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Migrant youth 'between mobilities': Sessility as a working concept

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Abstract

Conventionally, young people today are seen to be benefited by opportunities for mobility and disadvantaged by staying in place. We seek to advance critiques of this binarism by exploring the mobility and attachment aspirations and experiences of the 1.5 generation: those who migrate as children accompanying their parents. Building on calls to better understand the complexity of both mobility and staying in place for migrant youth, we analyse the experience and aspirations of a young Italian woman of Indian background who finds herself 'between mobilities', navigating her life amidst her parents' migration and settlement plans and her own aspirations for both mobility and emplaced belonging. We introduce the concept of 'sessility', taken from plant biology, to explore how forms of mobility and agency can be enacted in place, depending on the extent to which the environment supports capacities and aspirations.

KEYWORDS
1.5 generation, belonging, home, immobility, migration, young migrants

1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper contributes to the growing literature on young people, transnational mobility and opportunities for enhanced life chances by building on critiques of the problematic of youth mobility/immobility. Conventionally, young people today are seen to be benefited by mobility and disadvantaged by staying in place. This is especially the case for 'middling' youth, for whom education and employment opportunities are increasingly delivered through global engagement, but also for less-advantaged youth, such as those on South–North trajectories, for whom being on the

move is increasingly a requirement for livelihood and improved life chances (Robertson et al., 2017). We contribute to problematizations of this binarism and add nuance to conceptualizations of simplistically classified typologies of mobile/immobile youth and their agency by exploring the experiences of young people who have been in conditions of mobility enacted by their parents via migration, and yet may have their own mobility aspirations curtailed by economic, social and psychological circumstances.

These young people are often not accounted for in the youth mobilities scholarship, which typically investigates young people who choose to move, temporarily and instrumentally, from one place (home) to another (elsewhere) for work, study, self-development or other such motivations. Mobilities scholarship tends to separate out this cohort from others, such as migrant youth, and seldom explores questions of national identity and belonging, which are taken to be more relevant to migration or transnationalism than mobility paradigms. On the other side, even though they are not perceived as 'mobile' youth, such young people do not fit the criteria for 'immobile' either. Migrant youth who find themselves 'stuck in place' in spite of mobility experiences and aspirations tend to confound the conventional representations of those at the bottom of the 'mobility hierarchy' (Bauman, 1998, p. 88). Bauman describes these people as living in 'the world of the "locally tied"', being 'barred from moving and thus bound to bear passively whatever change may be visited on the locality they are tied to'. This is often taken to be an intergenerational condition affecting autochthonous populations. The kinds of immobile–mobile migrant youth we are concerned with here have not remained in place, but rather have been successful participants in their parents' migration aspirations, have often moved extensively and embarked on integration into new places, forged cosmopolitan and flexible identities, and have ongoing mobility aspirations of their own. At the same time, their own opportunities to cash out this migration effort and to continue the beneficial mobile trajectory is hampered and constrained by socioeconomic, political and existential realities, leaving them in a liminal space and having to rethink their imagined adulthoods, plans and aspirations.

Overlooked by the mobilities scholarship, such young people have been more commonly researched through somewhat fixed typologies of migration research, such as second generation or 1.5 generation, and through the analytical lens of integration and identity. We suggest it is now valuable to open up the youth mobilities framework to account for young people who do not neatly fit a conventional migration settlement story or migrant-generations paradigm, and whose challenges and opportunities in a mobile world include but extend beyond cultural identity resolution and assimilation into the host society. As Colombo and Rebughini (2012, p. 1) suggest, the life pathways of the children of immigrants in what is now a mobile, globalized world are fundamentally rooted in new ambivalences and cannot be sufficiently analysed through old frameworks of integration (see also Harris, 2017). Specifically, we would argue that in times of complex mobility, economic crises, and changing imperatives, conditions and conceptualizations of youth belonging, aspiration and generationally distinctive life-courses and opportunities, these older analytical models of migration settlement no longer adequately account for the lived experience of im/mobility of these youth. While there has been some attention to the transnational and translocal practices and identities of migrant youth that goes beyond settlement paradigms, these tend to be framed by a 'home/host' or 'here/there' problematic that does not capture the multiplicity, multi-directionality, ambivalences or staggered/interrupted (Robertson et al., 2017 character of migrant young people's mobility experiences and aspirations. As Reynolds and Zontini (2015, p. 6) indicate, it is now timely to more closely consider 'the complex and multiple mobilities characterizing contemporary migrant youths'.

Further, we suggest that to better understand the complexity of the experiences of this considerable number of young people today, who find themselves 'between mobilities', the youth mobilities scholarship would benefit from attention to the concept of 'sessility'. This is a metaphor we introduce to consider how such young people might express agency and engage to some extent in the advantages of global flows and movements even when mobility plans and opportunities are disrupted or rerouted, and when, for positive and negative reasons, they stay in place. We build on work such as that of Cook and Cuervo (2020), Cuervo and Wyn (2012), Finn (2017), Harris and Prout-Quicke (2019), and others, who consider what it means for young people to choose to remain in place. We concur with Somaiah et al. (2020, pp. 238–239) that in spite of this critical scholarship, there remains a prevailing tendency in much literature on migration and youth to locate agency in leaving, and like these scholars, we seek to instead 'turn the spotlight on how young women exercise agency in their aspirational life choices "to stay"'.

