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Mobility and security: The perceived benefits of citizenship for resettled young people from refugee backgrounds

Caitlin Nunn, Celia McMichael, Sandra M. Gifford and Ignacio Correa-Velez

In recent decades, the meaning and value of formal state citizenship has shifted dramatically. In the same period, scholarship on citizenship has drawn attention to the proliferation of alternative forms of sub-, supra- and transnational citizenship, at times obscuring the ongoing importance of formal state citizenship. For refugees, however, formal state citizenship remains a critical and widely shared goal. Drawing on interviews with 51 young people from refugee backgrounds in Melbourne, Australia, this article explores the intersecting themes of mobility and security that were identified by participants as the most important benefits of acquiring formal state citizenship in the country of resettlement. In contrast to the insecurity of forced migration, formal state citizenship provides a privileged mobility that enables refugee-background youth to maintain and create transnational identities and attachments and to be protected while doing so, while also granting a secure status within the nation state and insurance against further displacement in an uncertain future. In offering these forms of mobility and security, formal state citizenship contributes to a sense of ontological security among refugee-background youth, providing an important foundation for building national and transnational futures.

Keywords: citizenship, refugee youth, mobility, ontological security, resettlement

Introduction

In recent decades, the meaning and value of formal state citizenship has shifted dramatically. In many immigrant-receiving nation states, including Australia, citizenship has been

reformed through the seemingly contradictory trends of relaxing restrictions – including extending many of the benefits of citizenship to resident non-citizens and increasing access to dual citizenship, and tightening controls – such as increasing residency requirements and implementing citizenship tests (Castles 2014; Shachar 2014; Faist 2000). At the same time, contemporary conditions of globalisation and transnationalism have aided the proliferation of non-state communities to which people may belong, fostering ‘multi-layered citizens’ (Yuval-Davis 1999) with local, national and transnational allegiances. As a number of scholars have noted (c.f. Haggis and Schech 2010; Yuval-Davis 2007; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006), this does not, however, signify the demise of the nation state. While the relevance of formal state citizenship to everyday belonging and participation has been questioned (Waite and Cooke 2011; Gow 2005), the nation state remains the foundational source of legal rights and obligations for individuals, while the nation state system continues to play a significant role in enabling and constraining other forms of political community.

Reflecting the increasing complexity of contemporary citizenship, theories and understandings of citizenship are also increasingly diverse, and include a focus on substantive citizenship (c.f. Lange et al. 2007; Gow 2005), and on forms of post-, supra- and transnational citizenship (c.f. Strumia 2013; Sassen 2003; Soysal 1994). These have been productive developments for engaging with the dynamic and multidimensional nature of citizenship, yet there are attendant risks. The extension of the concept of citizenship beyond the traditional scope of ‘a legal status attributed to individuals by states and the legal rights and obligations attached to this status’ (Bauböck 2010, 847), along with an increasing focus on the erosion and devaluation of state citizenship, risks obscuring the ongoing importance of formal state citizenship as a mechanism for including and positioning people within global political structures (Castles 2005). This is critical when considering the differential access to and implications of citizenship for different groups (Stewart and Mulvey 2014; Bauböck 2010). It is particularly salient for refugees, who by definition are unable to avail themselves of the rights and protections conventionally provided by the state.

Based on in-depth interviews with 51 refugee-background young people who resettled in Australia during adolescence, this article explores the intersecting themes of security and mobility that were widely identified by participants as the most important aspects of formal state citizenship. Mobility and security are of profound importance for those who have experienced forced migration and the dispersal of family and community, and who, prior to displacement and while seeking asylum, have likely experienced the insecurity of physical

and psychological harm, precarious housing and livelihoods, and limited legal protection. The tangible benefits of the mobility and security provided by formal state citizenship include the ability to visit family and homeland, to be protected while doing so, and to have the right to return to and remain in Australia. The mobility conferred through Australian citizenship additionally provides a sense of freedom and possibility, while the security it offers evokes confidence and comfort in the present and future. Together, the mobility and security of Australian citizenship foster a sense of ontological security among participants. As conceptualised by Giddens (1990, 92), ontological security refers to ‘the confidence that most humans beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action’. This is something that is eroded by experiences of forced migration, during which self-identity is often challenged, and social and material environments are frequently unsettled (Fozdar and Hartley 2013). Further, given their young age at the time of displacement, many participants may not have experienced this sense of security prior to settling in Australia. Ontological security is an important though under-examined element of refugee settlement, integration and transnationalism.

In exploring participants’ ideas and experiences of citizenship, this article demonstrates that, despite the changing nature of and perspectives on formal state citizenship, for those from refugee backgrounds it continues to provide highly valued rights and opportunities. In conferring a secure status within the nation state and a concomitant ability to freely and safely move beyond it, citizenship signifies the end of *forced* migration and provides a secure basis for pursuing national and transnational futures. In light of the underrepresentation of refugee and migrant perspectives in discussions of citizenship (Stewart and Mulvey 2014; Fozdar and Spittles 2010; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006), and the paucity of empirical studies of formal state citizenship more generally (Ho 2008; Nordberg 2006), this article also addresses a significant research gap.

