Article

Migrants' Social Positioning Strategies in Transnational Social Spaces

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

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

be explained if the specific and changing nature of the transnational spaces within which migrants' lives are embedded is taken into account.

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

2. Conceptual Framework: Boundary Making in Transnational Social Spaces

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

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

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

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

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

Research on transnationalism (Faist, 2019; Levitt, 2001) has contributed ample evidence that for a great number of migrants, leading transnational lives involving their social, cultural, economic and political partici-

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

3. Methods

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

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

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

4. Interviewees' Subjective Evaluations of Social Mobility Trajectories

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

4.1. The Modernisers

People who could be characterised as 'modernisers' in our interviews often came from working-class backgrounds and originated from middle—or low-income countries outside the EU (in our case countries like Bolivia, Uzbekistan, Nepal, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine or Serbia). They therefore had limited legal opportunities to migrate to Germany for work, study or family reasons and experienced difficulties in accessing residence and work permits. Many of the respondents we classified in this group originated in rural or marginalised areas in their country of origin. Often, when they had completed a professional or university education there, the qualification was not recognised on the German labour market. Several respondents in this group had not finished school or professional training before leaving. Some respondents had already experienced marginalisation and discrimination before coming to Germany because they were members of ethnic and/or political minorities in

their countries of origin, were physically impaired or otherwise disadvantaged. Interestingly, people in this group often indicated that, while they also had experienced discriminatory treatment in Germany because of their origin, they did not experience the same level of discrimination in Germany as in their country of origin. The vast majority of respondents in this group had never been to Germany before, did not have any social contacts in Germany and did not speak the language prior to migrating. Thus, respondents in this typology relied on limited cultural, social or financial capital in their origin countries and were only partially able to convert these resources into valuable capital in Germany.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ity. The young woman from Central Asia, for example, explained how her social status had risen in the eyes of her families and friends back home:

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

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

4.2. The Choosers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3. The Achievers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, the most numerous group in our sample is connected to a third type: It concerns those who share similar pre-migration characteristics with the highly skilled migrants, but who were less able to convert their existing resources into valuable capital in the destination country. This group experienced various degrees of downward mobility just after migrating and are not always able

to recuperate their social status. The so-called 'achiever' type is likely to refer to moral and cultural boundaries related to values in their home country in order to position themselves socially in a positive light, often by referring to national stereotypes that depict their own origin culture in a particularly positive light. However, they also value economic markers of prestige as status-relevant because income and possessions appear to play a dominant role in these people's evaluations of social status. This is particularly so when these prestige markers are part of culturally sanctioned life-course goals, such as buying a car, building a house or marrying and having children. We find that this group of migrants bears resemblance with research undertaken on the social standing of middle-class migrants in many parts of the western hemisphere (Garapich, 2012; Hussain, 2018; Kawashima, 2018; Mapril, 2014; Scott, 2006), which is, however, still predominantly qualitative in nature and difficult to investigate through quantitative methods because of the multiple ways in which migrants negotiate their social status trajectories in different cultural, social and economic contexts and spaces across nations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the section that follows we apply our findings empirically through both quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to show how the index can be used together with qualitative interview material to investigate in more depth how different types of migrants construct symbolic boundaries of different value around similar social status indicators. In our example, we relate our
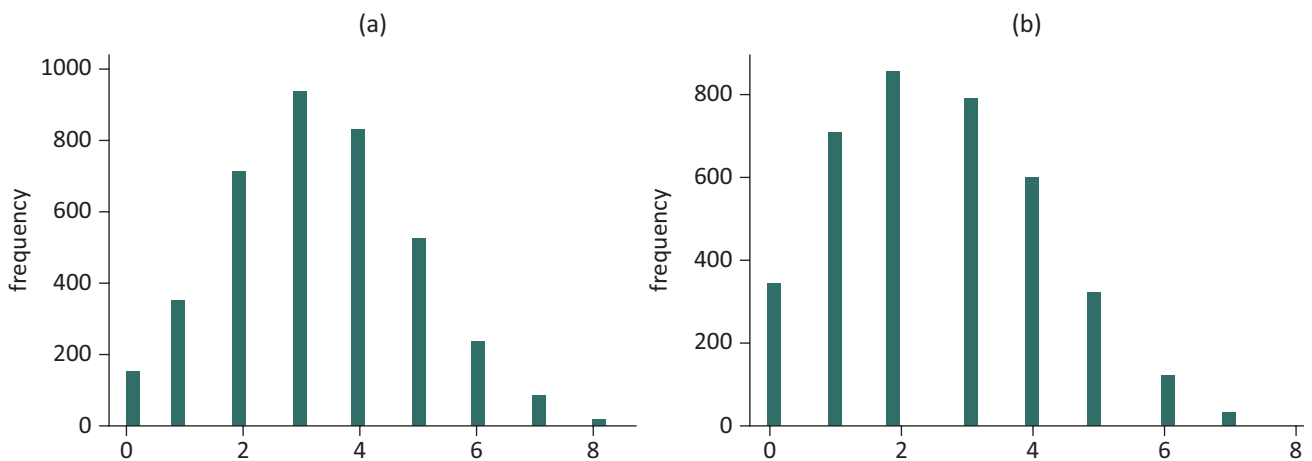
Figure 1. Distribution of respondents within the chooser (a) and moderniser (b) typology index. Source: SOEP (2019), own calculation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the case of travel, then, choosers use a similar pattern of social boundary drawing as described in the ear-
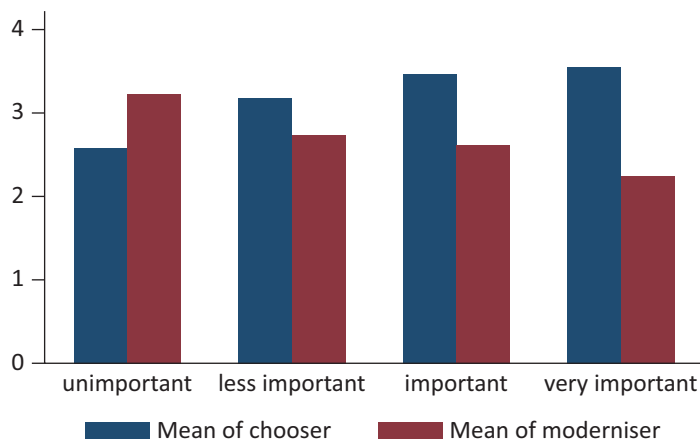
Figure 2. Mean values scores for choosers and modernisers within the four categories evaluating travel (unimportant, less important, important, very important). Source: SOEP (2019), own calculation.

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

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

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

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

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

7. Conclusion

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

and destination country is also influenced by the transferability of cultural, economic or social capital in the transnational social spaces they inhabit.

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

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

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

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

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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