2 | BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The current generation of youth are expected and encouraged to include mobility into their life trajectories (Cairns, 2014; Farrugia, 2016; Robertson et al., 2017; Wyn, 2015), becoming the new institutional and cultural mantra; a one-size-fits-all solution for the benefit of individuals as well as for national and global economies and communities. As Cuzzocrea and Mandich (2016, p. 554) outline, 'Within this wide perspective, a willingness to be mobile is portrayed as the dominant characteristic of a cosmopolitan, postmodern and entrepreneurial (young) agent, who is opposed to that which is locally embedded (or immobile)'. Late modernity has brought broader socio-economic shifts that no longer support fixed life patterns. More random and complex routes towards adulthood or settlement seem the rule. Mobility is proposed as a solution to juggle unequal access to resources and opportunities with creating opportunities for making one's own pathway in life in a globalized world (Brooks & Waters, 2010; Harris et al., 2020; King & Williams, 2018; Robertson et al., 2017, 2018). Zelinsky (1971, p. 222) classically defined mobility as 'a widening range of options for locating and patterning one's life'. The increased mobility of people across states creates what Tarrow (2005, p. 25) has further delineated as a 'transnational opportunity space…a dense, triangular structure of relations among states, non-state actors, and international institutions, and the opportunities this produces for actors to engage…at different levels of this system'. Navigating through these spaces enables new forms of agency and opportunities.

However, the opportunities afforded by transnational spaces are closely intertwined with exclusions and restrictions that emerge through both the existing global economic stratification and the diverging legal frameworks and regulations in different nation-states (Raffaetà et al., 2017). A series of reasons, therefore, might render mobility a less favourable option or even damaging for some. Young people's capacities for mobility are differentiated along lines of class, ethnicity, sexuality, race, gender and migration status (Jeffrey & Mcdowell, 2004). Mobility, indeed, is not for all. Moreover, the current emphasis on youth mobility neglects or bypasses other aspects of mobility's implications, such as feelings of belonging and participation in social, familial and civic life (Robertson et al., 2017; Woodman & Wyn, 2015), instead mainly focusing on mobility's effect on education and employment prospects.

Against this backdrop – and through the story of Leela, a young Italian woman of Indian origins living in a city we have pseudonymized as Rivo, Italy – we explore how the complexity of mobility imperatives and opportunities may be negotiated by some specifically of the 1.5 generation who find themselves uniquely between mobilities. We then propose and argue for an enhanced perspective on youth mobilities drawing on Leela's case as one that captures the complexity of multiple attachments, aspirations, and related constraints. Being 'between mobilities' is different to the one-dimensional understanding of im/mobility as either being mobile or being stuck, and thus our approach builds on the work of others who also contest this binarism. In further advancing a non-dichotomous perspective to think about im/mobility for young people of migrant background, we conceptualize the potential of staying in place through the metaphor of 'sessility', a concept taken from plant biology meaning to be grounded, attached to something. Sessile organisms do not or only partly move, but they can still perform many activities by productively interacting with their environment. We find the concept of sessility a unique tool because in addition to helping us to think through the tensions between mobility and immobility and between agency versus passivity, it also emphasizes how much human agency emerges from a relational process with an environment made of both humans and more-than-humans.

In the analysed case of Leela, we show how the overlapping and intersecting conditions of poor economic resources, absence of citizenship, and migrant and gender status ultimately work against this grounded agency; she cannot achieve the potential of sessility because her environment is not enabling. This paper shows the need to take into account a more nuanced understanding of mobility, one that disrupts the binary of mobility-agency/sedentarity-passivity and builds on extant scholarship that interrogates this distinction. This contribution to our conceptual redefinitions, we hope, can inspire new ways to consider, promote and enable forms of agency for the 1.5 generation of youth who may 'stay put' in a mobile and ever-connected world.

3 | METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

This paper draws from the Italian component of Anita Harris's project on young people and social inclusion in multi-cultural cities, an international study of young people's intercultural relations and civic participation in eight culturally diverse cities with large migrant populations. The Italian site was Rivo, a city in central Italy, where fieldwork was undertaken over a period of 6 months in 2010 and 10 months in 2013–2014, including extensive participant observation and a total of 35 interviews with participants in schools, youth associations, institutional bodies and, in particular, young people. Most of the youth participants were first, second or 1.5 generation migrants, with the majority from an Asian background. Leela was introduced to us by someone working in the department for cultural activities of the province of Rivo, because she engaged in some events promoting interculturality. Leela was happy to share her story and she told us that our encounters allowed her to reflect on her situation. We met Leela two times, conducting 90 minute in-depth interviews in Italian. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, translated into English, coded in NVIVO, and analysed thematically, with analytic categories emerging to inform the development of further coding and conceptual connections. While Leela's individual story is the focus of our empirical analysis, it is illustrative of many of those who participated in the research. Commonly, these young people had grown up in Rivo as a result of their parents' economic migration but had also moved frequently both within Italy and to and from their parents' homeland. As young people marked as visibly 'different', they faced the challenges of integration and belonging in a place where national identity is coded racially, and all had to navigate the complex system for acquiring Italian citizenship, even if born in Italy. We decided to explore Leela's story in depth because the vivacity of her narration allows our main argument to emerge in all its dimensions.

