

Chapter 4

Transnationalising Resources: Three Biographies



I have argued that mobility practices may turn into a type of capital that some of the respondents in this study are able to mobilise. Depending on the amount and composition of the other types of capital migrants possess, they can develop different practices of cross-border movements, which in turn allow them to obtain various advantages. In this chapter, I unpack how mobility may enhance migrants' socio-economic situation. By focusing on a selected number of respondents' biographies, I demonstrate the complex and multifaceted processes that allow some people to circulate and "transnationalise" their capital thanks to their practices of border crossing.

Crossing borders is not only about quantitatively increasing the number of places where resources can be gathered: it is also about being able to circulate these resources and gain from doing so. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the twin processes involved when social actors cross borders and benefit from their mobility. On the one hand, mobility allows a geographical shift from one place to another: mobile people acquire specific resources in one place and reinvest – or mobilise – them in another place where they are valued more highly. On the other hand, there is often a shift in the social contexts and networks in which these resources are acquired and those in which they are reinvested. In both cases, and this is this chapter's main argument, social actors benefit from a favourable exchange rate of capital between the two contexts at stake. Mobility is the core resource that makes the transnationalisation of capital possible.

4.1 Theoretical Debates on Migrants' Circulation of Capital

Capitals do not have intrinsic and universal values. Their valuation depends on the context and the social field in which they are activated and mobilised (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Social status and symbolic power relate not only to the accumulation of resources, but also to the ability to mobilise them in social environments

where they are valued most highly. If one's social position depends on one's possession of and access to different types of resources, and if these resources' symbolic value is historically and contextually constructed, then mobility and transnational practices complicate the story because they introduce multiple geographic locations into the game.

The first part of this section offers a theoretical discussion of the processes that allow migrants to benefit from the differences in the valuation of capital in different places by transnationalising the capital they possess. In doing so, it explores various debates in the literature on migration and transnational practices. First, I discuss scholarship that has attempted to illuminate the various ways through which migrants' social position may improve through the cross-border circulation of capital. A move from one place to another enhances resources' value, and migrants benefit from this favourable exchange rate.

The second part of this section examines the twin processes through which resources also gain value by being activated in social environments other than those in which they have been acquired.

4.1.1 Social Positions and Inequalities in a Transnational Space

Social theories of inequality (including Bourdieu's) tend to examine social positions, the differential allocation of resources and social hierarchies within the single arena of the nation-state. Bourdieu's conceptual landscape has been critiqued for not sufficiently taking into account the sometimes inconsistent and contradictory social positions of people even within a single national context (Bennett et al. 2009 in Erel 2010), let alone multiple national contexts (Nowicka 2013; Weiss 2005). This research is situated in a (quite recent) field that aims to "transnationalise" theories of capital and social inequalities (Erel 2010; Weiss 2005; Nieswand 2011; Kelly and Lusi 2006; Nowicka 2013; Beck 2007). Considering social inequalities under a perspective that challenges methodological nationalism makes it possible to ask a key question: "how can the frames, the units of social inequalities be constructed across borders and between people and populations whose identities also include solidarities which are based on other interactive and participatory classifications than nations and political units?" (Beck 2007).

In the late 1990s, Sayad (1999) initiated an epistemological turn in the sociology of migration by emphasising the interconnections of migrant's social statuses in their country of origin and in their place of immigration (in his case Algeria and France). Since then, the idea that migrants embedded in transnational fields often experience diverging social statuses, depending on whether they are evaluated with respect to their country of origin or their country of residence, has been developed further, often with a focus on status in the region of origin (see in particular Goldring 1998; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Nieswand 2011; Salih 2003; Anghel 2009). These authors demonstrate that transnational practices are an important means

through which migrants can maintain and improve their status and that of their kin in their place of origin. These practices include remittances, investment in a house or other property (land, business), gifts they bring with them when they visit, financial participation in important celebrations such as weddings and funerals, sponsorship of others' legal or illegal migration and participation in hometown associations. Salih (2001) demonstrates how Moroccan women who live in Italy make a great deal of effort to prepare for their annual visit to their place of origin, consuming and displaying particular consumption goods (for instance, clothes, shoes and domestic appliances) as symbols of their social status as residents of a European country. In a study on Ghanaian migrants in Germany, Nieswand (2011) emphasises how fulfilling social obligations and redistributing resources earned in the country of residence leads to a higher social status in the country of origin, despite the fact that the migrants in question no longer have the cultural capital or socioeconomic position that used to be the symbolic markers for higher social statuses in this context. Nieswand's research demonstrates that symbolic systems and the value of capital may be challenged (in this case by temporarily returning migrants): existing local hierarchies of power are modified by transnational practices and the circulation of not only people, but also the material and symbolic goods they carry with them (see also Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Goldring 2001). Symbolic systems are subject to negotiations and struggles regarding the legitimate sources of symbolic power and the value of different types of capital. Symbolic struggles revolve around not only the possession of resources, but also the value of these resources in a specific context and their position in a socially meaningful hierarchy. For instance, migrants introduce new resources into their country of origin that gain value mainly because they are associated with Western lifestyles and consumption practices (Salih 2001, 2003; Nieswand 2011).

What is particularly important here is that these discrepancies in statuses – what Nieswand (2011) calls migrants' "status paradox" – can only be properly understood when we take into account the different localities of the transnational field in which people are embedded, their characteristics and their relative position in a global context. Social locations may be multiple and contradictory depending on the context in which symbolic value is given to resources. For Nieswand, the status paradox "emerges in interaction with the opportunity structures for transnational transfers of resources on the one hand and the specific problems that occur by converting the material and symbolic resources earned in one socio-spatial context into social status in another" (2011).

This chapter focuses on the strategies through which mobile migrants transfer resources obtained in one place in order to have them be evaluated and mobilised advantageously in another. These strategies rely on the conscious or unconscious acknowledgement of symbolic exchange rates between different localities. This is where the different social, economic and political contexts that constitute actors' mobility systems become crucial, because they determine the value of specific resources, always in interaction with the gendered and ethnicised/racialised position of those who possess them. For a migrant of Somali origin, being fluent in English constitutes a form of cultural capital that has a different value depending on whether

it is mobilised to obtain a skilled job in Britain or to be employed in an international organisation or an NGO active in Somaliland. Two interrelated dimensions are at work. The first relates to actors' social location, in terms of their gender, ethnicity, race, religion, legal status or age, which is valued differently depending on the context. While being Somali, Black or Muslim may all have a negative impact on the value of specific resources (such as possessing job qualifications and speaking English) in the labour market in Britain, these same attributes become assets when the job needs to be done in Somalia. The second dimension relates to the intrinsic value of resources in relation to the locality itself (as well as the social field in which they are evaluated): being able to speak English might be an especially valuable asset when attempting to obtain a better job in Somaliland, but it is less so in Britain.

Nation-states are important in structuring the possibilities of transferring and exchanging resources, and therefore in determining their symbolic value (Nieswand 2011; Nowicka 2013). Weiss (2005) argues that the symbolic value of resources depends on the social, economic and political contexts in which they were accumulated, and on the international position of these contexts. States hold different positions in global power relations: imbalances in economic and political power can be seen in the international disparity in GDP per capita. States' differing positions can also be seen in the differences in the right to cross border and enter a national territory associated with different passports. "The position of (national) spaces in which an actor is situated structures the opportunity he/she is offered" (Weiss 2005) in terms of the ability to accumulate resources, but also in terms of mobilising them and capitalising on them, i.e. gaining advantage from them.

Scholars of migration and transnationalism have shown that the different positions of nation-states in global power hierarchies are important vectors and incentives for migration, as well as post-mobility and transnational practices (Glick Schiller 2010; Nieswand 2011). Weiss (2005) develops two concepts to grasp the ways in which these differences play out in people's strategies to transnationalise their resources: spatial autonomy, and the quality of spaces one has access to. Spatial autonomy refers to social actors' differentiated ability to choose optimal environments in relation to the resources they can mobilise. It refers to the possibility of moving to different places, rather than the actual fact of being mobile: as such, it is close to the concept of "motility" developed by Kaufman and his colleagues (Kaufmann et al. 2004; Flamm and Kaufmann 2006). Spatial autonomy is directly related to the quality of spaces that are accessible, i.e. their relative position in global power relations. "As spaces offer opportunities and preclude options, the unequal rank of spaces to which an actor is materially, socially and symbolically attached is one important factor structuring social positions on a world scale" (Weiss 2005). It follows that the transnationalisation of resources may be a strategic way for migrants and other mobile people to exploit the differences in the symbolic value of their resources in different localities. However, some resources are more easily "transnationalisable" than others, i.e. transferred and exchanged in a place other than that in which they have been acquired. In particular, it is much more difficult for migrants from less powerful states, even if they are highly skilled, to validate their cultural or social capital in Western countries than it is for those who

move in the other direction (Weiss 2005). Much of the literature in this field has focused on the ways in which resources gained in the destination country are mobilised in the country of origin to enhance the social position of migrants and their relatives. The empirical sections that follow demonstrate how capital can also be transnationalised in others directions.

4.1.2 The Valorisation of Capital Within Specific Hierarchies

Geographical location is not the only dimension that determines the symbolic value of the resources circulated by mobile migrants. The concomitant shift involves gathering resources in specific locally bound or transnational contexts and mobilising them in other environments where their value is higher. I argue that migrants' social position within different hierarchies influences their ability to convert their capital into social advantages when it is transferred.

Bourdieu's concept of social fields provides a useful theoretical tool through which to understand how social relationships and networks are structured by power relations (see also Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), different types of capital are valued differently depending on the social field in which they are mobilised. Lahire (2001) argues for a less restrictive, "metaphoric" definition of social fields than Bourdieu's, which "is limited to configurations within which power struggles between agents with objective characteristics and differentiated interests, strategies, etc. take place" (39, personal translation). Based on this idea, I am interested in the different and interlocking sets of relationships in which individuals are embedded, and in which they occupy specific social positions.

The aim of empirical analyses, from this perspective, is to define the different formal and informal structures that are relevant to respondents' lives and practices, the institutions with which the respondents are connected and the various networks in which they navigate. I refer to these structures as the "frames of reference" within which respondents acquire resources or reinvest them. I focus on contexts that are significant for the empirical issue under investigation, namely the transfer and circulation of various types of capital. This chapter thus interrogates the multiple contexts and social fields in which Somali migrants are simultaneously embedded through their participation in local, national and transnational networks and institutions.

As other researchers in transnational studies have done (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999; Nieswand 2011; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), I examine these ideas through an empirical analysis of the diverse social connections that respondents have created with significant others who are located in different places. The social fields (widely defined) in which migrants participate will be analysed more specifically under the light of the social hierarchies that cross them.

As discussed in the theoretical introduction, social actors occupy specific social positions in relation to hierarchies and boundaries related to gender, class, ethnicity

and race. However, their positions may be inconsistent depending on the context and the social fields in which they are understood: migrants, for instance, may belong to a disadvantaged socioeconomic group vis-à-vis the local population but simultaneously hold privileged positions within particular networks, for instance those based on a shared ethno-national background. The analysis will focus on these inconsistencies and show the processes that make it possible for social actors to benefit from mobilising resources gathered in one social context and investing them in other, often ethnicised, social networks. It will also demonstrate that cross-border mobility acts as an important facilitator of these transfers. The idea of simultaneity is especially important here: it is *because* people are connected to different institutions and embedded in different networks at the same time that they can transfer resources from one to the other and benefit from doing so.

Migration scholars, in particular those working from a feminist perspective, have demonstrated how networks characterised by ethno-national homogeneity are crossed by (internal) social hierarchies based on gender, legal status and education. They argue that these “migration-specific social fields” (Erel 2010) constitute contexts in which some migrants are able to valorise some types of capital that they cannot valorise in the majority society. In particular, a strand in this literature focuses on the ways migrants actively valorise some of the resources they have brought with them when they migrate to the country of residence (see for instance Erel 2009, 2010; Nowicka 2013; Anthias and Cederberg 2009; Anthias 2007). Erel (2009, 2010) argues that migrants not only adapt whatever cultural capital they have brought with them from the country of origin to the host country, but also develop strategies to validate their capital in frameworks that are alternative or oppositional to the national framework. She confronts a “national (cultural) capital” (based on a concept by Hage 1998), validated at the local level of the nation-state, with a capital validated within what she calls a “migration-specific social field”. This field is the one in which migrants are able to bargain over the value of their resources and transform them into capital, mostly through two related processes. The first is the gathering of new resources in addition to those they already had previously to migration. The second is the development of strategies to validate their cultural capital in specific social fields, often building on internal differentiation within the migrant network, for instance gender or ethnicity. In the case of the Turkish women in Erel’s case study, being Kurdish or having knowledge of a “good” Turkish language may be mobilised in the migration country to access employment, for instance as teachers for Turkish children. Gender, belonging to a majority or minority population in the country of origin, religion, rural-urban origin and legal status are all markers of social differentiation and demonstrate the heterogeneity of the migrant population.

“Migration-specific networks” are characterised by shared ethnicity or nationality among their members, and people who participate in them hold various social positions within them determined partly by gender, educational level, legal status and religious identification, for example. Some scholars are interested in how ethnicity can become a resource for some people who occupy privileged positions within these networks. In fact, ethnicity has been acknowledged as a potentially strong resource that migrants may mobilise in their country of settlement, although

with important drawbacks. Ethnicity becomes a part of migrants' "migration-specific cultural capital" (Erel 2010) when, for example, it enables them to have access to specific sectors of the labour market. The field of intercultural mediation, which has been increasingly institutionalised in recent years (Dahinden and Bischoff 2010), is one of the specific sectors in which "cultural" and linguistic knowledge constitute indispensable assets, in particular in the local context. Many of the respondents in this study are or were employed as intercultural mediators in their country of residence, using their ethnicised/racialised embodied cultural capital. However, these service jobs, aimed at other, less privileged migrants' needs, rarely lead to upward mobility: instead, they are ethnicised/racialised (and gendered) niches based on skills and knowledge that are difficult to transfer to other sectors (Erel 2010; Lutz 1993; Livsage 2009).

