequalities must learn to negotiate classed, gendered and racialised social relations and seek the most suitable social positions within new systems. This article builds on Amartya Sen's capability approach to conceptualise migrants' embeddedness in the framework of social inequalities and explores the relationship between individual choices, resources and entitlements. It points towards patterns of advantage and disadvantage that frame migrants' opportunities and draws tacit analytical, theoretical and methodological links that have the innovative potential for the study of migration. Building on the parallels between studies in the fields of social inequalities and migration, this article argues that Sen's analytical and conceptual approach provides innovative insights into migration experiences, and Sen's unique reasoning opens up new avenues for the discussion of migrants' social justice.

Keywords

capabilities; choice; entitlement; inequalities; migration; social justice

Issue

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1. Introduction

There is little doubt that the global world—interconnected, fluid and dynamic—has a substantial impact on individual lives. The processes and shifts occurring at different levels of the global economy, politics and culture are transforming social structures, creating new circumstances that encourage individuals to take risks in the search for a better future. Transnational mobility is one of these opportunities, but it comes with the complexity of individual and social challenges that alter biographical trajectories and national histories alike. Migration studies operate in the unique theoretical and methodological environments that aim to capture the individual experiences of migration as well as the international and intercultural social relations within global, national and local scale. Migration studies regularly tap into the underlying disproportion of status and individual rights on the one hand, and the structural patterns of the global economy and international politics on the other. This complex and diverse field of study incorporates a wide array of theoretical and methodological approaches focusing broadly on issues of movement, settlement and control embedded in the context of citizenship (Collyer & King, 2015; Kivisto & Faist, 2009). However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that migration studies rarely engage with the discourse of social justice, such as ideas of fairness and representation, despite them forming a vital part of migrants' experience.

This article explores the potential of Amartya Sen's "capability approach" that proposes the social justice system that focuses on a person's ability to act and choose, rather than resources and utility-based justice systems that highlight the importance of individual resources and needs. The focus on capabilities addresses two crucial shortcomings of other inequality approaches: It does

not assume that everyone has the same needs, and it highlights the systemic obstacles that frame a person's agency, such as discrimination (Burchardt & Hick, 2016). The capability approach points towards 'the central relevance of inequality of capabilities in the assessment of social disparities' (Sen, 2010, p. 232), which aligns closely with the everyday experiences of migrants all over the world. These parallels between studies in the fields of social inequalities and migration suggest that Sen's analytical and conceptual approach can provide innovative insights into studies of migration. Furthermore, Sen's unique conceptualisation of fairness building on capabilities opens up new avenues in the discussion of social justice for migrants.

Sen's theoretical framework and migrations studies have interacted to some extent via the field of development studies. Sen's ideas formed the cornerstone of the "human development paradigm" (Nussbaum, 2011) focused on the questions of how people can act and what opportunities they may have to do so. Within this paradigm, migrant workers are perceived as effective "agents of development" (Nussbaum, 2011). Their contribution to national economies and developmental potential of remittances have been identified as a leading force in economic development. At the same time, there has been some recognition of the personal costs, associated with the loss of social and economic rights, highlighted by the Global Forum for Migration and Development in 2010 on shared prosperity, shared responsibility (Juran, 2016). According to Preibisch, Dodd, and Su (2016, p. 2113) 'both the capabilities and development approaches are used to emphasise the agency and potential of migrants to contribute to their economic growth and poverty alleviation in addition to that of their families, communities and countries of origin.' I argue, however, that this evolution of the capability approach within the context of development studies does not do Sen's capability approach justice. Sen (2010) argues that his approach should be focused on the inequalities and assessment of social disparities, that concentrating on capabilities is not a specific formula for policy decisions, nor is the way to evaluate policy frameworks, such as Human Rights agendas. This article expands on Sen's (2010, p. 232) argument that the capability approach can be used to its greatest advantage to inform the 'assessment of societies and social institutions' and draw attention to the decisions that would have to be made to address the issues of fairness and social justice. This approach applied to migration research deepens our understanding of migration and introduces new analytical tools for international research agendas.