Rivo has a significant population of immigrants, most of whom have arrived since the mid-1990s, sparking in the local population some defensive attitudes against 'foreigners'. At the time of our research, the largest percentage of the resident immigrant population was Chinese (7.9% of the total number of inhabitants), with another 9.4% of the city's population comprising other groups of immigrants, including those from eastern Europe (Albania and Romania, in particular) and north and west Africa (particularly Nigeria and Morocco). Migrants from India constituted only 0.1% of the population at the time of research (references available on request).

At the national level, foreigners (as defined in terms of citizenship status) constitute 8.3% of the total Italian population (Garha & Paparusso, 2018), and Indian immigrants are a sizeable component of this foreign cohort. Italy has the highest number of Indian immigrants in continental Europe, with mass immigration commencing in the 1990s and growing rapidly since, with recent figures putting the Indian community at 2.9% of the total foreign population in Italy (Garha & Paparusso, 2018). Researchers describe a situation of 'fragmented integration' for the Indian immigrant community, such that economic engagement can be achieved but social, cultural and political inclusion is thwarted by discrimination, segregation and slow and complex citizenship regulations (Garha & Paparusso, 2018). Many have noted the nature and extent of racism, racialization, exclusion, prejudice and discrimination experienced by Indian immigrants in Italy in both everyday and formal domains (see Bonfanti, 2017). It is against this national and local backdrop that we explore Leela's experiences.

3.1 | I wanna be a pilot!

Leela was born to a Hindu family in 1987 in a small town in Punjab, in north-west India. Soon after her birth, her father, a surveyor who had travelled extensively abroad for work, migrated once again to find a job and sustain the family. When she was around 8 years old and her father was living in Italy, near Rome, having changed careers and opened a restaurant, Leela's mother decided that it was time for the family to reunite. The experience of flying to Italy had a profound impact on Leela: 'The first time I took an airplane to go to Italy I looked out the window and said: "I want to understand how this thing is flying". In that moment I took the decision. I was eight or nine. In that moment I decided that I wanted to become a pilot!' 'I wanna be a pilot!' affirmed Leela, looking at me (Roberta) with sparkling eyes.

This was a dream that was to be left sadly unfulfilled. Initially, Leela convinced her parents to pay for the first of five years at a specialized aeronautical studies school, which was the only option for non-citizens. She assured them she would find a solution to continue without their financial support after the first year. She described it as 'posh, a private school…all rich people, sons of industrialists, entrepreneurs, and me: poor, on a scholarship, female [one of only two females in the school], a foreigner and better than them [laughs]!' She worked assiduously to achieve high marks and at the end of the first year met with the school principal to explain her financial situation and her aspiration to become a pilot, telling him 'this is what I want to do with my life'. She reported that he was very impressed and subsequently offered her a scholarship: an extremely rare occurrence. She obtained her diploma with full marks, and all that remained to qualify as a pilot was to complete flying practice hours, which could not be funded by the school. She did about 50 hours, but had to stop because of the cost. Even one hour of flying (around 250 Euros) was too expensive for her parents.

She then planned to enrol in a military academy where flying hours were included, but that was not possible because she still did not have Italian citizenship at the time: 'even though I grew up here I do not have the same rights as Italians, it takes many years to get it [citizenship]'. The current Italian citizenship law (dating from 1992) significantly favours access to citizenship through descent (*ius sanguinis*) and marriage (*ius conubii*), rendering membership to the 'family of Italian citizens' extremely difficult for people who are in Italy for reasons not linked to family ties (*ius soli* or *ius domicilii*) (Zincone, 2006). Such applicants must prove 10 years of uninterrupted residence (absences over six months not permitted), stable income, and regular tax payments. Citizenship in Italy is conceptualized as a privilege or concession, not a right. Applications often take at least two years and commonly up to four years to be processed and can be denied with no explanation. As soon as she was 18, Leela applied for citizenship, a process she had to undertake together with her parents. Enrolment in the military academy was possible up until the age of 22 but she received Italian citizenship too late: just a few months after her 22nd birthday. To add insult to injury, her parents received citizenship a year earlier than Leela, despite the fact that they all applied at the same time. In anger, she explained that if she had received citizenship at the same time as her parents she could have enrolled in the military academy. She sadly concluded 'So, I had to give up the dream, at least for now, unless I win the lottery!'

3.2 | The unfulfilled promises of mobility

At the time of the interview, four years had passed since her last flight. Forced to put aside her dream, which practically and symbolically encapsulates mobility, power and freedom, she had no clear ideas about her future. She was still affectively attached to her hope of being a pilot, but at the same time, she acknowledged that from a rational perspective, the dream was probably gone forever: 'at 24/25 you are willing to start a career, not at 35.' She started doing casual translation work while also studying economics at university.

