

**Care-related journeys over the life-course:  
Thinking mobility biographies with gender, care and the  
household**

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# **Care-related journeys over the life-course: Thinking mobility biographies with gender, care and the household**

## **Abstract**

As they go about everyday life, members of households negotiate complex arrangements around mobility and immobility, which continue to change over time. Mobility biographies research has made an important contribution to our understanding of these dynamics. At the same time, mobility biographies often rely on limited definitions of the household and change over the life-course, reflecting an empirical focus on cohabiting nuclear families in North-West Europe. In this paper, we approach everyday im/mobilities as based in the changing relations of care which shape the everyday life of households. We demonstrate how the care relations which underlie everyday im/mobilities are gendered and intergenerational, exceeding distinctions between productive and reproductive activities, or living together and apart. The transformations which everyday im/mobilities undergo over the life-course are not limited to pre-defined milestones, but unfold through a range of abrupt, subtle and multi-directional processes. Drawing on data from Manila and London, we examine these dynamics with particular reference to childcare and ageing, in order to make visible the complex ways in which households negotiate and re-negotiate everyday im/mobilities.

## **1. Introduction**

The everyday mobilities of households involve complex negotiations around multiple individual and shared concerns. As household members navigate everyday life, the arrangements which enable and constrain daily mobilities continuously undergo both subtle and sudden transformations. To grasp these transformations over the long-term, a

life-course approach has been adopted first in feminist geographic scholarship, and increasingly in mobility biographies research (Pratt and Hanson, 1991; Rosenbloom 1993; Lanzendorf 2003; Axhausen 2008; Greene and Rau 2018; Scheiner 2018). Mobility biographies research in particular has shed light on the interconnectedness of individual journeys for education, work, care and leisure over the life-course, identifying key milestones which trigger change in the organisation of everyday mobilities.

Despite these valuable contributions, mobility biographies research remains limited in its theoretical reach (Müggenburg, Busch-Geertsema, and Lanzendorf 2015). This partly reflects the focus of mobility biography studies on North-Western Europe and the resulting global North bias of its conceptual vocabulary. For example, key events such as moving house or entering the labour market are assumed to be shared by most households, and households themselves are implicitly defined as nuclear families occupying own dwellings (Rau and Manton 2016; Rau and Sattlegger 2018). The present paper seeks to expand the theoretical and empirical scope of mobility biographies research by rethinking its definition of the household and its conceptualisations of changes over the life-course.

The study takes inspiration from recent advances in comparative urban studies to move towards mobility biographies from and for more diverse urban locales (Robinson 2006; Robinson 2016). We draw on data from a qualitative study in two low-income urban areas in Manila, the Philippines, and London, the UK, to rethink a) households as sites of gendered and intergenerational negotiations around care and mobility, and b) the complex interplay of change and stability in everyday mobilities and immobilities over the life-course.

While the importance of gender has been highlighted in more recent mobility biographies research, its application has been limited to the observable differences in travel behaviour between men and women (Scheiner and Holz-Rau 2012; Scheiner and Holz-Rau 2013; Scheiner 2014). We place gendered relations rather than gender differences at the centre of our discussion in order to shift the focus away from

individual travel behaviour and towards household negotiations of daily im/mobilities. At the same time, taking care relations as a starting point challenges the view that households and their im/mobilities are demarcated by co-residence and parent-children relations.

Thus, a focus on the on-going renegotiations of care can open up mobility biographies to different temporalities of change and the intersections of intergenerational relations with the idea of the life-course. At present, mobility biographies interpret stability and change predominantly in terms of habit and choice (residential choice, travel mode choice, etcetera) (Scheiner, 2018). This approach offers limited insights into everyday im/mobilities which change or persist in light of scarce incomes, inaccessible transport options and/or precarious living conditions. In this paper, we approach stability and change not as neatly separated categories, but as entangled and relationally constituted. The shape of change in im/mobilities can thus be multidirectional, partial or minute, reflecting the ways in which households can face significant and continuously shifting constraints. By interviewing older women, we trace these dynamics over at least three generations, problematising the nuclear family as the assumed domain of mobility biographies. Rather than framing the life-course as periods of relative stability punctuated by turning points, we explore care-related im/mobilities as an entanglement of constancy and transformation which is both everyday and long-term, and intergenerational as well as individual.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Understanding care**

Care involves physical and emotional labour on behalf of others (Conradson 2003). It has multiple dimensions, including caring about and noting the need for care, taking care of and assuming responsibility, performing competent physical work, and being cared for (Tronto, 1993; Schwanen, 2007; Raghuram 2016). As an entanglement and a

site of negotiations, affects, and changing roles, caring is more than transactional: it exceeds the idea of care as something that is given and received (McEwan and Goodman 2010; Hanrahan 2015b). At the same time, as demonstrated by Hanrahan (2015a), care can be reciprocated or expected to be reciprocated, sometimes over relatively long timescales, for instance in the way children may eventually care for elderly parents. Care is produced in the relations between individuals and in their diverse practices and is thus inherently bound up with notions of place, mobility and immobility (Raghuram, Madge and Noxolo 2009; Raghuram 2016).