Citizenship and refugee youth

Refugees,¹ as Haddad writes, exist in the ‘gaps *between* states’ (2008, 7, emphasis in original). Refugees are reliant on international regimes, notably the Convention (1951) and

¹ Throughout this article, the term refugee refers to those who meet the UNHCR Convention definition of being ‘outside the country of his/her nationality and...unable, or...unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country’ due to ‘a well founded fear of being persecuted’ (2010 [1951]), and who are yet to have that status

Protocol (1967) Relating to the Status of Refugees, to guarantee their rights, and on international and non-governmental organisations for support and protection (UNHCR 2010). Yet such regimes and organisations exist to augment, not replace, the role of nation states (Haddad 2008). Their reach is limited and uneven, and their intervention intended to be temporary and exceptional. These regimes and organisations are, furthermore, dependent on states for legitimacy, enforcement, access and funding (Isin and Turner 2007; Ehrkamp and Leitner 2006; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Thus refugees are, in effect, ‘ward[s] of the international community’ (Haddad 2008, 3), with all of the insecurity and limited autonomy that this implies. Moreover, their nation state guardians are largely unwilling to prioritise the rights and protection of refugees over their own sovereignty and citizenry, as global responses to asylum seekers illustrate. Many refugees exist for extended periods in the liminal zone of displacement, aspiring to a viable state citizenship while simultaneously resisting and challenging the logic of the nation state system through the maintenance of multiple trans- and sub-national practices and allegiances (McNevin 2013; Smith and Guarnizo 1998).

According to the UNHCR Global Trends 2013 report (UNHCR 2014), there were, in that year, 16.7 million refugees worldwide. Only approximately 1% of the world’s refugees are likely to be accepted into one of the small number of states participating in UNHCR’s resettlement program (UNHCR n.d.). For this minority, resettlement provides access to rights, opportunities and protections inaccessible to those without a reliable state affiliation, including, crucially, a pathway to citizenship. Moreover, under current conditions of ‘hierarchical citizenship’ among nation states (Castles 2005, 690), the citizenship on offer in resettlement countries is a privileged one, bestowing a degree of security and mobility often unavailable in the country or region of origin. Further, in the context of ‘civic stratification’ in immigrant-receiving nation states, wherein ‘inequality [is] generated through the differential granting of rights by the state’ (Morris 2002, 122), resettled refugees have a secure status. This is in often sharp contrast to irregular migrants who cross national borders via alternative means, and who, depending on the country they enter, may face severely curtailed or no access to a range of rights and services, including access to citizenship (Koser 2007; Morris 2002).

resolved via any of the three durable solutions (voluntary repatriation, local integration or third country resettlement). Recognising the cessation of the legal/bureaucratic status of refugee upon resettlement, but also the ongoing relevance of refugee experiences, those with permanent residency or citizenship in a resettlement country are identified as being ‘from refugee backgrounds’.

Refugee youth

This article is concerned with the ways in which formal state citizenship is valued and utilised by resettled refugee-background youth. The resettlement experiences of refugee young people differ considerably from those of refugee adults in relation to factors including education and employment, family responsibilities and relationships, host society interactions, and transnational engagement (Nunn et al. 2014; Gifford and Wilding 2013; McMichael et al. 2011; Correa-Velez et al. 2010). While age at migration and settlement may also affect experiences of and feelings about formal state citizenship, there has been little research undertaken in this area. Where refugee young people's perceptions and experiences of citizenship have been examined, this has most frequently been in the context of broader studies of migrant background youth, and primarily in relation to more substantive forms of citizenship (c.f. Mansouri & Mikola 2014; Harris 2013).

Refugees who are resettled during adolescence occupy an ambivalent position in relation to formal state citizenship. Many leave their country of origin as children, or are born elsewhere, while others experience internal forced displacement within their homeland. This means that, prior to resettlement, many refugee-background youth have only briefly, if ever, experienced functional state membership, and only as minors, without the rights and responsibilities of adult citizens. Further, growing up as 'wards of the international community', many refugee young people have not experienced the 'family feeling' (Betts and Birrell 2007, 47) of national membership, and may not therefore experience the nation state as an important site of belonging. Many are 'trailing migrants' and do not have a choice in leaving their homeland, settling somewhere new, or even adopting citizenship in the resettlement country (Williams and Baláž 2014), which may affect their relation to countries of origin and settlement. Given this, it cannot be assumed that young people from refugee backgrounds view formal state citizenship as a normative or necessary component of identity. Combined, these factors are likely to differentiate refugee-background young people from both adults with refugee backgrounds and from young people more generally.

