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The migration-kinship nexus: Mobilising kinship during fragmented Afghan and Iraqi journeys to European Union countries

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Abstract: This chapter proposes that the ways in which transnational migrants and refugees mobilise kinship during their migration journeys can be examined through a concept we call the ‘migration-kinship nexus’, which focuses on the intersection of kinship, migration and aspirations. We go beyond a static, nation-state bound perspective on transnational families by focusing on a flexible concept of kinship and on refugee journeys rather than on families across nation-states. In our study of the kinship-migration nexus, we draw on Carsten and analytically distinguish between: ‘kinship as being’, kin relations that derive from birth and relate to individuals’ past; ‘kinship as doing’, how kin relations are performed in the present; and finally, ‘kinship as becoming’, how kin-related aspirations regarding the future are formulated. Our research is based on two multi-sited ethnographic research projects with Afghan and Iraqi refugees conducted in 2011-2015 and 2017-2019 at various points of their migratory journeys: in Iran, Istanbul, Athens, Lesbos, on the Balkan Route, and in Helsinki, Bergen and Oslo. Our analysis demonstrates that while the migration-kinship nexus is shaped by European nation-states’ increasingly restrictive migration policies and bureaucratic borders, kinship remains a flexible source of aspiration for migrants. Thus, the kinship-migration nexus concept encourages a deeper understanding of how migration and kinship are co-constituted and how kinship is central in understanding aspirations during the migration process. Our research demonstrates that kinship is a dynamic force that is not only about being, but also about making and unmaking in the present, as well as about becoming in the future.

14.1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, a great deal of migration research has focused on transnational families; how migrants continue to maintain family ties after migration (Basch and Blanc 1992; Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc 1995; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Glick Schiller, Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Skrbiš 2008; Baldassar et al. 2014;); and the crucial role of relatives, family and communities in the decision to migrate (Castles and Miller 2003). While this research has been important in demonstrating that individuals have innovative ways to continue to 'do' family despite physical separation (Morgan 2011), research on transnational families has mostly focused on analysing family lives in relatively sedentary situations, connecting specific locations in which migrants reside more or less permanently.

Moreover, research has demonstrated the impact that nation-state borders and increasingly restrictive migration regimes have on the lives of transnational families (Al-Ali 2002; Merla & Baldassar 2011; Kilkey & Merla 2014; Merla 2014; Brandhorst et al. 2020; Merla et al 2020; Näre 2020). Scholars have criticised mainstream research for conceptualising family as an idealised, domestic unit adhering to western norms (Declich 2020), which is also reflected in European national legislation. What has been overlooked in existing research is the ways in which migrants 'do' family, and, more broadly, are 'doing' kinship, during their journeys? By shifting the focus from transnational families across specific nation-states and to the migratory journeys, our chapter argues for the need to use a more flexible concept of kinship that is not limited to how family is understood in specific nation-state contexts. In this chapter we make use of the term transnational kinship rather than transnational family. 'Transnational' families are usually defined in research as families who live apart but create and maintain a 'sense of collective welfare and unity, in short "familyhood," even across national borders' (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002, p.3). While family tends to include members who are part of the same household (either physically, or through transnational social and economic relations), kinship includes people who are not necessarily part of the same household but are intrinsically linked through continuous, existential relations. We draw on Sahlin's notion of kinship as shared membership and kin as those who "participate intrinsically in each other's existence," in that they share "a mutuality of being" (Sahlins 2013: ix). While this definition opens the possibility to analyse the complexities of what

kinship does, we acknowledge that it does not involve an assessment of its quality. As Carsten (2013, 247) reminds “[d]ifferentiation, hierarchy, exclusion, and abuse are [...]also part of what kinship does or enables.”

In this chapter, we analyse how transnational refugees mobilise kinship during their migration journeys, how kinship is constituted through existential social practices and endeavors for the future, and what these practices tell us about the intersections between aspiration, mobility and kinship — what we term the migration-kinship nexus. Our starting point is an examination of kinship practices among people who have moved as a result of forced migration but whose identities are not defined by their ‘refugeeness’ or their asylum-seeker status. Hence, we analyse how they perform kinship relationships in order to overcome physical and bureaucratic borders that might hinder their aspirations towards a better life as a result of their journeys (Brandhorst et al. 2020; Näre 2020; Bonizzoni & Belloni forthcoming). Rather than considering the term ‘migration aspirations’ as interchangeable with migration ‘wishes’ or ‘desires’ (Carling and Schewel 2018), we draw on Appadurai’s understanding of aspirations as socially rather than individually constituted. Aspiration is ‘always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life’ (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67). The capacity to aspire is a ‘navigational capacity’ according to Appadurai (2004, p. 67-69). Similarly, Hart (2016) has argued that aspirations are relational and dynamic. They can be individual or collective, and shared by family members.

