

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Labour market integration and transnational lived citizenship: Aspirations and belonging among refugees in Germany

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Abstract

Transnational lived citizenship has gained prominence as a means to analyse mobility and foreground activist notions of citizenship over legal status. I argue that lived citizenship and transnational movements are strongly intertwined with aspirations and belonging. I use the material example of labour market integration as the space of enactments of citizenship and analyse the patterns of belonging those create and contest. I develop my argument through the empirical example of labour market integration of refugees in Germany. I demonstrate how such integration transforms social, and more importantly, economic location and in turn creates complex and often contradictory forms of transnational allegiances. I ultimately argue that lived citizenship can in important ways advance aspirations of refugees and migrants. At the same time, transnational lives and multiple allegiances are often hindered by state-based citizenship and the rights this confers. Legal status thus remains an important marker of citizenship.

KEYWORDS

aspirations, belonging, Germany, labour market integration, refugees, transnational lived citizenship

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The concepts of lived citizenship and/or transnational lived citizenship have gained prominence over the past decades in parallel with the increasing pace of transnational movements (Kallio & Mitchell, 2016; Kallio et al., 2020). Lived citizenship has expanded the understanding of citizenship in important ways, as it allows to analyse citizenship beyond rights-based status conferred by the nation state. It conceives of citizenship as relational and affective practices grounded in multiple forms of belonging and interconnectedness (Al-Ali, 2001; Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Wood & Black, 2018; Youkhana, 2015).

In a different strand of literature, the usefulness of lived citizenship as an analytical category has been questioned. A focus on citizenship as practiced in everyday encounters, regardless of official status or rights granted by a nation state, risks being “‘everything’ and therefore ‘nothing’” (Kallio et al., 2020, p. 3). Lived citizenship, it is argued, needs clearer demarcation. Four categories have been proposed to sharpen its analytical value, namely, spatial; intersubjective; performed; and affective (Kallio et al., 2020). While those categories can indeed be useful to analyse activist forms of lived citizenship in a potentially more systematic way, I argue that the normative framing inherent in those categories misses an important dimension of lived citizenship, its link to personal aspirations and belonging. In this paper I therefore reconfigure those categories through demonstrating how aspirations and belonging are of key importance when investigating concrete, and often ambivalent, practices of transnational lived citizenship.

In relation to refugees and migrants, the wider literature has aptly demonstrated how lived citizenship provides a meaningful framing for the analysis of everyday practices that disrupt social-historical patterns in that subjects ‘constitute themselves as citizens’ (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 2). This has been discussed predominately in relation to claim-making or activism with regards to social or political rights in diverse geographical locations the world over. These include access to health care for non-status groups (Castañeda, 2013); as well as forms of political intervention like demonstrations, hunger strikes, escape aid, country-wide marches, and sustained public campaigns, for example the *sans papiers* movement, by non-status populations and citizen movements combined (Isin, 2009; McNevin, 2006; Müller, 2016; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2020; Ticktin, 2006). These examples demonstrate the importance of lived citizenship as a category to analyse social reality, and also point to a transnational dimension in that movements connect and ideas and practices circulate (see also Boccagni et al., 2016; Finn et al., 2018).

In this article, I add to that literature in moving the focus away from activist enactments of citizenship, and instead analyse lived citizenship as embedded into aspirations and belonging. I focus on the concrete material example of aspired labour market integration of refugees as the space of the enactment of citizenship. This demonstrates how the transnational element of lived citizenship is underpinned by often complex connections between aspirations on the one hand, and (trans)national allegiances on the other. To analyse the latter, I make use of the dynamic category of belonging, defined by Yuval Davis (2006) as based on the three distinct analytical categories of social locations (including economic locations); identification and emotional attachments; and ethical and political values. I argue that transnational lived citizenship is strongly determined by enactments of aspirations and their material manifestations. Yuval Davis’ categories allow me to demonstrate how in fact economic location serves as the key factor that underpins manifestations of belonging and citizenship practices.

I further argue that enacted citizenship cannot be ‘detached from broader currents and processes shaping societies’ (Staeheli, 2010, p. 394); legal status remains an important marker of borders, physically and metaphorically, and for navigating transnational aspirations and mobilities.

In order to develop my argument, I use the empirical case of refugees who arrived in Germany from summer 2015 onwards with the aspiration to build a professional career. Research participants benefitted from business sector engagement with refugees and integrated into the German labour market. The empirical data was collected within a wider project entitled *Moving the goalposts of citizenship? German business sector engagement and refugee integration* that sought to analyse the motivations behind business sector engagement in refugee integration (see Müller, 2021). A separate component interrogated how the lives of those who achieved labour market integration were shaped by this integration. This last issue is the focus of this article.

