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THE CONVERSION OF CAREER CAPITAL OF HIGHLY SKILLED SYRIAN REFUGEES IN SWITZERLAND: EXPLORING THE ISSUES OF TRANSNATIONAL RELOCATION AND TIME PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

In this paper we use the Bourdieusean conceptualisation of capitals to understand the difficulties and the strategies of highly skilled Syrian refugees trying to position themselves in the fields of the Swiss employment market and trying to pursue their career. Analyzing 21 interviews of Syrian highly skilled refugees in Switzerland, we focus on refugee specific issues of relocation and conversion of capitals in a transnational context, and more precisely on time issues associated with relocation of capitals.

The Bourdieusean notion of 'Capital' has been regularly used in the career research field (Mayrhofer et al., 2004; Chudzikowski, Mayrhofer, 2011; Gunz et al., 2011) and more recently to analyse some of the difficulties encountered by migrants and refugees on Western European employment markets (e.g. Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Eggerhofer et al., 2018). Both scholars from HRM and migration research fields have employed Bourdieusean conceptualisation to show how migrant capitals are devalued in host country employment markets and how migrants respond to such devaluation (Joy et al. 2018). Joy et al. (2018) insist that HRM scholars usually tend to focus exclusively on host nation contexts whereas Migrations scholars consider the transnational nature of migrant contexts, and they therefore recommend to HRM future research to adopt a transnational perspective to generate a more

comprehensive understanding of migrant careers. We use the notion of cosmopolitan capital, which has already been used in the research field of Elite sociology (Bühlmann et al., 2013; Bühlmann et al., 2018), to describe the elements of career capital which seem to be the easiest to convert on international employment markets: we also give an exhaustive list of examples to illustrate and to define cosmopolitan capital.

Furthermore, we focus on the refugee experience as a career transition period from a temporal perspective (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018, 57-63) and we identify two time issues in the refugee process of relocating capitals. The first issue is an issue of temporality and the difficulty of considering a continuous linear representation of life course and career after the rupture experience of flight and the waiting period in the refugee camps. The second one is the difficulty to evaluate the time necessary to relocate capitals according to alternative strategies in an unknown environment.

2. Relocating career capitals in the migration process of highly skilled refugees

The population of highly skilled migrants is usually defined as having a high level of education or substantial experience in a specific field (Iredale 2001). The notion of the ‘highly skilled migrant’ is often easily associated with the image of ‘privileged’ and ‘economically wanted’ people, who migrate across countries predominantly through the channel of work migration (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011). Cangia and Zittoun 2018; Hercog and Sandoz 2018). Highly skilled refugees, however, are in paradoxical situations and should be considered as an original field of research. Highly skilled refugees can experience greater vulnerability as concerns their legal, social, financial and professional conditions, if compared to other highly skilled migrants. They can face specific obstacles when integrating into the host country, including restrictions to move cross-border or to work, financial difficulties, lack of local language-knowledge or access to information, age or childcare-related barriers, precarious legal status as well as the long waiting time for the asylum procedure with uncertainty about the future (Sontag 2018; Bakker, Dagevos, and Engbersen 2017). Often forced to leave their home country unexpectedly, refugees do not have time to prepare appropriately for the departure and can end up in a country they hardly know with no personal contacts (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. 2018).

Bourdieu’s work has held great attraction for careers scholars because of the way it combines the concepts of field, habitus and capital (Gunz, Mayrhofer, Tolbert, 2011). In our paper, we explore the strategies of capital mobilization to integrate into the new social environment (Crul and Schneider 2010) by drawing upon Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1986), which describes four capital forms: economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to financial means, directly convertible into money and institutionalized in the form of property. Social capital relates to the network of relationships and personal connections, as well as the ability to activate these connections. Cultural capital is present in different forms, from cultural products and artefacts to cultural behaviours. Degrees and diplomas can be defined as an institutionalized form of cultural capital. Cultural behaviors and language are defined as embodied cultural capital, which also refers to personalized, long-standing dispositions of body and mind.

Capital is useful for an agent only if it is recognized as legitimate and can be used in a specific field; then, it becomes symbolic capital. Symbolic capital, finally, relates to a legitimate power gained or inherited through the accumulation of the other forms of capital. The way a capital is valued can change depending on the different social fields within which migrants

navigate (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Capitals acquired in originating national fields that proximate to host national fields may be less devalued (or valued more highly) upon conversion than those that are not (Joy et al., 2018). Previous research on capital mobilization in the context of highly skilled migration and refugees' migration has particularly explored the relational character of capitals, as well as the interrelation between structural elements and subjectivity in shaping migrants' career development strategies (Ariss and Syed 2011; Qureshi, Varghese, and Osella 2013; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. 2018; Erel 2010). According to a relational perspective, the various capitals acquired in the past and mobilized by migrants arriving in the new place are not predefined, but are relational and can be combined in multiple ways. By drawing upon a Bourdieusian lens on capitals, research has shed light on the ways highly skilled migrants actively overcome the structural barriers they encounter in their life and career trajectories on the move: migrants "do not just unpack their capital from a 'backpack'" (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. 2018, 33), they can reinterpret the value of capitals, develop these into new resources, and find alternative ways to validate them in the new context, also in view of their future plans (Greco Morasso and Zittoun 2014).