The Australian context

Australia is one of a small number of states that participate in the UNHCR resettlement program. In the past decade, Australia has granted humanitarian visas to approximately

13,000 to 16,000 people per year, almost 40% of whom were aged less than 18 years on arrival (Australian Government n.d.a).² During this period, resettled refugees originated from countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, and Burma.

Refugees who are resettled in Australia are granted Permanent Humanitarian Visas (PHV). As permanent residents they gain wide-ranging rights and entitlements, including access to social security, the national health scheme (Medicare), free primary and secondary education, a Commonwealth supported university place, and eligibility to sponsor a person for permanent residency. Unlike other permanent residents, PHV holders are also able to access the Commonwealth higher education loan scheme.³ In addition, resettled refugees receive intensive practical support during their initial settlement via the Humanitarian Settlement Services program (DSS 2014). PHV holders have almost all of the rights and entitlements of citizenship. Exceptions include the right to vote, the right to work in the Australian public service or defence force, and limitations on travel outside of Australia (DIBP 2015b).

Australian PHV holders, along with other permanent residents, are eligible to apply for citizenship after four years of residency (increased from two years in 2010), providing they have resided in Australia for at least nine months of the year prior to application and that they are of 'good character'. Good character is determined via an assessment of the 'enduring moral qualities of a person', including consideration of criminal offences committed in Australia and abroad (DIBP 2014, 171). In order to obtain citizenship, a person must pay a fee and pass a citizenship test oriented to testing basic English literacy and an understanding of the 'responsibilities and privileges' of Australian citizenship (DIBP 2015d). Applicants who are aged less than 18 years are not subject to good character provisions nor required to sit the citizenship test. Children under 16 are generally included on their parents' applications, though they can apply independently with the consent of a parent or guardian (DIBP 2014).

² These numbers include both refugees who were selected for resettlement in Australia while residing offshore and asylum seekers who were granted refugee status after arriving in Australia (DIBP 2015c). However, changes to legislation implemented in 2012-13 and aimed at discouraging unauthorised boat arrivals, mean that asylum seekers who arrive via this means and are subsequently found to be refugees are now unlikely to be resettled in Australia (DFAT 2013).

³ The HECS-HELP scheme entitles tertiary students to a government loan to cover student fee contributions. The recipient only begins repaying the loan once their income exceeds a minimum threshold (Australian Government n.d.b).

Citizenship uptake in Australia is well above the OECD average, with a higher – and faster – uptake by humanitarian migrants than those in other migration categories (Smith et al. 2011). While Smith et al., in their Department of Immigration and Citizenship report on citizenship in Australia, suggest that the high rate and pace of citizenship uptake by humanitarian entrants may be in pursuit of security and in acknowledgement of the opportunities provided by Australia, there is scant research on this phenomenon. It is also important to note that this report drew on data that pre-dated reforms to citizenship legislation, including increased residency requirements and the introduction of the citizenship test. These changes have been widely criticised as disadvantaging refugees and other migrants who may have lower education and literacy skills (Fozdar and Spittles 2010; Haggis and Schech 2010). The changes in eligibility conditions for Australian citizenship reflect a broader trend in developed nation states toward encouraging a patriotic relation to the nation as a core dimension of citizenship (Fortier 2008; Betts and Birrell 2007). The citizenship test and extended residency requirements require potential citizens to demonstrate their commitment to the nation, addressing nationalist concerns about the allegiances of conferred citizens. The accompanying rhetoric emphasises national identity and belonging as a product of citizenship (c.f. DIBP 2015e), seeking to imbue citizenship with value beyond the limited practical benefits it offers. Australian citizenship is thus widely understood to be both procedural and patriotic (Fozdar and Spittles 2010).

Overview of study and participants

This article examines in-depth interviews conducted with 51 young adults from refugee backgrounds, all of whom were resettled during adolescence via Australia's offshore humanitarian and refugee program. At the time of interview, they were aged between 18 and 27 years and had resided in Australia for between eight and ten years. Interviews were conducted during 2012–2013 as part of a follow-up to the Good Starts Study for Refugee Youth (2004–2008), a mixed-method longitudinal study that aimed to identify the factors that support the settlement and wellbeing of adolescent refugee migrants settling in Melbourne, Australia. One hundred and twenty newly-arrived refugees, aged between 11 and 19, were initially recruited to the study from three English Language Schools and were followed

annually over a four-year period.⁴ Participants' regions of origin reflected the main regions of origin of refugee arrivals at the time (Gifford et al. 2007). The 2012–2013 follow-up study was designed to examine participants' longer-term experiences of settlement and transitions into early adulthood (McMichael et al. 2015). In this follow-up study, 64 members of the original cohort of 120 were contactable, of whom 51 agreed to participate. They comprised 25 females and 26 males. Thirty-three originated from Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea), 16 from the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq), and two from Europe (Serbia). Participants were broadly representative of the original cohort, with no statistically significant differences in terms of gender, region of birth, or number of years of schooling prior to resettlement (McMichael et al. 2015). All interviews were conducted in English, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were coded thematically using NVivo software. A coding framework developed in the initial Good Starts Study was first applied, facilitating longitudinal analysis of the complete data set, and was further refined based on inductive analysis of the interview data.