The issue of ethnicity as a resource is also central in the literature on ethnic businesses (Pécoud 2010; Morokvasic-Müller 1999). According to the "ethnic approach" (Pécoud 2010) or "ethnic resource model" (Piguet 2010), ethnicity may be crucial to the success of migrant entrepreneurs who benefit from their cultural skills and specificity. Such may be the case when the clientele is defined by ethnic boundaries with specific needs and wishes, when the entrepreneurs count on (often cheap) labour from their ethnic group to develop their business, or when a local population is potentially interested in finding specific "exotic" products (Piguet 2010; Anthias and Cederberg 2009). This perspective on ethnic businesses, which focuses on the networks in which entrepreneurs, their customers and their employees move, has been criticised for two major reasons. First, it does not pay enough attention to the socioeconomic, legal and institutional contexts in which ethnic businesses develop. Migrants often face high levels of competition and have little choice but to enter the lowest threshold of the market, and they often remain trapped in poor areas with poor customers (see for instance Jones et al. 2010; Ram et al. 2008).

Second, it obscures both the tensions and the other lines of differentiation that cross the populations in which migrant businesses exist (Pécoud 2010; Anthias and Cederberg 2009; Anthias 2007). The focus on intra-ethnic solidarity diverts attention from the heterogeneity of the migrant population, which also shapes access to, and success in, business activities. Studies (for instance Anthias 2007; Anthias and Cederberg 2009) have demonstrated, for example, that ethnic entrepreneurs are often only able to survive by making use of cheap labour provided by family members, women and/or newly arrived migrants. Their ethnic background may help these employees acquire these jobs, but the jobs occupy the lower positions in an already marginalised segment of the labour market. This study includes respondents who are or have been active in these ethnicised and gendered economic niches, i.e. intercultural jobs or ethnic businesses. It focuses on how individuals' social positions within different social fields influence their ability to acquire or invest different types of capital within those fields, but with a specific focus on the transnational (and not only localised) character of those processes.

More generally, recent academic discussions about migrants' social networks have pointed to the importance of also examining networks that are not characterised by ethno-national homogeneity. Ties with people "outside the ethnic group" may act as

important bridges to the majority population and thus constitute important sources of capital (see also [Chap. 3](#) for a more thorough discussion of migrant's social networks). There has been a tendency to assume that the most important ties (and thus those worth exploring) are the ones migrants create or sustain with people of the same ethnic background, and these ties are often presumed to be strong ones. Critiquing this assumption, however, some recent studies have empirically analysed the networks in which migrants are embedded without limiting their investigation to (strong) ties with co-ethnics: they demonstrate the relevance of other types of bonds in migrants' lives (see in particular [Ryan 2010](#); [Cederberg 2012](#); [Glick Schiller et al. 2006](#); [Dahinden 2005](#)). These studies have demonstrated that building up relationships to people and institutions "outside the ethnic group" is of great importance in being able to access different resources and improve one's socioeconomic conditions.

Migrants' access to what can be considered the majority population (i.e. the non-migrant population), in particular through weak ties, has a major impact on opportunities for settlement, incorporation and social mobility in general. Many authors have found that, in spite of their attempts to build these types of connections, many migrants find it very difficult to access those networks (see for instance [Cederberg 2012](#); [Ryan 2010](#)). Processes of social closure towards migrants prevent these "outsiders" from accessing resources that are available to the majority population. For instance, strategies to make new friends outside of the ethnic group are confronted with class discrimination based on ethnicity ([Ryan 2010](#)) or difficulties related to structural conditions such as life in ethnically segregated areas ([Cederberg 2012](#)). In a study on access to positions for migrant doctors, [Raghuram and her colleagues \(2010\)](#) demonstrate the ways in which migrants are pushed into less desirable positions within the field because of tendency of non-migrant networks to favour non-migrants, as well as discriminatory practices and racist attitudes.

Including in the picture the networks that migrants find it difficult or impossible to access thus makes it possible to grasp the contextual and structural elements that shape the kind of bonds and relationships that people are able to build. It points to the relevance of the social position that individuals occupy in specific contexts in their ability to develop different kinds of ties.

Theoretical and empirical debates regarding, on the one hand, differentiated "migration-specific social fields" and, on the other, the inclusion of non-ethnically bounded social networks in analyses of migrants' lives are important to my argument in this chapter because they examine the processes through which capital is acquired or invested in social fields in light of the specific hierarchies that cross them.

4.1.3 Farhan, Safia and Fatuma

Many of the respondents in this study have developed various types of mobility practices, all of which, in one way or another, affect the ways in which they transnationalise their capital. The life stories of two women and one man have been chosen to illuminate how the processes described in the theoretical discussion above

actually occur in their lives, and how they relate to their practices of mobility. How do the resources that migrants arrive with affect their processes of settlement and mobility? What types of capital do the migrants accumulate to develop cross-border mobility practices and benefit from them? How are assets gathered in one place and converted in another context? In what social fields in particular do these migrants most fruitfully invest their capital? What role do ethnic belonging and representations about it play in these processes?

Mobility practices develop over long periods of time, depending on the amount and types of capital that have been accumulated in specific places and at specific times. Earlier in this book, for instance, I have shown that a stable legal status, in particular citizenship in the country of residence, may allow migrants to benefit from wider opportunities for cross-border mobility. Likewise, marriage, the arrival of children, divorce or having grown-up children leave the household may affect how and whether mobility capital can be mobilised. A diachronic perspective takes these evolutions in the respondents' lives into account and thus allows for a better understanding of the different dimensions that shape the constraints and opportunities they face at specific moments in their lives. It also shows how mobility capital builds from recurring experiences of mobility – which are not always experienced positively at the time – and from increased control over one's movements.

The three life stories recounted in this chapter principally focus on the events that occurred between the respondents' initial migration to Europe and the time of the interview(s). A few aspects of the respondents' situation in their country of origin before they left are also included to illuminate their socioeconomic background and the resources they could count on when they arrived in Europe. Attention is largely given to cross-border mobility as it has been, is currently being or will be practiced. However, it would not be possible to understand those practices without relating them to the settlement processes in which respondents simultaneously engage.

The stories of Farhan, Safia and Fatuma have been chosen, on the one hand, because they demonstrate clearly how mobility capital is acquired transnationally, converted and invested, and, on the other, because of the variations they present. These mobile migrants have developed different types of mobility practices at different times in their lives, which together include all the ideal types described in [Chap. 2](#) (except for definitive return). The respondents were based in different places at the time of the interview, in Switzerland, in London or penduling between the two. Their level of education, type of professional activity and employment, family situation and projects for the future differed significantly. Furthermore, while Fatuma and Farhan are originally from the southern part of Somalia, Safia's family is from Somaliland. However, they are all citizens of a European country in which they have resided or are currently residing; they are in their early 40s, have children and were among the first refugees to arrive in Europe at the beginning of the conflict in Somalia. Their trajectories cannot be considered representative of those of Somali migrants in Europe, or even of the other respondents in this study. However, the multiple and interrelated processes through which these migrants activate their mobility capital to transnationalise their resources can be observed in most of the mobility practices developed by the people I have met.

4.2 Farhan: Penduling and Taking the Best from Two Places

We already met Farhan in [Chap. 2](#). After having lived and worked in Switzerland while spending weekends and holidays with his family in London for 8 years, he moved to Britain. A couple of years later, however, he decided to take a job in Switzerland again, and he started penduling once again. I had the chance to meet him on many occasions during the research, in both Switzerland and London, and to conduct five interviews with him: this has allowed me to observe changes in his aims and strategies over time, and to have in-depth discussions with him regarding various themes. He was always very keen to meet with me, and he shared a great deal of information about his own trajectory and offered very perceptive analyses on many issues. Farhan's story of constant movements between two nation-states in Europe is illustrative of the differentiated resources each context offers, but also of the ways these resources may be "transnationalisable", i.e. be validated in places other than where they were acquired. Mobility becomes capital because it allows the individuals who are endowed with it to expand their sources of various assets and validate them in different places. This case study also points to the role played by the British context in (re)creating connections with the place of origin, Somalia.

4.2.1 *Migration to Switzerland: The Importance of Acquiring Education*

Farhan arrived in Switzerland in the early 1990s at the age of 20, after having interrupted his university education in Somalia. He has always regarded higher education as a priority, for himself and his children. In his early years as a migrant, he took advantage of his position as an educated single man without transnational economic responsibilities to obtain a tertiary education. He was aware that the social background of those like him who arrived in the early 1990s played a role in having this opportunity, contrasting it with that of Somalis who have left the country more recently:

When we left the country, our parents were from the middle class, and the jobs that we could find [here], such as cleaners or kitchen porters, weren't very rewarding, so we didn't really want to take them. [Semi-structured interview, UK, notes]

Despite this relatively privileged position, his educational trajectory in Switzerland was not without difficulties, because of the non-recognition of his Somali high-school certificate, his unstable legal status and the constraints of having to finance his studies himself. His aim from the start had been to acquire a higher education, but soon after his arrival he took an unskilled job. This rapid involvement in the labour market, as well as the French lessons he partially financed himself, allowed Farhan to slowly build a local social network with colleagues and friends, and to understand how the Swiss labour and education markets function. After a few years, he decided to obtain his *maturité*, the Swiss diploma that is equivalent to a

high-school certificate and opens the door to tertiary education. Of the limited options offered to adults who want to obtain this diploma, he chose the shorter but more expensive one, in a private school. He told me that he had saved money from his wages, but that the school director had agreed to charge him reduced fees because of his situation. When I asked how he came to this agreement with the director, Farhan told me:

I had heard about it [the school] from a work colleague, whose son was enrolled in this private school. She told me, “Maybe if you went to meet the director, he could do something for you; maybe you could make a deal”. But I think that the other thing that worked in my favour was that he was of foreign origin too. Even though he had arrived in Europe as a kid, he was of Iranian origin. And I think he had some kind of interest in philanthropy, so I explained my situation to him, and he said [OK]. [Biographical interview, Switzerland, recorded]

At least two elements are relevant in Farhan’s access to the *maturité*. First, his involvement in the labour market resulted in the development of weak ties, in particular with colleagues who could inform him about opportunities he, as a newcomer, might not have direct access to. Second, the relationship with the school’s director, which Farhan characterises as partially based on a commonality – the migration experience – helped him.

From the beginning, Farhan worked either full-time (saving money) or part-time, investing his wages in language courses, the private school to obtain his *maturité* and then university. His Swiss diploma and his experience in local companies allowed him to accumulate institutionalised cultural capital, but also embodied cultural capital, in the form of fluency in French and familiarity with the norms of his work setting and the local labour market in general. He mentions having simultaneously created local relationships based on his professional and associational activities, as well as a small network of friends who had arrived from Somalia at the same time as him.

4.2.2 *The Beginning of Penduling*

While he was studying, Farhan met a Somali woman living in London, to whom he got married and with whom he has since had four children. Neither of them was interested in moving to the other’s country of residence: Farhan wanted to capitalise on the effort he had made to acquire educational and work experience in Switzerland, while his wife (according to her husband’s account) had kin and friend networks in London she did not want to leave. In this situation, they decided that their best option was, at least for a while, for him to move back and forth between the two places. That is how Farhan started penduling: studying and working in Switzerland, and spending time with his family in London. This gendered arrangement allowed Farhan to become the primary economic provider of the transnational unit, and to acquire the cultural and social capital needed to do so in the best context for him (i.e. Switzerland). At the same time, it provided the most favourable environment

for his wife to assume the unit's domestic and educational responsibilities, since she and their children were located in London.

Before he moved to London, he perceived the advantages that the city offered mostly in terms of his children's upbringing. The kind of education that Farhan wants his children to have is based on strict educational principles and control (for instance regarding who they socialise with), on their learning about their parents' place of origin (in terms of language, religion and culture), and on access to a good education. The couple found that London offered better opportunities in this regard than Switzerland. This vision of London was also shaped by the fact that Farhan's wife has lived there for a long time and has developed connections that make her life comfortable, at least regarding her mothering responsibilities. Farhan acknowledges that his wife and children navigate mostly within "Somali circles" when it comes to kin and friendship ties (which could be considered strong ties). Yet he also explained that she manages better than he the relationships with local authorities and administrations. She has thus acquired (limited) informal cultural capital and social capital, which allow her to obtain the necessary information for the family's local anchorage. Furthermore, these resources, although relevant in the London context, would have little value in another place, for instance Switzerland.

This situation has motivated the sedentarity of Farhan's wife and children and justified his own moving back and forth. Furthermore, Farhan places a strong emphasis on his children's academic education. In this regard too, London offers much better opportunities in his eyes. During an interview in Switzerland, he compared the situation in London with what can be found in Switzerland:

I want to enrol my eldest son [10 years old] in a school that is... not private, but it is a public school that selects its pupils according to their IQ, at least that is what they say. And this school is very focused on academics. They said that 1,500 people want to enrol, but they take only 180, you see. [...] So we went to the open-house days, and I could see all the people who were there, the parents, the pupils, you could see all races. So it gives you the courage to try to do it, [because you see that] there is an opportunity to give them a good education. And when we visited all the different sections – sciences, chemistry, physics – and we could see all the children of all ages, but also of different origins, Asians, Africans... at least Blacks, Europeans. [J: And you feel that this would not be possible in Switzerland?] I could not say that, but I think it would be less possible in Switzerland. [...] The problem is that here, you are penalised from the start. Because [there are] those who have middle-class parents who know how to support their kids with school, how to help them with homework, at least to give them a structure through their education. Here, it's difficult for the parents who don't have that, who are migrants, or who aren't middle class. But there, you have, not private schools, but extra classes [*cours d'appui*]. It's an industry; it's not just a university student giving an hour here or there. There, after school hours, it's not compulsory, but you can take your kids there for an hour or two to do some arithmetic. [Biographical interview, Switzerland, recorded]

Farhan sees better academic opportunities in Britain's neoliberal meritocratic educational system than in Switzerland's state-managed system. He is explicit that he is a migrant, but one who has high academic expectations for his children, and that he is prepared to make the best of all opportunities offered to people in his situation. He believes people who are lower class in Europe and are willing to work hard are better rewarded in Britain than in Switzerland. This view relates to his own cultural capital (maybe also his wife's), and the investment he is willing to make, in

particular in terms of time and money, to transmit what he has accumulated to the next generation (Bourdieu 1979b), and to compensate for what he has lost through migration. His family's choices regarding settlement and mobility are made taking into account the possibilities for social mobility. Farhan, who came from a middle-class family, experienced a strong devaluation of his (institutionalised) cultural capital, as well as his economic and social capital, when he fled Somalia. The couple's choices regarding their settlement and mobility practices are intended to improve their socioeconomic situation, primarily by building their cultural capital. These strategies appear to be highly dependent on their classed and ethnicised position within particular contexts.