Beside classical Bourdieusean categories of capitals, we observed how *cosmopolitan capital* plays an important role in the access to the local labour market. Cosmopolitan capital has been defined as those cultural and educational credentials that predispose a person to cope with the difficulties involved in migration and travel (Kennedy 2008). In the Elite sociology, "Cosmopolitan capital" has been defined along various dimensions, as a person's earlier experiences overseas (both in the form of migration and travel), international networks (family, friends, or other social networks), language skills and transnational educational degrees and qualification (Bühlmann, David, and Mach 2013; Bühlmann, Davoine and Ravasi, 2018). In our analysis, we try to understand how the cosmopolitan or transnational dimension of social, cultural and symbolic capitals, played a major role in the integration process of highly skilled refugees in different integration phases. Switzerland is an interesting field to observe these mechanisms because Switzerland has been identified as a small country with a high globalization index and a regional employment market for global executives where cosmopolitan capital is highly valued (Ravasi, Salamin, Davoine, 2015; Davoine et al., 2015).

The experience of highly skilled refugees on the host country employment market can also be considered as an extreme experience of career transition. Following the model of Gunz and Mayrhofer (2018), the refugee experience represents a twofold simultaneous challenge for the spatial and the temporal dimensions of a career. Like the experience of expatriation or international mobility, it represents a classical transition challenge from a spatial perspective on careers. It clearly involves boundary crossing. As we mentioned before, former research also showed that refugees' experience is a transition challenge from a temporal perspective. Usually, career temporal perspective is a chronological approach, which focuses on sequences within a linear temporality, with units of analysis such as 'precedes/follows' or 'past/present/future' (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018, p. 249). This temporal perspective looks at the accumulation of capitals with a logic of chronological and causal order. This perspective of career sequences brings career actors to interpret their past retrospectively by bringing meanings into their past to build a coherent career narrative with causal steps. It also brings the career actors to predict future events or to define intentions to make these future events happen (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018, p. 61). Capitals can therefore be associated with specific temporal sequences of top management careers (Araujo, 2020). In the case of highly skilled refugees, the experience of critical events and brutal transitions might affect the linear representation of career construction and the intended process of accumulating capitals. A

time lense on the chronology of the access to qualified employment can bring new insights in the mobilization of home country capitals and in the development of host country capitals.

3. Context and methodology

A focus on highly skilled Syrian refugees is especially relevant for two main reasons: first, much of the recent public focus has been on the large inflows of Syrian refugees in Europe since the start of the conflict in 2011 (OECD 2015) and yet a limited number of studies focus specifically on highly skilled Syrian refugees, in particular in Switzerland; second, Syrians appear to be an interesting population to explore the interplay between various forms of (im)mobility considering that recent refugees from Syria are generally more skilled than other groups (OECD 2015). This study draws upon an ongoing qualitative research conducted in Switzerland since 2018. We have been carrying on 21 semi-structured interviews with both men and women, aged between 28 and 56, and with diplomas including medicine, dental medicine, law, architecture, education, literature, engineering, business and economics, informatics and social sciences. Most of our respondents were forced to leave Syria suddenly as a consequence of the conflict. Some reached other destinations before arriving in Switzerland. Some were unemployed at the time of the interview; others just started working in their field or in other employment.

Participants were recruited through personal contacts, public agencies, and snowballing sampling techniques, and were selected to maximize diversity concerning gender, qualifications, ethnic and religious background, familial situation, career trajectories, current working life, and residence. A first phase of study was carried out with 7 interviews in Arabic and French in Winter 2018/19 by one of the authors. In a second phase in Winter and Spring 2019/20, 15 interviews were conducted in French and German by the three co-authors. Interviews lasted between 90 minutes to 2 hours, were confidential, recorded and held at a time and place chosen by participants (at cafés, at their home or at the university; last 2 interviews were skype interviews during the confinement period). Interviews in Arabic were partly transcribed and translated, the others were fully transcribed. Names of people and places have been modified to guarantee anonymity.

Socio-demographic characteristics of the highly skilled refugees interviewed

N°	Name	Sex	Age	Family situation	Duration of Stay	Permit	Education	Current professional position
1	Sam	M	46	Divorced	4.2 years	B	Diploma Law and Criminal Sciences	Active (20%-freelance) Community translator
2	Rim	F	39	Married, 3 children	4.5	F	Diploma in Architecture	Active (30%) Non-paid internship in her field (architecture)
3	Aram	M	29	Single	4	B	Diploma in Mechanical Engineering (specialization production engineering)	Active (100%) – standard contract Watchmaker
4	Majd	M	31	Married, 1 child	4	B	Diploma in civil engineering (topography)	Student Bachelor in Business