Following the notion of aspirations as collective, we examine the various ways in which refugees’ aspirations are shaped by diverse forms of kinship relations and how these relations are reshaped through the migration process. The collective aspirations and kinship relations are imbued with gendered dynamics partly as a result of culturally constructed ideas of masculinity and femininity. They are also defined by the state and its policies (Boehm 2012; Vogt, 2018: 135, Yarris 2017; Näre 2020; Madziva & Chikwira forthcoming). Research has shown how social relations are fractured and undone by state migration policies, and how state definitions of the family determine who can migrate through formalised ‘family routes’ (Strasser et al. 2009; Declich 2020; Bonizzoni & Belloni forthcoming).

Taking a different approach, we analyse how migrants are – sometimes strategically – doing transnational kinship relationships across borders, and while crossing borders, and how migration policies affect these activities and relational practices.

Drawing on two multi-sited ethnographic projects focused on Afghan and Iraqi refugees enroute, we observe that migrant journeys do not constitute linear trajectories nor are they structured by predetermined destinations. Migrant journeys are fluid and dynamic, changing according to new aspirations attuned to micro and macro level contexts, such as new governmental policies and regulations or the construction of new physical or bureaucratic barriers. Journeys are fragmented and multi-directional (Collyer 2007). The outcome of migration does not merely depend on a momentous go/no-go decision in the countries of origin and the journey should not be viewed as an exceptional phase of mobility. Migration can in fact resemble a semi-permanent form of liminality (Vogt 2018) and it is difficult to assess when and from where a migrant journey starts and where and when it ends.

In their attempt to de-exceptionalise mobility in migration studies, Schapendonk, Bolay and Dahinden (2020) denaturalise the presumption of place-based lives and suggest that the migration journey is not necessarily fundamentally different from pre- and post-migratory mobilities. Researchers have long discussed the reasons, aspirations or drivers for migration, proposing various 'push-pull' models (Lee 1966, van Hear, Bakewell and Long 2018), including the aspiration/ability model (Carling 2002), to grasp the ways in which mobility and aspirations are shaped by forces at different scales or levels. Carling and Haugen (2020) have recently introduced the term 'circumstantial migration', placing emphasis on improvisation as part of migrants' agency and ways of responding to shifting challenges and opportunities during migration.

A migration journey can be circular or take different loops at different times. Keeping in mind the dynamic nature of migrant journeys, we analyse how Afghan and Iraqi refugees mobilise kinship in order to continue their movement or to fulfill their aspirations, through which also kinship is confirmed, disrupted or constituted. This includes practices such as marriage, offering and requiring (economic) resources, creating safety and facilitating mobility along the journey at various geographical points in Finland, Norway, Iran and along the Balkan route. Some of the migrants we met left Afghanistan for Iran more than a decade ago. Several Afghans were born as refugees in Iran and, while growing up, had been deported back to Afghanistan from where they later returned to Iran. Some Afghans living in Iran had been deported or returned to Afghanistan from Sweden and Finland after spending several years in these countries. From Afghanistan, they journeyed back to Iran and were

planning to return someday to Northern Europe. Some decided to continue their migration journeys from Iran to Turkey, and after a while continued from Turkey to Europe, where they 'got stuck' in refugee camps. While for some the journey ended in Norway and Finland, or at least had ended at the moment of our encounter, others planned or contemplated returning to a different European country, or to Iran or their country of origin. Others lived in Norway and Finland in fear of deportation to their country of origin. Thus, many of the people we interviewed testified to the fact that journeys are highly fragmented, circular and circumstantial (Collyer 2007; Crawley et al. 2018; McMahon and Sigona 2018; Carling and Haugen 2020).

It is impossible to depict migration as a journey with a starting and ending point. Rather, migrant journeys have different stages, and decision-making is shaped by situated possibilities and necessities, as well as structural constraints and opportunities. What is often overlooked in existing research on migration journeys, is kinship as a key force of mobility. Kinship can work both physically and materially in ensuring and providing means for mobility. It can also work existentially, as a source of aspiration and emotional committed support for existential life projects through which kinship can be established and constituted.

In this chapter, the 'kinship triangle' (kinship as being, doing and becoming), unfolds as our ethnographic material is introduced and situated. Second, our multi-sited ethnographic methodological approach is outlined, followed by exploration of three ethnographic case studies, showing how the kinship triangle evolves at different junctures of the migration journey while being shaped by European nation-states' migration management, yet remains flexible and aspirational for migrants.

14.2 Kinship as being, doing and becoming in migration journeys

In the interdisciplinary study of migration, kinship has long been an important research topic. Existing research has analysed the role of kinship networks in facilitating migration and connecting migrants and non-migrants in various places (Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak 2020). Research has demonstrated that ideas and practices of kinship change because of migrants' experiences and cultural adaptation (Foner 1997), and that some social constructions of kinship are part of cultures of mobility (Declich 2020). In their important

work on kinship in a migration context, Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) demonstrate that the practices, composition and structure of transnational families frequently do not imitate nation-states' definition of what counts as a 'legitimate family', which is the target of social policies and family reunification regulations. Family units are foundations for state control (McIntosch 1979; Moore 1988), and in a migration context, people are forced to present themselves according to the western family unit model (Declich 2020).