Before receiving citizenship, Leela could not even go abroad to look for work but when we met she enjoyed the idea that 'now I can go wherever, this is not a problem anymore'. Still, she drew a distinction between the possibility of moving and its practical feasibility: The reality is that you need to have the means to go abroad. If I were to go, I would start from scratch. It's not like abroad they have a position ready for me and they just give me work. You can be a genius but if your brilliance or talent are not recognized they are worthless'.

Leela probably developed this pessimistic view by taking her parents' biographies as a model. As Somaiah et al. (2020, p. 240) argue, 'it is important to understand how young people tally the costs and benefits of parental migration and become relationally positioned discerning subjects'. Leela's mother had had a good job as an art teacher in India. She remembered her mother saying that by contrast, in Italy: 'Here I am nobody. My degrees are not valid, my Bachelor is not valid. What am I doing here?!' Her father had a higher degree as a surveyor in India but could not find a job there. He moved to Dubai on a short-term contract, went back to India but, not finding work, left again and 'virtually travelled right around the world but didn't find an opportunity to work and live abroad, so he returned to India. Then he left again, he opened a restaurant and he ended up in Italy. It was a mess.' Leela reflected on the fact that the

family's economic situation was the cause of her father's mobility and the family uprooting. And even then, her father's extensive mobility did not help: 'stuck' in Italy, her father complained, 'I do not love this place because it did not give me anything'. Leela felt her father's despair once she joined him, from the moment she arrived at the airport:

> When I landed, I was excited at the idea of finally knowing my father. I did not even remember his face! … But when we arrived, I realized that he had no car, we had heavy bags and we did not know how we were going to get home. We had to take a bus, then a train then another bus; it was unreal. … 'How is this possible?' I was asking myself. My father worked hard all those years and he does not even have a car?! … I was very aggravated by that situation. *Mi sono rizzati i capelli veramente.* … He worked like crazy, he stayed away from us for ten years to end up having nothing?

Leela's disappointment points to the unfulfilled promises of mobility. Through her parents' frustrating and frustrated pathways, Leela had a disillusionment toward physical mobility as synonymous for social mobility. In a fast-changing and moving world, she thinks that 'luck' – the opportunity and capacity to intersect with fortunate situations – has replaced a more rigid path through the life course and toward economic fulfilment. Those lucky situations have to be sought on the go, as Leela states: 'equilibrium is enabled by continuous adaptation: if you move (you move, create an activity, look for better employment) something propitious will arrive.' But, as Orlandi (2018) shows in her ethnography with young Italian women, the concept of impersonal 'luck' that they employ to explain opportunities in a precarious world obscures the long chain of obligations, social relationships, forms of capital, and socio-economic privileges that ground one's successful realization of aspirations. Even in a world where opportunity is presented as emerging out of mobile initiatives, power geometries still shape lives more than mobility itself.

Further, here we see how the children of migrants are uniquely positioned both passively and agentically at the intersections of their parent's hopes for mobility's promises and their own modified aspirations. As Findlay et al. (2015, p. 391) have argued, migration studies has become increasingly attuned to the relationality of mobilities across time and space, meaning that migration can no longer be analysed 'as an "event" at one point in time affecting a single decision maker'. Mobility links lives intergenerationally and across time and space (see Harris et al., 2020). As Suarez has suggested (quoted in Feixa & Lopez, 2015, p. 254) children of migrants, and especially the 1.5 generation, are obliged to make their futures out of circumstances they do not choose and are thus 'pioneers of a vital project launched by their parents… Children are symbolically placed in a social position, violently thrust into a future in the country of destination'. In this respect, she argues, they are the by-products of history rather than agents in their own right. On the other hand, and as Leela grapples with these issues, the parents' actions provide opportunities for mobility that enable some generationally unique forms of agency and self-management of life plans. As we have written elsewhere (Raffaetà et al., 2016, p. 434), such children of immigrants are

> part of an imagined community of global youth, whose attributes include very mutable conceptions of identity and belonging, who are expected to demonstrate capacity to manage different aspirations and social contexts (and not just those of home and host), and to move with ease among these, both socially and geographically. Further, the demand of late modernity that each individual becomes responsible for their own path in life is brought home to young people of immigrant background in special ways. Such young people must keep their ties and options open, see the possibilities in multiple belongings and the strategic use of cultural identity and resist being pinned down.

Indeed, Leela was aware of the expectations and opportunities that her circumstances produced in relation to the mobility of aspirations. In this respect, she embodied the character of what Colombo and Rebughini (2012) describe as the 'generational avant-garde' or active minorities of children of immigrants who can well manage a range of cultural codes and identifications, can capitalize on their education, have cosmopolitan skills and a propensity for late modern self-making. As they argue (2012, p. 123), what is most salient for these young people is not a fixed

sense of cultural identity but the cultivation of flexibility, adaptability and transferable skills. Leela recognized that by being based in Europe, speaking Italian, English and several Indian languages, her profile would be attractive everywhere: 'with markets opening toward India and China I could easily find a lot of work abroad'. However, in spite of these excellent prospects, she had decided to remain in Rivo. How can we make sense of her decision to reject mobility?