								Administration
5	Zeina	F	40	Married, 3 children	3	F	Diploma in Law	Not active, admitted at the university, BA in Law
6	Jean	M	31	Single	5	B	Technical diploma in Economics (Accountability)	Active (100%) short time contract Internship in global logistics services (Customer service)
7	Salma	F	28	Single	3	B	Diploma in Law and Mathematics	Student MA in Mathematics
8	Hadi	M	32	Single	6	B	Diploma in informatics and MIS	Active (100%) – short time contract Video-maker for an international organization
9	Wafa	F	48	Divorced, 3 children	3.5	F	Diploma in dental treatment	Active (100%) – standard contract Health Auxiliary
10	Pascal	M	31	Single	8	B	MBA	Active (100%) Private bank
11	Shaza	F	45	Married, 2 children	6	C	Diploma in civil engineering	Active (60%) Engineer in a engineering agency
12	Jacques	M	31	Single	6	B	Diploma in economics	Active (80%) – standard contract Accountant in an multinational corporation
13	Maya	F	30	Single	5	F	Diploma in Medicine	Active (100%) as a medical doctor (limited contract)
14	Joseph	M	48	Married, 2 children	6	C	Diploma in Medicine and Surgery	Active (100%) Paediatrician in a children hospital
15	Azad	M	36	Married 1 child	8	B	Diploma in Social sciences	Active (100%) Community translator and social worker
16	Hiba	F	46	Married	5	F	Diploma in Law	Active (50%) Employee in a Cafeteria
17	Amal	F	32	Single	2	F	Diploma in Economics	Active (30%) Non paid internship
18	Karim	M	43	Married, 2 children	4	F	Diploma in Law	Active (30%) Non paid internship in administration
19	Pierre	M	56	Single	5	F	Diploma in Dental Medicine	Not active

20	Akram	M	37	Single	3	B	Diploma in Economics/Business	Active (freelance 10% teacher; volunteer)
21	Lina	F	39	Married, 2children	4	F	Diploma in Law	Not active

Compared with other studies, our population has the advantage of being homogeneous in terms of capital acquired in the country of origin. Our interviewees are individuals who have obtained a minimum academic education of Bachelor's level in Syria and used to hold - through their personal experience or family background - higher social positions in the Syrian social field. The social homogeneity of the sample, which corresponds to the selection criterion used, masks a certain diversity of geographical origin within the country (regional or big city origin might be source of differentiation) and above all a religious and ethnic diversity (in our population we find Christians and Muslims, Kurds and Armenians). Finally, Switzerland is not a homogenous host country either. While some of the interviewees live today in large international cities such as Geneva and Zurich, many live in smaller towns or even villages in less international cantons.

Another peculiarity of our sample is that 15 out of 21 individuals came to Switzerland because of family reunification (brother or sister, uncle or aunt, having already settled in Switzerland, mostly in recent years). For some, this family presence may have been useful in terms of social or financial support, but not systematically.

During the interview, we asked the participants about their everyday life, professional life and aspirations before migration, previous experiences of migration and future plans, educational background, the procedure to get asylum, obstacles and strategies of job search, recognition of their diploma, and perceptions about their gender and family role after forced migration experience. Interviews were analysed through a transversal analysis with a grid based on Bourdieu's capital forms. In the analysis, we focused on major ruptures and critical events experienced by these people, on those capitals that are not converted, capitals converted in the immediate and those for the future. We present our analysis in two main sections and use representative extracts from the interviews to illustrate the strategies of capital mobilization and relocation. The first section illustrates how our interviewees mobilize home country capitals and how they relocate these. Apart from the classical bourdieusean categories of capitals, a particular focus has been given to cosmopolitan and transnational dimensions of capitals. The second section explores the time dimension of the relocation of capitals, highlighting that the linear temporality of their life course and of their career representations is being challenged. Moreover we insist on the time period in which capitals have been relocated or translated.

4. Relocation of capitals

Refugees try to mobilize various capitals gained in their home country and convert them into resources in multiple ways, for the immediate use, as well as for confronting possible future events. We observed different refugees' strategies to mobilize or to convert capitals, depending on their age, their gender and on the support of social workers.

The first section of results illustrates how our interviewees mobilize home country capitals and how they relocate these. After first sub sections on classical bourdieusean categories of capitals (economic capital, institutionalized and embodied cultural capitals, social capital), a particular focus has been given to cosmopolitan and transnational dimensions of capitals.

4.1. Economic capital

Economic capital was not an explicit theme of the interviews. Like in other studies, most refugees reported that they had to leave most of their material assets in Syria and were dependent on social service support. Some interviewees clearly show great distress in talking about their past situation.

As far as economic capital is concerned, financial dependence on social services is not considered as a satisfying solution by most of them. Respondents explicitly state that they want to work as soon as possible, earn their money and be independent. As Syrian highly skilled migrants, confronted in the reception centres with other unskilled migrants from Syria or African countries, they clearly position themselves in relation to the social services with a strategy of trying to work in their field of qualification by asking for support measures (language courses, further and university training) that would allow them to quickly reach a similar level of employment and financial independence.

We lived a very high level in our country... And because of the war and this situation we left our country... and we fled everywhere... we didn't come here to look for money! (Sam)

I told myself that I had to learn French quickly to read, to contact people, to be able to become independent and find my way. (Hiba)

Some of the people interviewed said that they were also supported by family members, loans or private donations to enable them to carry out their training or professional integration project. Some even said they preferred to go into debt rather than depend on money and social service decisions about their professional future.