Kinship and nation are deeply interrelated and reinforce one another (Schneider 1977; Delaney 1995; Rytter 2010). Ideas about blood and relatedness link to historical and demographic dimensions of kinship (Carsten 2004). Metaphors associated with the imaginary naturalised kinship – fatherland, motherland, brotherhood – are a prevalent part of everyday nationalism (Delaney 1995), and ideas of intimacy and genealogy are generated by notions of bloodlines and the marital couple. While kinship metaphors are mental constructs, they are nonetheless used in political decision-making and play a part in governance as naturalised forms of belonging (Decimo and Gribaldo 2018)

This attests to the flexibility of kinship. Since the 1980s, most anthropologists agree that in many cultural contexts, 'kin' are not born but are made; hence, kin relations are processual and maintained through relational actions and practices (Carsten 1995; Strathern 2014; Stone and King 2019). Mark Nuttal (2000, p. 34) offers a poignant definition of the dynamic and flexible nature of kinship in his study of Greenlanders: 'If a relationship does not exist, then one can be created. At the same time, people can deactivate kinship relationships if they regard them as unsatisfactory. People are therefore not constrained by a rigid consanguineal kinship, but can choose much of their universe of kin'.

The dynamic, creative and open characteristic of kinship makes it a 'flexible resource when people are on the move' (Carsten 2020, p.331). Carsten suggests both 'kinship as being' and 'kinship as doing' are intrinsic to migration processes. 'Kinship as being' prioritises analysis of kin relations deriving from birth, ties of descent and ascriptive status, while kinship as doing 'stresses the importance of processual and performative ways of becoming kin' (Carsten 2020, p.321). According to Carsten, 'kinship as doing' emphasises the present and the future, as it approaches kinship through practices of becoming.

Drawing on Carsten's work in our study of the kinship-migration nexus, the present practices of kinship as doing are analytically distinguished from future aspirations related to kinship as becoming in cross-border migration processes and journeys, alongside analysis of

kinship as being, albeit kinship as being, doing and becoming are not distinct processes of kinship. Rather they are interlinked dimensions of the ways in which kinship is dynamically practiced and revealed by the statements and practices of our research participants constructing kinship as being in relation to their past, kinship as doing in relation to what we have observed in the present and kinship as becoming as research participants formulate kin-related aspirations for their future.

14.3 Methods and data from two multi-sited ethnographies

This chapter draws on insight from two ethnographic research projects and multi-sited ethnographic research on Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Lesbos, Athens, Belgrade, Tuzla, Sarajevo, Istanbul, Teheran, and various cities in Finland and Norway (Marcus 1995). Rather than conducting more traditional single-site ethnographic observation and participation, we each pursued a multi-sited ethnography individually, observing the role of kinship along the migration journey at different locations.

The methodological approach of 'following the people' as they travel between localities is concerned with how the migratory practice is constituted by movement (Marcus 1995). Scholars have long argued that research should study both the country of origin and of residence and the movements between (Kearney 1995, Glick-Schiller 2003). Doing so can illustrate continued transnational links while also avoiding methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002). Rather than following 'the people' along the route as migration researchers increasingly do, we instead investigated kinship along various significant nodes of the journey, probing the meaning of kinship for migrants at multiple observation sites, contributing to reassessment of the concepts of refugee/migrant and kinship.

The original intention of the study was to observe ways in which people move, get stuck, wait and find ways to move again rather than focusing on the role of kinship. Yet, going through our notes, we noticed how the theme of 'journey' was intrinsically related to the theme of 'kinship' (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). Kinship turned out to play a significant role in the migration process. Thus, this analysis centres on the cultural formation of kinship, following its connections, associations and social relationships (Marcus 1995). The aim is not to provide a holistic representation of the phenomenon but rather to argue

that ethnographic understanding of kinship and migration cannot be pursued from a conventional single ethnographic site, given kinship is produced and constituted by linkages between multiple localities. How migrants talk about their journey, which kinship-related terms they use in which contexts, how they use them (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995) and what these terms do, provides insight into more intricate situated knowledge (cf. Geertz's 1983 'local knowledge'), underlining the meaning of kinship in migrants' specific situations. Using a multi-sited participant observation approach involving migrants at different times of their journey, revealed the changing, non-bounded nature of journey and how kinship appeared and transformed in different nodal points.