To draw on the notion of relations of care as the basis of mobility biographies is to critically think through the household as a unit of analysis. Feminist geographers and other social scientists have long critiqued the notion of the household as a bounded social and spatial unit, defined by familial links, co-residence and a shared outward orientation (Pratt and Hanson, 1991; Peterson, 1993; Hanrahan, 2018). Critical geographies and social-economic studies of the household have revealed it to be a site of complex cooperation, contestation, tensions and compromises, where negotiations of daily life arrangements are both gendered and continuously shifting (Katz and Monk, 1993; England, 1996; Jarvis, 1999; Gil Solá, 2016). In this sense, the household can be thought of more usefully as an entanglement of relations of care (Milligan and Wiles, 2010). Thus, in her study of three communities in the Philippines, Peterson (1993) builds on the concept of generalised exchange (Lévi-Strauss 1969) to demonstrate that ties in extended families are realised through organic solidarity: that is to say, caring for others is not necessarily immediately reciprocated between individuals, but circulates among wider networks of kin depending on need and capacity to care. As a result, this type of solidarity plays an important role in offering some stability for (extended) families with low incomes, especially in geographical contexts where state provision of care is limited, has shrunk as part of neoliberal policies, or is beyond the reach of particular social groups.

## **2.2. Gendered household relations**

Our approach to im/mobilities over the life-course is rooted in critical studies of gendered household relations (Pratt and Hanson, 1993; Wheelock and Oughton, 1996; Bowlby, 2012). This approach implies moving beyond observable gender differences in trip-making to examine underlying gendered negotiations. As noted by Scheiner and Holz-Rau (2012), this task has scarcely been addressed by mobility biographies research to date. This omission can perpetuate an individualistic logic especially prevalent in transport research, in which the journeys a person makes are taken to reflect their personal choices and preferences. By contrast, we follow in a feminist geographical tradition which aims to make visible the underlying household negotiations which shape mobility and immobility, and which are always profoundly gendered (Mandel, 2004; Schwanen, 2007; Uteng and Cresswell, 2008; Gil Solá, 2016).

To reflect this focus, we use the term im/mobilities, a notion which attends to journeys undertaken, as well as to the act of staying in place. Theorising household im/mobilities in terms of gendered relations, rather than gender differences, draws on a long-standing feminist critique of the distinction between the productive and reproductive spheres (Pratt and Hanson, 1993; Dyck, 1996; Jarvis, 1999). Applying this critique to care-related im/mobilities, we argue that they are not limited to domesticity or reproductive work. While the performance of care within households is deeply gendered, we define care relations as traversing the productive/reproductive distinction. As previous studies have shown, commuting, shopping trips, staying at home and walking to school are all part of a field of interrelated im/mobilities which shape, and are shaped by, gendered household relations (McDowell et al., 2005; Schwanen, Kwan, and Ren, 2014). However, the majority of studies which trace the gendered mobilities of work and care have concerned themselves with the particular life ‘stage’ of childbirth and rearing young children (cf. Katz and Monk, 1993; Hapke and Ayyankaril, 2004). For instance, while the importance of grandmothers as informal childcare providers has been documented (see, for example, Wheelock, Oughton, and Baines, 2003; Goh, 2009; Feng et al., 2015), the resulting im/mobilities have not been studied in detail; they are often simply acknowledged as an enabler of mothers’ capacity to travel to paid work (Feng et al., 2015), or as an influence on the mobilities of grandchildren (Rau and Sattlegger, 2018).

To sum up, we have defined the household in terms of dynamic and intergenerational care relations and porous boundaries, and im/mobilities as the gendered ways in which these relations are negotiated in space and time. We next turn to the biographical dimension of mobility biographies research, discussing possible avenues for conceptualising the changes to intergenerational im/mobility arrangements which households experience over the life-course.