My brother had already been living in Switzerland for a long time. In the beginning, we stayed with him and he helped us a lot with our integration.(Rim)

I'm going to borrow this money from someone in my family and when I work I'm going to give it back to him. So I managed to get a private fund that I will give back when I go to work. (Amal)

4.2. Institutionalized Cultural capital

Work Permit can be considered as indispensable institutional cultural capital. Permits take a long time to obtain, months or even years, and it is impossible to work without one. While Permit F officially permits work, it is a temporary permit which in practice makes employers reluctant to hire candidates with Permit F in qualified positions. Long waiting periods and non-recognition by employers of work permits were regularly mentioned in interviews.

But we later discovered that with our F permit, it was impossible for us to work. So, despite the scientific qualifications and extensive work experience we have and the three languages we speak, our permit was and still is a big barrier to our employment. (Majd)

So that's good, but after the F permit it means that you can work but you need this work permit and for example when I apply online, you don't even have the choice to put F permit, b permit, c permit or nationality. So how am I going to do it? (Pascal)

One interviewee even received a job offer from a well-known international organisation in Geneva for which he had worked in the Middle East, but he could not accept the job offer because of the lack of a permit.

At the beginning of 2017, I received an offer of work from the (international organization) in Geneva but the canton told me - no, you can't work, you only have the N permit, so I missed that chance, it's really annoying. Why do I have to stay idle here and receive social assistance instead of being able to work and earn a living in Switzerland? (Akram)

The recognition of diplomas is a complex and differentiated process. Other studies underline this by showing that recognition is particularly difficult for highly qualified professional groups with strong professional identities and high national protection mechanisms, such as doctors or lawyers. Most of our interviewees tried to have their qualifications recognised, encountering many difficulties: incomplete information on the process, sometimes impossibility to provide their documents and certificates, slow responses, numerous refusals to validate.

Some criticized the non-recognition of their Syrian diploma while the academic accreditation bodies recognize diplomas from various foreign countries whose quality of training is not always superior to that of Syria.

And in Hungary too... And here he accepts Hungarian diplomas! But the universities there are very bad... they accept that! And they don't accept our diplomas that have a good reputation?! I don't know... it's weird for me... Poland, Hungary, and so on... (Wafa)

Younger refugees often make the decision to invest time to obtain a local diploma or certificate, with or without financial assistance. This type of strategy is more difficult for older people.

After a longer stay, I felt that I was getting to know the country, the labour market and the job opportunities available for refugees a little bit better. It was then that I realised that without a scientific qualification acquired in Switzerland and a command of one of the country's official languages, opportunities in the labour market are very limited or almost non-existent.(Majd)

In some professional fields, such as architecture or management, it seems possible to find a job without recognition of a diploma.

But they added that the profession of architecture is an unprotected profession... and that a worker with good professional experience and who masters the Autocad can work like an architect (...) but they did not tell me that the problem is that for me to be able to work without having my architectural diploma recognised in Switzerland, I really need to find an employer who wants to hire me! (Rim)

Generally speaking, the approach to qualification recognition in the Swiss job market is often described as quite pragmatic. The recommendation of an employer following an internship facilitates the recognition of a qualification (e.g. a hospital for a doctor, or a construction company for an engineer). But this method only works for those who find an internship and an employer.

4.3. Embodied Cultural Capital

For our interviewees, highly skilled refugees, cultural differences between country of origin and host country were rarely explicitly thematized despite our focused questions. The main Embodied Cultural capital mentioned was the importance of language for successful

professional integration. Language was described as helpful and necessary to understand the local culture, local values and appropriate behaviours.

To live with a Swiss family. It can help him or her to learn the local language, broaden his or her social network and gain a better understanding of the Swiss system and customs. Language courses should also be requested directly, as mastery of the local language is, in my opinion, the key to integration.(Maya)

Learning the language. The first key in Switzerland is learning German. (Jean)

Many people say that language certificates are not enough and that they try to develop personal learning methods to develop their language skills. It is not just an everyday language, but a professional language that allows you to be operational in a profession.

The language is the most important thing, you have to learn it from the very beginning because without mastering the language, the person cannot understand the laws, cannot communicate with others, cannot do correspondence and send CVs and cover letters. In job interviews, you have to speak the language well to be able to convince recruiters who already perceive our skills and qualifications as inferior to those of Swiss or Europeans.(Aram)

Depending on the canton, this professional and qualified language can be either French or German. But it can also be Swiss German when a doctor realizes that patients want to talk to their doctor in Swiss German dialect.

German knowledge was not enough. My husband decided to have classes in Swiss German. It was a necessity to communicate with patients at the hospital. (Shaza)

For Muslims there is the cultural issue of the veil for women and the physical proximity in gender interactions (e.g. handshake). The Muslims interviewed, including veiled women, say that Syrians from high social positions are often more liberal than the stereotypical perceptions of local employers and explain that they found normal to adapt their practices. When the male interviewer (ED) led the interviews with 2 veiled women, the latter were the first to reach out hands during greetings.