Participants were first asked about their citizenship status in the final year of the Good Starts Study, four to five years post-arrival. At that time, 58 of the 79 respondents were citizens. When this question was repeated in the follow-up study approximately four years later, 45 of the 51 respondents reported having Australian citizenship. None of the six participants yet to take up citizenship expressed a strong resistance to doing so, and all but one intended to apply in the near future. The stated reasons for not yet applying included not perceiving an immediate need and waiting for parents to pursue citizenship as a family. In one case, a young man was waiting to have a criminal record expunged due to concerns that his application may be rejected under the 'good character' provision.

Having arrived in Australia prior to 2010, participants were not affected by the extended residency requirements, however, those who applied for citizenship after September 2007 and who were aged 18 or over were required to undertake the citizenship test. While a number of participants applied for citizenship independently, most took it up with their families. In interviews conducted in this follow-up study, citizenship was addressed as part of a broader discussion about belonging in Australia. Participants were asked whether acquiring Australian citizenship was important to them and, if they were citizens, whether it had made a

⁴ With attrition, the numbers of participants per year were as follows: year 1: n=120; year 2 n=109; year 3 n=100; year 4 n=80.

difference in their lives. Thematic analysis of participants' narratives revealed two central organizing themes that underpinned views and experiences of the value of attaining formal state citizenship: as supporting mobility and as providing security.

Australian citizenship as mobility and security

Among those participants who have taken up Australian citizenship, and several of those who have not, mobility and security emerged as primary perceived benefits of formal state citizenship. Australian citizenship supports mobility via the right to obtain an Australian passport and to exit and re-enter the country. It provides security via access to consular assistance when overseas, a stable government and the rule of law, and formal membership of the nation state, and thus the guarantee – except under exceptional circumstances⁵ – of the right to stay in, or return to, Australia and to receive the protection of the state. Beyond this, as the following accounts demonstrate, the mobility and security provided by Australian citizenship transcends the practical and tangible to address deeper and less-defined concerns about freedom and safety.

Emphasis on these two aspects of citizenship is comprehensible in light of participants' refugee experiences of forced migration, dispersal of family and friends, and physical and ontological insecurity (Shachar 2014; Agier 2008). It should also be understood in the context of the Permanent Humanitarian Visa scheme, which ensures that more urgent needs and rights have been addressed prior to obtaining citizenship. This focus on mobility and security additionally reflects the dual processes of integration and transnationalism in which these refugee-background young people are engaged, and for which, Erdal and Oeppen (2013, 877) suggest, the security of 'a legal and regularised situation is important'. While the theory and practice of integration and transnationalism have been conceptualised in a wide range of, at times conflicting, ways (c.f. re integration: Da Lomba 2010; Strang and Ager 2010; Castles et al. 2002; re transnationalism: Vertovec 2009; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Faist 2000; Smith and Guarnizo 1998), they are used in this article to refer to the varying

⁵ Citizenship granted by conferral may be revoked if it was obtained illegally, such as via fraud; if a person is convicted of a serious offence committed in Australia or overseas prior to obtaining citizenship (so long as this does not render them stateless); or if, as a citizen or national of another country, a person serves in the armed forces of a country at war with Australia (Australian Government 2014). At the time of writing, a bill has been introduced into the Australian parliament that seeks to extend these circumstances to include the revocation of citizenship for a range of terrorism-related activities.

forms and intensities of engagement in national (integration) and transnational economic, social, cultural and political spheres (Valtonen 2004; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Participants in this study engage in processes of integration that include undertaking higher education, working, participating in ethnic and religious communities, voting in elections, and in a few cases, contributing to the purchase of family homes. Simultaneously, these young people are engaging in transnational processes that include maintaining social connections via telephone and other information and communication technologies, return visits, remittances, and engagement with homeland politics. Overlapping processes of integration and transnationalism in migrants' lives are widely recognised (Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Vertovec 2009; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), though under-researched in relation to refugees (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001).

Mobility: practice and possibility

Acquiring an Australian passport and the concomitant ability to travel outside of Australia was identified by many participants as the most important – and sometimes only – benefit of Australian citizenship. This perspective was shared by people who both do and do not hold Australian citizenship and who have and have not yet taken advantage of access to international mobility. Asked if having citizenship made a difference to how she felt living in Australia, Selvana, a 20-year-old Iraqi Chaldean woman who was resettled with her complete nuclear family and has not yet travelled as an Australian citizen, responded:

No, I don't think so, no. Not really. It's just the same. Maybe it's just about the going away. If I want to go away I've got the citizen, I've got permission to go away. But other than that, no, same thing.