What is central here is that Farhan's investment in his children's academic education in Britain is partly based on resources that are acquired in another nation-state, namely Switzerland. Nowicka (2013) demonstrates that economic capital earned by migrants in the destination country is sometimes transformed into cultural capital by being invested in the next generation's education in the country of origin. Farhan's biography shows that other mobility strategies, such as his back and forth movements, may have similar goals. Cultural, social and economic capital are transnationalised by being accumulated in Switzerland and (partially) reinvested in Britain.

Farhan's regular mobility practices are thus a central piece in this gendered arrangement and his mobility practices would be meaningless without his wife's sedentary lifestyle. The two spouses have accumulated different types of capital, which are invested in their children's education. Both spouses participate in developing the conditions for improving their socioeconomic status, both in Europe and possibly in their country of origin. However, the localised resources that Farhan's wife has accumulated have limited potential in comparison to the more transferable, transnationalisable assets that Farhan himself has acquired. As he put it, he is the "mobile element of this unit": this situation results in a crystallisation of the unequal division of their mobility capital, since the capital that Farhan has accumulated cannot be transferred to his wife.

Farhan moved back and forth between Switzerland and Britain for 8 years. His mobility became easier when he finished his studies and could start working full-time as a qualified employee in his field, and later when he became a Swiss citizen. His socioeconomic and legal situation stabilised, which gave him more flexibility to travel back and forth. In contrast to his colleagues, he viewed the irregular working hours demanded by his employer positively: he would work long hours, including night shifts, during some periods, and benefit from several consecutive days off, during which he would spend time with his family in London.

4.2.3 From Switzerland to Britain: A Secondary Move

In 2008, Farhan's mobility strategy took a new turn, as he decided to move to London and settle there with his family. The decision was taken for family reasons, but also because Farhan hoped he would be able to complete a master's degree in his field and improve his qualifications. In terms of work and educational prospects,

however, his expectations were disappointed: although he found a job, he was never satisfied with the working conditions in London and could not find a master's that fulfilled his ambitions. Farhan interpreted this situation as resulting from his lack of preparation before his move:

The travelling was taking me a lot of time, the constant trips between Switzerland and London. If I had had more information, I would have taken shortcuts. When I arrived here in London, I immediately found a job. But I had been looking for a year before I came. And I didn't take the time to prepare myself, for instance by learning English, which would have allowed me to start studying straight away. My main idea when I came here was to do a master's. As well as becoming closer to my family, of course. But the courses are too expensive. I'd thought I could find an employer who would be ready to pay for part of my studies, but that proved difficult. [Semi-structured interview, UK, recorded]

Constant mobility involves difficulties and costs: it takes time and means that some activities cannot be undertaken, as Farhan observes. But being part of a transnational family also results in emotional costs that may include love, fear, anxiety and sacrifice, and that – despite a lack of attention to them in the literature – also touch migrant men (for exceptions, see Montes 2013; Ryan 2010). Farhan told me of the emotional pain associated with being separated from his family; their decision to stop the back and forth movements was an attempt to mitigate the emotional costs of being a transnational family. For several years, he and his wife had seen penduling as the best way to capitalise on the assets they had accumulated. But then they thought they could try to settle in one place and mobilise their resources mainly in London. Work, study and family life would mostly take place there, although transnational connections to other places remained alive.

London offered another advantage: access to a master's degree in his field of education. His motivation to obtain a British master's relates to economic criteria (although expensive, it costs him less than in Switzerland), the quality of the education and his perception that it is a more “transnationalisable” degree:

In fact, another reason [apart from the economic one] is that Britain is more advanced than Switzerland when it comes to higher degrees. There are many universities in London where you can do a master's in my field, and I reckon that it would be a new experience for me, an additional degree. And if one day I decide to leave and go to Africa, or to Geneva [referring to the international organisations located there], or to Switzerland.... Or to find a job at an NGO or at the United Nations, I don't know. [Semi-structured interview, UK, recorded]

This quotation demonstrates particularly well the central role that mobility plays in Farhan's projections. His career builds on gathering resources that may be valued in more than one setting: Switzerland, Britain, Africa, but also the transnational world of NGOs and international organisations. When thinking about accumulating additional institutionalised cultural capital by acquiring another degree, he strategically opts for a setting that might have greater value at the transnational level. Britain can be considered an “economic and cultural hegemonic” nation-state from which location-specific cultural capital (i.e. a British master's and the English language) can be transnationalised (Weiss 2005). A British master's degree has better academic recognition, but it would also “force” him to improve his English, which appears to be an important lack in his portfolio of skills.

The move from Switzerland to London, however, did not meet Farhan's expectations. His disappointment was related to his difficulties in enrolling at a British university and paying the fees, but also to the job he was able to obtain. Lacking the necessary information, he had imagined that his qualification and professional experience would be sufficient for him to obtain an interesting position in Britain, with opportunities for further education and career advancement. He sees this unsatisfying outcome as resulting from his lack of preparation before he undertook the move to Britain; at the same time, he mentions having looked for a job for a year before he actually decided to move. The dilemma he faced demonstrates the difficulties involved in planning something in one place while being physically in another. Farhan finally found a job after his move to London, although not the kind of job he had hoped for. He described his job as "not rewarding" and referred to it as "assembly-line work", comparing it with his previous employment in Switzerland, where he had time to learn things and grow, personally and professionally. This contrast has to do with differences between the two countries. But more importantly, it is related to Farhan's own position, based on his endowment with different types of capital and their differentiated valuation in the two contexts. His institutionalised capital may be "transnationalisable": his Swiss diploma is recognised in the British labour market. Furthermore, Farhan has accumulated embodied cultural capital valued in a European context: he is perfectly aware of the cultural norms of the European labour market and recruitment processes, and he dresses, behaves and speaks accordingly.

But he lacks other types of capital, in particular specific forms of informal cultural capital and social capital. The informal cultural capital that Farhan lacks consists of knowledge of implicit institutional rules, the "rules of the game" in this particular social field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Because he needed to start earning a salary quickly, he could not wait to accumulate these resources and obtain the kind of job he had hoped for. Knowledge of English is another kind of cultural capital that Farhan lacks. He repeatedly mentioned his limited proficiency in this language as a major constraint in the labour and educational markets in Britain.

The issue of social capital is also relevant to understanding Farhan's difficulty in accessing the labour market. He is aware that if he had had the right information, he "would have taken shortcuts". Information is one of the main resources that circulate within social networks. The social networks Farhan is able to mobilise in this specific social field, however, are located in Switzerland and cannot be activated to obtain information elsewhere. During his years of penduling, Farhan has developed some relationships in London, mostly based on his wife's relatives and neighbourhood connections: these bonds, however, cannot be transformed into social capital, at least in his field of qualification. His temporary stays in Britain have not allowed him to develop the kinds of ties, in particular weak ones, that he could have used to obtain the kind of information he needed. The capital endowment that Farhan could count on, and its valuation in this specific context, further relates to his position as a migrant, a Swiss man of Somali origin and a person whose social trajectory tends towards upward mobility. Although his social networks in Switzerland are quite diverse, those he has developed in Britain are mostly based on kin and neighbour-

hood bonds; they are also characterised by ethnic and social homogeneity and cannot be mobilised for employment in his field. The “bridging” potential of these connections is thus limited. These limitations are related to his wife’s migration trajectory, the local context’s favouring of ethnically homogeneous areas and his years of penduling, which have prevented him from creating other kinds of relationships in London.¹ Farhan’s story illuminates that, although mobility can often be a resource, being constantly on the move may also limit opportunities to develop sustainable relationships (as well as other types of resources).

For all these different reasons, Farhan never obtained the kind of employment he had hoped for in London. The difficulties he experienced in trying to transfer his cultural capital to Britain demonstrate the relative precariousness of his classed positioning in Switzerland. Although, to adopt Weiss’s (2005) terminology, he moved from one centre state to another, and despite the bilateral agreements between the two European countries that permit the free circulation of people and the recognition of foreign credentials, he could not fully validate his assets in the new context. Farhan does not belong to the “transnational upper class” described by Weiss in her study: his situation is not that of an expatriate whose mobility is related to an employer (although he would like it to be one day), but of an individual highly skilled mobile European. Moreover, his trajectory as a migrant has limited the amount and quality of the resources he has been able to acquire in Switzerland: although his trajectory has been successful (in comparison to that of other Somali migrants), his institutionalised and embodied cultural capital and his social capital are ultimately limited. If he had grown up in Switzerland in a middle-class family like the one he came from, he might have been able to learn English as a teenager (at school or through student exchanges), or he could have counted on weak ties from parents or relatives who could have connected him with people and institutions in London. Moreover, although he is a Swiss citizen, his national and religious background has positioned him as a Somali Muslim man in the British context, which may have contributed to the difficulties he faced in obtaining the job he was hoping for. For these different reasons, Farhan’s classed position in Britain is more ambiguous than it is in Switzerland.

When he realised that it would be difficult and time-consuming to gather the necessary resources, he decided to once again mobilise his connections in Switzerland, and to again undertake back and forth movements (see next section). However, during the couple of years he lived in London, he created new relationships with a group of Somali intellectual men, which became important in his life.

¹ His ability to validate his capital in the British context may also have been limited due to discriminatory practices and racist attitudes. Farhan has never mentioned having had such experiences, but other studies point to practices that exclude migrants from the labour market by employers, but also by colleagues and customers (Fangen and Paasche 2013; Raghuram et al. 2010; Bauder 2003). Subtle discrimination practices tend to push even highly qualified migrants into less desirable positions, for instance in the case of migrant doctors in Britain (Raghuram et al. 2010). Employers’ evaluation of potential employees is further influenced by cultural judgements, which are partially based on ethnicised or racialised representations: how one looks, dresses, speaks or even smells might play a part in the valuation of one’s skills, demonstrating how embodied cultural capital interacts with institutionalised cultural capital (Bauder 2005).

4.2.4 “*Closer to Somalia*”

In the last interview I had with Farhan, he reflected on why he had moved to London. He mentioned that it was also part of a project to “get closer to Somalia”. Intrigued, I asked more, and I learnt that Farhan had found a resource in London he had not expected – a specific network that was highly homogenous in terms of national origin, gender and level of education. Joining this small group of Somali intellectual men who live in London has been a way for him to reactivate a transnational “way of belonging” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) and identify more closely with other Somalis, although not all Somalis:

Because I have been thinking in terms of the long run. But also, for me it would be more interesting to stay there [in London] if I want to have contacts with Somalia. Because I also like to be close to, not all Somalis, but some of them, and to be in touch with what is happening in Somalia. Because when I am here [in Switzerland], I feel isolated, because I don’t listen to the Somali media, their websites or their radios, because, I don’t know, I don’t find them useful. They only report on facts, there isn’t any reflection, there aren’t any in-depth analyses; it is merely people reacting to events, but nothing more. But what I have been finding in London, for some time now, is that I have met a few people and we send articles to each other, not only about Somalia, but about everything that concerns politics, and the state of the world. And that allows me to have exchanges that are richer intellectually, if I may say so. [Biographical interview, Switzerland, recorded]

Farhan makes a clear distinction between the two places (“here” and “there”) in terms of the intellectual stimulation he can find through specific networks. He has found an adequate informal group of people who meet his expectations in London: a friend introduced him to the other men who participate in these discussions. Farhan mentioned them for the first time in London, as he had just started to spend time with them and was hoping their encounters would evolve in a satisfying way. While he considered them at that time to be “acquaintances” rather than friends, the other men in the group had known each other for much longer, sometimes from before their arrival in Britain. They had all arrived in Britain as students. In Farhan’s eyes, their bonds are based on common interests, openness and the pursuit of knowledge. The group meets regularly in coffee shops in the city centre, since the men who participate live in different areas of London. A year later, when I met Farhan again, he was still meeting the group regularly, about once a month, sometimes even initiating the encounters himself. Although some of the exchanges take place virtually (they send articles or YouTube links to each other), they set up more formal meetings to discuss and analyse the material they have circulated. Physical presence in London is thus required to benefit from participating in this group. Moving to Britain and settling there for some time allowed Farhan to develop ties other than those related to his family: when he was penduling, his time in London was limited and mostly devoted to his family. Once he started spending most of his time there, he could diversify his connections.