For the refugee populations at its centre, who are determined to achieve professional aspirations in a nation-state setting, Germany, but who remain in multiple ways connected to a wider transnational field, economic location is a key

marker of lived citizenship. The empirical example therefore lends itself particularly well to an analysis of transnational lived citizenship through a re-interpretation of categories of belonging: Forced migration disrupts aspirations and displaces belonging, and both can be reconfigured through transnational lived citizenship practices firmly grounded in labour market integration and the economic location this entails.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: In the next section, I provide a brief background about the (post-) 2015 refugee arrivals in Germany, and labour market integration through business sector engagement. Subsequently, I discuss methodology and data collection. The following sections will use Yuval-Davis' category of economic location to analyse how citizenship is lived, and subsequently what kinds of belonging in relation to identifications and values have emerged among research participants. The article will conclude by relating these patterns of belonging back to transnational lived citizenship. Taken together, in providing a detailed empirical analysis of labour market integration as a space where lived citizenship practices emerge, and how those translate into other aspects of belonging, the paper makes a novel contribution to debates around transnational lived citizenship and its discontents.

THE (POST-) 2015 REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN GERMANY AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION

When German chancellor Angela Merkel allowed refugees stranded at German borders and beyond to enter Germany for a brief period in the summer of 2015, many German companies regarded Merkel's move as one way to overcome labour shortages and future demographic bottle-necks (Bergfeld, 2017; Juran & Broer, 2017). The latter had long been identified as a key challenge for Germany that could only be addressed by increased recruitment of labour from outside the European Union (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2015). What became, rather misleadingly, referred to as the 'refugee-crisis' (Bojadžijev, 2018; Holmes & Castañeda, 2016), could serve as an important milestone on the way towards greater acceptance of such recruitment in the eyes of the German business sector, while at the same time demonstrate the capability of German society to 'welcome' these new citizens into mainstream society (on 'welcome culture' and its discontents see Benček & Strasheim, 2016; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Trauner & Turton, 2017).¹

Initially, it became clear that the hope for swift labour market integration largely overstated the skill status of many refugees, including those from Syria, even if among the latter were a disproportionate high number with vocational skills or a university education. But few of these skills corresponded to German labour market requirements. In addition, among the refugees who had required skills on paper, actual knowledge and expertise, and German language skills were often missing (Müller, 2021; Rietig, 2016).

For many of the 2015 refugee arrivals this situation was difficult to understand, as a comparatively large number were skilled professionals or university graduates with skills that made them valuable employees in their countries of origin. This in turn created the expectation to return to a professional life as soon as possible. Thus, the first hurdle they encountered were not only the rules and regulations of German bureaucracy, but also the realization that good knowledge of the German language was a prerequisite for almost every professional career. At the same time, access to German language courses was based on often incomprehensible criteria. Unless one had the funds to pay for language education oneself this meant long stretches of time in limbo, while entitlements were checked and processed (Bock & MacDonald, 2019; Rösinger, 2017).

Thus, a number of business sector initiatives who hoped to offer employment to refugees started with mentoring programmes that focused on language acquisition and the navigation of German bureaucracy, partly to make refugees ready for future employment opportunities. Companies who offered internships, apprenticeships or employment often did accompany this by their own in-house language training provision.

¹ A note on terminology is in order here: Legally speaking, a refugee is a recognized asylum seeker but not all study participants have that status (yet). But as 'refugee' remains the key term in the debate in Germany, not as a legal category but in everyday use, I have decided to use that word in its more general, non-legal sense.

More generally, for many professions where skilled refugees could ease labour shortages, the usual route into the profession is the German apprenticeship system called the dual system (*duales System*). It is based on shop-floor learning as an apprentice combined with, partly profession-centred, secondary school education. Thus, either one to two days a week an apprentice goes to school and the other days he/she is on the shop-floor, or, alternatively, blocks of school attendance alternate with blocks at work, depending on the profession. An apprenticeship for most professions lasts three years, a time during which salaries are comparatively low.² Successful completion offers a good chance to gain permanent employment and further qualification opportunities. In that sense, for anybody wanting a permanent professional perspective in Germany, an apprenticeship is perhaps the most valuable entry point, almost like winning the lottery as one research participant remarked upon.

Apprenticeships also include an examination at the local Chamber of Commerce, thus good expertise in the German language, including technical German for the relevant profession, is a prerequisite for completion. For businesses engaged in offering apprenticeships, the entry route for applicants usually is an internship of between three weeks to three months, to work out if the job and the applicant's profile fit, but also if the applicant can fit into the company culture. As an apprenticeship is a substantial investment on part of the company in question, in terms of finance but also in terms of additional support refugee-apprentices need on the shop-floor and in dealings with state bureaucracy, one wants to be sure there is a fair chance an applicant will complete their apprenticeship successfully (see also Berger, 2017; Müller, 2021; Rietig, 2016).

The refugees interviewed for this article, all in some work relationship, thus belong to a group of people determined to make their future life in Germany and achieve successful integration into the labour market combined with a longer-term career perspective. Only with this ultimate objective as a driving force, the struggle to learn a proper profession with a quasi-employment guarantee at the end makes sense, as it requires in most cases three or more years of learning while being paid a comparatively low wage. For those among the (post-) 2015 refugee arrivals who saw Germany as a transitory space towards somewhere else, seeking non-permanent employment in a low-skill sector, often on gig-economy terms and conditions, was the usual route taken – even if many of those might have stayed in Germany over the long-durée.