As two authors pursuing ethnographic research on refugees and migration within different research projects, we independently conducted our research but engaged in extend analytical discussions thereafter. Bendixsen did fieldwork with irregular migrants in Oslo and Bergen, Norway, in the period 2011-2015. She talked to more than 100 irregular migrants whose asylum applications had been rejected, followed political demonstrations organised by irregular migrants in Oslo and Bergen, and interviewed a total of 52 irregular migrants. During two fieldwork trips to Lesbos, Greece (June-July 2018 and April 2019), she interviewed 15 volunteers assisting the refugees, talked to translators, and interviewed and ethnographically observed more than 20 migrants living in Moria Camp. She also conducted ethnographic research along the Balkan route (Serbia and Bosnia) in June-July 2019 and February 2020. There, she visited four refugee camps and interviewed more than 60 migrants traversing the Balkan route, on their way to a European Union Member States. Seventeen volunteers in the region including representatives of the Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders were also interviewed.

Näre has been conducting ethnographic research on asylum seekers and refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq since 2017, which included: participant observation at a political protest organised by rejected asylum seekers in Helsinki, interviewing a total of 41 asylum seekers and refugees. During two fieldwork trips to Istanbul, in 2018 and 2019, she conducted participant observation in a neighbourhood where Afghans live and organise their travel to Greece, and recorded interviews with 12 Afghan adults. The fieldwork included informal discussions and drawing workshops with 13 children. In Athens, she conducted fieldwork among Afghans in a refugee camp in May 2019 and interviewed eight Afghan refugees. During 2019 participant observation fieldwork in Tehran in July 2019, she

did ethnographic interviews with 27 Afghans and recorded interviews with six Afghan refugees on their deportation experiences. Later, in Finland, she conducted interviews over WhatsApp with six Afghans deported from Finland to Afghanistan.

To jointly analyse the data from these different places and times, we had long discussions on the context of the ethnographic examples, exchanged insights from our fieldwork, and discussed our understanding of their implications. During fieldwork, both of us paid close attention to its ethical dimensions. Interviewing people in precarious situations who might think that talking to us might have an impact on their future placed a heavy obligation on us to scrupulously follow ethical conduct in a responsible and sensitive manner. The participants were given a clear explanation of the aim of our research, emphasising that their participation was voluntary, and would have no impact on their future asylum claims or future journeys and that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time. When writing this chapter, the informants' names were changed to pseudonyms and their ages were slightly altered, with the omission of any personal information which might be revealing.

In the following sections, three stories of migration to Europe representing different stages of migration journeys are compared and contrasted, interrogating aspects of kinship as being, becoming, and doing, demonstrating how kinship characteristics are intrinsically linked. While all three cases contain the three characteristics of kinship, there are varying patterns of their salience, which attest to migrants' collective aspirations and the intersections between kinship, migration and aspiration.

14.4 Mobilising kinship before and after the journey: Kinship as being, doing and becoming

Kinship frequently is a motivating force behind migrants leaving home often associated with the intention to improve the the family's livelihood, safety or prospects for the future (Decimo and Gribaldo 2018; Declich 2020). Kinship also offers a social network, which has an impact on when and how migrants leave home, which route to take, how to pay for the journey and where to go.

The following case of two couples engaged to be married – Hamdiya and Farhat, and Hamdiya's brother, Azad, and a friend of Farhat's family, Jalila – casts light on the migration-

kinship nexus, notably how kinship is constituted, how migration can contribute to configuring kinship, but also how nation-state policies shape the migration-kinship nexus.

During her fieldwork in Tehran, Iran in July 2019, Näre participated in the engagement party of 22-year-old Hamdiya, a young Hazara woman born in Iran to Afghan refugee parents. Hamdiya was going to marry Farhat, a 25-year-old Afghan who had lived in Finland for almost ten years. Farhat, unlike the rest of his family members, did not have Finnish citizenship due to a bureaucratic mistake made at the Finnish Immigration Office (henceforth Migri) when he moved to Finland from Pakistan as a teenager with his brothers.

Hamdiya met Farhat for the first time a couple of weeks before getting engaged to him. She had turned down several previous suitors because she did not want to end up married to 'just any Afghan' or to a random Afghan taxi-driver. Hamdiya had fought for her education in Iran. As an Afghan, she was not allowed to attend public universities and had to pay high fees for her MA degree in a private university. Her older brother who lived in Finland was paying for Hamdiya's university fees. Thus, her existing cross-border kin relations, the blood ties of kinship-as-being, were crucial in facilitating Hamdiya's educational aspirations in Iran. Hamdiya agreed to marry Farhat because he promised her that she could continue to pursue her career aspirations in Finland.

Farhat was a taxi driver in Finland when his mother proposed him to Hamdiya's older brother in Finland and to Hamdiya's parents in Iran. In order to conform to Hamdiya's aspirations of her future husband, Farhat stopped driving a taxi, and got a job in the family business. When they were courting over WhatsApp before meeting in person, he was able to present himself as a businessman.