3.3 | Feeling at home – citizenship and belonging

Leela's decision to not move abroad was not simply motivated by work prospects and her current economic situation, nor a perverse refusal to capitalize on the opportunities her parents' mobility had enabled for her. Mainly, her decision to stay in Rivo despite poor local work opportunities was motivated by an existential rather than economic driver: her need to find a sense of firm ground on which to stand. According to conventional mobility discourses, her situation might be considered as a 'refusal to move [that] can mean failure to self-realize' (Cairns, 2014, p. 7). However, a closer investigation of her circumstances sheds light on the relational and belonging dimensions inherent in mobility processes and choices (Harris et al., forthcoming). As Harris et al. (forthcoming) note, drawing on the point made by Finn (2017, p. 752), it is vital to address 'the need for embeddedness, connectivity and routines of place' that shapes young people's approaches to mobility beyond instrumental decision-making represented by the simplistically rendered dilemma of 'should I stay or should I go?'

Up until the age of 8, Leela had lived a 'quite enjoyable' life in a village in India, thinking 'that was the world.' In 1995, Leela's mother decided to take her to Italy to join her father, but it was difficult for her to adapt to a jobless life there and around 2 years later she returned to India with Leela. However, she realized that the family could not stay separated and after a year they moved back to Italy, this time to stay permanently. This continuous back and forth was experienced as traumatic by Leela:

> It was a new adventure for me but, in the end, something didn't line up: I was here [Rivo] but I didn't feel like myself… I felt a discomfort I never felt before, something I couldn't grasp, something I couldn't understand, make sense of or manage because – even if I had done well enough to have learnt the language, even if I had done well enough to have learnt many things, like different ways of living – that year wasn't enough for me to adapt and I always felt a bit out of place. Then, when I went back to India I felt like I was being carted to another new place yet again, where I would lose track of myself.

This account brings to mind de Martino's (2005 [1961]) concept of 'crisis of presence', which he developed to describe a condition, often affecting 'subaltern' people[1], that undermines the foundation of their world and, consequently, of their identity. The feeling of being uprooted, the sense of being out of place is what often accompanies migratory experiences. Most of all, what transformed Leela's 'new adventure' into a 'tragedy' was the feeling of not being accepted and being constructed as 'different' by the majority of her schoolmates.

In light of this, Leela strongly felt the impact of having finally received Italian citizenship – a formal legal mark of her being part of a community. At the time of the interview, she had received Italian citizenship a few months prior, and she expressed the need to finally embrace the rights attached to it:

> It's absurd that I have to go abroad from Italy, now that I am Italian, to enjoy my rights as such. It's a joke… It's absurd that, after having done all that to achieve citizenship and having felt so miserable until I got it, now I decide to not enjoy my rights. I cannot take advantage of my rights? It would be absurd.

One of the rights granted by Italian citizenship is to freely move across European countries, but Leela expressed a greater need to enjoy the citizenship rights she could now exercise within Italy rather than travel abroad. Lack of

citizenship had caused her considerable hardship and grief in her daily domestic life, not only in thwarting her career ambitions but in myriad other ways. Although travelling abroad was one of the most useful rights she could now take up, instead she sought to embrace her capacity to fully enact citizenship at home.

Leela's experience points both to the importance of the formal property of citizenship – which grants her some rights – but also to its affective and substantive dimensions. For many youth migrants in Italy, both the formal and the substantive aspects of integration are essential to their identity construction and the meanings they attach to citizenship (Baldassar & Raffaetà, 2018). Leela had long felt Italian and had suffered a lot until the time when her feeling matched her legal status. Still, legal citizenship alone is not enough to erase discrimination. To confirm that, Leela's narrative is not free from ambiguity either: while she enjoys the idea of finally being Italian both substantively and formally, this citizenship carries the mark of having come too late to make her dream come true. Moreover, she bitterly observed that 'people in the street still look at me strangely, therefore it [citizenship] is worthless, it is like I did not obtain it'.

Despite these ambivalences and the tortuous process through which Leela came to feel Italian, at the time of the interview she enjoyed feeling Italian:

> Many years ago I didn't think I was. Later, in my way of behaving, of talking, also the way I react to many situations, I feel Italian, not 'Italianized' as many think, but genuinely Italian: I perceive as an Italian thinks, because if you don't react as an Italian, you are not Italian. Now, instead, I react as if I was Italian.

At the conclusion of our meeting, however, she told me that my questions about belonging made her realize something:

> After ten years since I left my world, I think I have recreated it again, somehow, and I have achieved the feeling that I wanted to feel in my everyday reality: feeling my true self, living how I like. So, having found my shelter, again after so many years, makes me feel at home, I don't care if it's India or Italy. At the end of the day I care about being at home, whatever it's called. Where I feel good, I feel at home.

Through our dialogue, Leela became aware of the fact that what she was really attached to was not a specific national identity but the feeling of being at home, to have a ground or – as Leela said – to be part of and to participate in a world. Home, indeed, might not be a specific location but it is the result of a 'making' (Massey, 1992), the output of situations and actions that project one's feelings of belonging onto places (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Raffaetà, 2015; Raffaetà & Duff, 2013). And this is particularly true for migrants whose biographies include mobility (Ahmed et al., 2003; Al-Alì & Koser, 2002; Rapport & Dawson, 1998). At the same time, the concept of 'home' is a metaphor for safety and belonging (Douglas, 1991; Jacobson, 2009).