Before the year 2000, (in Syria) there were stereotypes about the veil like here. They said, if you're veiled, you're not free. Even for Swiss people, when I started I understood that, because they are not used to being in contact with a veiled woman, but a few minutes after introducing myself, explaining that I am a lawyer and that I have travelled, all that changes afterwards. (Hiba)

Regarding the functioning of the labour market, the social services provide training to prepare for the labour market, but most of the individuals who found a skilled job were able to train themselves or develop their own strategy. Most of them already know how to use the Internet for their searches and few of them say they have difficulties with a more transactional and formalistic way of operating in the local labour market.

They helped me with the application letter, but told me 'you have to apply yourself'. I was with them for about eight or ten months and I applied more than fifty times. (Shaza)

Some also point out that the Swiss labour market is not only formal and transactional and that interpersonal relations also play an important role.

Because social relationships, I've seen it especially in this canton... they decide everything! If you don't have a diploma... there's something here called "an Arabic phone"! I'll call you, I'll tell you she's my cousin... she's very important to me... the next day she'll find a job with you! (Wafa)

4.4. Social Capital

First, the period in reception centres of several weeks and months is described as a difficult period during which travel – even in Switzerland - is impossible. Social relations were limited and Syrian highly skilled refugees were confronted with refugees from other countries and social groups.

Secondly, the family reunification situation of some individuals may have facilitated integration. However, the help of families is more often described by highly skilled migrants as psychological or, more rarely, financial support. Only one individual was able to take advantage of his brother's professional network to find a first internship.

So really on the first day when I arrived in Switzerland, my brother sent my CV to all his acquaintances and then someone who works with the (well-known international organization) directly answered my email saying we are looking for someone who speaks Arabic, French, English to do video editing... and then I did three interviews and I got the job 20 days after my arrival in Switzerland. (Hadi)

Often newly integrated or with very different qualifications, families' professional networks are not always so useful.

On the other hand, we observe a double strategy among highly skilled refugees who have been able to obtain a qualified position. The first strategy was to develop relationships with Syrians who are already settled, via their family or first contacts. Facebook seems to be a very powerful relationship accelerator among this population.

Every time I meet someone new, it also introduces me to someone else. And sometimes through facebook you find people here. (Maya)

A second strategy for developing social capital is played out in the associative milieu and by the many Swiss volunteers who put people in touch with each other. Many highly skilled refugees also engage as volunteers for several reasons: to stay active, to develop relationships, to develop language skills. In fact, it is often through contacts or information derived from this social capital developed on the spot that the first internships and first jobs are found.

(In this period), I have done a lot of things as a volunteer. (Akram)

Then I signed up for this professional association for women. An American woman there recommended me that I take courses, not exams, just to learn the technical language. Then I took two courses, I think it also increased my chances. (Shaza)

It is an organisation of Swiss women and immigrant women. I became a member of the education committee of this association. I work with this association as a volunteer. (Hiba)

4.5. Cosmopolitan vs. transnational capital

The notion of cosmopolitan capital comes from the sociology of elites and describes capital that is internationally valuable, such as internationally recognized university degrees, mastery of professional English, but also an ability to function in an international social environment. We realized that, while the more international character of capitals facilitated integration, this capital generally depended on specific national or cultural contexts, and the recognition also depended on specificities of the host country context.

Some interviewees had developed friendships with European and Swiss people during their study or during former job experiences. Cultivating a large and international network of

acquaintances is also a way to accumulate relational reserves, so that the person can rely on them in case of future need, like for Sam:

My Swiss friend who helped me when I arrived in Switzerland and whom I had known for 15 years, was able to help me in the present to find a new apartment. I consider her as my safety valve, when I needed something I feel that I am not in danger as she is always there to help me. (Sam)

Many interviewees had relatives, close or distant family members having settled in other countries (France, Germany, Sweden, UK, Canada), some of them with successful professional integration. Our interviewees usually compare host country contexts. Some interviewees expressed the wish to move to another country if recognition of qualifications was easier.

Finally if we make the comparison between Switzerland and Germany, I have for example several colleagues (engineers, doctors, dentists), they entered the labour market right away because Germany integrates its refugees in a totally different way than Switzerland. (Hiba)

Three individuals who can be described as truly cosmopolitan were rather young individuals with studies in English, business or advanced technical qualification and relatively international experience. They have been able to find stable jobs in Switzerland in international environments. One was able to work successively in two Geneva-based international organisations and became self-employed. Another works in a Zurich-based multinational company, the third works now for an international private bank.

I didn't know anyone at (well-known MNC)! I applied like the others, I did the interviews like the others and then I got the job. So I didn't have any acquaintances at all or anyone who helped me... (...) What they asked for this job was really all I had done before! (Hadi)

There was no great culture shock, not really. Because I spoke English, I lived in Germany for six months, I knew very well what was ahead of me, ok apart from the war and the papers and all that, but at least during the first year. I also knew that I was going to have European colleagues or everybody and that was good so there was not really a shock. (Pascal)

All three say they feel good in Geneva and Zurich because they are international cities. They say they hang out with people of many different nationalities, including Swiss and binationals. Paradoxically, the cosmopolitans aim to obtain a C permit for permanent residence or even Swiss nationality in order to become a full citizen in Switzerland but also to continue to be able to be mobile and gain experience abroad. They also consider moving abroad if better opportunities are available to them.