In Iran, before the engagement party, Farhat worried that Migri would require his bank account statements from six months prior to the application for family reunification after marrying Hamdiya. He had not received a salary from the family business and wondered whether he should wait before applying for family reunification arrange a way to demonstrate a sufficient income. To assure Migri that his marriage was not a 'fake' marriage, he asked family members to take a lot of pictures from the engagement party so that he could attach those to the family reunification application.

When Farhat returned to Finland, he decided to train to become a bus driver, which would involve a monthly salary payment. After working for some months, he applied for family reunification in summer 2020, but his application was rejected: he had not

demonstrated a steady income for the full six months prior to the application. He faced a bureaucratic obstruction with set time and income requirement preventing him from marrying Hamdiya in Finland (Pellander 2019; Maury 2020; Näre 2020). The regulation of marriage migration had shifted from using proof of 'love' as the criteria for acceptance to governing transnational migration through technicalities (Scheel 2017) and economic governance of marriage migration (Staver 2015; Kofman 2018; Pellander 2019). This shift not only governs cross-border mobility but also migrants' future aspirations for kinship-as-being and becoming.

Meanwhile preparations for the engagement party of Hamdiya's brother Azad with Jalila, an Afghan woman from Iran were in progress. Jalila had Finnish citizenship and was a friend of Farhat's family. Despite approaching his 30s, Azad had not found a woman he would like to marry. Farhat's mother, Nabiha, well aware of the fact that Azad was still single, suggested Jalila's engagement to Azad at the same time as she proposed Farhat as a groom for Hamdiya. Nabiha had previously met Jalila and her family in a reception centre in Finland and the two families had become close. Hamdiya's parents were happy for the opportunity to marry both of their still single adult offspring to Afghans with residence in Finland. This not only ensured that Hamdiya and Azad could migrate to Finland and marry, but also consolidate ties between the two families. In fact, Hamdiya and Azad's mother considered Farhat's mother a close relative and part of the same extended family because they had a good relationship and were family friends. This preceded any formal kinship arrangement between the two families.

For Azad, the proposition to marry Jalila, an independent woman working as a nurse in Finland with Finnish citizenship, matched his aspirations to migrate from Iran and offered an opportunity to build a life and career in a more secure country. Azad had an engineering degree from Iran but was unemployed at the time of the engagement, as educated Afghans have very limited job opportunities in Iran. Azad was offered a job in Kabul by an international agency that supports repatriation of skilled Afghans, and to Jalila's horror, Azad moved to Kabul in May 2019. For Azad, this was an opportunity to pursue a career in his own field, an opportunity that Afghans in Iran did not have. Jalila was terrified that Azad

would get killed in Afghanistan and her fear was not unfounded.¹ Nevertheless, Azad insisted on gaining job experience and returned to work in Kabul after the engagement party in Iran.

At the engagement party, Jalila insisted on wearing a white wedding dress according to western tradition, so that Migri would not question the authenticity of the marriage. In the Afghan tradition, the bride's dress at the engagement party would have been another colour, usually green or pink. Jalila's decision to go against Afghan traditions and the wishes of her future mother-in-law, demonstrates that migration legislation and the state also shape marriage traditions and rituals. Because Jalila had Finnish citizenship, her family reunification did not have an income requirement and it was approved in spring 2020. Azad moved to Finland in the summer of 2020 after having waited a long time for his residence permit due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This case of two linked marriages highlights several aspects of the relation between migration, kinship and aspiration. Migration can be one way to improve one's livelihood and realize future aspirations. Kinship through marriage becomes a way through which sons and daughters can move, physically, materially and socially. In relation to Afghans, Monsutti (2007) has argued that migrating to Iran can be understood as a rite of passage that makes young Afghan men eligible for marriage after return.²

In this case, cross-border marriages related to kinship after settlement. Farhat and his family had lived in Finland for more than 10 years. After migrants arrive at a destination where they plan to settle, kinship is brought into play in different ways. Transnational marriages generally arranged through links of affiliation are established and made stronger, while labour migration continues and values and identity with transnational family and kinship networks are confirmed (Ballard 1990; Werbner 1990; Rytter 2012; Shaw 2000).

¹ According to the Global Peace Index by Institute for Peace and Economics, Afghanistan was the least peaceful country in the world other than Syria in 2019 and 2020 (Institute for Peace and Economics 2020) and in 2019, for the sixth year in a row, UN statistics reported more than 10,000 civilian casualties (UNAMA 2020).

² Marsden and Ibañez-Tirado (2015) suggest that for Afghan traders in Odessa, marriage can be an anchor to the local community.

Marriage is about moving into adulthood and aspirations for the future, but it is also about negotiating notions of identity and belonging (Rytter 2012). Marriage is a specific 'decision-event' in one's life trajectory and a resource for creating a future self (Humphrey 2008; Rytter and Nielsen 2020). More emotional aspects of kinship do not always figure prominently in the decision-making related to a couple's transnational marriage, partner preference and extended family links (Shaw & Charsley 2006; Rytter 2012).