Farhan draws clear boundaries between this group of men and other Somalis, whether they are in Switzerland, London or Somalia. The lines he draws are multi-faceted, but they are always based on different endowments of cultural capital. In

the excerpt above, the emphasis is on the kind of intellectual exchanges that take place in those different networks (the group of Somali men vs. transnational Somali media). The distinction is made on the type of information that flows: based on analysis in his new circle in London, and based on factual accounts in the (Somali) media he can access in Switzerland. Farhan further distinguishes between the men he meets in coffee shops in the city and the other Somalis he meets “every day in [his] neighbourhood, mostly at the mosque or at the local café”. Once again, the difference is based on the issues that are discussed with those relevant others: political, philosophical, intellectual exchanges in the first case, more down-to-earth and practical conversations (children’s education and appropriate religious behaviour, for instance) in the second. Although Farhan regularly mixes with Somalis in his area, he draws a line between himself and (most of) them, based on a distinction between “Europeanised” and “traditional” Somalis. This dichotomy came up regularly in the discussions I had with Farhan (and other respondents): he partially relates it to his trajectory of mobility within Europe. Farhan associates himself with the “Europeanised” side and relates it to the time he has spent in Switzerland. Comparing Somali migrants in the British and the Swiss contexts, he emphasises that the former have limited contacts with the majority population (Somalis live among themselves), while the latter have more opportunities to mix with people of different origins:

Of the Somalis who arrived in London, some of them came directly from Africa and were parachuted into London, where they live in neighbourhoods – I don’t want to call them ghettos, but at least in places where there are fewer opportunities to mix with other cultures, at least European. So there is an obstacle to integration, to learning civic behaviour, how to handle things, manage a budget, pay the bills, have time for oneself but also for others. So I would say some of these people would be less organised than others who came from Europe. [Biographical interview, Switzerland, recorded]

In his trajectory, Farhan has been confronted with systems other than the British one, which has forced him to incorporate some of the norms associated with living in Europe, here (almost a stereotyped version of) Switzerland. His description of those who move from mainland Europe to Britain is similar to that of other respondents, who recurrently stated that having lived in another nation-state has prepared them to do well in Britain, even better than those Somalis who have been established there for a long time (see also Van Liempt 2011). Settlement in Europe, together with mobility (secondary movements), has equipped these migrants with skills to navigate both Somali-based networks and more ethnically diverse networks in Britain. In particular, it has allowed them to acquire some of the “habitus” associated with the European labour market (Bauder 2005). In comparison, those who went straight to London are seen as not having had the chance to mix with many non-Somali people or familiarise themselves with the majority society and institutions. It is worth noting, however, that those Somali migrants who settled in Britain a long time ago are also weary of these newcomers from Europe. Farhan himself mentioned that he has been criticised by other Somalis for being “too European”, echoing the findings of another study, according to which secondary movers in Sheffield are sometimes not identified as “proper Somalis” (Valentine and Sporton 2009).

Yet Farhan draws a further distinction that operates at the transnational level and in reference to Somalia. The discussions in the group of men do not exclusively relate to Somalia: they talk about religious, political or ethical issues that often have to do with Islam and Somalia, but which also take a larger philosophical perspective, reflecting on “what it means to be human, to live in this world, in relation with others”. However, when I asked him whether concrete projects could emerge from the group, his answer clarified his wish to “get close to Somalia”:

Not for the moment. [...] But it is something that I have in mind. Not with all of them, but with one or two of them, I think it would be possible to think in the long run whether we can have a common activity, or a common project. [J: Of what kind?] I don't know, but I feel it would be possible to do something... to contribute to the reconstruction of the country, and also of the people. But things become more complex. Because I have already been away from Somalia for 20 years, while they have more regular contacts. I am not thinking of the family level, but rather of the Somali context, the political level. They are people who have been part of a network for some time, so they have more contacts with what is happening, and they also know the leading political figures. So in this way, I am also doing my apprenticeship; I am learning who is who, and who thinks what, and who would be.... [Biographical interview, Switzerland, recorded]

The cosmopolitan motivation (to think about “what it means to be human”) is not in contradiction with a wish to act in one's country of origin: Farhan's perspective shows similarities with the kind of “diasporic cosmopolitanism” described by Darieva as “a kind of simultaneity of ethnic and cultural parochial closure as well as openness to the world and global issues” (Darieva 2011; see also Glick Schiller et al. 2011). For some migrants, mobility may be a way through which cosmopolitan aspirations and a historically anchored relationship with a place of origin can be reconciled.

The group to which Farhan belongs, however, has a specific significance in terms of concrete projects located in Farhan's country of origin. Farhan differentiates between various types of connections with or in Somalia. While he is himself in very regular contact (at least twice a week) with his sister and other members of his family in Somalia, he has no connections with people active at the political level there. In this specific transnational social field, the men he has met in London become important resources, since they allow him to catch up with the Somali political context. According to Farhan, the men in the group arrived in Britain less than 10 years ago, and with sufficient economic and cultural capital to undergo academic studies: this indicates that they most probably belonged to privileged social classes in Somalia, since only a minority of the population has been able to receive an undisturbed education there since the beginning of the 1990s. Through this classed network, Farhan might be able to obtain part of the cultural and social capital that he could mobilise in the future, in a potential project in Somalia.

I conducted a spatial interview with Farhan during one of our encounters in London: to the question of where he situates himself on a geographical map, he answered “somewhere between Somalia and Switzerland, but not in London”. London, where he had settled at the time of this interview, has never been a place he identifies with, although his wife and children, some of his friends and acquaint-

tances, his job and his future education are all located there. While he has faced difficulties in accessing dominant institutions and the dominant population in London, in particular in regard to the labour market, neither does he identify with the majority of the local population of Somali origin. Through his trajectory of migration and post-migration mobility, the ties he has created, maintained and consolidated are those that link him with his country of origin and his first migration country. That is where he can best value the different types of economic, cultural and social capital he has accumulated over the years in different places, including London, in the present, but also possibly in the future. The way he positions himself on the world map could not illustrate the concept of “spatial autonomy” (Weiss 2005) more clearly: he situates himself in the places where he can best valorise his resources.

4.2.5 A Return to Penduling

About 2 years after his move to London, Farhan changed his strategy again and decided to return to pendular mobility between Britain and Switzerland. This new turn was motivated primarily by his unsatisfying working conditions in Britain. Farhan thus contacted his previous employer in Switzerland and started working at the same department as before. The advantages of working in Switzerland pertain to the interest of the job, better wages and work schedules that are set early enough for him to organise his life. Although he acknowledged that the working conditions had become more stressful in Switzerland as well, he expressed his happiness at “having a job in which [he is] respected”, in contrast to his position in Britain.

During his first penduling period, Farhan spent most of his time in Switzerland, but now he has been able to organise things differently, spending about half of his time in each place, working long shifts in Switzerland, compensating with five to ten consecutive days off, moving back and forth twice a month. When I met him last, he had just started the new arrangement, but he was satisfied with the situation: not only did he enjoy his job more, but he also believed that the quality of his family and social life in London had improved.

It is easier, more manageable. For work and for my family. When I am there, I can offer the time I have to my wife and children. [...] [J: So you live differently in London?] I live London differently. I handle my social life quite well, if you want. I can plan things ahead, the people I want to see, I text them, and ask them whether we can meet on such or such day, and if they answer fast enough, then it's OK. So it's true that there is a fatigue that comes from travelling, but apart from that, the quality of my life is better, I find. [Biographical interview, Switzerland, recorded]

Pendular mobility, once again, is the pivotal element in his strategy of transnationalising capital: apart from satisfying and respectful working conditions, Switzerland offers Farhan the opportunity to accumulate economic capital that is mostly reinvested in Britain. Part of it is transformed into cultural capital for Farhan's children,

but also for himself. When he is in Switzerland, he benefits from days off between shifts, which he makes good use of by studying for the academic English test he plans on passing. This, in turn, would open the doors to the master's programme he wants to enrol in in Britain. This arrangement also gives him more flexibility to manage his social life in Britain, and to take care of his family relationship, but also of other kinds of relationships.

The time he spent exclusively in London has been beneficial, in the sense that his long-term physical presence there allowed him to build and consolidate specific social networks, in particular the one involving the group of Somali intellectual men. His new pendular mobility does not jeopardise these bonds, since they seem sufficiently strong, and since he spends half his time in London.

His account of this new stage of his life demonstrates how he has gained control over his cross-border movements over the years and through experiences of different types of mobility. Farhan feels not only that he masters his mobility better, but also that he is able to control the activities that he undertakes in each of the relevant places in his system of mobility. He finds himself in a situation in which he can capitalise on his mobility practices quite well.

4.2.6 Concluding Remarks

Farhan is aware that different places offer different resources, and that nurturing his connections with the relevant places in his trajectory can be an asset. Depending on the circumstances and the development of his own projects, he might favour one place over another and build on the links he has maintained with this place (see also Walker 2011). Mobility is thus an important way through which these connections are sustained and nourished. It contributes to a solidification of the territories and networks he has appropriated during his life trajectory (see also Fournier 2008). But mobility is also a central strategy in capitalising on these links, because it makes it possible for him to transnationalise the resources he has gathered in the different places. This process can be summarised as follows: cultural capital is acquired in Switzerland and partially mobilised, through conversion and border crossing, in London; this in turn might allow Farhan to obtain a privileged position not only locally (for instance by improving his, or his children's, socioeconomic status), but also possibly in Somalia, as a member of an elite diaspora, thanks to the relationships and knowledge he has acquired over time in London. However, he has tried different mobility practices, with uneven success, demonstrating that transnationalising resources, even for someone endowed with economic, social and cultural capital, is not a simple matter.

But the transnationalisation of capital does not only take place through the cross-border transfer of resources from one geographical place to another. Farhan's incorporation into specific social fields and his (divergent) social positions within them also need to be understood.

On the one hand, he has been able to regain a relatively good social status (in comparison to most other Somali migrants) in Switzerland, in particular thanks to his inclusion in the labour market and the development of weak (possibly vertical) ties with people who are not necessarily of Somali origin. On the other hand, this status did not transfer to Britain as easily as he would have thought. Simultaneously, Farhan is striving to acquire a favourable social position within a Somali-oriented transnational social field located in London. These efforts combine with a drawing of (classed) boundaries between himself and the local, marginalised, Somali population, based on a class-related dimension.

Mobility practices, processes of the transnationalisation of capital and the simultaneous embedding in multiple networks and hierarchies, both local and transnational, blur neat class distinctions and social positionings. They constitute a challenge to Bourdieu's (and others sociologists') assumption that individuals have a unique and consistent class position (see also Nieswand 2011; Nowicka 2013). Resources are valued differently in different places, in particular the country of origin and the country of immigration, as a great deal of research has demonstrated (Nieswand 2011; Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999; Goldring 1998). Farhan's situation shows that more national contexts may be included – in his case two countries in Europe – on top of his country of origin; it also points to the inconsistencies that may emerge in a single location, depending on the social networks and related hierarchies in which social status is evaluated.

Furthermore, ethnicity emerges in some contexts as an important modality of commonality or differentiation. Being Somali, although an important aspect in Farhan's self-description from the first interview ("I am Somali deep down, but I am not only Somali"), has become more salient since he arrived in London. The gendered arrangement he has made with his wife, with her raising their children in London, has meant that she has settled in an area with many other Somali migrants. This situation has also influenced the kind of network that the family, and Farhan individually, could forge in London, and it has contributed to reinforcing the ethnic component of his social environment. But Farhan has also been increasingly mobilising some of his various types of capital into networks characterised by ethno-national commonality, through his involvement in the group of intellectual men. Farhan might not have been actively pursuing such a goal, but his search for intellectual stimulation in a context with limited contacts in this regard caused him to engage in a group that happened to be partially constructed around a common national background. As a result, opportunities related to an (ethnicised) transnational social field and to the Somali territory have appeared in his "realm of the possible". Being Somali has taken on a new meaning in Farhan's practices: its reactivation in the particular context of London has made it possible for him to position himself favourably at the transnational level. His new practices and identification enact, at least in this context, a renewed transnational "way of belonging" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) based on an explicit recognition of the ethnic component of actions and groupings.

4.3 Safia: Secondary Movements and the Construction of a Transnational Future

Safia is a woman in her early 40s and a divorced mother of two who lived in Britain when I met her in 2010. She had first arrived in France in the late 1980s, where she spent 5 years before moving to the Netherlands, attracted by rumours of a better life for Somalis there. After more than a decade in the Netherlands, of which she became a citizen, she decided to move again and settle in Britain: she had been living in London for 4 years at the time of the interviews.

I met Safia three times, once during a quite informal but long group interview with her and two other women, another time during a brief and unexpected encounter in a shop owned by a Somali woman in the neighbourhood where she lives and a third time for a planned interview. From the start, Safia was very open to discussing many issues with me, including issues I had come to consider as sensitive, such as the migration trajectory or relatives' whereabouts. Our encounters all took place in a context marked by a certain degree of informality: even the planned interview took place in a restaurant, which meant a few interruptions by people coming to talk to us, sometimes even participating in part of the interview. Her story illustrates particularly well how resources can be deliberately gathered in order to be mobilised in another place in the future (here the country/region of origin). Safia is furthermore quite conscious that this strategy is a good way to obtain a desirable social status in a transnational social field.

4.3.1 *The Migration Trajectory: A Multi-step Journey*

Before she left her country of origin in her late teens, Safia lived a comfortable life with her family. When the war broke out in Somaliland, Safia was living in a Middle Eastern Arabic country. Advised not to go back to her country of origin, she joined a group of refugees and arrived in France without having specifically chosen this destination. Her class background appears in the description she gives of her arrival in France.

I was about 20 years old. It was so difficult. They sent me to a small village where people had never seen a Black person. And I had only an underskirt and a t-shirt. And I was alone with 50 men from Asia. I wanted to cook, but I could only cook cakes. Back home, we had servants, so I had never cooked before. My mum had only taught me to cook cakes [laughs].
[Semi-structured interview, notes]

The description of her life in her country of origin, with servants, stands in sharp contrast to her situation in Europe as the only African woman amongst refugee men and white locals, stripped of everything, even most of her clothes. At the refugee centre, as the only woman among many men, she felt the gendered necessity to cook, but she was unable to do so because of her class background. In a context of

class privilege, women would cook (her mother – not her father – taught her), but as a leisure activity rather than out of necessity, which resulted in her only being able to bake cakes. In a European refugee centre, cakes seem quite inappropriate when confronted with a gendered demand to feed 50 hungry men, probably with minimal means. Gendered expectations here closely interact with Safia's diverging classed positioning in different contexts.

Later, Safia got married, got divorced and eventually decided to follow other Somali refugees who left France for the Netherlands, where conditions for Somali refugees were known to be better. She acknowledges having felt better in the Netherlands: she was able to meet other Somalis more easily and had the opportunity to receive an education “in [her] own language and culture”, as well as in the field of intercultural mediation. During the 12 years she lived there, she married a Somali man, had a daughter and a son and got divorced again. She was also a founding member of an association, based in the Netherlands, whose transnational activities focus on rebuilding in Somaliland (more below). Thanks to local funding, the association has been able to complete projects including the building of sanitation and a school in Somaliland.