On a social level, I didn't really see a difference between Damascus and Geneva, i.e. I in Damascus was exactly the same as I am now in Geneva. I haven't changed to adapt to society!. But if you ask about Syria, there is a large part of Syria that lives like the Europeans. (Pascal)

The mastery of the English language, as an international language, opens many doors. First of all, it facilitates communication with administrations and social services. Secondly, it facilitates the development of social capital in social environments with qualified people, via volunteers, Facebook contacts or family contacts.

Of course, language is the most important element in speeding up the integration process. One hundred and forty different nationalities, I was communicating every day with people of these different nationalities . (Pascal)

No, no... it was a bit easier because I used English at the beginning... I spoke with (the team leader of social workers) for 3 months in English... I didn't really use French! (Hiba)

However, some interviewees also point out that international experience is also accompanied by a capacity to adapt to a culture and an ability to learn the languages of a host country.

Yes, of course! Because he had more "exposure", that's all! He has more experience of working with people from other countries, who speak other languages, other cultures, other religions. (Hadi)

Not all the international qualifications and experience of our interviewees were systematically recognised: a Serbian doctorate, a Lebanese diploma, experience in the Turkish senior civil service, qualified experience in Saudi Arabia or Oman, etc. It is not international experience that is recognized but rather international experience in countries perceived as close by the host country (Joy et al. 2018), or in companies and international institutions with high symbolic value.

5. Capital conversion: a matter of time?

The second section explores the time dimension of the relocation of capitals, highlighting that the linear temporality of refugee life course and of career representations is being challenged. In the second sub-section we insist on the perceptions of time period in which capitals have been relocated or translated.

At their arrival, asylum applicants are sent to one Swiss Reception and Procedure Centres for a maximum of 90 days. In this initial phase, a major challenge relates to the time spent waiting for the asylum procedure. Refugees report a sense of uncertainty regarding their status and their next destination during this time in the reception centers, which generates a sense of time-pass (Jeffrey 2008) and in-betweenness (Mzayek 2019), with a consequent feeling of physical, professional and existential immobility. Refugees cannot leave the center, their work and whole life is on hold, and opportunities diminish with the passing of time.

5.1. The disappearance of linear time

The flight situation represents for many refugees a major break in several dimensions of their life course and by extension for their careers, in the sense of the Gunz and Mayrhofer model. It is a situation of rupture in which both spatial and temporal dimensions are affected. Compared to highly skilled migrants abroad, assigned or self-initiated expatriates, refugees also move from one space to another. But unlike expatriates, they lack preparation time. A significant number of our interviewees also reported the difficulties of experiencing a sudden break in temporality.

Our interviewees report that one of the greatest obstacles encountered in the early stages is the lack of planning or projection into the near future. Many say they have suffered from this waiting, not knowing whether they will get refugee status, not knowing whether they will get a work permit, and especially not knowing how long the wait will be.

But, my problem is, the answer took a long time. Normally the decision on an asylum application comes six or seven months later, or a year at most, but not three years. (...) During this period (in the refugee camp), I had the impression that I was immersed in water without being able to come to the surface and that the deeper I got, the deeper and deeper you know. (Hiba)

Screening and preparation is made all the more difficult by the fact that the refugees also do not know whether they will be sent to a French- or German-speaking canton, to a country village or to a large international city.

Then there can be quite long waiting times for answers as to the recognition process of their qualifications or for the acceptance of training or supporting measures. These waiting times are all the more unpredictable as labour market integration programmes for refugees are not designed for highly qualified refugees.

Another difficulty is the break with the linear time of the past. Some social service counsellors explicitly asked some of our interviewees to give up their past and to forget what they were and which qualifications they had in order to better accept low-skilled jobs.

I'm always under pressure at the social service... you have to change the job and forget about it, it's not easy for someone to forget their diploma, absolutely not! (Pierre)

I prefer something more important to society here than being or working as a nurse's aide. Switzerland needs doctors, pharmacists... They need people with education, qualified people... why are they erasing all my past to start from scratch? (Wafa)

This threat of the disappearance of linear temporality, past and future, is extremely destabilising, as it does not allow planning for the use of capital from countries of origin or the development of new capital allowing access to the labour market.

5.2. The time of capital conversion or hybridization

In a second phase, when the first permit is obtained, a new trajectory representation can be considered. This representation may also involve obtaining a second permit that promotes better integration. In the interviews of those who have found employment following this phase, the first years lost are presented as a transition time, a more or less useless waiting time, or a time for capital conversion.

For Institutionalized Cultural capitals, this transition phase can also be seen as a time of capital conversion to negotiate recognition of one's diploma, to invest in the obtention of a local diploma, to learn a language or to convince an employer of one's qualification.