'Permission' to leave Australia has been taken advantage of by a significant number of participants, with 22 out of 51 people travelling abroad since obtaining citizenship. Many have returned to their country or region of origin, while several have visited their 'homeland' for the first time. Such visits play an important role in establishing or reinforcing ties with people and places, and 'strengthening...ethnic and transnational identities' (King and Christou 2011, 458; see also Muggeridge and Dona 2006). Given the negative consequences of family separation for health, wellbeing, and overall settlement of people with refugee backgrounds (Wilmsen 2013), maintenance or re-establishment of family ties is critical,

particularly in light of the limited opportunities for permanent family reunion in Australia under current regulations and quotas (RCOA 2014).

Only one-third of the original cohort migrated to Australia with both parents, and many participants in the follow-up study have parents and other close family members living in the country or region of origin, or elsewhere in the diaspora (McMichael, Gifford and Correa-Velez 2011). It is unsurprising then that 21 participants have used their Australian passports to visit family and friends. Akok, a young Sudanese man who migrated to Australia with his uncle, visited South Sudan to reunite with his mother, who he had not seen since he was seven years old, and to meet his ten-year-old brother for the first time. Nyandeng also traveled to South Sudan with her mother and siblings after locating her missing father:

‘Cause since we left, we don’t even know where’s my dad is, when there was a war. So we don’t even know if he die or not. And then 2008 my mum found out he is there. So that’s why I went there.

In other cases, people have met or reconnected with siblings, grandparents, extended family members and wider ethnic communities. Furthermore, in five cases visits have led to establishing or formalising new ties via marriage to co-ethnic partners from the homeland or diaspora.

For some of those young people who grew up outside of their country of origin, a visit to the ‘homeland’ has played an important role in identity formation: fostering a sense of ethnic and cultural belonging, (re)establishing a connection to their country of origin, and brokering new relationships with people and places. For Aisha, who has no close family members in Australia, a return to Sudan in order to ‘see my blood’ resulted in shifts in her perception of and relationship to her country of birth:

The way I see, it’s not bad like I used to remember when I was young. Yeah, it’s now better. And the other thing is I’m already grown, I know how to manage things. At that time, I don’t know where to move or where to come – I’m just sitting and waiting. But now...

For a few, Australian citizenship has facilitated a ‘return’ to a homeland they never lived in. Senay was ‘born in Sudan as a refugee’ and growing up had negative perceptions of Eritrea, based on his father’s flight from its dictatorship and stories and media representations that portrayed it as ‘just another African village’. Visiting Eritrea with his father in late adolescence, Senay found that ‘the stories that are out there about my country are very

untrue', that it is, in fact, 'beautiful' and 'modern'. Moreover, he experienced a new sense of belonging:

I call Sudan home, but to actually be in the country...that's where I'm actually from, that's where my people are...It was a feeling that I'd never felt before, and it was good... I mean just to see your people everywhere you go, it's just your people everywhere, it's amazing, and it's a good feeling.

For others, it is not necessary to leave Australia in order for citizenship to shape their perceptions of their current situations and future possibilities. Ayanna, a young woman of Ethiopian background, reported: 'after I get my citizenship I felt like I can do anything, like travel if I want at any time, 'cause I have my passport.' Similarly, Iraqi Chaldean-background Rosa, despite not having left Australia since immigrating, found having citizenship made her 'feel more comfortable. Like I can go anywhere I like'. This freedom to 'do anything' and 'go anywhere' is in contrast to the constrained mobilities and opportunities that characterise the refugee experience. For Ayanna and Rosa, the mere possibility of international mobility is a source of optimism and comfort.

The possibilities that citizenship represents relate also to more cosmopolitan aspirations for work and travel. An Australian passport provides entrée into a privileged field of mobility that is largely inaccessible to members of less-developed states, including those from which participants' originate (Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006; Castles 2005). Citizenship thus encompasses the potential for socio-economic mobility: for accessing the opportunities available to citizens of the developed world. This has included a Sudanese-background young man traveling to the Philippines to play in a basketball competition and an Ethiopian-background young man engaging in the very Australian pursuit of holidaying in Thailand. And while most participants imagine their futures in Australia, several aspire to international careers that leverage both Australian education and citizenship and cultural and linguistic competencies gained prior to resettlement. Ethiopian-background Ermias, for example, intends to seek employment in a Middle Eastern country, capitalising on the Arabic literacy he acquired in Sudan and the English competency and tertiary qualifications he has gained in Australia. Ermias is one of a number of participants who envisage transnational futures that include Australia, but not necessarily as a primary residence or allegiance. In several cases, such imagined futures involve contributing to and/or benefiting from the 'homeland'. According to one Sudanese young man, Malong, 'there's heaps of opportunities there for me or for anyone that can speak English or been out of Sudan'. This assertion is given credibility

by the experiences of people from other refugee-background communities in Australia, notably the Vietnamese, who have returned to work or establish businesses in the country they or their parents fled (Carruthers 2002).