### **2.3. Life events and beyond**

The conceptual roots of mobility biographies research can be traced to time geography (Hagerstrand, 1973), as they illuminate the way the journeys of individuals are woven together and are both enabled and constrained by the mobilities of significant others. Mobility biographies have since made important contributions to our understanding of everyday mobility, as they attend to the routine nature of travel, while at the same time recognising that mobilities are not stable arrangements, but subject to fairly frequent reorganising (Lanzendorf, 2003). These reorganisations are conceptualised by mobility biography researchers as ‘key events’ – those milestones in the life-course of household members which are significant from a transport and mobilities perspective, i.e. are likely to result in a change in the mode, duration, frequency and destination of trips made (Lanzendorf, 2010). Key events can include starting education, marriage, changing jobs or residential location, childbirth and retirement, among others (Scheiner and Holz-Rau, 2013; Scheiner, 2014). By conceptualising the household as an entanglement of care relations, we seek to address two limitations of the current approach to mobility biographies.

First, the existing focus on key events implies that over the life-course, change in everyday mobilities manifests itself through a series of milestones which interrupt periods of (relative) constancy, and which is made visible in changes to household members’ journeys (Müggenburg, Busch-Geertsema, and Lanzendorf, 2015). This view of change equals the trope of the punctuated equilibrium and risks omitting a host of dynamics through which im/mobilities become different. Alternatively, mobility

biographies can be conceptualised in terms of the diverse temporalities of change manifested in the social and spatial settings of households, continuously folded and refolded into the similarly diverse temporal trajectories of the life-course (Schwanen, Hardill, and Lucas, 2012, drawing on Deleuze, 1993). Mobility biographies are thus made up of the continuous folding together of the long-term and the short-term, the internal and the external, the past and the future. This understanding of change over the life-course needs to be complemented with the idea that identical repetition is more of an abstraction in thought than something commonly encountered in the real world (Deleuze, 1994). As every enactment of a particular trip such as the home-to-work commute is slightly different from previous occasions, minute variations may over time – and often in non-linear ways – accumulate into more substantive changes.

Beyond milestones, then, mobility biographies entail minute but significant reconfigurations of activities, schedules and routes; changes in im/mobilities which do not coincide with pre-defined life events; changing and then returning to previous arrangements; and adaptations which are too gradual and too multidirectional to be easily associated with specific turning points. Thus, drawing on relations of care highlights dynamics which are not necessarily sequences of stabilities and turning points but can also encompass continuous change and absence of stability. At the same time, a focus on relations of care draws attention to the profoundly relational settings in which seemingly individual journeys come into being. To provide an in-depth view of im/mobilities as relational, and their adaptations as entanglements of multiple temporalities, the discussion below gives a necessarily partial take on im/mobilities over the life-course. Rather than aiming to produce exhaustive biographical accounts, we have sought to trace the connections which link im/mobilities associated with a particular period of the life-course, to spaces, individuals and periods which may exceed it.

Second, mobility biographies research can benefit from engaging with mobility experiences beyond those which are (assumed to be) shared by well-off, White and middle-class households in European cities (Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). Recent contributions have brought social practice theory in conversation with mobility



biographies research in an effort to highlight the role of the socio-material context in which households operate (Greene and Rau, 2016; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). However, reflecting a concern with the sustainability impacts of consumption practices in the global North, this body of work emphasises mobility practices such as daily private car trips or international family holidays. While such activities are deeply problematic from an environmental perspective, they are not available to large numbers of poorer households, especially but not exclusively in the global South. There exists a need for understandings of im/mobilities over the life-course that apply to a broader range of households and do not presuppose access to carbon-intensive modes of transport (see also Hapke and Ayyankaril, 2004; Esson et al., 2016). We address this tension in two ways (over and above drawing on research from both the global South and the global North): first, by prioritising relations between individuals over the transport modes used by individuals; and second, by exploring the intergenerational nature of these relations, discussing stability and change in im/mobility biographies across multiple generations. A focus on intergenerational relations does not reject the possibility that nuclear families with young children remain the most meaningful unit of analysis for mobility biographies in some cases; however, it recognises that for many households, life-course changes are folded into the relations of more than two generations.