After I had read all the conditions for having my diploma recognized, I did not do so. You're probably going to ask me why. Let's get back to the main point, which is that I was trying to get off welfare as soon as possible. It was going to take me almost five years to get my diploma recognized, two years of language courses to get to level C1, and two or three years of university, full-time or part-time, depending on each person's circumstances. So I thought this story is going to take me at least five years so that I can work with my degree. At the same time I had the opportunity to study Business Administration in English.(Azad)

For Embodied cultural capital, the temporality of a new language learning process will make it possible to accept a period of time and to consider the period as a development time rather than a waiting time. The waiting time is seen as a time to translate one's skills into another language.

I normally prefer to read in English if it's written in English, but here I really forced myself to read in French, which helped me a lot to be really active in associations, even if it's not paid, there was nothing to lose because I didn't have a job anyway, so I had a lot of free time. (Hadi)

Personally, when I was looking for a study opportunity, I was studying German at the same time. I thought that this would give me another qualification in case I couldn't study at

university. I will have at least a good level of German, which can be very useful in such a field, or for such a job or such Praktikum. (Jean)

But this transition time, if it is seen as a time for investment in local capital development or conversion of capital from the country of origin, can be seen as an obstacle for those over 40 years of age. Many interviewees were not allowed to attend alternative training to construct a new work profile and learn a new job, due to their age. Age plays a negative role for planning the future, for job-search, further education or training, or to meet a partner and build a family.

Also, my age played a role, because when a person arrives in their twenties it is not the same as if they arrive in their thirties. ...] If I had arrived younger, I would have done studies and internships, no problem for the duration... but the problem is that I am now almost 40 years old with a lot of professional experience and I don't have time to do internships for years... I'm not young anymore.... (Wafa)

Moreover, you have to consider the age of the person; a person in his fifties cannot start his professional life from scratch like a young person in his thirties. (Maya)

For Social capital, we also observe how refugees use their predisposition to develop relationships to take up symbolic social positions within refugee communities or voluntary associations. They often play the role of translator or spokesperson, or even organiser, within the communities, and develop associative social capital. These roles give them a visibility that will enable them to build local capital in the host country.

(After a while) I was the only one who spoke French well, so I was the one who helped others to integrate. (Akram)

Thus, one of the refugees with the most international cultural capital finally found a job thanks to this volunteer social capital.

I finally found my job thanks to the fact that I'm really active in everything voluntary and it was really random, completely random! The head of an association that has nothing to do with banks, it is finally thanks to her that I found this job which eventually allowed me to see my parents, to have a salary, to be independent from the (social worker) and to have a B permit. (Pascal)

This last example also shows that capital held in the country of origin can be activated or reactivated later in a hybrid form, together with capital gained in the host country. This is, for example, the case of the Arabic language, which in two cases is a cultural capital that two interviewees regularly use in their jobs within banks or multinationals.

Lots of accounts or invoices in Arabic, I'm also a translator. If it's in Arabic, I translate it into German. It's an international company. (Jacques)

Sam, Alan and Zeina tell us how they used their native knowledge of Arabic or Kurd languages to prepare a Swiss certificate as translator, getting access to first translator assignments, in order to better understand the Swiss environment and the local language, and to develop their social network:

Despite the fact that working as a translator does not give me financial independence, I find it very interesting for me for several reasons. It really helps me to improve my language, which is so important for finding a good job then, and also allows me to better understand the Swiss administrative, legal and health system (Sam).

It is also more simply the case of all career capitals which, once translated and recognized, can be mobilized again in a hybrid way and adapted to the new professional context.

Similarly, the social capital of the Syrian network can be mobilized later when the first refugees to arrive have access to more stable positions and can support their relatives or friends.

Because I know Syrians who have been coming to Switzerland for a long time. They have built their lives here. They opened shops, something like that... When their family came here, it was easier psychologically and they found a lot of help from their family who was there... in terms of work, to find a job... in terms of psychological and financial support... and to find a place to live. Even to give advice on how to find the way... no no, it's easier! Social networks help a lot. (Azad)

My brother was the key person in our integration process; it is thanks to him and his efforts that we were able to establish ourselves in Switzerland. He always guided us and gave us information that even our social worker didn't know. You could even say that our social worker was my brother! [Laughing] Salma)

6. Discussion and conclusions

Our paper presents how highly skilled Syrian refugees develop strategies to convert or to relocate home country capitals for the host country labour market. Like former studies, we identify similar issues and obstacles as well as similar strategies to overcome difficulties.

As far as cultural capital is concerned, the difficult local recognition of institutional capital is a major issue for the highly skilled Syrians Switzerland like in other environments (Akkaymak, 2016; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). It is especially challenging for the older ones, who, on one hand, do not have the time to invest in long years of study and will not easily get the approval and the financial support of social services, and, on the other hand, who may experience more difficulties to get internships from local organizations to make their qualification recognized. The experiences of our interviewees highlights the important role of permits as key institutional cultural capital (see also Al Ariss and Syed, 2011).