Safia was able to partially transfer her education and experiences from the Netherlands to Britain once she moved to London with her teenage children. Despite only having been in London 4 years, she told me that she finally felt “at home” in the suburban town where she had settled. She has simultaneously retained strong connections with the Netherlands (much less with France), regularly going back to reactivate various ties and visit her daughter, who did not adapt to the British context and went back to her previous country of residence, where she got married. The last time I saw Safia, she was eagerly waiting to become the grandmother of a baby to be born in the Netherlands.

Her trajectory has thus consisted of multiple movements and successive settlements in countries on different continents. After her naturalisation, she also lived in the UAE for 6 months, following a cousin's invitation, as well as in Somaliland for another 6 months, when she was hired by an international humanitarian organisation.

Safia identifies with the suburban town where she lives rather than with London. After her arrival in Britain, she worked for a year as a cleaner but gave up for health reasons. Later, she became involved in various counselling and interpreting activities, working in particular in a local community centre as well as for health-service providers in different parts of London. At the time of our meetings Safia was quite well anchored in her place of residence in Britain, the one she pragmatically calls “home”. However good she feels there, however, her socioeconomic situation remains unstable, based on voluntary activities as well as precarious and low-waged work. Furthermore, she lives in an economically deprived area of Greater London, where “ethnic minorities” are a majority, including a large Somali community.

Simultaneously to her localised activities, as the following sections will show, past, present and future mobility practices are important aspects of her life, which allow her to transnationalise varied kinds of resources.

4.3.2 *Associational Involvement*

After a few years in the Netherlands, Safia participated in the founding of an NGO that has a strong transnational orientation: the funding came from Dutch sources, but its purpose was to rebuild facilities (such as schools, hospitals, wells) in Somaliland. Safia's involvement in the association also led her to travel to her region of origin to supervise the projects on at least one occasion. Soon after she had moved to Britain, Safia founded what she called the "UK branch" of her organisation, using the same name for it.

I relocated. But I kept asking for funding in Holland, because it is much easier to get money for these projects [in Somaliland] there than in Britain. Here, there is much more paperwork, and it takes time. I will regularly go back to the Netherlands to look for funding, probably every year. [Group interview, notes]

The projects in Somaliland have apparently been put on hold over the last couple of years, but Safia expressed her intention to reactivate them. However, she acknowledges that funding mechanisms for such projects are different in the Netherlands than in Britain. It may also be that her access to such funding is different: she might have better knowledge of those mechanisms in the country where she lived for a long time and has already done it, and she may have social connections there she can capitalise on. Safia has transferred important knowledge related to her associational activities to Britain, which constitute cultural capital when it comes to establishing and running a new organisation in her new place of residence. However, this capital is limited, as the quotation above illustrates, in particular when it comes to finding funding. Awa, another woman who moved from the Netherlands to Britain and is heavily involved in transnational associational activities, mentioned similar strategies: she regularly returns to the Netherlands, where she has good access to funding networks to keep her projects in Somaliland alive (see [Chap. 2](#)).

However, Safia's organisation in London has reoriented its activities: rather than attempting to improve the situation in Somaliland more broadly, it mostly addresses the needs of Somalilander residents in her local town, in particular through discussions on health issues with women. The association in London is thus much more locally oriented than the Dutch one is. Safia also provides counselling and support services for Somalis through her involvement in one of the local community centres.

Somaliland, rather than Somalia, is an important component of Safia's identification and activities. For instance, she has been involved in concrete activities for the recognition of Somaliland as an independent state, mostly at the local level. During the group discussion with two other women, she explained that she was part of an initiative to officially register the Somalilanders who live in the town. Safia explained that the aim of the action was to advocate for the recognition of Somalilanders as a distinct minority, and to obtain separate funding from the local authorities, in particular for the community centre's activities.

When developing and trying to fund a project in Somaliland, it may be rather easy to legitimate the restriction of beneficiaries to Somalilanders, because of the

convergence of the population and the territory. A project needs to be anchored in a geographically circumscribed place. It is another thing to justify the provision of services and associational activities only to Somalilanders who live in Europe when Somaliland is still officially considered part of Somalia. Since British policies to support activities by minority groups and migrants are, like elsewhere in Europe, still often based on the national or religious origin of organised groups, legitimacy comes from political recognition on the part of their country of residence.

When she moved to Britain, Safia therefore started to mobilise part of the cultural and social capital she had developed in her associational activities in the Netherlands. She built on the experiences and knowledge, as well as on the funding networks and mechanisms, she acquired there to set up and continue her activities in London. During her successive moves, however, Safia added new resources to her portfolio and constantly adapted the ways she mobilises her different types of capital to the local context. The fact that she was able to set up a new branch of her organisation shortly after her arrival and settlement in her new environment shows that mobility is not necessarily an obstacle to her activities, as she is able to adapt and add to the resources she needs in order to attain her goals.

Safia deploys what Erel calls “migration-specific cultural capital”: she finds ways to validate her cultural capital (gathered in different places) in her new place of residence, at the same time building on dominant institutions and migrants’ networks (Erel 2010). Safia’s strategies consist of circulating and constantly building up her cultural assets, finding the right environments to best valorise them. Erel argues that the conversion of capital “depends on [the] socio-political ability of actors to define the boundaries and content of the field of migration-specific cultural capital” (Erel 2010). This ability regards individuals’ position vis-à-vis other relevant actors with whom they interact, both locally and transnationally, both migrants and non-migrants. In Safia’s case, her secondary move to Britain as a Dutch citizen may have helped her secure a favourable position in her new town of residence, in particular within hierarchies based on the local population originally from Somaliland. Like other secondary movers who live in Britain (see, for instance, Farhan in the previous section), Safia makes a distinction between Somalis who arrived directly in the UK as refugees and people like her who arrived for other reasons, have lived in other places in Europe and arrived ready to mobilise and valorise their assets in their new settings. Formal and informal cultural capital (together with legal capital) obtained in the Netherlands (or in other countries in continental Northern Europe) has a certain value, at least in the eyes of its owners, but possibly also in the eyes of the local authorities and institutions and other migrants with the same ethnic or national background who are related to them through associational or other activities. The fact that Safia had already founded an association in the Netherlands, and not in Somaliland or in other poor regions, was an asset when she undertook to set up the new branch in London. Despite being a newcomer, she was given credit and legitimation to become a representative of the Somaliland population in her town, develop activities to address their needs, counsel them and translate for them when needed. Erel (2009, 2010) argues that differences related to gender, class, urban-rural background and identification with specific segments of

the ethnic or national group shape opportunities and constraints in one's attempt to validate one's migration-specific cultural capital. Safia's trajectory demonstrates that past experiences of mobility are another line along which these internal hierarchies are built. However, this fairly good social position within a local, ethnically defined population, does not translate into advantages in relation to the wider British context and its labour market, for instance, where her socioeconomic status remains low. In this situation, she considers other – transnational – options to improve her living conditions.

4.3.3 *A Transnational Future*

Although her associational and professional activities are rather localised, Safia is simultaneously building a future that crosses the borders of Britain. Similarly to Farhan (and other respondents), Safia finds opportunities in London to gather cultural resources that can be later mobilised in other places, specifically in her country/region of origin. These resources pertain in particular to education and the acquisition of an internationally recognised language, English. The following excerpt demonstrates how she consciously aims to transnationalise her cultural capital:

J. Do you see yourself in London in the future?

S. Yes but I also want to go back to Somaliland. I worked there for six months in 2007, and it's so different. Here, work and education take you so much time; you do it for so many hours. There, you work for only two hours; people are lazy. And there are servants to help you. So I first want to improve my English, especially writing, and then go back.

J. You want to improve your English to go back?

S. Yes, because there, they have a very good education, and I want to be better than them. Because I was a refugee, I lost some time. So I want to go back with more and more education. You know IOM [the International Organization for Migration]? They employ a lot of Somali people, but they have high requirements; I looked at that.

J. But would you work for them there permanently?

S. No, for a year or two. But then I could find another job there. Or you know World Vision [a Christian humanitarian organisation that works with children]? I applied in 2007, when I lived there for six months. They took me, but I first wanted to come back to England to take English classes. [Spatial interview, notes]

Safia envisages “going back” to her country of origin, but not under any circumstances, and not permanently. She sees her future in London and at the same time in Somaliland, which demonstrates the almost taken-for-granted role of mobility in her projects. A form of pendular mobility is more likely, which would allow Safia to enjoy the advantages offered by both locations and maintain her multi-local connections and assets.

She has already undertaken a couple of trips to Somaliland, staying there for a few months on two occasions, once for a project with her own association, and once employed by an international humanitarian NGO.

Her past trips to Somaliland have helped her familiarise herself with the local context there and imagine the social position she may be able to obtain there as a returning migrant with a European education. But they have also given her a clear vision of the capital she needs to accumulate in order to reach the privileged position she imagines in this particular social context. And these (mostly cultural) resources, in particular a Western education and command of the English language, need to be gathered in a place that is most highly transnationally valued, London. Thanks to the time she has spent in Somaliland, Safia has been able to obtain a (more or less) realistic picture of the profile of the people she would be competing against if she wanted to acquire a comfortable socioeconomic position there. In a case study on Afghan migrants, Oeppen (2013) describes these return visits as “reality checks”, demonstrating the importance of physical mobility in contrast to imaginative or virtual mobility. By travelling there, Safia has learnt something she did not know: people there have a very good education. If she wants to make a difference (“be better than them”), she needs to accumulate more cultural capital that can be validated there. Past mobility practices to Somaliland have thus allowed Safia to gather the necessary knowledge (and possibly contacts) about the social, cultural and economic environment in Somaliland, and to bring them back with her. Sagmo (2015) similarly describes how Burundian migrants established in Norway use return visits to their country of origin to explore the possibility of converting the capital they have obtained abroad. Thanks to her experiences, Safia is able to decide where to devote her energy. She gathers the additional cultural capital she needs in a place where the resources she already has (her legal, economic, social and cultural capital) give her access to further education. Several times during our interviews, Safia mentioned wanting to improve her English and pursue a higher education.

What is fundamental, therefore, is that these cultural assets, although they may also improve her situation in the London context, are perceived as being valuable when transnationalised and mobilised in the future in her region of origin. Safia wants to “improve [her] English and go back”: the kind of return she envisages implicitly involves professional environments with international staff, where English is the common communication language. On several occasions, she mentioned international governmental or non-governmental organisations active in Somaliland, such as Care International, World Vision, the IOM and the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). Working for such employers would have many advantages – in economic terms, but also in terms of mobility, since temporary contracts would allow her to move back and forth more easily than a permanent job there would. Relocating (permanently or temporarily) in a country with less economic power is a common way for Somalis to capitalise on their Western citizenship and achieve a higher-class status (see Al-Sharmani 2006 for the case of Egypt). However, working for international institutions does not guarantee Safia or other Somali migrants access to a secure, stable and well-paid job.

Earning institutionalised cultural capital in the West and mastering English are complementary to another cultural asset: her Somali background. Safia mentions that the international institutions she referred to employ Somali people in their field-work in this region of the world: a Somali-related national, ethnic and linguistic

background is a requirement for at least some of the positions in these specific work environments. A shared ethnicity with the beneficiaries and partners on the field becomes an asset that not all employees in those international institutions can claim.² However, not just any “Somali” person is likely to be hired by these institutions that have “high requirements” regarding the level of education of their staff. Returning migrants who have had the opportunity to settle in the West are in a particularly good position to obtain those kinds of jobs, thanks to a combination of “local and diasporic capital” (Hansen 2007), or rather a set of resources that have been gathered in different places but that, combined in this context, can be mobilised as real capital. One’s migration experience and post-migration mobility practices are pivotal to valuing those assets in a place where they can be most beneficial.

Safia’s past experiences and future projects in relation to Somaliland show similarities with the status paradox described by Nieswand (2011). Her experience of forced migration entailed a substantial loss of status; however, thanks to her constant connection with and regular travel to Somaliland, she is able to envisage regaining a privileged position there. In Safia’s case, this position would not depend on a (low-skilled) job based in the country of immigration, but on employment in a specific social field, that of international governmental or non-governmental organisations. Thanks to the cultural, social and legal capital she has obtained and validated in Europe, as well as her ethnic background, she may be able to obtain a job in this context. International institutions constitute a (transnational) social field with their own rules, stakes and types of competition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). By definition, they are grounded in and have effects on more than one place, navigating between different states with unequal power. For Safia (as well as other migrants), these very characteristics create opportunities for them to validate their different types of capital in a particularly favourable context. These institutions need to hire people with linguistic and cultural knowledge that allow them to work in the countries in which they operate, but who also possess sufficient Western-validated cultural capital.

Furthermore, in contrast to the Ghanaian migrants described by Nieswand (2011), Safia’s status paradox does not emerge from her being part of transnational kinship networks in which migrants are a minority. The migrants in Nieswand’s study are caught in this paradox because their social status – and the status of their family in their country of origin – depends on their living and working in a wealthier country. The majority of Safia’s kin members have emigrated themselves and now live in different parts of the world. Although her (highly) transnational kin network is most likely not free from solidarities, reciprocity and social obligations, Safia’s social position in Britain does not directly influence the social status of family members in Somaliland. However, she is clear about the place in which she wants to achieve a privileged status: she wants to “be better than” other people in Somaliland,

² Unfortunately, the relationship between ethnicity and the position one can obtain in those international environments cannot be explored here. Neither can issues of power related to the involvement of migrants in international organisations (see Horst 2013 for a critical discussion).

thanks to her high education, which may allow her to obtain a job with an international institution. Pendular mobility will be a core part of her strategy to come to terms with this paradox: while her social status in Britain might not improve as a result of her temporary employment by international institutions, such an employment will allow her to obtain an advantaged position during her stays in Somaliland.³ Permanent return does not seem to be an option for her, indicating that Britain offers opportunities that she still wants to count on.