Leela's feelings of displacement are indeed articulated through the prism of the history of her difficult experiences with 'making home', a process both subjectively meaningful (Easthope, 2004) and politically relevant (Duyvendak, 2011). When she and her mother first arrived in Italy, they joined her father who was living in a house in a city near Rome. Leela recalled: 'That was not a nice house. We were used to living in a house which was spacious, airy, full of windows. That place, instead, was not a pleasant situation. Because we were not used to living in such a small space.' The oppressive features of the new home echoed her diminished capacity of being and expressing herself in the new context.

After a while, the family had to move cities because her father lost his job due to health problems. He found a new job in Rivo, where they shared a house with an Indian workmate. Again, through the description of the house, Leela expressed her feelings of despair and disorientation:

> We were not happy there because we were used to being independent, by ourselves … [T]here was one open plan room, and a bathroom in a closet. When we arrived, we realized that all our things did not fit

there. Chaos. Indeed I kept asking: 'which is our room?' [Also] I did not like [the housemate]… He was our nationality but he was not a good person. He drank a lot, getting drunk. He was only interested in the money we paid for the rent of the room… I was asking 'how is it possible that we have to stay in such a place?' … I found myself in the midst of another change, again. An absurd and disheartening one…a closet. I was terrified… Time amplifies every time I remember that period. I am terrified thinking of those moments, again compelled to stay in a place that [trails off].… We spent a year and half in this terrible situation.

Those experiences profoundly marked Leela, making the search for stability one of her priorities. When we met she was living in a home she liked and, again, her description of 'home' mirrored wider feelings of belonging:

I like the place where I am living now. Maybe it is not the most wonderful place in the world but I like it. Partly because I grew up there and partly because after so many years… In Rivo it is not that easy to know your neighbours well, you need years. I have started to become friends with my neighbour. Now I feel good from the point of view of – now I have an identity, now I have a passport, there are many positive things which make me feel good about living there.

Leela described her home as the haven from which she could strive to re-create her world and her identity, a firm ground on which to stand. Leela's story exemplifies the sort of constraints that might make mobility an unappealing option. Indeed, it was not just the physical movement between places that came to be problematic, but the tough process of 'making home' along with economic difficulties and social and legal discrimination. Hage (2005, p. 470) traces a stark distinction between 'existential mobility', which is that often experienced by low-social-class migrants, entailing feelings of uprootedness and of being out-of-place, and the 'physical mobility' of cosmopolitan elites who move but, in a way, still remain in reassuring and hegemonic socio-cultural global flows. Neoliberal regimes of inequalities, added to migratory experiences, made Leela incongruent with stereotypical ideas of youth as frictionless 'mobile' people. Leela also inverts conventional linear transition models (Leccardi & Ruspini, 2006), showing that amidst extended and increased mobility, youth might not represent the state of transition par excellence. Having experienced intense mobility in her childhood, and associated trauma, she prepared her transition to adulthood by 'staying put' in Rivo.

As Wyn (2015) has noted, one of the most significant issues for youth transitions research is young people's relationships to people and place as a core aspect of managing increasingly fluid, unstable and mobile lives. As youth studies scholars in particular have observed, the increasing attention to mobilities of people has often been at the expense of those that have remained in place (see Cook & Cuervo, 2020). Place, space and localities have always been regarded as integral to youth identities (Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Farrugia, 2016; Hall et al., 2009; Nayak, 2003; Thomson & Taylor, 2005), and although successful transition is often associated with 'moving on', there is increasing attention to place-attachment, at times in the context of thwarted aspirations and rural/urban/neighbourhood/township belongings and identifications (Risør & Pérez, 2018; Swartz et al., 2012) or to trouble dichotomous ideas of belonging and mobility (Fallov et al.,2013). Sometimes this work has taken the perspective of local attachment as a way for 'emplaced' young people to defend themselves against the pressures and imperatives of globalization and the false promise of mobility to those who are stuck at the bottom of its hierarchy, whilst other research has focused on nuancing views of 'staying put', noting that global flows continue to influence young lives regardless of physical mobility (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008), and that mobility/immobility is not a simple binary and nor should agency be only associated with leaving (Cook & Cuervo, 2020; Cuzzocrea & Mandich, 2016; Harris & Prout Quicke, 2019; Somaiah et al., 2020). What we further show here is that certain experiences of migration and mobility can also engender strong (and perhaps apparently counter-productive) place attachment amongst young people who are transnationally experienced, active and inclined, cosmopolitan in disposition and who can theoretically capitalize on some of the opportunities that mobility brings – and yet are obliged to cash these out in extremely difficult personal and socio-political conditions of instability, precarity and unmooring. It is in this context that we can understand why and how Leela comes to choose to stay put, at least for the moment.