But the focus here is on those who actively aimed for a fulfilling and successful career, and to become a valuable part of German society, regardless of official citizenship status (even though the majority will be able to apply for the latter in a few years' time). For some research participants, it was through this professional success that they secured indefinite leave to remain, while for others, official refugee status recognition preceded training, apprenticeships or employment. What unites all participants is that their status of living in Germany is not currently under threat, even if this might change for some in the future if legal provisions should change. What equally unites them is the fact that the majority had close family connections (spouses; parents; siblings and so forth) either in their country or region of origin, who were likely to remain there.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

Methodologically, the article is based on interviews with refugee-apprentices or refugees who have profited from labour-market integration programmes. This choice of method was based on the objective to investigate transnational lived citizenship as the interplay between labour market integration, personal aspirations and belonging. It led me to adapt a research design that centred on research participants as key actors navigating structural constraints (Long & Long, 1992). Understanding these interplays is best achieved through in-depth, narrative face-to-face interviews in which people are invited to reflect upon and interpret their social reality (Crewe & Harrison, 1998). This implies that a

² Depending on profession and sector, apprenticeship salaries on average vary from Euros 300 to 900 per month. Traditionally, apprenticeships target German youth from the age of 15 who often still live with their parents, thus older apprentices and those who need to pay for accommodation, can get additional funding for the latter. A number of refugee-apprentices who took part in this research still lived in refugee accommodation paid for by the state.

reciprocal relationship exists between empirical data and theory, in which any theoretical reflections grow out of the researched context (Lather, 1991), similar to what has been described as 'extended case study' (Burawoy, 1991). Such a case can be a single person (see for example Pascucci, 2016), or a small sample bound together by a key characteristic - in this case the overarching aspiration to create a fulfilling professional life in Germany. The research design therefore focused on in-depth interviews with refugee-apprentices and where possible observations in their work environment, contributing to the call to ground research on transnationalism and the complexities of belonging in everyday practices of individuals and their interpretations of those (Walsh, 2006).

The entry point to refugee interviewees was through the businesses where they worked, as the interviews were conducted within a wider project that focused on the business-sector response to refugee arrivals in Germany that included interviews with business and trade union representatives (see Müller, 2021).

Refugee participants were identified via the employing business and first approached by the respective liaison person in the business. Interviews were then arranged individually (in most cases) or in small groups, usually with me on my own with the refugees but in one case somebody from the company also present (this did not hinder an open exchange as far as I can tell, as even in this interview critical views were expressed). Taken together, even though identified as participants via the company for which they worked, refugees did engage with the interview process frankly and critically.

Interviews were open ended but framed by an interview guide that focused on how apprenticeships (or subsequent employment) opportunities had changed participants' lives and outlook in Germany. Follow up questions centred on their daily lives, their place of residence, friends and colleagues, and the social relationships that determined their lives, in Germany and the wider transnational social field.

I took notes during the interviews, which with one exception where the interviewee preferred to speak in English were all conducted in German, and wrote up an extensive interview report immediately afterwards. Interviews usually lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Some interviewees I met again for informal chats when returning to the same company at a later date, and I could also observe some of their work practices in around half the settings where interviews took place. These encounters and observations were noted in a field diary after each visit.

Between May 2017 and February 2020 I interviewed 18 refugees either in work-placements (6), apprenticeships (6) or permanent work/a permanent work offer (6). Of these, nine were from Syria, five from Afghanistan, two from Eritrea, and one each from Pakistan and Palestine (the latter born in Syria). They were all male - two women (in permanent work) who were approached to participate in the study declined, as did a number of other men who had been interviewed and featured in local and national newspapers before. They all gave the same reason: wanting to live a normal life and not be a showcase for integrated refugees (even when assured their participation would be anonymous). A note on gender is in order here: the majority of post-2015 refugees, more than 60 percent, were men, many single and between 16 and 35 years of age (BAMF, 2020). The majority of women came as family members, and were often not available to participate in the labour market for reasons related to family obligations, combined with gender norms in their country of origin that dominated their early life in Germany (for deeper analysis see Integration durch Qualifizierung IQ, 2017). Some of the companies in this study proactively targeted women for their programmes but often with little success. This makes the relatively small number of women in successful apprenticeships indeed stand out and potentially identifiable. It goes beyond this article to discuss these gender issues in more detail, just to say after five years in Germany, the percentage of refugees in work is 57 percent for men, and 29 percent for women (Brücker et al., 2020).

Geographically the companies where refugees worked covered the city-states of Berlin and Hamburg, as well as the states of Bavaria, Baden Württemberg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Hesse.

Interviews have been anonymized, and refugee interviewees have been given a codename. As geographical location could in some cases easily identify the business (and thus indirectly the refugee participants), these have been removed. The project received ethical approval from the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee. All interviewees agreed to the usage of anonymized direct quotations in publications.