#### **2.4. A comparative approach**

In developing a more inclusive vocabulary for conceptualising the household, and change, mobility biographies research can benefit from engaging with post-colonial approaches to comparative urbanism, over and beyond turning towards feminist geographies of work, care and mobility. This strand of post-colonial thinking highlights the need to move beyond theorising the urban solely on the basis of Western exemplars (Roy, 2009; Parnell and Robinson, 2012), urging geographers to ‘provincialise’ the Western city and displace it from its status as the supposedly universalist standard for cities worldwide (Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti, 2013). These arguments have more recently been extended to geographical studies of mobilities and transport (Porter, 2011; Lin and Yeoh, 2016; Esson et al., 2016; Schwanen, 2018a, 2018b).

One way to achieve this is to adopt a comparative approach in which the aim is not to test a Western theoretical framework in a different empirical setting but to open up that framework to thought and revision, problematising aspects that may otherwise be taken for granted (McFarlane, 2010; Ward, 2010; Robinson, 2016). One way in which we have pursued this is through reversing the direction in which theories usually travel, by generating concepts through interview data gathered in Manila (e.g. intergenerational im/mobilities stemming from care relations; work-related im/mobilities across the ‘milestone’ of retirement), before taking them to a London neighbourhood.

We recognise that comparing is a power-laden and performative practice that risks essentialising cultural difference, erasing geographical particularity and imposing a standard of equivalence that weakens one term in the comparison whilst ensuring the position of the other (Stengers, 2011). Yet, if done carefully, comparison can generate new ways of being for, and understanding of, each term. In this spirit, we bring into conversation accounts from Manila and London about the nature of domestic life, everyday im/mobilities, and the locales in which they take place. The result, we believe, is an opening up of what are ‘givens’ in mobility biography studies – a household; a key life event; a change in mobility arrangements – and a contribution towards a more nuanced and malleable conceptual vocabulary.

The next section outlines the research design which framed our study of everyday im/mobilities in Malate, an area in Manila, the Philippines, and Newham, in East London, the UK. We then present our findings, organised around the broad themes of the presence of young children in the household, and the role of ageing in im/mobility transformations. The final section offers a discussion of the findings and their implications for mobility biographies research.

### **3. Research design**

#### **3.1. Research locations**

[MAPS HERE]

The discussion below focuses on two low-to-middle income urban neighbourhoods, one of which is located in Malate, a district of the City of Manila, in the Philippines, and the other in Newham, a borough<sup>1</sup> of London, in the United Kingdom.

The National Capital Region of the Philippines, also known as Metro Manila, has a population of 12 million according to government statistics. It is made up of 16 cities, one of which is the City of Manila. The City of Manila in turn consists of 16 districts, including the district of Malate. The population of Malate has increased through natural population growth and internal migration from the provinces to the capital, reaching 77,513 in 2010 – about 5% of the total population of the City of Manila (National Statistics Office of the Philippines, 2010). The London borough of Newham is the fourth largest of Greater London's 33 administrative subdivisions which officially had a combined population of 8.2 million in 2011. Newham had a population of 337,000 in 2015, amounting to 4% of the total population of the metropolitan area (Greater London Authority, 2016). Like Malate, the borough has experienced population growth in the last two decades.

The Malate neighbourhoods where the research took place are largely made up of homes constructed with own efforts on vacant land, starting from the 1970s. Many residents continue to experience insecurity in terms of tenure, erratic or absent utility services, and through growing densification, a decline in access to public space. Local people point to high unemployment and residential overcrowding as two of the main social issues in the area, and many worry about the growing prevalence of drug use and drug-related violence. At the same time, the area has experienced increasing consolidation of housing from temporary to semi-permanent and permanent materials, and there is growing diversity in terms of the socio-economic status of local residents.

With 6.2%, Newham had the third-highest unemployment rate in inner London in 2017, as the borough has struggled to sustain over the long term the boost to local

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<sup>1</sup> Greater London is composed of 33 local administrative areas – the 32 London Boroughs and the City of London.

employment generated by the 2012 Olympics (Office for National Statistics, 2018). Over the last decade, local services across education, health, social care and housing have declined in line with government spending cuts (Moller 2017). Residential overcrowding defines the experience of many in Newham, too: a quarter of all Newham households were classed as overcrowded in 2014, the highest proportion among all boroughs in London (New Policy Institute, 2016). The borough of Newham has the highest rate of inward international migration of all London boroughs (Greater London Authority, 2016). Its population is diverse in terms of ethnicities and cultures, but social exclusion in its different guises is prevalent, and often acute, across most groups in the local area.

