

Reflections of Movement

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Human mobility is perpetuated at the intersection of opportunity and pressure. In this photographic essay, I explore reverberations of movement from the Arctic to East Africa, where I have done ethnographic fieldwork or passed through on my own anthropological and personal journey. The photos compare continuities of movement for transborder Skolt Sámi communities in Fennoscandia, sedentarized East African hunters, West African migrants in Madrid, and my own transnational movement. I show that just as the camera works by reflecting an image, the movement of the anthropologist intersects with interlocutor mobilities to reveal global inequalities of movement.

Why do people move? Some move or stay because they have to, as an anthropology of forced migration and the current global migration crisis makes all too clear (Chatty 2014). Others move because their fish, reindeer, or salaried jobs move or the skills and certifications needed to obtain them. And people move of their own volition, leaving or returning to cultivate roots in the tangles of transnational capital and displacement. As boundaries blur between immigration and migration (Horevitz 2009), mobility highlights and reinforces inequalities (Salazar 2017). Because meanings of mobility change in different contexts (Adey 2010), Salazar (2019) calls for comparative inquiry into the generation of everyday mobilities. Thus, the comparative movement of the anthropologist in dialogue with interlocutor mobilities reveals and perpetuates global inequalities of movement.

In the circumpolar Skolt Sámi homelands stretching across Norwegian, Finnish, and Russian borders, migratory lifeways in relation to fish and reindeer gave way to geopolitical relocation. The seismic effects of the Second World War led Finland to cede its colonial territories to the Soviet Union; people living in the Petsamo region were given a difficult choice—to move or become integrated with the USSR. So they left, and their children attended Finnish boarding schools that instilled national values of modern progress at the expense of cultural distinction, encouraging young people to follow newly built roads to town centers (Lehtola 2015). Today some come back, either for the people they left behind or for the land that emerges in political imaginaries of Sápmi—Sámi land. In a photograph from my car (see fig. 1), a reindeer appears to nod ambivalently at the cars that race across its pastures—the state dreams that wreak havoc on local well-being. Recent halted plans for an Arctic Ocean Corridor railway continue decades of postwar infrastructural reimagining of the northern regions (Seitsonen and Moshenska 2021); as these visions pull northern villages closer

to the capital, they also stimulate Indigenous resurgences of material heritage.

Along the currents of one such cultural movement in the second decade of the second millennium, I helped make a boat, a revival of a vessel once used to connect Skolt Sámi places, people, and livelihoods (Magnani and Magnani 2018). In these root boats (*vue´ddvõnnâz*), with the boards drawn together with roots, people pulled fish out of water a century ago and themselves out of spiritual harm. In some places they were buried in boats to row into the afterlife (Bayliss-Smith and Mulk 1999). Today, the boats come along with a resurgent movement of younger generations back north, who graft new roots from old ones through craft, language, and the northern environment. Intersecting this journey with my own, I helped collect moss to keep the boat afloat, sewed the boards together, and with a camera in one hand and a brush in the other, tarred the wood until it was a deep orange brown (see fig. 2). As I observed my collaborators' longings for predisplacement movement, I became aware of my own ability to move between worlds.

After writing this story of revived roots and migration for my doctorate, stuck to a chair for more than a year, I got on a plane to Madrid. I was there to visit a childhood friend but also to find new perspective on questions of global movement. There I met Cheikh, whose day-to-day thoughts revolved around the horizons and whirlpools of migration. For Cheikh it was an immigration of knowledge and globalization (*l'immigration de savoir, de mondialisation*) that propelled him to Spain.¹ Similar

1. Cheikh is of Wolof-speaking background and learned French during his education in Senegal, a former French colony. What began as exploratory fieldwork became a broader conversation illuminating similarities and differences between meanings of mobility in the regions I have worked in long term and in relation to my own transnational movement.

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Figure 1. Roads that expanded state infrastructure into Sámi land and carried away younger generations now also bring them back in new seasonal or permanent return migrations. Meanwhile, reindeer travel and are lost along the roads that traverse their pastures across the Finnish-Norwegian border. 2017.

to the “adventures” described by Julie Kleinman (2019), migration unlocked the possibilities of transnational capital and education.

But those Cheikh represented at the Senegalese Association, those who did not disappear on boats on the journey to Europe, were left adrift on the streets of Madrid in *l’immigration perpétuelle*. Denied legitimization in Spanish society, *manteros*

are in perpetual movement as illegal street sellers, grasping the drawstrings of their white-sheet *mantas*, ready at any moment to pull up glasses and bags and shoes and run. “*Ils tournent, ils tournent, ils tournent,*” Cheikh told me, “they turn.” In this turning they also gain force, organizing from the Lavapiés neighborhood across the country, sending images of antiracist protest across the world. In Lavapiés I walked past the concrete



Figure 2. Tarring the “root boat.” Č’vetjäu’rr, Sápmi, across the Finnish border. 2015.



Figure 3. Graffiti in Lavapiés reads POWER TO THE *MANTEROS*. *Manteros* are immigrant street sellers, mostly from West Africa, who in recent years have organized across Spain to escape cycles of both perpetual movement in the city and transnational immobility (fighting against laws that render them stateless and reliant on informal and criminalized economies). 2019.

walls of their streets, painted red with “POWER TO THE *MANTEROS*” (*PODER A LOS MANTEROS*; see fig. 3). The *manteros*’ simultaneously forced movement and immobility in Madrid weighed heavily against my own uninhibited visits to the city, my unencumbered movement through the streets.

That year, following my graduation, I started doing fieldwork together with my partner on the border between Kenya

and Tanzania with a community that had been displaced by shifting colonial policy. For more than 100 years, they moved through the area that they eventually permanently settled, following antelope and zebra and giraffe. When the British came, they had to leave the northern reaches of their territories (Hughes 2006); some returned to cultivate it for the colonizers. They ended up in a valley with a stream to irrigate corn and a



Figure 4. View from our house in Kenya—valley and farm fields, with the Forest of the Lost Child beyond the hills. 2019.



Figure 5. On a motorboat in Nje'žžjäu'rr, searching for the roots of movement. Skolt Sámi territories of Sápmi. 2014.

forest with game but new Kenyan wildlife laws. In this Forest of the Lost Child, a local story goes, a girl once wandered in and never came out. Despite this tale of caution, the people of the region circulate between forest and farm, looking over their shoulder at a colonial regime that compelled and now denies movement. The comings and goings of foreign visitors are less regulated; the region is full of tourists on safari, free wanderers between forest and savanna.

One day as I was sitting in our mud house with my computer, taking a photo of the valley and farm fields misted and rainbowed, imagining the lost girl wandering in the forest beyond, I received an email about a job in Norway, in coastal Sámi land (see fig. 4). A couple of children nearby joined my partner and me to dance in celebration as I remembered the strange familiarity of my life's movement: My family had relocated to the United States because the Soviet Union was collapsing as the American economy was growing. I went on to do my PhD in the United Kingdom, in the process migrating between fenlands and fells. Now I would be returning to Sápmi. My writing tethers me to livelihoods in new lands, making routes of roots (see fig. 5). But often I wonder whether I should instead stand still so as not to reproduce global inequalities of movement. I remember what Cheikh told me, "Why not do research in the world, for there are so many things that we do not understand" (*Pourquoi pas les inves-*

tigations dans le monde . . . il y a beaucoup de choses que nous ne comprenons pas).

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