3.4 | The potential of being sessile

Living in Rivo was not Leela's ideal choice but the final output of multiple contingencies. Despite her decision to not move from Rivo, the city provoked in her a lot of suffering. When asked about her feelings when thinking about Rivo, she replied:

> What comes to my mind? Anguish, mainly; I do not see ways out when thinking about Rivo. At the same time I think that I grew up here, therefore I also see almost an historical, affective bond with the city. I cannot be happy about Rivo … I see it as a prison which keeps me there, tied to it without giving me opportunities. As if I would like to escape its grip but at the same time it is convenient to me to live here because I spent my life here. But it is boring. It does not spark things, it does not stimulate people so that they would want to stay here.

Anguish and affection, unhappiness and bond, boredom and roots. A mixture of contrasting feelings co-exists in how Leela experienced Rivo. She felt attached to the city but, at the same time, this tie felt like a 'prison', as a 'grip', because Rivo was at the same time constraining her capacity – and will – to hope: 'In this moment, it's a city that makes me suffer a lot. […] the employment situation, in general, it doesn't give you hope in something.' According to Hage (2003), neoliberal states show deep inequalities in the distribution of hope among its citizens. Hope is a privilege for a transnational upper-class, which does not need the nation, but simply a formal apparatus for economic exchanges. Under neoliberalism little effort is put into building conditions for hope for those who stay in place, even though as Hage argues, creating a collective and forward-looking affect of hope should be one important commitment of a state.

In Italy, the economic crisis has made life even harder for young people and young women in particular (see Bertolini, 2012; Verashchagina & Capparucci, 2014). Unemployment for Italians aged 15–24 years increased from 20.4% in 2007 to 37.8 in 2016 (27.9% in 2010, the year of the first interview)[2]. In 2016, 44.3% of young women were not working or were looking for work compared with 25.1% of young men (Istat, 2018). This situation is only worsening as a result of COVID-19. Leela is young, female and of migrant background, conditions that do not help in a city like Rivo:

> Since I arrived, this city hasn't done much for young people. It's a very traditional city with its pretty insular scene and is almost ignorant. It was a city of industrialists with work and all, but anyway it's very enclosed. Now it's facing the problem of opening up to the young people, as well as the immigrants and other people.

Leela claimed 'the opportunity to grow up as a right. I mean: it is absurd that a young person needs to leave a place just because s/he doesn't have the possibility to live in the place.' Against rhetoric and promises of mobility, Leela's story shows that mobility might be not for all. Some people, and people experiencing intense and extensive migration in particular, might feel the need to find a firm foundation on which to ground themselves and flourish. This does not necessarily refer to a fixed territory (Malkki, 1992), but to a process of 'making home' and an identity. However, being a process and, for some people, one that is slow and fraught with difficulties, a certain degree of physical sedentarism is required.

But is it possible to stay put in the 21st century, an era in which everything moves at high speed? The extraordinary circumstances wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic have made a necessity of staying in place, while also exposing the stratifications along which this is experienced. The technology-driven world of late modernity, along with increased mobility, has already for some time permitted a number of people to physically stay 'at home' but to move virtually and be global in their reach, thanks to the internet. Similarly, some have argued that mobility and place-attachment

or belonging are not mutually exclusive (Andreotti, Le Galès, & Moreno Fuentes, 2013; Chan, 2017; Conlon, 2011; Gustafson, 2009). As Fallov et al. (2013, p. 484) argue,

> different forms of mobile belonging indicate that it is impossible to ascertain a view of mobility as an antithesis of local belonging. Instead, we need to discuss how different rhythms of mobility, variations in mobility resources and conditions of mobility result in different scales of belonging and different modes of 'centering' between the reciprocal movements of reaching out and home making.

Building on this work that problematizes such binarisms, we introduce a metaphor, taken from biology, to elaborate on these more nuanced ideas of how we might make sense of (im)mobility. This is the concept of 'sessility', which means to be grounded, attached to something. Plants are sessile: they are not free to move but they can perform many activities, even while being immobile. This can be achieved by interacting with their environment, made of other plants, animals, atmospheric conditions, humans and so on. Some animals are sessile too: corals, for example, can move through outside sources (such as water currents) but are usually permanently attached to a substratum from which they grow. Other organisms grow from a solid substance, such as a rock, a dead tree trunk, or an object, such as a buoy or ship's hull.

In using a concept taken from biology we wish to mitigate the anthropocentric understandings of agency as human capacity to act, pointing to the fact that such capacity emerges as a result of one's social coordination with an environment which is made of both human and non-human aspects (Raffaetà, 2015). We further propose that sessility is a concept that can build on work that aims to capture the complexity of mobility and immobility beyond simplistic associations of mobility or stasis with fixed and separate phases of youth and adulthood. For example, sessile animals might include a mobility phase in their life and it might be at different stages. Young sponges are mobile, becoming sessile at maturity. Other animals, by contrast, as with many jellyfish, are born as sessile polyps and become mobile with adulthood.