The first section of this article discusses thematic links between migration studies and Sen's approach to social inequalities. This section highlights the importance of the life quality discourse, the lack of migrant representation in the social justice discourse and the importance of freedom of choice. The second section outlines the analytical value of Sen's capability approach, particularly the distinction between capability as an ability to act and functioning understood as the outcome of this action, the focus on entitlement as a structural obstacle for capabilities and the relation between capability sets and structural advantage and disadvantage. The discussion section highlights the implications of the capability approach for the development of social justice theory in the context of migration as well as the theoretical and methodological developments that have the potential to enrich both academic fields.

2. Social Inequality Implications in the Context of Migration Studies

In the context of the ongoing theoretical and methodological developments in migration studies, transnational social practices often overlap thematically and analytically with the complex landscape of social inequalities (Faist, 2018). As groups and individuals, migrants exist in the liminal spaces within social structures, where the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege determines their life chances and life choices over their lifetime. Migration research exposes the underlying power dynamics within and between societies as well as develop new relations of advantage and disadvantage. To address this nexus of migration and social inequalities, this article forges analytical and thematic links between the "capability approach" based on Amartya Sen's original work on inequalities and key aspects of transnational practices that aim to answer the question on the value of choices, lack of representation and the idea of "quality life."

Having been awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in the field of economics in 1998, Amartya Kumar Sen is one of the leading contemporary intellectuals. He is a critical economic, social and political theorist with interests in social choice theory, welfare economy and international development studies. According to Hamilton (2019, p. 1):

> His capabilities approach changed the way we think about human agency, the standard of living, justice and democracy and shake to the very foundations many of theoretical edifices we have constructed around how best to conceive of our lives together.

In the context of migration studies, Sen's work on social disadvantage is potentially powerful. Sen champions a theory of justice based on fairness that 'must be deeply and directly concerned with the actual freedoms enjoyed by different persons—persons with possibly divergent objectives—to lead different lives that they can have reason to value' (Sen, 1990b, p. 112). This conceptualisation strikes a chord in the context of migration and exposes three areas of overlap between the relatively unequal, structural positioning of migrants and their individual capitals and aspirations in the pursuit of a better life: the notion of life quality, the lack of representation in the public debate and the importance of individual choice.

The first overlap between Sen's theory of justice and migration highlights the issue of quality of life, defined not merely as survival or the fulfilment of basic needs, but 'in terms of valued activities and capability to achieve these activities' (Sen, 1990a, p. 43). This point comes from Sen's critique of commodity-based justice systems that do not take account of the interpersonal variation of the ability to convert primary goods into a meaningful quality of life. The idea of the quality of life comes from Adam Smith's assessment that, to fully participate in social activities, individuals need to be able to fit in with others without a feeling of shame. According to Sen, to conceptualise social inequalities is to understand that there cannot be a single indicator for measuring the quality of life and that any such measurement needs to reflect the environment in which the individual exists and their individual choices. In the context of migration, the quality of life will be measured against the expectations of multiple reference groups, including the receiving and sending communities as well as the migrant groups themselves, with an added value attached to individual choices. This liminal position of migrants in relation to multiple points of reference allows them to build their individual notion of quality of life that stands against the set measures of value. This is the case, for example, in the situation when migrants are perceived as working below their potential or qualification, but they accumulate their value by accumulating financial resources that can be converted according to their definition of quality of life in their home country. To understand the inequalities in the context of migration, we need to identify what activities constitute value and how it is achieved.

The second juncture between social inequalities and migration focuses on the lack of power that leads to a lack of representation and voice in the political, social and cultural decisions that frame migrants' experiences directly. Sen (1990a, p. 45) argues that 'smugness about continued deprivation and vulnerability is often made to look justified on the grounds of a lack of strong public demand and forcefully expressed desire for removing these impediments.' This relatively powerless status of individual migrants and their communities is rooted in the utilitarian nature of these types of systems. Sen critiques this utility-based justice system because it forces people who form the relative minority to adjust their perceived value and quality of life to align with the majority's expectations embedded in the migrant status. Sen (1990a, p. 45) argues that:

> A thoroughly deprived person leading a very reduced life might not appear to be worse off in terms of the mental metric of utility if the hardship is accepted with non-grumbling resignation. In situations of long-standing deprivation, the victims do not go on weeping all the time and very often make great efforts to take pleasure in small mercies and to cut down personal desires to modest "realistic" proportions.

Research on migration often takes these statements of utility as an acceptance of the status quo, often assigning judgements to the inability of migrant communities to exert pressure and make their voices heard.