For young people from refugee backgrounds, an Australian passport is more than a travel document. It represents the ability to maintain transnational ties to people and places, to foster identity and belonging, to access the same international opportunities as their non-refugee-background peers, and to gain a sense of freedom and possibility. Notably, it can facilitate reunion with family members after often-extended periods of separation. While not all participants yet have had the desire or capability (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001) to visit the homeland or diaspora, the possibility of such a journey is highly valued. The young people in this study have, in most instances, lived mobile lives. As refugees, however, it has been a mobility that is both forced and constrained. Its legacy is a transnational orientation, with people and pasts in multiple places, and, for many, the desire for similarly transnational – though more socioeconomically mobile – futures. Australian citizenship attends to this by providing a sanctioned, privileged mobility, legitimated by a valid passport and respected as a marker of belonging to the developed world.

Security: ‘if anything happen...’

A significant aspect of the international mobility participants experience through Australian citizenship is the security it provides via the right to return to Australia, as well as the protection it offers overseas and during transit, both through consular assistance and, more generally, through the symbolic value of an Australian passport. This is critical given the continuing instability of many participants’ homelands. Australian citizenship also provides a sense of security as a formal mechanism of belonging to a (stable, developed) nation state, marking the end of the insecurity of forced migrancy (Stewart and Mulvey 2014; Fozdar and Spittles 2010; Haggis and Schech 2010; Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006).

The right to return to Australia was identified by several participants as an important precondition for international mobility. It enables one to venture forth into the world without risking the loss of ‘home’; something that cannot be taken for granted among those who have been forcibly displaced. As Haga, a Sudanese-background young woman, stated: ‘I’m citizen, so that mean I’m part of Australian. So no matter where I go, I always welcome here, so this is like my home, my second home’. Moreover, whilst overseas, Australian citizenship is

considered necessary ‘in case any trouble or anything’ (Charles, Sudanese background). As Aisha explained, when you travel to your homeland ‘you have to go to the embassy, like report, because if anything happen, any emergency, they will be able to get you directly, return you back to where you come’. Australian citizenship can also change the experience of travel. Negasi, a young man of Ethiopian background, reported that travelling on an Australian passport made him feel ‘more confident and more good even. More safety too.’ Waheed, an Iraqi Chaldean young man, also alluded to the protection an Australian passport provides in legitimating one’s transit, noting that: ‘No one can talk to you in the airport if you’re doing the right thing’.

For some participants, citizenship not only provides the right to return to Australia and to be protected while abroad, but also a sense of security in their status in Australia. While resettled refugees, as PHV holders or citizens, occupy a privileged position in the civic strata of the nation compared to irregular migrants, this does not ensure recognition and inclusion in the host society. Some, notably those who are visibly different to the majority community, may have their belonging in the nation questioned, even to the extent that they have trouble accessing the rights their legal status confers (Valtonen 2004; Morris 2002). In such cases, citizenship can, for some, provide comfort and security as proof of formal belonging in the nation. For Sudanese-background Charles, for example, citizenship mandates inclusion and fair treatment: ‘I feel like I’m Australian now, so I don’t see the point people can mistreat me and think I’m different from here’. Yar, a Sudanese-background young woman, similarly sees citizenship as locating her securely within the nation. She said: ‘Now I’m comfortable...if they ask me, I have Australian citizenship. I’m Australian. Like at work, any place that I want to work, because I have it’. Several other participants also feel that it enables them, as the Australian Government’s citizenship website suggests, to say ‘I am Australian’ (DIBP 2015e).

For Yar, among others, the security of status that citizenship provides has an affective dimension, eliciting feelings of comfort and belonging. Fahim, a young man from an Afghan-background, suggested that in acquiring citizenship ‘[y]ou feel like you are part of Australia now, part of Australian culture now, compared to we don’t have citizenship, feel like isolated.’ The strongest articulation of an affective relation to citizenship came from Iraqi Chaldean-background Basmina, who explained that gaining citizenship made a difference to her ‘[b]ecause I’m safe in Australia and because I love Australia, that’s why. Yeah, because I love Australia, that’s why I want to be one person from it’.