TRANSNATIONAL LIVED CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING IN REFUGEE LIVES

The professional success that unites all interviewees to different degrees provides meaningful answers to wider questions of lived citizenship and belonging among this population group who aspire to re-build their lives in Germany. At the same time, they are connected to multiple other allegiances related to their previous lives, and/or the various stages of and experiences during their journeys. The ways in which they live transnational citizenship can meaningfully be analysed using Yuval-Davis' three distinct categories of belonging, as they allow to demonstrate how social, and more importantly, economic locations constitute identifications and emotional attachments, as well as values.

Such an analysis provides an in-depth understanding of what lived citizenship may mean, and also reminds us of the potential limitations of a concept that locates citizenship too exclusively in everyday acts and experiences.

For refugees, some form of displacement of belonging has occurred once they had to leave the communities where their previous lives unfolded and where in most (even if not all) cases my interviewees had been formal citizens. This displacement severely disrupted career and wider professional aspirations, resulting in research participants placing great value on securing new professional aspirations and the means to attain those. In turn, a focus on labour market integration when investigating lived citizenship and resulting patterns of belonging provides an important entry point. The strong connection between labour market integration as a marker of economic location on the one hand, and transnational allegiances expressed through identifications and values on the other, makes Yuval-Davis' (2006) categories of belonging a pertinent analytical framing for refining the analysis of transnational lived citizenship.

Social and economic location of refugees in the German labour market

For Yuval-Davis (2006), social location is constructed along multiple lines of difference and connected to power relationships – both of which are strongly determined by economic location. Among the participants in this study, being employed or not, or at least being allowed to work, was regarded as an important building block for exercising citizenship in everyday encounters, and as a consequence key to the creation of a wider sense of belonging.

The majority of interviewees, in particular those from Syria, either already had a professional career in their former home country or country of residence, and some had a university degree or were studying for such a degree. They thus felt confident when they embarked on their journeys that, wherever they may end up ultimately, it would not be too difficult to rebuild their lives. Especially for many Syrian interviewees, having to flee the war had cut their university degree short, thus they had no completed degree, but they came from a comfortable enough middle-class background with resources to make their journey possible. This is in line with data on Syrian refugees in other European settings that indicate those qualified professionally or academically are more likely to be found in Europe, whereas the overall majority of Syrian refugees remain in neighbouring countries or the region (Carlson & Williams, 2020; Juran & Broer, 2017).

While in general aiming to get to Europe, for a number of participants the decision to go to Germany was predominately shaped on their way, by their experiences en route and/or in response to ever changing stories about safe places. Others had a clear plan to get specifically to Germany. Such plans were often linked to professional aspirations, however vague, sometimes combined with other prior connections. Bilal, who arrived in Germany from Syria in 2016, says:

I have an uncle who since 1989 lives in Düsseldorf, he came there to study medicine and stayed, and another uncle who married a German woman and lives in Berlin with her, and with the war, when I was studying and in danger of being recruited into the army [*in Syria*], I thought I perhaps have a better chance to live my life in Germany (interview, 11 September 2019).

For him, being in Germany provided professional openings in a different way than he had initially imagined. Bilal had started to study an economic subject at the University of Damascus when he left, as this was what was on offer. 'Originally, my aim was to do an engineering degree, but I did not have the grades for that' he says. Once in Germany, he could think again and even though he struggled with learning German initially, the German Job Centre (the agency responsible for helping people, including recognized refugees, to find work) organized a work placement for him that led to his apprenticeship at an infrastructure company that includes work on building sites. 'This practical experience helped me, I was able to try the different tasks involved and could find out what suits me, and I realized, studying, sitting at a desk is something I hate [...] I never thought before I could enjoy working on building sites' (interview, 11 September 2019). He continues to describe how the apprenticeship (he was in year two of three at the time of the interview) helped him 'to find my way, now I see a big goal in front of my eyes, I know the direction in which I am going [...] in the end, we left Syria to have a good future and now I can have such a future' (interview, 11 September 2019).

Other interviewees arrived with clear plans about their professional future, a case in point here is Faisal. Faisal had completed four semesters of a university degree in civil engineering in Homs in Syria, and like many young male Syrian students fled before he was being forcefully recruited into the Syrian army. He initially went to Egypt and worked as manager for various businesses. 'But I realized quickly there was no future here [*in Egypt*], I would never be able to study again or learn something that is relevant for a meaningful future, beyond earning money' (interview, 25 October 2019).

He did his research and felt Germany was perhaps the best country to be able to study or learn a good profession, so he made every effort to get to Germany. After some obstacles on his journey and stints in Italy and Sweden he succeeded, was recognized as a refugee four months later, and within six months had his B1 language certificate.³ He started to write applications to be admitted to university (but level B1 is not enough for university admission) or secure an apprenticeship. He initially wanted to work in the IT sector as 'back in Syria I was good at that, I always repaired the laptops of my friends', but his English was not good enough. He thus started to work partly on building sites, as this was related to his degree, 'but there you were simply a normal worker, even if I knew many things, there was no future beyond earning money.' He needed money to pay off some debts for his journey to Germany, but while working in these odd jobs, he continued to study German and has meanwhile completed level C1. When the interview took place, he had successfully completed the entry qualification [*Einstiegsqualifikation*] with a highly regarded employer, as the only one out of a group of nine refugees like him, and had started his first full apprenticeship year.