In sum, Safia is actively accumulating capital in Britain that might help her realise a brighter future in a transnational social field. In the quotation above, she refers to a life that she would like for herself, one with a lot of free time and domestic servants. It is not a coincidence that she chose the same referent, servants, as when she described her childhood before the war. Her goal is to regain the social status she once had, and with the same symbols of privilege, in her country of origin. She explains her loss of social status through her experience of forced migration (“I was a refugee”), and now plans to regain a high status by using the resources that this migration experience, after all these years, has allowed her to gather.

4.3.4 Concluding Remarks

Of all the respondents I have met, Safia is probably the one who shows the biggest variation in terms of mobility practices and places visited. During an informal discussion, she told me: “I’ve had my passport since 2000, and I’ve been in 31 countries since! I am like a journalist!” Of course, she knew that I was interested in travels and cross-border movements and was aware that such a statement would capture my attention, pointing to the performative character of interviews on mobility (for a similar discussion on networks interviews, see Ryan et al. 2014). Although I would have liked to learn more about many of the stages in her trajectory, the information I have been able to gather is sufficient to demonstrate the ways in which she has accumulated and built on her mobility capital.

Thanks to the legal, cultural, social and economic capital she has gathered over the years in different places, Safia has been able to access mobility, develop the necessary skills and take advantage of opportunities to transform her mobility practices into further resources (Flamm and Kaufmann 2006; Kaufmann et al. 2004). She undertook secondary movements within Europe in search of better opportunities in more favourable environments. However, these movements have also enabled her to gather resources in the different places she has been that, once put together, are more varied than if she had stayed in one place. In fact, by maintaining links with her previous countries of residence in Europe (in particular the Netherlands) and further developing her connection to both London and Somaliland, Safia

³However, the possibility of Safia sending back “reverse remittances”, i.e. improving her social status in Europe thanks to the money earned in Africa, cannot be excluded (see Oeppen 2013 for an interesting case study).

actively develops her portfolio of appropriated places and networks (Lévy and Lussault 2003; Fournier 2008).

Safia's mobility practices are the basis on which she transnationalises part of her capital, but her resources are simultaneously transferred from one "frame of reference" to another. Safia is involved in transnational associational and professional activities, which sometimes mingle, in both London and Somaliland. There is a common characteristic to those activities: they mostly address the needs of marginalised Somalis, whether they are underprivileged migrants in London or very poor people in Somaliland. Safia's shared ethnicity with the beneficiaries of her actions is fundamental to her activities, a "commodity" that gives her access to the labour market, even if only to restricted segments of it (Lutz 1993). Her strategy to overcome these restrictions is to make an asset of her ethnic background and to take advantage of the (limited) options that are offered to her in different contexts. The fields in which she can rationally value her cultural resources (including her education) are set up, funded and led by Western actors and institutions but provide for the needs of disadvantaged people with the same ethnic background as herself.

The ethnic component is not necessarily relevant when it comes to the institutional settings in which Safia is active, but it is relevant in terms of the population that she caters to within those institutions. The community centres in London and the international NGO for which she worked in Somaliland employed her because she is able to communicate and deal with their Somali customers/beneficiaries. Her involvement in voluntary work is more directly characterised by the boundary of common ethnicity, yet it is also influenced by dominant institutions and policies. Funding and recognition for associational work is more easily available for groups who define themselves along the lines of common ethnicity or nationality (Moret and Dahinden 2009). Safia and others' struggle for the recognition of a Somalilander minority demonstrates both the salience and the constructed nature of ethnic belonging (see also Baumann 1996). In sum, funding, recognition and/or access to the labour market come from heterogeneous institutions and actors, but only in the frame of actions regarding a population with which Safia can claim a similar ethnic background. This situation, common among migrants active in social work and social services, cannot be seen as resulting solely from migrants' desire or ability to help only other members of their "community", but also to employers' and institutions' channelling of their involvement in this direction (Lutz 1993). But Safia's account of her activities in both Europe and Somaliland illustrates that migrants may also benefit from this situation, and that they may be able to use ethnicity strategically as a resource to obtain a better socioeconomic position (Anthias and Cederberg 2009). Her involvement in associational, counselling, support and interpreting activities build on her common ethnicity with the beneficiaries, but also on internal differentiation between herself and the people she serves, in terms of migrant trajectory (including secondary movements), legal status, social class and age. Her endowment of legal, cultural, social and economic capital are invested in networks and hierarchies where ethnicity is relevant, but also where she can differentiate herself from other people with the same ethnic background. Helping others in a relatively formalised setting may involve solidarity, but it is also based on

unequal relationships and thus on boundaries and hierarchies. While Safia's socio-economic position in London may remain rather low in the British context, she might be able to build on those boundaries in Somaliland and eventually "be better than them".

4.4 Fatuma: Star-Shaped Mobility Practices and the Intertwining Effects of Formal and Informal Business Activities

Fatuma is a woman in her 40s who lives in a German-speaking city in Switzerland. She is married and has four children who were between 10 and 20 years old when I met with her. Her diverse professional activities all relate to independent business enterprises, both formal and informal, both localised and transnational. It was very difficult to convince her to participate in this study, but she finally conceded to an interview. I met her once informally after that first interview, but I did not have the chance to conduct a second formal interview with her. During repeated but brief contacts, however, I could observe her regular travel, the busy character of her life and her reluctance, despite her cordiality, to talk to a researcher about her experiences and activities.

Her story illustrates particularly well how processes of transnational mobility and local anchorage in the country of residence are intertwined with and influence each other. It also illustrates how social locations are gendered, classed and ethnified, as well as their interplay with the valuation of economic, social and cultural capital in different places and in different hierarchies and social fields.

4.4.1 Local and Transnational Independent Economic Activities

Fatuma arrived in Switzerland in the early 1990s with her husband and two eldest children. Her husband, an accountant in Somalia, took a job as a cleaner while she was responsible for most domestic duties. In parallel, she started small-scale independent economic activities, preparing Somali dishes for parties or for sale at a small convenience store in her neighbourhood (the same shop that she would later buy from its owner). This division of labour between her and her husband reflects gendered opportunities: Fatuma, as a young mother, carried out, apart from domestic duties, economic activities she was able to organise flexibly and from home; her husband was responsible for being the primary economic provider for the family, despite the strong deskilling he had experienced.

When she obtained documents that allowed her to cross national borders, Fatuma started to practice typical "star-shaped" mobility: she has travelled regularly to dif-

ferent places in the world importing objects she then sells to other Somalis who live in Switzerland. For obvious reasons, Fatuma was not very forthcoming about her informal economic activities with me. However, I can rely on information from other such businesswomen (who were also discreet regarding their activities) and from other respondents who told me about such women, to have a sufficiently clear idea about what they consisted of.⁴ The kind of trade in which Fatuma is involved responds to gendered constraints, opportunities and representations. What appears as a mostly women's activity has often been described to me by both male and female respondents in the following way: some women take advantage of the trips they make to different places to bring back a few things they then sell to other women, which mostly "pays for the plane ticket". This last expression is a recurring theme in discussions about informal business. It can be understood as an attempt to minimise those activities, in particular when addressing a researcher, partially because they are not declared at customs. Furthermore, the expression gives priority to other motivations for making such trips, making business appear as a secondary, less important activity. In this light, the reasons for these women's travels are social rather than economic, which corresponds to gendered representations about women's mobility. The devaluation of women's economic activities, in particular those that pertain to cross-border business, was common in interviews with respondents of both sexes, including by the women directly involved in these activities.

In developing her mobility practices, Fatuma counts on mobility skills based on knowledge about how to find cheap flights, as well as business partners and housing opportunities in the places she travels to, and on strategic plans regarding how to transport back what she buys.

I go to Dubai two or three times a year. When I go, I look at the deals to find a cheap flight; I usually find tickets for 400 or 500 Swiss francs [around 300-380 Euros], and then I go and I do my shopping. I take my little one with me, so I am allowed 20 more kilos of luggage. I bring back things that I then sell to others; this pays for my ticket". [J: And when you are in Dubai, where do you stay? Do you use those hotels run by Somalis that I have heard about?] Yes, there are lots of them; we know them. There are [Somali-run] travel agencies, restaurants, hotels, everything, just like in London. And since I don't speak Arabic, it makes it easier. [Semi-structured interview, notes]

Fatuma's *savoir-circuler*, in particular her knowledge of how to organise her travel and navigate between different social, cultural and legal contexts, is especially important (Tarrius 2002; Schmoll 2005; Morokvasic and Catarino 2010). Socialisation in families where mobility skills are widespread also counts (Fournier 2008), as Fatuma pointed out: her father was a businessman, and although she had never worked with him, she had always seen him do it; her brother is also a businessman based in Cairo who travels to Kenya, Somalia and other places. Furthermore,

⁴Informal trade – defined as such because it is undeclared, not subject to state taxes and to varying degrees on the margins of domestic and international laws – is not the central topic of this research, and it would need an in-depth, ideally ethnographic, investigation to be fully understood in all its complexity (see for instance Ellis and MacGaffey 1996; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). However, it emerged as a relevant activity within cross-border mobility practices, which justifies its being described here, although the information is incomplete.

the excerpt above shows that travelling with kids is not necessarily, contrary to what might be expected, a constraint.

Fatuma's stays in Dubai thus partially build on Somali networks of migrants who are settled there and offer services to those who spend a few days on business. Another respondent told me that an entire parallel economy has developed in Dubai, a major economic and business hub between Europe, Asia and Africa. According to this respondent, this economic niche exists within mostly Somali networks: for instance, there are apartments that men share when staying in the city, while women who live in different flats cook meals for them that younger men then deliver by bike. This parallel economy thus seems to be organised and differentiated along the lines of gender, age, legal status and social class. The Somali-based networks located in Dubai facilitate travellers' shopping and access to opportunities, in terms of accommodation and food, local transportation, meeting with business partners and so on. Fatuma makes explicit her recourse to Somali intermediaries to facilitate contact and communication with Arabic speakers, emphasising that her business networks in Dubai include people with different origins and languages. As another businesswoman based in London told me when I asked her who she bought her goods from in Dubai:

It depends. Some of them are Asians; there are some Arabs. It depends on the quality and the price. I don't mind, I don't care whether they're Somali or not; it's business. If I'm going to get a lower price from another person, I'll get a lower price. But if I know I'm going to get the same price, then I'll go to a Somali shop. [Aziza, Semi-structured interview, recorded]

While Somalis involved in transnational business may favour Somali partners, economic criteria are more important. Fatuma, like other businesswomen (and men), travels to places that offer them many advantages for their activities: support networks composed of people with the same national and linguistic background and commercial opportunities for products corresponding to a (culturally and socially constructed) demand from parts of the migrant population in Europe. While other places also appear to be important for business, Dubai is a central economic hub that was mentioned very often by the respondent. Besides its obvious business advantages, Dubai's geographic location at the crossroads between Africa, Asia and Europe is perceived as a further asset. Some of the respondents (including those involved in transnational business) consider the UAE in general, and Dubai in particular, a good place to meet family members who live in different places. On such occasions, business trips may also turn into family gatherings, or vice versa.

The objects that Fatuma imports into Switzerland are chosen with regard to the value they will gain there, once again within specific networks. As in Aman's case (Chap. 2), they correspond to demand by some Somali migrants who live in Switzerland for products that can be difficult to find otherwise. These may be everyday or festive clothing (for instance for weddings), jewellery, decorative objects, curtains, furniture or food. But these informal channels can also make available products such as electronic devices or computer games at a lower price. Tarrus and his colleagues (2013) have meticulously documented what they have called the "poor-to-poor" economy: constantly mobile transmigrants circulate recent low-

range products and sell them to sedentary migrants who would not be able to buy them through official distribution channels. These horizontal business networks develop in underground economic niches and build on few intermediaries, which is why they are able to offer these products cheaply (Tarrius et al. 2013). Fatuma's business activities, although less cosmopolitan than those described by these authors, build on similar characteristics. It is difficult to assess how lucrative this business is for her, but what is fundamental here is that mobility is an intrinsic part of those trade strategies, in at least two different ways.

On the one hand, these products gain value because they circulate: Fatuma needs to travel to the particular places where they are available and find the business networks in which she can buy them for competitive prices. Once they are imported into Switzerland or other European countries, they gain value either because of their rarity or because they are cheaper than those offered through official channels. That she carries those goods herself without declaring them constitutes an asset: the circulation of objects is directly related to the kind of circulation Fatuma herself undertakes.

On the other hand, products are imported by mobile migrants for more sedentary groups of the migrant population. The advantages associated with traders' mobility is directly related to their customers' immobility: business emerges from this line of differentiation. This specific population's demands are linked as much to their trajectory as migrants – and their desire for products that link them to their place of origin – as to their classed position (Tarrius' "poor"). Their demand for products they like and can afford creates a market based on alternative channels of distribution that mobile women like Fatuma are able to take advantage of.

4.4.2 Social Differentiation Within Local Gendered and Ethnicised Hierarchies

Tarrius et al. (2013) insist that the networks through which objects circulate in the poor-to-poor economy are non-hierarchical, but these processes do, in my view, involve social differentiation, based on gender, social class, generation, legal status and ethnicity. Social hierarchies appear very clearly when the networks in which Fatuma sells her imported products are analysed.

Respondents seem to concur in the description of the profile of transnational businesswomen who are settled in Europe. These businesswomen are generally at least in their 40s, left Somalia at the beginning of the civil war and belonged to the economic elite there. They have secured their legal status by obtaining European citizenship. Most of the products that Fatuma sells in Switzerland meet a gendered demand: her clientele consists predominantly of women who buy objects for their bodies (clothing, jewellery, beauty products) or for the home (curtains, decorative objects, food items). This clientele is also defined by its nationality, Somali women. While the networks in which this kind of business takes place are homogeneous in terms of gender and ethnicity, differentiation appears along the lines of age, time of

arrival in Europe and legal status. Fatuma's customers are women who do not have the means to cross borders and get the products they want on their own. They may have arrived more recently, not yet possess a secure legal status, be relatively poor or lack the motivation to travel.