While, as Antonsich notes (2010, 648), '[l]egal factors (e.g. citizenship and resident permits) are an essential component in producing security, which is regarded by many as a vital dimension of belonging', Basmina's pairing of safety and love as the foundations for citizenship is unusual within this cohort. Many participants feel that citizenship makes no difference to their everyday lives. This was clearly expressed by Iraqi Chaldean Mariam, who, while intending to take up citizenship, expressed no urgency to do so:

I don't feel like "oh, if I get it, I'll feel like an Australian or if I don't get it, I won't really feel like an Australian." I mean, I still, like, I don't even think about it sometimes. I even forget because like I get so many rights and just the same rights as everyone else, so I don't really see that as being a major difference.

These diverse perspectives on the intersection of citizenship, safety, and belonging demonstrate the ambivalent relationship between formal state citizenship and other more quotidian and affective modes of national belonging, which may be attained without citizenship, or withheld despite it (Gow 2005; Sassen 2003). This supports findings from previous studies of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds (c.f. Fozdar and Hartley 2014; Harris 2013; Ehrkamp and Leitner 2006). Yet it does not mean that the security formal citizenship provides is purely instrumental, or that its instrumental benefits lack an affective dimension. As the above accounts demonstrate, citizenship can, for some, provide evidence of a more generalised belonging, sanction a national identity and grant formal recognition of an affective connection.

The importance of citizenship to feelings of safety additionally speaks to deeper concerns about the position of people from refugee backgrounds in Australia in an uncertain future. Several participants noted the potential for something to 'happen' that would threaten the security or legitimacy of non-citizens. Juba, a Sudanese-background young man, is yet to take up citizenship due to a criminal record he fears could adversely affect his application. Yet he is eager to do so, because 'you don't know what's going to happen'. This sense that something could 'happen' was also expressed by Ethiopian-background Abraham, who, having obtained citizenship, reported: 'I feel more comfortable now. If anything happen, I won't go nowhere. I'm Aussie... I have that confidence'.

In other cases, participants struggled to articulate both their location in Australia and what might prompt its unsettling, hinting at the deep-seated but abstract nature of such fears. While Mariam is in no hurry to take up Australian citizenship, she can envisage a future where her

current PHV status might not be 'acceptable'. Asked whether she feels gaining citizenship would make a difference to her, she responded haltingly:

Maybe – it doesn't really, it won't really make a difference... It won't make it – but maybe in the future. Like thinking, hey, if we're not Australian, even if you go – you have that permanent visa. That's not – it might not be acceptable.

While, under current laws, there are few circumstances under which a PHV may be revoked, these young people understand, through their own and their families' experiences of displacement, that nations and their laws are not inviolable; that they can be subject to profound and rapid change. Moreover, such concerns are unlikely to be ameliorated by the increasing dynamism and conservatism of migration and citizenship regimes worldwide. For these participants, citizenship provides insurance against unspecified but imaginable future happenings. The elevated sense of security that citizenship confers was captured by Nyandeng, a young Sudanese-background woman:

...we feel like now we like, we're Australian, you know? We don't feel like – before, we don't have citizen, we're like oh, any time, maybe, if anything happened, we're not part of Australia, you know, maybe they just-. But now we're citizen, we feel good, you know?

For young people from refugee backgrounds, citizenship can be a source of comfort and confidence, fostering a sense of security that transcends physical safety (Stewart and Mulvey 2014). It functions both practically and symbolically to facilitate safe travel abroad and safe return to Australia, supporting the maintenance of transnational relationships and identities. For some, it also constitutes a secure basis for national identification and belonging in the country of settlement. Most significantly for young people who have lived insecure lives, the acquisition of formal state citizenship marks the end of forced migrancy and provides a bulwark against future displacement – and against the anxiety its possibility evokes.

Discussion and Conclusion

For many refugee-background young people in this study, the mobility and security conferred by formal state citizenship can be understood to foster a sense of ontological security. Australian citizenship supports the 'continuity of their self identity' and 'constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action' (Giddens 1990, 92) in a range of ways that include facilitating maintenance of attachments to multiple homes and communities

and reunion with family members, and providing security against future displacement. Reflecting the ‘emotional, rather than cognitive’ nature of ontological security (Giddens 1990, 92), the mobility and security provided by formal state citizenship transcends the practical and tangible to address deeper and less defined concerns about freedom and safety. It is not only the act of travelling that matters, but also its possibility; not only the formal protection that citizenship grants but the insurance it provides against an uncertain future. Thus, while participants’ accounts of the importance of formal state citizenship generally pertain to activities and events outside of the everyday, the role these play in fostering ontological security suggest that, at least for some, formal state citizenship underpins daily life.