My life has changed through the apprenticeship, I now use my time much better, my life is structured through my work, and I am keen to develop myself so I only see my friends at the weekend, I need time to learn and concentrate on my work, I lost enough time already (interview, 25 October 2019).

Faisal remembers well his first two years in Germany, how difficult it was to learn the language, 'and the feeling not to have a future after all, all these rejections [*of applications to work*], and not being able to study either'. He thought maybe it was all a mistake and he should simply go back, either to Egypt where meanwhile most of his immediate family, his parents and some siblings, live, or even to Syria. If he had no future it did not matter if he was sent to the army. 'But then I got the acceptance for my apprenticeship, and that has saved me', he concludes (interview, 25 October 2019).

For a lucky few, professional aspirations and career prospects did not fundamentally change. Hassan is such an example, who after high school in Syria completed vocational training as a welder and lathe operator, and worked for a number of years in this profession. The apprenticeship he completed at the time of the interview 'is the same thing, only here everybody speaks German' (interview, 11 September 2019). He in essence had to start from a lower base as he had no valid certificate from Syria. Because he was already a skilled professional, he finds the time apprentices need to spend at school 'a waste of time, they do not teach you anything new', and indeed, even with the added complication to re-learn everything in a language that was completely alien to him before his arrival, he is one of the best students

³ German language certificates range from the elementary A1 to C2, for an overview see: <https://www.europaischer-referenzrahmen.de/sprachniveau.php>

in his classes (which he needs to attend as the maximum time one can be absent is 10% of total school time, otherwise one is not allowed into the final Chamber of Commerce examinations).

What makes him impatient is the low salary as an apprentice, 'I know how to do all this work, I worked with my father on more sophisticated jobs back home, thus I finally want to earn real money, money that allows me to start a family' (he at the time of the interview lived in a refugee hostel, with his own room but shared kitchen). But he knows his time as apprentice will be over eventually and he can look forward to a fulfilling professional life.

Taken together, for most Syrian participants the step into employment, while not always easy, is smoothed by previous knowledge, study or expertise, even if they might not always be able to use this expertise fully. But in contrast to findings from a study in other European settings (Deloitte, 2017), this previous expertise is not 'wasted', but provides the foundation for successful integration into the skilled labour market.

For some of the participants from other geographical settings, the situation can be different, as they often arrive without previous qualifications. Daniel is a case in point here. He became a refugee when he had to leave his home country, Eritrea, with his mother as a child. His school attendance was cut short by the need to earn money, and from a young age he started to do temporary unskilled work, learning on the job. Once his mother had died he made various attempts to get to Europe or anywhere that offered him a better perspective in life. He always deeply regretted not to have been able to complete his secondary school education 'as from being a young child I was always curious, I wanted to learn, to study, to see how the world works' (interview, 11 September 2019). For him, securing an apprenticeship was 'a great joy', as finally he could catch up with learning, and he is, in his own words, 'totally focused on my apprenticeship as I do not want to lose any more time before having a real profession' (interview, 11 September 2019).

The above demonstrates the different ways in which a meaningful type of work with a clear future career perspective is an important marker of social and economic location and valued as such by research participants. They all know of people, often friends or acquaintances from their country of origin or former fellow travellers on their journey to Germany, who failed to secure meaningful work and 'stay in a life of limbo' in the words of Daniel. For those, everyday lived citizenship remains a struggle for survival, instead of a means to achieve aspirations that facilitate a sense of stake in or belonging to Germany. This connects to other recent literature that emphasizes the importance refugees attach to being able to work and live with dignity when navigating transnational spaces (Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020). Indeed, as the following section will demonstrate, a valued economic location translates into different forms of identification and emotional attachments, and thus determines the ways in which citizenship is exercised in everyday lives.

Identification, emotional attachment and values

Lived citizenship grounded in economic location that allows fulfilment of wider aspirations or at least the anticipation of such fulfilment is exercised in more complex ways than visible on the surface. Bilal for example, for whom the move to Germany meant a successful career perspective and who is 'very proud to work for a public company', says at the same time: 'My life is made up of two distinct parts, work and free-time. Work is in German and as part of German society, but my free time is in Arabic and most of my friends are from Syria' (interview, 11 September 2019).

While he feels respected, identifies with and is proud of his life in Germany, and has no plans to return to Syria to live there again, an important part of his emotional attachment belongs to other spheres. This becomes most visible in the realm of humour, as he fails to laugh about German jokes and 'the other way around is the same, Germans do not understand my sense of humour'. He speaks to his parents in Syria by telephone every second day, but does not see a contradiction in the fact that his life is divided into these in many ways distinct parts. At the same time, when he visited his sister who lives in Spain after the birth of her first child, and she told him 'you have changed, you have become German', he had no objections 'but felt proud that she said that' (interview, 11 September 2019).