The case demonstrates the three-dimensionality of kinship. That the two marriages involve a set of siblings is significant: an example of kinship as being, since the siblings in Iran were provided opportunities for marriage and migration. For Azad, being the brother of a sister with attractive marriage proposals provided him with a chance to go to Finland through marriage. For Farhat, having a friend with Finnish citizenship facilitated his marriage to a much-admired young woman. Kinship as becoming is reflected in this story. Kinship is generated, experienced and linked to aspirations for a future in Finland, good career prospects and safe living conditions. Love per se was not at issue. In any culture, marriage is always about more than romantic intimacy between two people. In this case, marriage was a way in which a professionally dedicated woman nurse found a partner who would support her aspiration to work and in turn her new husband gained means towards employment in a more secure work environment.

Finally, kinship as doing was also present. The strategy of Farhat's mother was driven by an aspiration to kin her family with that of her friend through the marriage of their offspring. The mother's active persistence in uniting three families (two in Finland and the third in Afghanistan) was possible because of Hamdiya's and her family's desire to migrate to Europe, and Hamdiya's aspiration to work after marriage. Hamdiya's family perhaps was more likely to accept the marriage proposal because the mother simultaneously offered a bride for Hamdiya's brother.

The realization of these goals encountered a pitfall. While Farhat changed his employment in order to impress Hamdiya and her family, increasing his chances of being accepted as a groom, he inadvertently disqualified himself from family reunification by the Finnish State. In his effort to establish kinship through marriage, Farhat experienced incompatible expectations: the nation-state required him to reach a certain income threshold, while the bride-to-be was more concerned about his occupation, and thus social status, than his income. The flexibility of kinship is also suggested in the ways in which

kinship ties are defined by sociability: those that we like and who are good to us, can be considered and accepted as our kin. Kin is a source of aspiration and support, and it is through caring and supportive practices that kinship is established, played out and affirmed. Kinship is thus not only about a predefined perception of “blood ties”, although it can also involve this, but rather about choices, practices and social relations tied up to existential life-projects.

The concept of flexible kinship is advanced in the next section.

14.5 Doing kinship flexibly during the journey

The next case study takes place along migration journey on foot. While some migrate through family reunification, other people depart on a journey over land and sea to apply for asylum. Amidst these uncertain, often dangerous journeys, kinship comes to play a different relational role than before the journey, altering kinship and its meaning in the process. Journeys are characterised by dangerous passages, waiting in transit zones, temporality, and uncertainty. Kinship can be a resource for people on the move in various ways, including people providing economic, social and emotional support enroute (Decimo and Gribaldo 2018; Declich 2020). People develop strategies to move, live and meet basic needs for survival, whether their transit experience is a journey of a few weeks, months or years (Vogt 2018). The role of kinship, its content, different expectations and relevance is sharpened in the process of the journey, as migrants learn who they can trust and rely on.

During Bendixsen’s 2019 fieldwork in Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina, she visited a temporary camp, Vicjak, placed on top of a former communal landfill, surrounded by mines, and without basic infrastructure. People were resting there, waiting to start the next leg of their journey, at the Pljesevica Mountain crossing to Croatia. The local Red Cross handed out food to the more than 500 migrants located there, many from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bendixsen’s attention was drawn to a young boy because he resembled her own 10-year-old son at home, and a conversation unfolded. The 10-year-old boy from Afghanistan hoped to reach Germany with his uncle. His father was already in Canada and wanted him to be brought from Germany to Canada. The child also caught the attention of an Afghan volunteer. The volunteer remarked to Bendixsen that the boy most likely was not travelling with his ‘real’ uncle, but with a person paid by his father to bring him from Afghanistan to

Germany. The volunteer had thought aloud about whether he should intervene - after all, this was a minor, travelling on his own, and not with his uncle, but with a person who was being paid. Was this a case of human trafficking?

Bendixsen and the volunteer noticed during the conversation with the young boy that the 'uncle' had watched the exchange closely. The volunteer came to the conclusion that informing an official in Bosnia would merely bring this boy's journey to a halt in Bosnia, as he would then be placed in one of the camps for minors travelling on their own, stuck, and unable to join his family in Canada. Instead, the volunteer asked the boy for the size of his feet, so that he could bring him better shoes the following day. Good shoes are essential to continue the journey, and by giving him shoes, the volunteer added, he could connect to the boy, and hopefully ascertain how the boy was feeling about his travel arrangement and whether he needed outside help.

This case demonstrates a boy's aspiration to eventually reunite with his father in Canada. The boy's strategy to inform the Bosnian volunteers and the researcher that he is travelling with an uncle, mentioning kinship connections most likely to avoid outsiders' interventions in the journey. Perhaps the reference to kinship also provided the boy with a sense of safety. The so-called uncle's presence is more than a fictive kinship, because the man seemed to be performing the tasks of an uncle — 'being his uncle' during the journey by taking up that role. While the man probably went his own way when his task had been completed, the man was contributing to the boy's family's aspiration to be reunited with his father in Canada.