Moreover, I was told repeatedly in the interviews that women active in informal business are also often involved in organising and managing rotating savings and credit groups: these are called "ayuto" or "hagbad" and are very popular among Somali women (Summerfield 1996).⁵ These informal groups of 10 or 15 women pool a fixed amount of money each month that goes to one of the participants, allowing them to have access to a larger sum of money at one time than they may be able to save on their own. Women who manage those groups are generally trustworthy, established women (Summerfield 1996). A male respondent described women who are active in informal business and who manage hagbad groups as well-connected, capable of making friends easily, not afraid of calling people late in the night, independent and able to use their influence and networks to help someone find a loan or support for personal matters.

Many Somali women participate in those groups, but those who need to do so the most are usually the poorest, and they have often arrived more recently and/or have not obtained a residence permit or Swiss passport. Anissa, a female respondent who lives in the same city as Fatuma, told me:

There are many families that receive assistance who have very limited means. For them, ayuto is necessary. If they want to buy furniture or curtains, for instance, they cannot do anything with 100 or 200 francs, so they do ayuto. They could also go to a bank, but then they couldn't take [the money out] when they wanted. And it's better with our system: we talk to each other, we listen, we are really like a family. [Semi-structured interview, notes]

Transnational businesswomen such as Fatuma and Aman partially use these groups to make sure the products they sell on credit will be paid for: the same women are often simultaneously their clients and participants in the groups they manage. Anissa, in the quotation above, implicitly makes this link: curtains are often mentioned as the main type of product Somali women buy through this informal market. It thus seems fair to assume that those women for whom ayuto is "necessary" buy their curtains from Somali businesswomen. In sum, informal traders bring back the kinds of clothing, furniture and jewellery that those who cannot travel cannot otherwise access and give them a way to pay for them by offering them credit, but also by setting up the hagbad groups that further bond their clients to them.

Collecting the money is also a time- and energy-consuming activity, since it is often necessary to "chase" participants to gather the sums they owe. Fatuma compares what she calls the "boutique" (her informal business) and the convenience store she runs (see next section):

When I go to Dubai, I bring back some small things. But the problem is that people don't pay, and then they have debts, and I don't like that. It is not the same with the convenience

⁵These systems are not specific to Somali women: so-called "tontines" are widely known among women in many places in Africa, and they are often related to business activities (see for instance Sengel 2000).

store. I prefer doing what I know, I sell food and people pay cash, and it's all easier to manage. The store is international, it's for everyone. The boutique is not the same; I don't really like it. [Semi-structured interview, notes]

Although Fatuma might have intentionally minimised her informal business activities in her discussions with me, this excerpt demonstrates the difficulties inherent in the kind of business she carries out. Her business activities are small scale, especially in economic terms. Yet it appears that these activities, as well as the rotating saving and credit groups, take place within relatively intimate networks based on national origin and gender. Summerfield (1996) describes *hagbad* groups as places where trust is expressed and bonds of friendship are created: this emerges very vividly in Anissa's account (quotation above) on how these groups are places where women can talk and listen to each other. But they are also networks based on unequal power relationships in which social status is acquired and maintained. The relationships between the women involved in these processes are complex: they are based on solidarity (as many of my respondents emphasised), but they also depend on and reinforce tensions and power inequalities within local Somali networks. Women like Fatuma are thus strongly anchored within these local ethnically homogeneous networks, and their mobility practices are one element through which they gain privileged social positions within them. This position further constitutes a solid basis on which she is able to maintain and further expand her informal business activities.

4.4.3 *The Formal Local Business*

Fatuma's transnational business activities remain informal, take place in her own apartment and have a limited economic impact. However, they were important steppingstones for her opening a small convenience store a few years ago that she runs with the help of her husband and older children. The store is located in a relatively deprived neighbourhood of her city. It offers cigarettes, chocolate bars, phone cards and chewing gum, as well as daily essential food items such as pasta, milk, soft drinks and canned food. While Fatuma cooks sambussas and pastries, her husband prepares sandwiches every day. The shop window announces, among other things, "Somali specialities", which refers primarily to the sambussas and cakes. The shop is open 7 days a week, from 9 a.m. to midnight, and there are no employees outside of the family. When I asked her how she came about the project of opening the grocery store, she answered:

It used to belong to an Afghan or Indian man. And I used to prepare sambussas for him often. And I would tell him: "I need to open a shop; this is really my dream". And then one day, the man called me and told me he was going to leave the shop. He told me: "Listen, you are a good woman, you know how to run a business, and your husband works hard. I want to give the shop to you". And he sold it to us. He even helped my husband with the money

from the second pillar.⁶ But that money was not enough. So we asked my husband's brother in Canada, who lent us some money, and then a (female) friend who also lent us 3,000 Swiss francs. That is how we found the money, in different places, thank God. [Semi-structured interview, notes]

Different types of relationships were mobilised to set up the business. The first was with the previous owner, who used to be a business partner, and with whom Fatuma (and her husband) created bonds of trust and respect. Her preparing sambussas for the shop and proving her business abilities, as well as her husband's work ethic, contributed to their being given the opportunity to take over the shop. Through their activities in different economic spheres, the couple thus displayed sufficient skills and motivation for this social relationship to be transformed into social capital. The previous owner called her specifically to offer her what she considered an important resource. Through her previous star-shaped mobility practices and related informal business activities, she had acquired specific skills and knowledge related to travelling, dealing with commercial and social realities in distant places and doing business. Her business skills and experiences motivated the man to sell her the shop. Fatuma transferred this cultural capital, acquired in a transnational social field, to the Swiss context and mobilised it to develop economic activities in her main place of residence.

Furthermore, she mentions that the man also helped them with administrative and financial matters, which demonstrates that their relationship was sufficiently strong for him to support them in other ways. Knowledge and information are other types of resources that circulated between them. He seems to be a migrant himself, but his origin is not important enough for Fatuma to remember. Since the store is located in the area where Fatuma lives, neighbourhood connections may have played a role. Other localised network connections that are not based on nationality were also involved, although in less direct ways: Fatuma's husband's incorporation into the local, formal labour market, despite the deskilling it entailed for him, had a major influence. Not only did it indicate his reliability for the previous owner, but it was also a way to accumulate some kind of "forced" savings: his pension money constituted a good share of the economic capital used to buy the business.

Second, Fatuma and her husband mobilised their transnational network, constituted of kin members and friends, to gather the necessary funds to buy the shop. This transnational economic support was hardly sufficient, however, in the face of the economic difficulties Fatuma faced 2 years later. A study on Somali entrepreneurs in Britain found that transnational social capital based on kin and ethnic ties is a fundamental asset on which local retail businesses build, supplying economic and moral support, as well as sharing skills and experiences (Jones et al. 2010; Ram et al. 2008). Yet the authors also find that most such enterprises do not fare very well, mainly due to the structural contexts and the high competition.

⁶The second pillar is part of the compulsory pension scheme in Switzerland: employees contribute to it through deductions taken from their paycheque. Under certain conditions, these savings can be used to buy real estate or set up a private business. The regulations regarding social insurance in general, and the second pillar in particular, are relatively difficult to understand.

The customers and suppliers of Fatuma's convenience store are characterised more by the fact that they are locally based than by their specific national background. Fatuma buys her goods from wholesalers, or in the case of more exotic food items, "local Indians". In an earlier quotation, Fatuma emphasises the "international" character of the clientele. Despite the diversity of their origins, most of her customers share the distinctive feature of "living in the area". Fatuma also mentioned that Somalis are a minority of her clientele.

However, she has not dropped the sambussa business: she continues to prepare them for Somali caterers. According to another respondent who knows Fatuma well, these (forced) intermediaries "exploit her", as they sell her dishes at three times the price they buy them from her. Despite the major efforts made by the whole family to run the shop, Fatuma complains about the difficulties in earning enough, due to the lack of customers, high taxes and strict regulations regarding what she is allowed to cook and sell in her shop. She told me about her project to move the store to other premises that would include an industrial kitchen: this would allow her to expand the catering part of her business and meet large orders of sambussas. This project is made difficult by the tight real-estate market. Each time I talked to Fatuma, she asked me whether I could help her find better premises for her business, demonstrating her attempt to mobilise any potentially fruitful relationship (unsuccessfully in this case).

4.4.4 Concluding Remarks

In her many activities, Fatuma circulates different types of resources from other parts of the world to Switzerland, where most of her life is organised. She chooses the specific objects she imports informally on the basis of the value they might gain in (specific networks in) Switzerland, and she plans her business activities accordingly. Her own physical mobility allows her to benefit from the differences in value of the products she purchases "there" and sells "here" in the informal market. If she did not travel herself, she would have to rely on intermediaries and lose out on this arbitrage opportunity. In sum, Fatuma has been able to accumulate even more of various types of capital in the transnational social field thanks to her mobility practices. In this sense, her regular border crossings cannot be seen as mundane practices: they really amount to mobility capital. She has developed sophisticated star-shaped mobility practices based on transnationalised skills and networks that, once transferred to Switzerland, are partially converted into advantages.

The description of Fatuma's formal and informal business activities is striking because of the differences between the two types of activities. The products she sells, the distribution channels, the clientele and the place where business happens in her informal and formal businesses have little to do with one another. Fatuma herself compared the types of clientele she has in each, contrasting the convenience store's "international character" with the "boutique", which is not "for everyone" (see quotation above). Interestingly, the categories she uses refer to the customers'

origins rather than their present geographic location, which is why they became clients of this particular shop. By describing the convenience store as “international” and “for everyone”, she implies that the other, undeclared activities take place within more homogeneous networks in terms of the national origin of the people involved.

Her commercial activities take place not only in different geographical places, but also within differentiated contexts and networks. This shift in the frame of reference is clearest in her informal activities, since the goods she sells are acquired in diverse contexts but reinvested and “cashed in” in local, gendered and highly ethnicised networks in the form of economic, social and symbolic capital.

However, her case also indicates that relationships based on local networks that are not characterised by shared ethnicity or nationality are often also important. The bonds she created with the previous owner of the shop and her husband’s long-term involvement in the formal Swiss labour market compensated for her lack of institutionalised cultural capital validated in Europe and made it possible for her to purchase her shop. Furthermore, the convenience store’s clientele is micro-local and “international”, i.e. not defined by a shared ethnic or national background.

Yet it is interesting that the part of her formal business she wants to expand is the sambussa business – that is, the one related more directly to the local ethnicised networks in which she navigates. In her evaluation of her situation, the best results, in economic terms, can be obtained by investing her skills in Somali networks. That may be because her embodied and informal cultural capital, as well as her social capital, can be best valued and mobilised in these specific ethnicised social networks, rather than in the majority society, where she struggles to find a favourable socioeconomic position.

The analysis of Fatuma’s involvement in both formal and informal businesses – one being at first sight fully local, from the suppliers to the customers, the other being based on transnational and mobility practices – demonstrates the complex ways in which different places and networks are articulated. It also shows how being incorporated in both a transnational social field and one’s place of residence results in developing complementary resources that, together, are transformed into various types of capital. It appears that, had she pursued only one business without the other, the outcome would have been quite different.

4.5 Conclusions

The three biographies illustrate that gender and family situations, the European country or countries in which people settled and their relationship to the formal and informal labour market have all influenced the constraints and opportunities they face. The diachronic presentation of each of their trajectories further demonstrates the changes that occur at different life stages (for instance, children’s education might become important and influence mobility strategies at one stage), but also the changes that might occur in one’s situation as a migrant (for instance, becoming a

citizen of one's country of residence may open up new opportunities for mobility) or in one's country of origin (for instance, changes in the political or economic situation there may prompt migrants to invest there at some stage).

The case studies also reveal different types of mobility practices (see [Chap. 2](#) for the full typology). Farhan's pendular mobility practices (type 2) allow him to draw resources in one place and invest them in another. The secondary move (type 3) he undertook from Switzerland to Britain allowed him to obtain some assets in London (social capital, improvement of his English) on which he may be able to capitalise later at the transnational level. Safia, after having undertaken multiple onward movements (type 3), also partially mobilises resources gathered in previous countries of residence in London. Thanks to a few return visits (type 4), she is also actively acquiring new types of capital with the intention of investing them in her country of origin in the future. Fatuma has actively developed a star-shaped mobility system (type 1): her frequent travels to different parts of the world for business purposes have concrete effects in her everyday life in Switzerland because they help improve her economic and social life. At moments in their lives, all three have experienced some kind of immobility (type 5). These individuals have accumulated and expanded their mobility capital, which allows them to obtain resources in places other than those in which they invest them. Mobility is part of a wider set of strategies to improve their socioeconomic situation and that of their children. Physical mobility becomes a fundamental resource that can be transformed into social mobility.

The analysis above focuses on the mobile aspects of these respondents' lives, but it also points to the many ways in which people are anchored in the places in which they settle. They learn the local language, find jobs, study, develop connections with neighbours and colleagues, interact with their children's schools and other local institutions, make new friends and become involved in or even set up voluntary associations, in parallel to developing mobility practices. Being mobile requires a high degree of investment and may involve losses and disappointments, but it is not contradictory with settlement and local anchorage. In fact, the two types of processes may affect one another positively.

The case studies have been chosen because they demonstrate particularly well the processes through which physical cross-border mobility can contribute to migrants' ability to improve their living conditions. While the people in this chapter, and in this study in general, have not experienced tremendous social mobility in their country or countries of residence, they have all benefited from their mobility practices in one way or another. In other words, their accumulated experiences of cross-border movements have given them opportunities they may not otherwise have had. In many cases, they have been able to transform them into advantages for themselves and/or their families.

I have focused my analysis on the different ways in which border crossings allow people to strategically transnationalise their assets. As discussed in this chapter's theoretical introduction, two closely intertwined processes take place: one relates to a geographical shift, the other to a shift in the frame of reference in which resources are valued. For both, the main theoretical argument is that social actors benefit from a

favourable exchange rate of capital: the contextual shift allows them to take advantage of the difference in the valorisation of their assets. In the next few paragraphs, I will discuss each of these processes separately, yet it is important to bear in mind that they are not independent from one another in people's lives and experiences.