Faisal also has a divided life, but for him the dividing line is related to different groups of friends. He has Syrian friends, mostly from Homs like himself, and German friends from different walks of life and backgrounds. With his

Syrian friends he speaks Arabic. Most of them are like he was before the apprenticeship, they have diverse jobs, in shops, offices, 'but no real perspective for their lives and can easily be made redundant, I am the only one with a clear professional perspective through my apprenticeship' he says (interview, 25 October 2019). Most of his German friends go back to the time when he arrived, he met them as volunteers or as people helping refugees with bureaucracy and language. They still often meet at weekends, cook together or simply hang out. At work, he has good relationships with his fellow apprentices, but they are all much younger and at different stages in their lives, 'these are not friends with whom I could spend my free time, they have very different interests' he says (interview, 25 October 2019). But through these three distinct social spheres, work; his Syrian community; and his German friends; he feels 'emotionally almost complete, the only thing that occupies my head is that I cannot see my family' (interview, 25 October 2019).

For Hassan, in contrast, identification and emotional attachment is much more grounded in his past life in Syria. The move to Germany was mainly a move to a geographical location where he was safe from military service or oppression. Coming from Aleppo, a city early on in the Syrian civil war considered a hotbed of opposition to the regime and thus heavily bombed, leaving and going to Germany was a rational strategy for survival – a move to a place where he could hopefully continue his professional life, as it had turned out to be the case. But he does not necessarily feel he belongs here. 'Nature and my work are very nice here, but I do not like the rest, I still feel like a stranger here' he says (interview, 11 September 2019). When probed he says that he has a very good relationship to colleagues at work, but no private contacts, and overall misses the social life he is used to from Syria, where to get to know people and then visit each other at home afterwards is easy and normal. While 'my work for now keeps me here, if things would change in Syria, why not? I would go back' (interview, 11 September 2019).

More general, identification and emotional attachment depend on lived citizenship and to an important degree on how life outside work unfolds. In that sense, belonging goes beyond economic aspects of lived citizenship, even if the former are of key importance, but becomes a multi-layered and dynamic process that changes and adapts over time (see also Pawlak & Goździak, 2020; Solano et al., 2020). An apprenticeship or labour market integration is not an endpoint in itself, but an important manifestation of lived citizenship that relates to aspirations and their fulfilment at a given point in time, and in an ideal scenario is accompanied by some form of wider positive emotional attachment.

It is also strongly connected to feelings towards one's country of origin. Asil, who had a permanent work contract before the imminent completion of his apprenticeship, was unique among the interviewees in having a German partner. But even with a big circle of German friends he often feels 'I am living between the worlds' (interview, 11 September 2019). But on a recent visit to his country of origin, when he hung out with old school friends, he felt quite alien among them. Upon his return he said to himself 'I now know I must stay here [in Germany], that is where I now belong'. He then cites a saying from his home country that says: 'if you are standing with each leg in a different boat, you will never reach your destiny', thus living between worlds is not good in the long run, 'and now I belong here' (interview, 11 September 2019).

This sense of belonging to Germany, whatever that may mean in concrete, translates in different ways into value judgements about one's everyday and transnational life.

Meaningful integration into the labour market is a key building block for positive value judgements. Bilal has the following to say in that respect: 'I am very grateful for the chances I was given in Germany, and I want to demonstrate that I can make the best of it, I am not here to simply earn money, but to provide good work and make a contribution to German society' (interview, 11 September 2019).

Similar sentiments are shared by Latif, one of those who has a permanent job, who says: 'I was trying my best not to act as somebody just coming without benefitting the country; I just wanted peace and act like a good person in the country where I am living' (interview, 5 November 2019). He continues:

It is very important for me to have peace here and no fear to go out or that I have to leave tomorrow ... since I was born I always heard visa, visa, visa, here I feel safe ... and German citizenship is one of my biggest dreams, it is a very big miracle in my life, it is not about nationality but safety at last (interview, 5 November 2019; Latif will be able to apply for full citizenship in the near future).

Daniel learned to value life in Germany through his apprenticeship. He has a number of German friends and they often have dinner together but 'in a sensible way to be fit when work starts the next day' (interview, 11 September 2019). The friends he has from his region of origin, many of whom he met on the way to Germany, from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia in particular, he meets mainly per WhatsApp, thus virtual rather than in real life. They usually chat until late into the night, and he feels a growing distance, as none of them has a permanent job while he has to get up early. When he says he needs to get some sleep 'they are surprised, and they say he has already become like a German', but for him the 'German' part of his life, that includes being punctual for work and refreshed, is what has become more important (interview, 11 September 2019).

The above conceptions of what participants value in their lives in Germany, in particular wanting to make a positive contribution to German society, relate to conceptions of what a 'good citizen' should be that have been discussed in the wider literature as partly internalized, and partly contested by refugees and migrants (Horst et al., 2020). But for participants in this study, labour market integration in its different facets fulfils a core aspiration. This speaks to wider findings in the literature that have demonstrated, taking the example of Syrian refugees in Belgium, how they regard requirements to work not as a disciplinary measure to turn them into good citizens, but as a means to restore their dignity as independent actors (Vandevoort & Verschraegen, 2019).