In this case, kinship as being (the father organised for his son to join him and his family in Canada), was enacted through kinship as doing. The boy's father paid and organised the trip and the hired man performed the role of uncle. The migration was also driven by kinship as becoming, namely the aspirations for the boy's future and for the family to be reunited. European national states' government, police and border management respond differently towards a boy travelling on his own (being categorised as an 'unaccompanied minor') as compared to a boy travelling with his uncle. The intimacy of kinship becomes a way in which the boy can travel relatively more safely through the journey and more unnoticed by the European nation-states that are relatively quick to intervene in cases of unaccompanied minors, housing them in particular refugee camps

sometimes making continued movement more complicated. Entanglement of policies in the shaping of the migration-kinship nexus is revealed.

14.6 Kinship as becoming during the journey

Kinship can also be a burden or cause of disappointment. Some migrants had left Afghanistan or Iran with big disappointments in their family's lack of support for life decisions they had made. Some cut ties with their family, and escaped from kinship ties, sometimes after having economically supported family members for years.

Conversely in some cases, it was not uncommon for migrants to talk with volunteers, café owners and other people they had met on the road, then claim them as their family. 'She is like my mother', one Afghan boy in his early twenties said of the restaurant owner who gave him food for free every day in Tuzla, Bosnia. Bendixsen also heard about a volunteer who had spent months trying to learn the real identity of a boy in his twenties that she had met who died on the journey. She called the Algerian Embassy every day for more than a month (one of the few clues she had was that the boy was Algerian), in order to inform the boy's family of his death. Explaining her action: 'If he had been my son, as his mother I would have needed to know.' For many migrants on the road, their family was scattered at different locations. For Zamir the focus of our final story, kinship figured prominently in a different way for his decision-making process and future aspirations.

Bendixsen met Zamir in 'the Afghan park' in Belgrade. The park had been given this name in the local vernacular since 2015 because of its popularity amongst refugees, mostly from Afghanistan. The park attracted around 100 refugees every day during the summer of 2019. They sat on benches chatting, eating kebabs, phoning, praying or talking about their onwards journeys, hopefully to a European Union member state. Zamir, an Iraqi man in his late thirties born in Iran, was on his way to Germany where his sister lived awaiting the government's reply to her asylum application. Zamir's brother, a former member of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, lived in Sweden. Zamir had left Iraq the previous year but enroute he was detained in jail in Athens. He had worked as a translator for the Americans in Iraq in 2003 and his family had applied for asylum in Canada but disappointedly: 'Canada rejected us because we are a big family. [Laughing] We are eight children. Canada would not allow us in.'

Zamir left his wife with two children, a three-year-old and a ten-year-old. His wife remained with his mother in Iraq. She had no intention of coming to Europe, so they separated, although not legally. He explained that he left Iraq because “it is not my country . . . I needed to go, I don’t like Islam, I want to be free — to breathe, no one can tell me what I should be.” Over the last four years, Zamir had a girlfriend in the UK, although they had never met in person and had only connected through social media and on the phone. He wanted to join her in the UK. She told him that she would visit him in Greece when he got out of jail. ‘But she didn’t come, she lied.’ He forgave her. When he was in jail, she had sent him a package with sugar and other things by post, but he never received it. He believed the police confiscated it. She had also wanted to send him money, but he had refused that suggestion. He explained his concern about the possible consequences. “Then later she will say — ‘you only wanted me for the money’ — I don’t want that. When we meet . . . she can give me money if she wants.”

Zamir only received help from his parents. Every month they collected €500 from the government salary he still received in Iraq and sent it to him. The last time he tried leaving Serbia, his parents paid for a taxi and bus for him to get to the Croatian border. Whenever he has had to pay a smuggler, his parents have helped. He explained the procedure: “We are not giving the smugglers money directly. The money is sent to an office at a destination along my route. When I have reached the destination then I inform my family by phone — so they see that I am in Vienna, for example. Then my family instruct the office to send the money to the smugglers.” Although his plan was to go to Germany, to his sister first, at the time of the the interview in Belgrade, he had had no contact with his sister. He wondered if she had received a positive reply to her asylum application because it had been a while since he had talked to her.

The intimate social relations that are part of Zamir’s life — his sister, parents, (ex)wife and girlfriend — affect his journey and aspirations in numerous ways. Zamir’s situation is illustrative of the three features of kinship particularly closely tied together: kinship as being emerges in the way his sister in Germany serves as a navigational lighthouse on his journey and a goal to reach along the way. Meanwhile his parents remain in Iraq, providing him with the economic means to continue his journey. His parents were key to his continued journey, acting as the interlocutors between him and the smugglers. His parents were part of a control mechanism that ensured that Zamir was not tricked by smugglers (by taking money

but leaving him in the wrong place). So too, his parents were informed of where their thirty-year-old son was at different stages of the journey.