Our findings also stress the key role of language (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014; De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010), French, German and even Swiss German, as most important embodied capital to relocate successfully. Language is a special form of embodied capital, which can impact the development of contacts with locals to gain social capital or to get qualification recognition of their institutional cultural capital, so language can be converted into other capital forms (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. 2018). Highly skilled refugees reported that granted publicly sponsored language courses were not enough to get a recognition of their qualification and many of them developed a high degree of initiative and creativity to learn French, German and Swiss German on their own.

In comparison with other studies about populations with various social backgrounds (Eggenhofer-Rehart, 2018; Wehrle et al., 2018; Sonntag, 2018), we found out that highly skilled refugees seem to have more difficulties in Swiss rural areas than in Swiss cosmopolitan cities where they can make a better use of the international dimensions of their capitals. They also experience less difficulties to adapt to formal application processes than lower skilled refugees, especially when they have former international experience or international capitals.

A first potential contribution of our study is to identify the importance of international or cosmopolitan capital in the forced migration experience of highly skilled refugees. *Cosmopolitan capital* (Kennedy 2008) (Bühlmann et al. 2013; Bühlmann et al., 2018) has been defined as a combination of qualifications, skills and attitudes accumulated

internationally that can predispose to deal with the difficulties involved in migration and travel. This capital includes earlier experiences overseas (both in the form of migration and travel), transnational networks (e.g., family, friends), language skills and international education (Bühlmann, David, and Mach 2013), but also the capacity and desire to expose oneself to international experiences and diversity (Hage 1997). Knowledge of foreign languages (e.g., English), and international education or professional experiences can be valued as an asset, not only in the case of international organizations or corporations, but also in the contacts with educated locals where refugees might embody a cosmopolitan symbolic status. Transnational social networks (e.g., family members living abroad, or friendships that were developed before, for example during studies), in turn, can facilitate the integration in a targeted market segment, and establish local contacts, also for future chances. Previous experiences of migration and travel, in particular, can be used in the present to deal with the newness of displacement, but can also be accumulated to respond to the emotional impact of migration in the long-term. Of course, the highly-skilled refugees interviewed had very heterogeneous forms of cosmopolitan resources and reserves, and these were not always sufficient to get access to employment. In Switzerland, the Zurich, Basel and Lemman Lake regions, with strong international communities offer probably better environments than rural regions to highly skilled refugees who can convert their capital and turn themselves into highly skilled migrants (Ravasi et al. 2015; Steiner and Wanner, 2018). Our findings offer illustrations and new avenues for the study of transnational relocation of capitals according by Joy et al. (2018).

From a theoretical point of view, we also focussed on the temporal dimension of the mobilization, combination and reconversion of capitals, a dimension that, a part from a small exception of research focusing on migrants' skills (Liversage 2009), has not been to our knowledge sufficiently explored so far. We suggest that, those resources that cannot be used in the immediate, can play an important role in the way refugees orient to their future and plan their life and work trajectory. Capitals hence take the form of "reserves", which refer to the resources a person accumulates not for immediate use but for future use, for confronting future possible adverse and transitional events (Cullati, Kliegel, and Widmer 2018). Our study shows that the refugee experience represents a twofold simultaneous challenge for the spatial and the temporal dimensions of a career (Gunz and Mayrhofer, 2018, p. 249). In line with previous research (Sontag 2018; Bakker, Dagevos, and Engbersen 2017), we identified specific ruptures and obstacles relating to three stages of migration: obstacles at the arrival, difficulties in settling-in and incapacity to plan the future. The experience of flight and of the long waiting period bring the refugees off from a chronological temporality of their career and from their familiar career sequences associated with capitals. After getting their permits, they rediscover the chronological dimension of their career and try to plan and define projects (trainings, learning languages, applications, internships... and plan to develop new host country capitals to facilitate their next career steps. On the other hand, we also identified that the most successful appointments on qualified positions were not the follow up of classical home country sequences or planned accumulation of capitals. The most successful experiences seem to have been the result of hazardous combinations of sequences and capitals, triggered by opportunities or chances, following more a *Kairos* approach of temporality than a *Kronos* one. For this reason, it is very difficult to define clear practical implications for refugees. Recommendations should be to plan host country capital accumulation, to keep home country capital active and to wait for opportunities of hybrid combinations.

A strong limitation of our analysis is a limitation of the theory of practice and of the sociological conceptualisation of capitals. Indeed, we could also identify throughout the

interviews and experiences of our interviewees the importance of personal and emotional resources (e.g., openness to meet people, spirit of volunteerism, hope and motivation) to look for employment, to learn languages, to build new relationships, and become more resilient to the distress of migration (Cangia Zittoun 2017). The combination of both forms of resources (Cullati, Kliegel, and Widmer 2018) offers new research avenues in overcoming obstacles of high skilled forced migration. A possible research avenue is also to consider *intersectionality* of other diverse characteristics such as gender, religion, ethnicity etc. with transnationality. We also identified Gender effects in the mobilization of capitals. Women seemed to face more obstacles in the conversion of capitals, some obstacles are associated with the Syrian gender regime but some obstacles can also be associated with the Swiss gender regimes and with the stereotypes of Swiss employers towards women from the Middle East, in spite of high qualification standards.

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