While citizenship (in its broad sense) is identified by Strang and Ager (2010) as foundational for refugee integration (see also Stewart and Mulvey 2014; Bloch 2000), the nature of the relationship between formal state citizenship and integration remains unclear (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2010). Formal citizenship can coincide with day-to-day exclusion from power and resources among marginalised refugee-background populations (Barnes 2001), and processes of integration can occur long after formal state citizenship has been accorded to former refugees (Koska 2015). Moreover, their interrelation is complicated by the fact that states are increasingly demanding, through mechanisms such as citizenship tests, demonstrations of integration prior to awarding citizenship (Ersanilli and Koopmans 2010). While this study does not establish a direct link between citizenship and integration in a site of settlement, it does suggest that formal state citizenship can support integration among people with refugee backgrounds by contributing to a sense of ontological security. This trust in ‘the reliability of persons and things’ (Giddens 1990, 92) – both within and beyond the nation state – reduces anxiety and contributes to the confidence and comfort necessary to participate in the national community.

Participants’ perspectives on Australian citizenship may not reflect the relationship between citizen and nation state as envisaged by the Australian – and other – governments, but this does not render the relationship unimportant. For these young people, citizenship does not always entail a patriotic relation to Australia, nor the assumption of Australian-ness as an important element of identity and belonging. It supports participants’ status as ‘multi-layered citizens’ by providing safe modes of mobility and a secure base from which to participate – physically and virtually – in multiple political and social communities. Yet as Levitt and Glick Schiller have noted (2004, 1003), ‘the incorporation of individuals into nation-states

and the maintenance of transnational connections are not contradictory social processes'. The participants in this study are actively engaged in both of these processes, and draw on both for their ontological security.

Moreover, transnationalism, rather than diminishing the value of formal state citizenship, increases its importance. As Castles notes (2005, 691), 'The worst thing to be in a world of nation-states is a "non-citizen"'. Formal state citizenship (re)incorporates resettled refugees into global political structures, providing access to national and transnational rights and opportunities. Privileged citizenships such as Australia's grant the mobility and security to foster transnational lives through the maintenance of multiple identities and attachments and access to opportunities that transcend national borders. That young people with refugee backgrounds are granted the same global possibilities as their non-refugee-background peers highlights another potential intersection between citizenship and integration.

The role of citizenship in providing ontological security has significant implications for refugees and other migrants who lack a reliable pathway to citizenship in settlement countries. The absence of a more general sense of security among such groups due to their insecure legal status, and the potential ramifications of this for integration, have been noted by Stewart and Mulvey (2014) and Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001). In the context of perceived social, cultural, economic, and physical threats to nation states in a mobile and globalised world, formal state citizenship provides some protection against the dynamic, and at times extreme, measures taken by governments under the auspice of self-protection.

Recent changes to policy and practice affecting refugee-background non-citizens in Canada – where there has been a significant increase in the issuing of 'cessation applications' to revoke the protection of refugee-background permanent residents who visit the country from which they were displaced (Keung 2015) – and in the United Kingdom – where refugees' protection status is reviewed after five years, and thus rendered temporary (Stewart and Mulvey 2014) – illustrate the insecurity of forced migrant non-citizens.

Yet the security provided by citizenship is also increasingly under threat. In the short time since the interviews discussed here were conducted many settlement countries have proposed or implemented legislative changes giving governments new powers to revoke or curtail citizenship privileges. Such measures are in response to concerns about the involvement of citizens in terrorism-related activities, and the threat this may pose at home and abroad. The United Kingdom has passed legislation that enables naturalised citizens suspected of terrorism to have their citizenship revoked, even in cases where this risks rendering the

person stateless (Bennhold 2014), while Canada has been revoking the passports of suspected terrorists (Bell 2014). In Australia, a bill introduced into parliament in June 2015 proposes changes to the Citizenship Act that include cancellation of the Australian citizenship of dual nationals who participate in or support terrorism (Parliament of Australia 2015). The possibility of revoking the citizenship of those who, while not dual citizens, have access to another citizenship, and of suspending some citizenship privileges of sole nationals has also been raised (DIBP 2015a). In concert with other constraints on transnational engagement imposed in the name of fighting terrorism, such as limited legal avenues for sending remittances to countries including Somalia (Longbottom 2014), such measures are likely to disproportionately affect people from refugee backgrounds, who may originate from areas where terrorism is now prevalent, and who may come under suspicion for maintaining associations with people and organisations in their homeland. Moreover, beyond these specific threats to mobility and security, the introduction of such measures removes the guarantee citizenship provides of the end of forced migrancy, presenting a new threat to the ontological security of people from refugee backgrounds.

While the significance of formal state citizenship has been somewhat obscured in recent decades by a focus on other forms of sub-, supra- and transnational citizenship, the perspectives of young people from refugee backgrounds presented here highlight its persistent value and pose a challenge to those who suggest its diminishing relevance. Given the insecurity and forced movement that characterise refugee experiences, and the extremely low rate of formal refugee resettlement worldwide, mobility and security are important and highly valued aspects of formal state citizenship. For people from refugee backgrounds, formal state citizenship signifies the end of forced migration and can foster a much-needed sense of ontological security. In doing so, it provides a reliable and sustained foundation for national and transnational futures.

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