The third overlap between the field of migration and Sen's approach to inequalities is the focus on freedom of choice that should be independent of the notion of achievement. Here, in particular, Sen stresses that the quality of life is not based on what we can achieve with the same amount of resources, but the freedom to choose how people would like to live their lives. In this context, migration itself may be a choice that leads to individually defined economic or social achievements. But it can also be the outcome of a lack of any other choices, as is the case for people fleeing conflict or prosecution, where the achieved status of refugee or asylum seeker does not convert individual resources into actual freedom. Sen (2010) stresses that the main goals of a capabilities-based justice system are to focus on systemic opportunities and freedom of choice, rather than simply the number of individual resources or a migrant's utility. This focus can be applied to great advantage in the field of migration studies.

Sen's original idea of a capabilities-based justice inspires analytical and theoretical innovation that can be applied in the field of international migration. In particular, Sen's early work on the capability approach can be adopted as an analytical framework for understanding the social structures that frame migrants' movement opportunities as well as their social and political rights. For the purpose of this article, I have selected three main aspects of the capability approach that carry particular potential and relevance for migration studies, namely the conceptual dichotomy between capabilities and functionings, the relations between resources and entitlements, and Sen's commentaries on the role of the state.

3. The Analytical Links between the Capability Approach and Migration Studies

The capability approach is at the centre of Sen's conceptual framework and forms the philosophical cornerstone of his later theory of justice and theory of social choice. In essence, it focuses on 'the capability to function' (Sen, 1990a, p. 43) as the main aspect determining an individual's positioning in the framework of social inequalities. Individuals with more opportunities to act will have a more advantageous position within the social system, and these with fewer opportunities will be in the position of disadvantage. Sen (1990a, p. 50) argues that 'the capability approach can, thus, be used at various levels of sophistication, and how far we can go would depend on the practical consideration of what data we can get and what we cannot.' Framing the analysis of migration within the capability approach framework offers new analytical lenses that can accommodate a wide range of empirical research methodologies equipped to pick up the elements of individual choice

and wider social change, including cognitive, narrative and biographical methodologies.

3.1. Analysis of Capabilities and Functionings

Within Sen's theoretical landscape, the term capability refers to the "potential" to freely pursue multiple opportunities and is related to the functioning that is the current state of being. Each individual has a set of capabilities, some of which will be converted into actual functionings whilst others will be abandoned. This introduces an element of retrospection into research designs that investigate the capabilities set before the actual functioning has happened. At each stage of life, an individual's capability set is changing depending on the conditions in which individuals find themselves. According to Sen, individuals with more capabilities have a relatively more advantageous position in society than those with limited capability sets. Advantage and disadvantage are rooted in 'the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another; that is, it reflects the person's ability (that includes her living conditions) to choose from possible lives' (Hamilton, 2019, p. 55).

In this context, we can consider migration in both meanings, either as a capability set or as functioning with its own set of opportunities to choose from. Migration, as part of a capability set, should be considered as one out of the range of opportunities. The analysis of other opportunities and the reasoning behind the choice to migrate adds to the analysis of the structural advantage in the analysis of migration movement. For example, in Eichsteller (2017), three styles of voluntary migration narratives are recognized to capture the self-positioning of the migrant within the broader social structures. The narrative of "explorer" is expressed as a life-project pursued by an individual migrant, and each step, including migration episodes, counts as a personal experience that forms part of the personal journey. This type of narrative would indicate multiple choices and access to opportunities that can be seen through the lenses of advantage. By contrast, the narrative of "guest" indicates a limited capability set. It focuses on the limited opportunities, lack of social status and sense of disadvantage in social relations. Eichsteller (2017) also points towards the narrative type of the "trader," who uses institutional frameworks, such as international companies or educational institutions, to facilitate opportunities and broker the professional skills for the sense of belonging and successful convert capability into functioning. All these narrative types orient the analytical framework towards the capability sets that determine not only access to resources and the individual perception of a person's utility but also the structures of advantage and disadvantage.