It should be noted here that this is not the case for all. Those include refugees, perhaps some of Daniel's friends mentioned above, who have been offered an apprenticeship but find the way the German system operates not appealing. All employers tell stories of refugees who started an apprenticeship but withdrew early on. Sometimes such decisions are connected to the comparatively low salaries paid during the apprenticeship stage and the need to repay debts to smugglers. More often, people withdraw because attachments to networks from their countries of origins, or people they spent years of travelling with on their migration journeys, are of greater value than a long-term professional perspective (fieldwork diary, 2019).

Even for those who navigated their professional life in Germany successfully and value the ways in which it unfolds, initially, in the words of Faisal 'it was a shock to my system, starting with working hours, before, I started working maybe at 8 or at 10, but here everything is so early, and you cannot be late, but now I am used to the rhythm' (interview, 25 October 2019). In addition, and in line with all interviewees, German bureaucracy can still drive him crazy and frighten him, 'often things arrive in the post that are illogical and wrong, and even my German friends do not always understand what is asked'. Sometimes they tell him he needs to complain against evidently wrong decisions, but he does not feel comfortable enough yet to do so most of the time, so such issues 'occupy your head, even when at work, it is stressful.'

While he aims to stay in Germany and 'overcome such hurdles', complete the apprenticeship 'and if I still have the energy continue to a higher qualification', he does miss his family (his parents and siblings), who now live in Egypt. Like many refugees who have permanent leave to remain and a German travel document, he can travel in the Schengen area but not beyond, and as a Syrian he cannot travel to Egypt. He applied for a visa to see his family in Egypt on a number of occasions, and was thus far always rejected, 'that is the thing that occupies my head most, that I cannot see my family'. Thus, while for Latif German citizenship is a symbol of safety, for Faisal it is a means to stay physically connected to the transnational social field that he values most, the connection to his family.

DISCUSSION: LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION AS A FOUNDATION OF TRANSNATIONAL LIVED CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING

When looking at the participants in this study, economic location, discussed here in relation to labour market integration, is the foundation from which other enactments of citizenship emerge. Those in turn result in complex, multi-dimensional and often contradictory emotional identifications and value judgements.

These are partly related to participants' country of origin and the reasons why they left. For participants from Syria, many of whom came from professional, middle income families, opportunities of professional advancement were the

key aspect of lived citizenship. In principle, they can envisage going back and using their career skills in Syria, even if not in the near future – and should any of them do so they would have a higher skill level than their compatriots.

For those from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Palestine, a return to their country of origin is not anything they can envisage. And while a meaningful professional career is also of prime importance to them, they are equally driven by the desire to be in a safe place. Their objectives for (re-)building their lives are broader, with a focus on securing economic, social and ultimately legal status combined – having the right papers, a professional career, an income that guarantees material security. This does not mean their emotional attachment to their country of origin or their extended families, the latter often dispersed around the world, is any lesser. But for those who opted to take the apprenticeship-route, a future as a professional or meaningful integration into the labour market is the key aspect around which emotional attachment and values emerge. For others, like some of the friends Daniel talked about, who see Germany as a transit station or who could live anywhere as long as they are safe, the trade-offs are different. This supports findings in the literature among more settled migrant populations that have demonstrated how local citizenship practices complement rather than contradict transnational citizenship (Van Bochove et al., 2010). In this case one may say lived citizenship as an employee in Germany makes transnational belonging feasible. It also enforces the argument, advanced for example in relation to Somali refugees in Cairo, that material and temporal dimensions of transnational lived citizenship constitute each other: To live transnational identifications is highly contingent on material conditions, or the socio-economic processes that determine such identification (Pascucci, 2016).

For those who participated in this research, transnational identifications are deeply intertwined with localized, everyday practices of citizenship (see also Pascucci, 2016, p. 327), and connected to being useful to society as well as having space where own aspirations can be fulfilled. As Latif reflects: 'I never had any peace in my life except since I am in Germany, most of the people I have met are very kind, here in the company but also outside, I feel comfortable, and [I feel] that I can make a contribution here (interview, 5 November 2019).

Even for those who had to give up the ambition of a university degree and settle for a job they might not have considered before, a long-term career perspective has positively shaped their lived citizenship. Rajab says in this respect: 'We came here to live and be safe, and sometimes the bureaucracy suffocates you, everything takes ages and you always hear wait, wait, wait, but in the end things work out and one needs to adjust and professionally do what is possible, then you can really have a new life' (interview, 22 January 2020). Rajab is in Germany with his family and three children, who all go to school and his eldest, a daughter, will start secondary school in the coming year, 'she is like a perfect German young lady' he says proudly (interview, 22 January 2020).