Sessility also points to the difference between mobility and motility, further complicating ideas of agency versus passivity. *Motility*[3] is described in biology as a movement that needs the organism's energy to be accomplished. Motility is an active process but it might also not be volitional nor conscious, simply genetically determined. Descriptive accounts of motility can be found as early as the seventeenth century in van Leeuwenhoek's letters to the Royal Society. Researchers indeed have been fascinated with movement as a fundamental attribute and primordial manifestation of life (Allen, 1981). But it has been found that sessile organisms can move even if not actively (that is, with no energy expenditure). This movement is called *mobility*, which is not an intrinsic property of the individual but can be acquired by connecting and taking advantage of the environment's elements and devices. And again, the same organism can be motile in a certain phase of its development and become mobile afterward (or vice versa). Young cochineals, for example, can move to another cactus if the cactus on which they are born is overcrowded. In their infancy, in fact, they have legs (cochineal nymphs are known as 'crawlers'). Once they have moved to the edge of the cactus pad, they wait for the wind to catch the stiff bristles that cover their body and act as a parachute. Cochineals aggregate to the highest point of the cactus, from where they are blown off, sometimes for several metres, by the wind.

For all these reasons, we find the metaphor of sessility particularly suited to thinking about the potentialities in the situation of many people living in the globalized, fast-moving world of late modernity who – despite increased mobility – can, need or wish 'to stay put'. But what about those people – like Leela – who wish/need to be grounded somewhere but have no or poor means to act and express their agency in the place they are living, and thus cannot achieve sessility? The social discrimination experienced by Leela transforms 'home' simultaneously into a prison: not an environment of opportunities but of constraints. The concept of sessility, therefore, prompts us to re-frame sociopolitical core issues and to imagine new practices of social coordination: even in a global and fast-paced world, people's life success depends less (and only partly) on how much they move from one place to the other in search of better opportunities and more on how well they can coordinate with their own environment, which is made of human and non-human affordances (Raffaetà & Duff, 2013) like other people, institutions, technology, policy, laws and so on. The

global condition has increased – rather than diminished – the need to have equal access to resources and opportunities in the place where one lives, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown. Mobile and complex biographical paths, afforded by globalization and increased mobility and connectivity, also create the need to perform globality even while staying put. The sessile condition aspires to an optimal coordination between local resources and entities: if resources are not enough, unequally distributed or defective, sessility becomes a death sentence. In the case of cochineals, only a few of them can position themselves well in order to catch the wind successfully and land safely on another cactus. Unsuccessful cochineals climb upwards again and try to catch the wind over and over until, after a few days, they die of starvation.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have analysed the story of Leela, an Italian girl of Indian origins who wanted to become an airplane pilot: a vocational aspiration that expresses mobility desires par excellence. Despite her efforts to make her dreams reality, in the end she could not make this happen because of a combination of citizenship constraints and Italy's economic situation in times of crisis, especially affecting migrants. At the same time, she could not and did not want to move to another country where her opportunities may have been greater and may have enabled her to realize some aspects of her ambitions. Leela's need for grounding appears in stark contrast with the current emphasis on the benefits of mobility, especially for youth. Her story shows that for people who, for various reasons, cannot or do not want to move from where they are, mobility is simply motility, a physical movement not supported by other elements in the person's environment. Therefore, it can be a disorientating experience that fragments people's identity and certainties. Leela's story is a classic and devastating mixture of ethnic, class and gender factors that continue to stratify life courses in a mobile, globalized world, and that deeply affect her life chances, despite her extraordinary efforts to create future opportunities.

We have explored Leela's story to contribute to nuancing the debate about youth im/mobilities, indicating that when we reflect on the mobility imperatives and opportunities for young people today, more consideration is still required of the spaces in between. We have shown that it is critical to investigate not only how young people's opportunities and aspirations for mobility, conventionally conceived, might be enabled or thwarted (such as a dream to become a pilot), but also their ability to 'catch the wind' even while remaining in place (that is, to be afforded sessility), depending on how their environment supports their capacities and hopes. This may be also critical in building a national identity that, as emphasized by Hage (2003) is linked to both place and time, especially to future time in the case of migrants. We have argued that the opportunity to remain in place, and still hope, is particularly relevant for young people such as 1.5 generation migrants, who do not fit the classic conditions of the mobile or the immobile, but have a history and potentiality of movement and migration that engenders ambivalences and complexities in relation to their circumstances, experiences, capacities and dispositions regarding mobility and emplacement. We have introduced the concept of sessility as a way to build on thinking about the potential for mobility and agency in place for young people in these conditions. It helps us to look in depth but also beyond traditional structural conditions analysis: discrimination affects people not only despite but because of increased opportunities to move and be connected.

Notes

[1] de Martino developed this concept by studying peasants of southern Italy in the post-war years. They were described as 'subaltern' to the north of Italy, which quickly moved toward industrialization. The so-called 'Southern Question' existed since Italy's reunification in 1871 and provoked mass migration of subalterns from south to north Italy. Therefore, even if international migration arrived in Italy quite late compared to other European countries (Baldassar & Raffaetà, 2018) key issues related to the recognition of cultural difference has characterized the Italian debate for more than a century.

[2] Istat (National Institute of Statistics) Unemployment rate according to age: http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode = DCCV_TAXDISOCCU1#

[3] Our use of the term 'motility' is more linked to debates within biology to complicate the dichotomy between active/passive that pervades the concepts of 'movement' (Allen, 1981), than the use made by Kaufmann et al. (2004) to refer to a general capacity to move independently from its effective realization.

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