The expressions of choice and opportunities are often embedded in the language and narrative form used to describe the experience. Sen (1990a) uses the analogy of "fasting" and "starving" to highlight the difference between the same type of condition with a completely different set of capabilities. In each case, the more choices and opportunities are available to an individual, the more privileged their position is in the social structures. Therefore, a significant advantage of the capability approach lies in its focus on opportunities rather than resources. Migration studies, especially those focused on individual agency, are largely concerned with the power of individual resources. They stress the relevance of economic means in facilitating migration movements and subsequent settlement and social capital as the ability to engage with new social networks, thus attributing the responsibility for the migration outcome largely to the individual. This supports the idea that, by merely making resources available for individual migrants, for instance in the form of housing or employment in low-skilled jobs, they can be converted into successful assimilation or at least adaptation story. Within the capability approach, this way of thinking does not hold. According to Burchardt and Hick (2016), the capability approach recognises that, firstly, people have different needs that cannot be fulfilled by a one-size-fits-all approach and, secondly, that migrants may face systemic obstacles, such as discrimination, that may significantly limit their capability set and put them at a disadvantaged position.

3.2. Focus on Resources and Entitlements

The capability approach focuses on opportunities that create an advantage. Along with the ability to choose, Sen (1983a) points to the notion of entitlement that highlights how individuals acquire capabilities. According to Sen (1983a, p. 754), 'entitlement refers to the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces.' In Sen's work, an individual's entitlement is comprised of two elements: a person's resources (endowment) that can be bought and exchange possibilities (exchange entitlement) that are determined by their status and rights. Sen highlights that the main commodity that a person can sell his labour, and for that reason, a person's entitlement primarily depends on the ability to find a job. But entitlement is more than a simple income measure. According to Sen (1983a, p. 755), entitlement is concerned with what people can and cannot do and therefore should be conceptualised to capture the complexity of entitlement relations, such as access to and affordability of health provisions, education, social equality, self-respect and freedom from harassment.

In the context of migration, the endowment can include economic resources as a start, but in the long term, it is more about any valuable assets that can be exchanged in the new structural context, mostly to secure a place in the labour market, but also to gain access to other resources, such as information. For migrants, these assets would include physical health, the ability to communicate, transferable skills, an education degree, as well as other skills, such as creativity, adaptability,

resourcefulness and trustworthiness. To illustrate the complexity of the exchange and entitlement, we can look at the study by Davis, Day, Eichsteller, and Baker (2017) that analyses the biographical experiences of migrants learning a second language. It questions the assumption that the ability to speak the language will help with the individual's integration into their new social structures, namely assist in finding jobs and facilitate access to a broader set of opportunities. The study findings suggest instead that simply learning a second language (building an endowment) does not necessarily achieve this goal. The authors explain this by drawing on Bourdieu's notion that, to become fluent in a second language, the person needs to be in a situation when he or she has the right to speak and right to be heard. This notion of "right" would link directly with the exchange entitlement. The person can learn a new language but then needs to be in a position to use it. Among migrants, including refugees, illegal migrants and asylum seekers, this entitlement is often missing and therefore hinders the language acquisition and possible integration.

Exchange entitlement is the aspect of the capabilities approach that carries particular promise for the field of migration studies. It taps into the element of migrant stories that often include the word "luck" to explain successful migration pathways. Exchange entitlement makes it possible to exchange endowments into successful functioning. It highlights that 'the freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us' (Sen, 2000, pp. xi–xii). This element of Sen's theoretical framework currently takes on a new shape within development studies (Nambiar, 2013) investigating the institutional entanglements and constraints that directly affect the conversion of individual skills and resources into actual opportunities.

3.3. Expanding Individual Capabilities and Development

The last element of Sen's capability approach introduced here with unique relevance to migration studies is his understanding of the role of the state and community as an enabler for the improvement of quality of life. Sen builds on Marx in arguing that the exact role of the state and corresponding social structures should be about 'replacing domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of the individuals over chance and circumstance' (Sen, 1983a, p. 754). The focus of the state should be on understanding the entitlement on the one hand and expanding the capabilities set on the other. In the context of migration studies, the focus on creating opportunities that enable the individual agent to tackle complex circumstances produces a better social, economic and political outcome than simply providing short-term resources based on an external assessment of individual needs. Within the context of migration studies, social policies should focus on building institutional support that enables individual agents, both citizens and non-citizens, to successfully convert individual endowments into functionings by recognising the role of exchange entitlements and the importance of individual choice.