In other ways, labour market integration is important for creating a sense of belonging beyond the world of work. Nabil explains how once he secured economic independence, he valued the freedom to make his own decisions. In Afghanistan he always had problems. While a Muslim, he is not very religious but thinks religion is a personal issue, 'I believe in God and that God watches over every human being', but he says of himself he is 'liberal' in terms of practicing religion. Once settled in Germany, he for example told his wife she could decide if she wanted to wear a headscarf. He likes the life here, and as one would in the Afghan way of showing hospitality, regularly invites his mostly German neighbours to drink tea together. And 'of course I have contact to other Afghans who are here, but that is often complicated, we argue about religion all the time, they accuse me of having betrayed my religion and my culture, but that is not true, so I try to avoid seeing my Afghan contacts'. He prefers to meet with people he got to know during his journey, other refugees, and also his work colleagues with whom he gets on well. 'I want to stay in Germany as this allows me to live my life', he says (interview, 31 January 2020).

He misses his parents and other family back home, but his father said to him 'your country is where you are happy and content, where you are safe and can live your life in peace', so he would give up his Afghan citizenship to become German. He once went back, not to Afghanistan but to the border region between Iran and Afghanistan, in 2017, and met some members of his family there, 'it was tough and there was always insecurity, only for seven days I was there, but that made it clear to me that it would be impossible to live there safely again' (interview, 31 January 2020).

Taken together, even for those who successfully integrated into the German labour market, who live in German communities and have amicable relationships with their neighbours, transnational lived citizenship is a complex

process. It may not only run into problems at the Schengen or other borders when trying to connect in material ways with the transnational connections of families and friends, but equally there remains a shadow of discrimination and difference, often visible in well-meaning praise by others of how well-integrated some of the 2015 generation of refugees in fact are (Bock & Macdonald, 2019; Hamann & Karakayali, 2016). But the economic and social location manifest in meaningful labour market integration and secure employment is a key to deal with this 'otherness' the refugee experience also entails, and create forms of emotional attachment and belonging that transcend formal citizenship papers.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have reconfigured the literature on transnational lived citizenship through an analysis of lived citizenship as intimately intertwined with aspirations and belonging, the latter defined through a re-interpretation of Yuval-Davis' (2006) categories of belonging. I have used the material example of labour market integration of refugees as the sphere of the enactment of citizenship, and in doing so added a new dimension to the literature on activist citizenship with its dominant focus on laying claim to social and political rights (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Kallio et al., 2020).

My findings advance debates around transnational lived citizenship in three domains, theoretically and empirically combined. First, I argue that labour market integration is an important arena of lived citizenship. While one may regard such integration as a form of imposed imagination of a 'good citizen' (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Horst et al., 2020) that helps otherwise exclusionary states enhance their 'cultural, emotional and reputational value' (Mavelli, 2018, p. 485), at the same time such integration fulfils a core aspiration of refugee-migrants (see also Vandevoort & Verschraegen, 2019).

Second, focusing on labour market integration, in itself an important marker of economic and social location within a society and/or community, helps to advance our understanding of transnational lived citizenship analytically. I do so in using an expanded definition of Yuval Davis' analytical framework for the study of belonging, expanded by focusing on economic aspects of social location as key. This is particularly useful when analysing the transnational aspects of lived citizenship and how those evolve over time, as social and economic location and the aspirations associated with both can often only be realized through transnational migration. I demonstrate that success in the pursuit of professional aspirations and labour market integration after such migration not only transforms social and economic location, but has important implications for emotional attachments and values.

Third, in using the empirical example of relatively recent refugees to Germany whose lives are determined by professional aspirations and transnational allegiances of different types and intensities, I argue that disrupted aspirations and displacement can be reconfigured through transnational lived citizenship practices that create multiple forms of belonging.

Even though the empirical research was small scale and focused on a limited sub-section of refugees, these findings clearly speak to the wider debates on transnational lived citizenship: They demonstrate how aspirations are realized in everyday life and how forms of belonging and emotional attachment evolve from these, while connections and affective relationships are sustained across borders and across a transnational field, even if often only virtually (see also Martin & Paasi, 2016; Van Bochove et al., 2010).

These findings point to a number of further conclusions: First, in the literature on lived citizenship and acts of citizenship, the main emphasis is on claim-making and contestation from below or among those who have 'traditionally been excluded from economic, political and social esteem' (Kallio et al., 2020, p. 2). The business sector, in contrast, is neglected as an important actor in relation to advancing the possibilities of lived citizenship, be it through lobbying and other involvement in potentially altering exclusionary state practices, even if success here is not always guaranteed. In the German case, various business sector initiatives have secured more formal rights for those in employment or otherwise valuable for the labour market, while in other cases companies failed to prevent deportation of valuable staff (www.unternehmer-initiative.com; Der Spiegel, 2019; Von Dewitz, 2018).

This leads to the second important conclusion: While lived citizenship and citizenship as a relational practice are important ways to conceive of and advance aspirations of refugees and migrants, the transnational lives they often lead and the multiple allegiances those entail, particularly in relation to intimate private connections, are hindered by state-based legal notions of citizenship and the rights these confer. This is most evident in the empirical data presented here in the restrictions that legal papers give participants to travel to connect with family in real life rather than virtually – restrictions that will be lifted once they gain full legal status as German citizens, and only then allow to properly ‘live’ transnational connections in the way they desire. Legal status thus remains an important marker of citizenship, physically and metaphorically, and for navigating transnational aspirations and mobilities as an expression of transnational lived citizenship.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflict of interest.

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