4.5.1 The Geographical Shift

The mobile migrants I have discussed in this chapter are embedded in transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). By maintaining connections with those various fields at the same time, they are able to mobilise the resources inherent to them at different times and different places. Physical mobility is the cornerstone of this process, as the case studies have illustrated.

What can be witnessed is not simply an accumulation of resources through a diversification of the places in which they are gathered or invested: advantages result from the strategic circulation of assets between those places, and the difference in the value of those assets in those different places (Savage et al. 2005; Bourdieu 1979a). Assets are valued differently depending on the social field, but also the geographic location in which they are evaluated.

Migrants who live in richer countries are sometimes able to take better advantage of the resources they have gathered there by mobilising them in their country of origin. Financial remittances are the clearest example of this process: low salaries in their country of immigration sometimes allow migrants to support many people in their country of origin, buy land and build properties, which would not have been possible if they had invested their economic resources where they were obtained. The stories of Farhan and Safia show that cultural capital earned in Europe is also better invested in their country of origin than in Britain, Switzerland or the Netherlands. The "transnationality" of cultural capital validated in more powerful countries is increased, thanks to these states' economic and cultural hegemony (Weiss 2005). Both institutionalised and embodied cultural capital that has been validated in a European context may circulate advantageously in this direction, and can include educational credentials, mastery of English, professional and associational experiences and bodily understanding of appropriate behaviours and attitudes in a European work context. Farhan and Safia have both invested time and money, and strategically planned their mobility practices, in order to obtain an education, learn English and develop adequate social networks, and they hope to use all of these assets in their region of origin in the future. Having accumulated some kind of "spatial autonomy" (Weiss 2005), they find themselves in a position of (partially) being able to choose the environment best suited to the resources they already possess or to develop specific resources that they know they will be able to mobilise in other parts of the world. Being part of a small group of intellectual Somali men or mastering English and obtaining a degree may not be sufficient to improve one's socioeconomic position in London. They may help do so, however, when they are coupled with mobility strategies and mobilised in the right context (and in adequate social fields), where they can become symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1987).

It emerges from this study that the transnationalisation of capital does not occur only through this directional geographic shift. Post-migration mobility practices open opportunities to benefit from favourable exchange rates between countries other than the country of origin and country of residence. Safia's secondary movements have allowed her to capitalise on experiences and social connections acquired in the Netherlands in London. Likewise, Farhan's constant movement between two European states allows his family to invest economic capital earned in Switzerland in a context perceived as more favourable, London. Fatuma also benefits from a differential in the valuation of the material resources she obtains in different regions (in particular Dubai) and circulates informally in Switzerland. Her profit results from the circulation of carefully chosen products that meet a demand located in Switzerland: the added value comes from the scarcity of these products in this context and from the alternative they offer to products imported through more formal channels of distribution. The transnationalisation of capital is a multi-faceted process that does not only consist of having resources flow from migrants' country of residence to their country of origin, contrary to the focus in much of the literature. Some migrants are able to extend their "patrimony of places, territories and appropriated networks" (Lévy and Lussault 2003) and draw resources from them. In some instances, it may even be that resources gathered in one's country of origin are reinvested in Europe (see Oeppen 2013).

Whatever the countries involved and the direction of the flow of resources, the transnationalisation of capital takes place at the crossroads of two power differentials that determine the value of capital in different places. On the one hand, nation-states occupy different positions in the "global exercise of power" (Glick Schiller 2010), which affects their ability to influence whether resources earned in one place can be valued in another (see also Nieswand 2011). One illustration of this phenomenon lies in the fact that migrants from Somalia find it almost impossible to validate their cultural capital (in particular their educational credentials and work experience) in Europe, while the education they receive in their country of immigration creates opportunities for them to obtain highly valued jobs in Somalia upon their return (see also Weiss 2005 on that topic). On the other hand, their position as migrants from a poor country to a wealthier country in this configuration of unequal power between nation-states has important effects. "Imbalance of power both shapes the circumstances that compel people to migrate and simultaneously constitutes the conditions under which migrants attempt to settle and develop transnational social fields" (Glick Schiller 2010). In other words, migrants have become migrants partly because of wealth differentials and geopolitical relations at the global level, but the transnational and mobility practices they develop as migrants are also shaped by these unequal relations and their own relative social position in the different places involved. Farhan, Safia and Fatuma have accumulated specific types of capital (economic, cultural, legal and social capital) that give them access to different resources and a higher social status depending on where they convert them. Their mobility capital is a fundamental asset that enables them to "play" between different yet interrelated social positions in varied social, economic and political contexts.

4.5.2 *The Shift in the Frame of Reference*

This geographical shift, carried out in order to benefit from a favourable exchange rate between two different nation-states, is one of the processes involved, but it would be insufficient to stop the analysis there. Resources, whatever they are, are not evaluated uniformly within one nation-state or even one city or one neighbourhood. The relevance of the global context should not overshadow the importance of other social contexts. Individuals' positions are linked to the ways in which they are able to value their assets in specific social fields, which depends on the rules of the game specific to each of those social fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The wider interpretation I have adopted refers not only to social fields in the strict sense implied by Bourdieu's definition, but also to less bounded social environments and less stable, less formal social networks crossed by specific internal hierarchies (see Chap. 1).

Farhan, Safia and Fatuma all participate in the various social fields in which they are embedded. They gather a significant part of the resources they mobilise to secure or improve their socioeconomic status within networks linked to the dominant society in their country of residence. Studying, working, participating in associational activities and maintaining contacts with schools and neighbours are all ways to accumulate economic, cultural, social and legal capital in institutions and networks that are locally based and heterogeneous in terms of the ethnic background of the people involved. The life stories I have described in this chapter have shown that the capital these individuals have accumulated in these ways has allowed them to improve their socioeconomic status to a greater or lesser degree since they arrived in Europe, but it has not allowed any of them to regain the kind of status they had before migration. For instance, in their formal employment, they are economically precarious as self-employed workers (Fatuma), cobble together odd jobs for different institutions in different places (Safia) or have a job in the skilled-labour market, yet in lower positions (Farhan). Most other respondents are in similar situations: they are not able to valorise highly the resources they obtain at the lower and most precarious end of the labour market.

In this situation, transferring resources from one place to another is also a way for mobile migrants to select optimal environments (not only in geographical terms) in which their assets can best be valorised. These processes do not necessarily require border crossings; however, mobility, as the case studies have shown, widens the number of opportunities and thus increases the social contexts in which assets can be mobilised. A major result to emerge from this chapter is that many of the activities intended to transnationalise resources address the needs of people who are originally from Somalia, whatever their actual current location.

Fatuma's informal business activities and her project to expand her formal business to catering activities for local Somali parties address a clientele composed exclusively of local Somali migrants. Likewise, Safia mobilises the education, linguistic skills, work and associational experience she has acquired in different countries in Europe to cater to deprived and marginalised Somali migrants who live in London. Both these women valorise their assets in "migration-specific" social environments (Erel 2010). Furthermore, Farhan's desire to one day mobilise his newly

acquired social networks and cultural capital in Somalia is aimed at improving the situation of the local population there, through either political or developmental activities. Safia has already started to carry out such projects by temporarily returning to Somaliland and working in the “development industry” (Hansen 2007), and she hopes to keep capitalising on her cultural capital this way. The context of post-conflict political, economic and social reconstruction opens up opportunities for educated migrants to support those processes while obtaining high-status jobs (see also Oeppen 2013; Sagmo 2015). International institutions such as inter-governmental agencies or NGOs constitute specific transnational social fields in which returning migrants are able to valorise their assets, i.e. cultural capital acquired in Western countries together with localised cultural capital in the form of linguistic and cultural skills related to the country of fieldwork.

If all these activities are (partially) based on the transnationalisation of resources, they are also all directed at a population with a similar ethnic background as the mobile migrants who undertake them. Whether the targeted population consists of customers in a Swiss city, socioeconomically disadvantaged migrants in London or residents in Somalia who have been suffering from the conflict and its consequences, these “beneficiaries” are all originally from Somalia. Ethnicity is thus a salient component of many of the social environments in which respondents reinvest the assets they have accumulated in varied contexts. Being able to claim this identity themselves (“being from Somalia”), they are also able to mobilise the cultural assets that go with it (speaking the language, knowing the “culture”) in specific social contexts that grant them value. “Ethnic business” markets, social services that cater to migrant communities and employ professionals with a similar background, international institutions that work in the countries of origin and hire employees from the diaspora and Western funding partners for development or humanitarian projects all attach meaning to the ethnic background of the people involved (see also Lutz 1993; Anthias and Cederberg 2009; Erel 2009). In these specific environments, ethnicity itself becomes a resource that (classed and gendered) migrants can mobilise to pursue social advantage (Anthias 2007). Ethnic or national origin is not a resource per se, but it may become one when, on the one hand, migrants are in a position to build on internal differences within the ethnic group and, on the other, institutions from the wider society find interest in valuing it as an asset.

In sum, the second shift that can be seen is one in which migrants draw resources from social fields and networks in which ethnicity is not relevant and reinvest them in social fields where it is salient. Mobility not only enables social actors to circulate resources from one geographic place to another; it also widens the types of social fields in which they can valorise and convert them most favourably.

4.5.3 Status Inconsistencies in Local and Transnational Fields

The mobility practices and the strategies of transnationalising capital described in this chapter build on the (often conflicting) social position of migrants in different places and within different social fields. The people described in this chapter all

experienced strong downward social mobility upon their arrival in Europe as refugees. Though they came from families that were part of the political or economic elite in Somalia, they were not able to transfer most of their capital to Europe: economic capital was lost in the conflict or spent for the migration journey; social capital became transnational and of little use at that time; and the cultural capital validated in that part of the world obtained little recognition in Europe.

However, these assets were not completely lost in the migration process, and they have played an important role in the strategies these migrants have developed in the years and decades following their settlement in Europe. Farhan, Safia and Fatuma first benefited from their privileged status by being among the first Somali refugees to be able to reach Europe, at a time when states and the European Union had not yet restricted their legislation as much as they would later. This is not to say that those first waves of Somalis were welcomed with open arms; but it would no longer be possible to undertake irregular secondary movements within Europe today, it is more difficult to obtain a European passport and the political environment in general is marked by increased xenophobia and anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiments. Furthermore, although none of these respondents have been able to regain a status similar to the one they had in Somalia, they have been able to valorise and convert their initial assets – in particular their cultural capital, but also later their transnational social capital. Their early arrival in Europe and the amount of time they have been here have also enabled them to obtain a stable legal status, an undisputable asset when it comes to mobility, as [Chap. 2](#) discusses.

These different aspects of their capital endowment influence their social position. Their education level, their participation in the labour market and the type of area in which they live (populated by people who are lower class, migrants or minorities) point to a positioning in their main country of residence that, although not marginalised, is quite low. Simultaneously, their particular migration history has allowed them to develop relationships with the wider society and its institutions, secure some weak ties with non-Somali people and acquire cultural resources that, although limited, position them favourably in comparison to most other Somali migrants who live in Switzerland and Britain.

In fact, in comparison with the other Somali migrants with whom they interact, their social position is a privileged one. Farhan regularly meets with his Somali neighbours, even while he simultaneously distances himself from them, working hard to differentiate himself through his investment in his children's schooling, through his own education achievements and through his links to an intellectual diasporic elite. Safia's professional and associational involvement in London leads her to create daily relationships with people she helps and supports, in exchange for a salary and/or for social recognition. Fatuma stands in an unequal relationship with the clients of her informal business and the women who participate in the rotating saving groups she established. In both cases, these women have generally arrived more recently and have a precarious economic and legal situation. All three interviewees (along with most other respondents in this study) actively participate in social networks constituted of other local Somali migrants. Their life stories dem-

onstrate, however, that they benefit from a privileged position within these networks: differentiation and hierarchies exist in terms of their migration trajectory; legal status; education; skills and professional experience that can be valued locally; development of local networks, including weak ties to the majority society; and, last but not least, (im)mobility practices.

In sum, the migrants in this study who have been able to capitalise on their mobility practices experience a contradiction in their local statuses depending on the social environment in which they are evaluated: while they belong to a less privileged socioeconomic strata of the local population, they can – and often explicitly do – claim an advantageous status with regard to the other Somali migrants with whom they are in contact. This status is in most instances reinforced by their constant interactions with these other people: they benefit from these unequal relationships. In other words, inconsistencies between different social positions occur within the same nation-state, depending on whether the resources in question are evaluated with regard to the majority society or the other Somali migrants to whom they are closely and daily connected.

Mobility and embeddedness in a transnational social field, however, are crucial aspects of these inconsistencies. On the one hand, mobility capital constitutes a fundamental asset in these migrants' ability to obtain a favourable social status within these networks. Transnational resources and skills may further be converted in contexts and networks related to the majority society, as the example of Fatuma's informal and formal businesses has demonstrated. In her case, as in others, mobility capital is mobilised both to improve one's social position within networks of Somali migrants and to attempt to become socially mobile within the wider society.

On the other hand, in many instances these inconsistencies extend transnationally: some respondents are more or less explicit about how they aim to use their mobility strategies to (re)gain a privileged position vis-à-vis the Somali population in their region of origin. Farhan hopes to use the social networks he has developed in London to obtain access to the political elite in Somalia, while the kin networks with which he is in close contact there cannot offer him such access. The local and transnational position inconsistencies intertwine in this case. But migrants also mobilise the cultural and social capital they have acquired in Europe to improve their social status in their region of origin: while their capital endowment is not sufficient for them to obtain privileged positions in Europe, it becomes a favourable marker of differentiation with regard to the local population in Somalia. This resembles the "status paradox" described for Ghanaian migrants (Nieswand 2011), as well as for other migrants who invest in alternative power hierarchies in their place of origin (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1999; Goldring 1998). Safia's case has made clear that international institutions constitute a specific transnational social field in which the status paradox emerges: while migrants' capital is often poorly valued in the European context, it can be converted favourably in the region of origin – by working for institutions funded and managed by Western actors. In turn, this transnational capital allows those migrants to obtain a privileged status in Somalia, thanks to good wages and positively valued positions.

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