The focus of migration research incorporating a capability approach would highlight the structural features of social relationships that are made on the basis of this entitlement. Sen (1983a, p. 755) argues that 'a person can acquire some capabilities, i.e., the ability to do this or that and fail to acquire some other capabilities. The process of economic development can be seen as a process of expanding the capabilities of people.' Analysis of changing capabilities, between countries as well as within a country's historical context, can enrich a comparative understanding of social entitlements in the context of migration. This research agenda can be applied to different structural levels (Nambiar, 2013), including regulations and legal frameworks, social relations and personal factors.

3.3.1. Capabilities in the Context of Legal Frameworks

Analysis of capabilities associated with regulatory legal frameworks should focus on access to legal infrastructure as well as the institutions associated with law enforcement. In the context of migration studies, the legal regulation of mobility at national and international level creates a multi-tiered system of advantage and disadvantage, posing varied levels of restrictions for citizens of other countries, ranging from unrestricted movement, exclusive visa systems, to refugee and asylum-seeker requirements. From an individual migrant's point of view, these legal regulations are often reinforced by bureaucratic administrative infrastructure that may significantly reduce their capabilities. Application procedures for a tax number, social insurance, welfare benefits and qualification recognition can set up road-blocks to the individual's exchange entitlements. One of the most infamous cases of these administrative practices is the creation of a "hostile environment" promoted by the UK's Home Office in 2012 under Theresa May, which encouraged civil servants to be overzealous in their practices in order to make the legal stay and work in the country as difficult as possible. The capability approach analysis in this context can highlight administrative practices that are affecting individuals' opportunities. In some contexts, they are designed to drain individual resources and delay the ability to exchange them. These practices may take the form of repeated delays, such as ongoing demands for documents, or high administrative costs. By contrast, analysis of successful transfers of entitlements would highlight the social processes that open up opportunities and expand the capabilities set.

3.3.2. Capabilities and Social Change

The analysis capabilities associated with social factors should explore the intersectionality of power positions

determined by gender, ethnicity, age and social class that constrains migrants' opportunities and entitlements. In his writings, Sen (1990b, 1999, 2000) highlights particularly the role of gender in restricting capability sets due to biological and social factors, but the minority-majority hierarchies embedded in the ethnicity relations, as well as a social class, are equally relevant for the analysis of structural disadvantage. With the conceptual framework of the capability approach, migration research should aim to capture the structural power relations and gain insight into the creation and change in the discrimination patterns within as well as between states. This geographical mapping of social capability patterns holds the significant analytical potential for migration studies.

3.3.3. Personal Factors

Finally, the study of individual strategies aimed at converting individual resources and entitlements into capabilities can be particularly relevant for migration studies. This approach holds an additional advantage when contrasting individuals who experience lifelong disadvantage within the social structure with those who enter it from the outside. Analysis of personal factors should include issues of access to institutional frameworks that support an individual's well-being, including health care assistance, social welfare as well as the ability to engage and thrive in the labour market. It can also capture the process by which individual migrants either gain or lose access to a wider array of capabilities to obtain a clearer picture of broader social change.

4. Discussion

Drawing analytical links and tracing the parallels between discourses of migration and social inequalities brings out the potential for new theoretical and methodological innovations. Firstly, the application of the capability approach into empirical research has the potential to engage in migration research with discourses of social justice. This conversation has mutual benefits by expanding the discourse on the conceptualisation of migrants' social rights on the one hand and introducing the discourse of methodological transnationalism (Amelina & Faist, 2012; Glick Schiller, 2007) to social justice discourse that is still framed within the national discourse. Thus far, the idea of migrants' justice has been drawing on the Human Rights agenda rather than more welfare-orientated debates. The Human Rights framing of the migration has narrowed the discussion of migrants' experiences and well-being to the issues of regulating the international movement of people (Kivisto & Faist, 2009; Ypi, 2008). According to Ypi (2008, p. 392), justice in migration with its asymmetry between rights of immigrants versus rights of emigrants 'points to a serious moral deficiency in the theory and is incompatible with the general principle of justice.' This approach is why migration studies stay away from the social justice discourse, as to claim universal rights of non-citizen individuals interferes ideologically with the politics of nation-states and privilege of citizenship.