Simultaneously, Zamir was exercising kinship as becoming. He was already thinking how to get to the UK after reaching Germany, in order to meet his girlfriend. He had left his wife and children behind in Iraq and his obligations as a husband and father appeared less significant to him than his aspiration to create a new life with his girlfriend, in Europe, and to see his sister.

On the journey, his girlfriend provided him with emotional support, aspiration and hope for a new future. In what appeared to be an effort to generate a sense of equality with his current girlfriend, he avoided accepting money from her, although it would have been helpful for his onward journey and survival. Receiving money from his girlfriend could perhaps have upset his normative idea of masculinity and femininity. Perhaps more importantly, receiving money from his girlfriend would have set up an obligation of reciprocity he might be unable to fulfil in the future.

In contrast, the money sent by his parents was unproblematic. It was sourced from his previous salary earnings. His relationship to his parents was conditioned by a long history of obligation and the expectation of sending future economic remittances to them when he found a job in Europe. By comparison, his intimate relationship to his girlfriend was more fragile and asymmetrical based on the fact that she had an EU passport, and he was travelling illegally in Europe. Negative stereotypes attached to dependency on a foreign girlfriend led Zamir to avoid introducing money into their relationship.

The role of kinship during all of these journeys is characterised by flexibility, fluidity and adaptability. Migration journeys are potentially dangerous, always uncertain and filled with unexpected events and challenges. Being on the road is a precarious situation for people of both genders and all ages, although in different ways. Kinship can be an aspirational source on the journey to guide the direction, facilitate the next step and offer a compass for where to go next.

14.7 Conclusion

Our chapter contributes first to the existing research literature by offering the notion of transnational kinship as a conceptual tool to analyse what kinship can do in migratory

contexts. Second, rather than focusing on family practices between individuals in relatively static situations, we argue for a perspective on kinship that takes into account the mobilities and journeys in migration. Third, we argue that migration processes and kinship are intrinsically linked, and the latter can be strategically mobilised during migration journeys.

We have argued that the entanglement of migratory mobilities and kinship, or what we term the kinship-migration nexus, can be an aspirational and driving force for migrants, including for forced migrants. The concept of migration-kinship nexus encourages a deeper understanding of how migration and kinship are co-constituted and how kinship is analytically central to understanding aspirations during the migration process.

Kinship networks and practices shape the collective aspirations of migration journeys and social mobilities. Kin networks direct when and how migrants leave, and the possibilities and routes during the journeys. They can mitigate the perilous journeys but also present opportunities for social mobility. Our cases reveal how migration and border regimes impact kinship practices.

By analysing the different axes of kinship, the elasticity of kinship is revealed. Kinship-as-doing demonstrates that it can be generated and enacted in innovative ways. In its enactment, kinship-as-doing can contribute for example to protection from outsiders' intervention during travel. Its enactment during the journey can be a means of aspirational navigation, providing security and survival. Kinship is commonly perceived as an intimate relationship, and thus as a force which should not be interfered with by outsiders. Yet, we demonstrate how the state in migration legislation and migration governance shapes not only the mobility of individuals but also the rituals in which all three dimensions of kinship come into existence.

The migration-kinship nexus, and particularly its ability to generate aspirations, operates differently at various stages of the migration journey. Kinship shapes when, where and how to migrate. But transnational kinship also affects migrants who have reached what is viewed as a destination and are trying to settle in that country of residence as illustrated by Farhat and Hamdiya. Their desired marriage provided navigational direction towards future employment.

While many are forced to migrate due to violence and war, simultaneously, mobility is also commonly a way to meet one's aspiration to move along one's life course. Kinship is both an aspirational force that generates action or agency and a relation which people seek

to maintain or acquire through that very action. Through mobility, people establish, affirm or re-emphasise kinship which again contributes to realize their desired physical and social mobility.

Kinship is flexible. During the journey, we see how people refer to, operate and understand kinship in different ways, through which it becomes a resource and a way of moving on. This flexibility opens various ways in which kinship is played out. Kinship is not tied to merely biological or blood relations, a creativity with relations is implied. The ways in which kinship is practiced and referred to are frequently tied to existing cultural norms, yet not defined by them.

Other researchers have pointed to the flexibility of kinship. Trémon talks about 'flexible kinship' (Trémon 2016, 42) to draw "attention to the strategic uses that are made of kinship in the context of migration and diaspora: the adjustments to cultural, political, and legal borders that lead to changes in family forms and in the relations between kin." The flexibility of kinship is also found in the ways that kinship is enacted and defined as not only (blood) relations between kin, but also as friendship and other relations. Moreover, flexibility is illustrated in the ways that kinship rituals and practices are modified to better correspond to the demands of migration regimes and governance. Our research calls for future analyses to approach kinship and migration from the perspective of a dynamic force that is not only about being but also about making and unmaking, as well as becoming in the future.

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