Malate is relatively well-connected to the rest of Manila as some of the key road arteries, as well as a light-rail line, can be found nearby. However, the major roads act as barriers for pedestrian trips within the local area. They also suffer from severe traffic congestion, which results in very long trips to employment opportunities elsewhere in Manila. Among our participants, the most commonly used modes of transport were walking, pedicabs,<sup>2</sup> tricycles,<sup>3</sup> and jeepneys.<sup>4</sup> Jeepneys and buses offer a 20% discount to those over 60, which is verified by showing a Senior Citizens ID card (Republic of the Philippines, n.d.). Although Newham is served fairly well by public transport, employment opportunities within London are often a long commute away, the cost of which is prohibitive to many local residents. However, once they reach the official state pension age (63 years for women and 65 for men since 2016), all permanent residents of London can benefit from the 'Freedom Pass' (London Councils, 2016). The Freedom Pass gives holders free access to all public transport services within the metropolitan area. In the Philippines life expectancy at birth was 65 years for men, and 72 years for women in 2015, while in the UK, it was 79 and 83 years, respectively (World Health Organization, 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> Cycle rickshaws, referred to as 'pedicabs' in Manila, are commonly used for short-distance journeys within Malate, while being an important source of male employment in the local area.

<sup>3</sup> In Manila, tricycle – or trike – typically refers to a pedicab propelled by a motorbike.

<sup>4</sup> Jeepneys (also jeeps) are minibuses with fixed routes serving the public. Jeepneys can be repurposed military trucks, or custom-made locally using second-hand diesel engines. They are often decorated with distinctive designs.

### **3.2. Study participants**

The data presented in this paper originates in a larger research project which studied the impact of flood risk on the everyday mobility of older women living in cities. The focus was on older women in order to explore the interplay between gender and age in shaping experiences of disrupted im/mobilities. More specifically, the study sought to extend the very small body of work on the experience of im/mobilities among older women and particularly older women who are not drivers (Rosenbloom, 1993; Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist, 2005). While findings pertaining directly to flooding are reported elsewhere, the present paper addresses questions around household relations and the life-course which emerged in the course of the research.

As part of this study, 32 women residing in Malate, and 10 women living in Newham, were interviewed between September and December 2016. All had lived in their local area for at least 20 years, but for most that period was considerably longer. By focusing on long-term residents, we aimed to examine changes over the life-course and within the household, rather than those resulting from residential relocations. While we only interviewed older women in order to ensure that the collected data represented their perspectives on im/mobility arrangements, participants were also asked about other household members' im/mobilities during the interview. Research participants were between 55 and 78 years of age.

In Malate, participants were recruited through the community outreach office of De La Salle University, whose main campus is adjacent to the research area. In Newham, participants were recruited through a local church and two community centres.

### **3.3. Methods and analysis**

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, with the same interview guide used in both research locations. Interviews in Malate were conducted in Tagalog and English, with field assistants from De La Salle University interpreting, and on occasions subtly directing our interactions with participants, in an effort to improve

our sensitivity to local cultural specificities. Interviews in Newham were conducted in English. All interviews were conducted by ourselves – a female and a male researcher, both based in higher education institutions in the global North, neither of an age similar to that of the research participants, and both White, unlike the majority of participants in either Malate or Newham. Furthermore, we were first-time visitors to the research locations. The fleeting nature of our visits meant that, while participants were generous with their time and answers to our questions, we did not expect and did not ask them to ‘open up’ on topics which could be considered too sensitive, personal or upsetting (we return to this point in the conclusion). Given the research themes pursued in this work, we could not but prioritise empathy and care in our interviews, over the need to ‘collect’ as much ‘data’ as possible (McDowell, 1997). All interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed with the help of qualitative data analysis software.

In the discussion that follows, we use both direct interview quotes, and vignettes which draw on interview quotes to provide concise narratives about change over the long term. The vignettes remain entirely based on participants’ own accounts as presented in the interviews, and rely on interviewees’ own words as much as possible. Although they are a compromise on the verbatim quote, they reflect the unfolding of long-term processes covered over the course of each interview that a series of short excerpts cannot convey. The discussion is organised by theme rather than geography, in order to challenge distinctions between aspects of everyday im/mobilities *of* a place, and those which speak back from a research location to the concepts used in mobility biographies. All names used are pseudonyms.