Sen's conceptualisation to social justice does not engage with the idea of rights, but with fairness that is relative to the particular community and specific country. Sen (2010, p. 8) argues that 'in contrast with most modern theories of justice, which concentrate on the "just society"…[his work] investigates realisation-based comparisons that focus on the advancement or retreat of justice.' Sen argues that it is possible to have plural ideas and competing reasons for justice, but the real question is how we can gradually advance the fairness of social systems, rather than focus on what the ideal social system should be. In the context of migration, this conceptualisation of justice has enormous potential. It frames the discourse of justice as a notion of collective achievement—moral as well as developmental—and places the discourse of migration within the more positive context of common goals and progress, whilst characterising a possible retreat of justice as a failure to meet our own norms and common expectations, whatever they might be.

Secondly, the focus on the change in the set of capabilities combined with the idea that expanding these capabilities should form a part of social policy agenda highlights a new aspect of the dichotomy between individual agency and social structure. Most of the contemporary migration methodologies struggle to reconcile the singular character of migration experience and structural patterns that are very limited in their explanatory power. This is due to the fact that migration research focuses on the migrant's functionings, focusing on either the individual resources, often framed in terms of Bourdieu's notion of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Erel, 2010), or broadly defined utility and needs (Apitzsch & Kontos, 2008; Chamberlayne, Rustin, & Wengraf, 2002). Sen's (2010, p. 18) work on justice is relevant to migration studies, as it 'cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actually live.' It acknowledges the diversity of human experience because it places individual choice at the centre of the migration analysis. The outcomes of these choices, including the achieved functionings as well as the idea of the quality of life, the sense of agency and responsibility associated with these choices, and the structural constraints associated with entitlements, are determined by the individual's freedom of choice. This has substantial implications for the analytical frameworks and theoretical discussions of contemporary migration research and impact on a global scale.

Finally, linking Sen's capability approach with studies of transnational migration promises interesting analytical developments as to the nature of retrospective and narrative types of data that should gain importance for methodological approaches in this field. Sen is aware that methodologies and data play a key role in the application of the capability approach and argues that the selection of migrant functionings and migrant capabili-

ties should focus on 'underlying social concerns and values' (Sen, 1990a, p. 49). But to fully capture the changes in capability sets and their impact on individual functioning, researchers need to look deeper into what Lahire (2019, p. 379) refers to as sociological biography, 'the successive or parallel socialising experiences through which the respondent has been constituted and which have settled in them in the form of schemes or dispositions to believe, see, feel and act.' The focus on the sociological aspects of the biographical process provides a good methodological fit between migration research, the capability approach and the wider theory of social justice focused on changes in the fairness of opportunities that can be applied in a local, national and global context.

5. Conclusion

Sen's capability approach has been widely discussed in the fields of international development and social policy. In the ongoing debate with Nussbaum (2011) and Robeyns (2005), there has been an urgency to develop a more analytical "capabilities list" that would elaborate on the measurable aspects of inequalities and allow more comprehensive comparative frameworks. Sen's original ideas, however, inspire analytical innovation that can be applied across different academic disciplines, including international migration. This article discusses thematic parallels between the main problems experienced in the study of social inequalities and migration studies. These include the internal and external variations in perception of "quality of life" and "valued activities," judgments on the lack of voice and representation in the public discourse as well as the lack of recognition that limited choices and opportunities are the indicators of social deprivation.

By introducing Sen's analytical and conceptual approach, this article provided an overview of his unique perspective and analytical toolkit posed by the capability approach, which offers innovative insights for the field of migration studies. It explored the power relations that frame access to opportunities and tied these up with the idea of individual choice. It also conceptualised entitlement as a main structural obstacle in the individual's ability to convert their resources, such as education and skills, into whichever prosperous and fulfilling life the individual chooses to pursue. The analysis of entitlement can point towards the frameworks of structural discrimination. Furthermore, Sen's approach frames the study of advantage and disadvantage in the model of expansion and retraction of individual capabilities over time, highlighting the processes of broader social change that affect migrants and offering interesting methodological perspectives for migration research.

In addition, Sen's unique approach opens up new avenues in discussing social justice based on the idea of fairness rather than the notion of universal and highly contested rights. Sen has proposed a flexible, context-related, capabilities-based justice system that aims for the constant improvement of social relations, rather than an ideal, one-size-fits-all concept of a just society. Within this system of relations, he highlights the importance of both individual responsibilities associated with choices made and the responsibility of states and communities to gradually expand the set of capabilities in an effort of self-improvement. This potential to frame migration experiences and migration relations within a framework of social justice is a powerful incentive to explore, apply and adjust Sen's capability approach in the field of migration.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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