## **4. Caring im/mobilities across generations**

### **4.1. Children**

#### *4.1.1. Negotiating childcare in everyday im/mobility*

*Caren moved to Newham 37 years ago from a Caribbean state, together with her husband. “When I was growing up, there were extended family relatives, grandparents, older auntie – there was no worry [about childcare] in my parents’ life at all. When we moved here, we were both working, and I had a tough time with my children when they were young, not having relatives here.” Caren was working as a nurse during the period when her two daughters were born. “With my first, she had a childminder, and then got a day nursery place. I was preparing for the final [nursing] exam. I nearly went crazy. For my second daughter, we got a private nursery place until she got to school age, and then I worked part-time until they were old enough to get themselves home from school.”*

*After Caren had retired and her husband had passed away, their older daughter moved to North West London, and started her own family. “I [didn’t have help with childcare], but I did it for her. I would travel daily for a year, and return to my home. It was two hours each way. But that was my condition – I didn’t want to be under their shoes, because she has a husband to think about, the child. Let them get on with their life. I will come as early as you wish. I didn’t mind, because I was living alone. My husband had died, and I had no-one to rush back to prepare for.” A couple of years later, Caren’s daughter’s family moved out of London, and now lived closer to the paternal grandparents. “They were more than glad to take over.”*

*Since she stopped looking after her grandchild, Caren has helped several neighbours with childcare. “I was collecting a little boy locally and the parents would come to my house and pick him up. Since then, I’ve been collecting these two little ones from their music school on Saturdays. I’d said that when I retire, that’s what I would do, help a young mother, because it can drive you crazy, the stress and worry about your children.” Caren receives no pay for this work, but hopes that “one day, when I’m old and helpless, somebody will help me.”*

In many locations worldwide, women remain responsible for the bulk of domestic and care work, even if their overall participation in the labour force is on the increase (Chant

and McIlwaine 1995; Schwanen, Kwan, and Ren 2014). Like Caren, many participants in the two research locations had moved to their current neighbourhood upon getting married and had no extended family to help with caring for children. As a result, many of them were involved in complex on-going negotiations of childcare provision. Sixteen participants in Malate and six in Newham described at least one period in which they stayed at home full-time, looking after their children and performing housework. Six women in Malate never returned to paid work, on the insistence of their male partners:

*Lisa is 55 years old. She has four children. Before her marriage, she had worked as a clerk in a recruitment agency. She used to take a jeepney to work: “With the traffic, it took about an hour. The traffic was really bad ... Once I got married, my husband told me to stop working, so that I could take care of the children.” Once her children had reached school age, her main daily journey was to accompany them to school – an hour-long roundtrip, twice a day, but this time on foot.*

However, stopping work to take care of children was not always an option due to economic pressures: over half of respondents in both Newham and Malate described their everyday life with small children in terms of a combination of giving childcare, securing childcare, and engaging in income-generating activities. The challenges involved in combining paid work and childcare are well-documented (Pratt and Hanson, 1993; England, 1996; Schwanen, 2007). Women not only put in long hours of care labour themselves, but tend to be responsible also for arranging any additional childcare (Pratt and Hanson, 1991). Arranging the “jigsaw of care” (Wheelock, Oughton, and Baines, 2003) is no straightforward matter, as it has to be adapted continuously to the evolving needs of children, and ever-changing domestic and external circumstances.

Negotiating im/mobilities was central to the childcare arrangements reported by all research participants. Both Lisa in Malate and Caren in Newham experienced periods when they spent over two hours per day travelling between locations. While for Lisa this was dedicated to travelling to work prior to having children, for Caren the long journeys began after she became a grandmother. Importantly from the perspective of rethinking presupposed kinds of everyday im/mobilities, the journey to work could also



be the work itself, as in the case of Christina who worked as a street vendor in Malate, walking along main streets with a push-cart selling jewellery (see also Hapke and Ayyanketil, 2004; Esson et al., 2016). Her account demonstrates how diverse work-related im/mobilities can be, challenging the idea that income generation involves either commuting to a workplace or working from home.

Participants in both research locations had limited financial resources, but the local circumstances in which they accomplished childcare-related im/mobilities were different. Malate participants relied mostly on themselves and informal care from within the extended family. Notably, they were more likely to have five or more children compared to their London counterparts who tended to have between one and three. On one hand, this meant staying at home with young children over an extended period of their lives. On the other hand, older children, especially girls, helped their mothers with the care for younger siblings, particularly when women were also engaging in income generation from the home, as doorstep food vendors or owners of sari-sari stores<sup>5</sup> (see Peterson, 1993, for a discussion on sibling relations in Philippine households). In Newham, most participants had some recourse to paid, or state-subsidised childcare, which facilitated being away from home for paid work.

#### *4.1.2. Caring for children over the life-course*

Participants' accounts pointed to childcare as an everyday activity extending beyond a specific life stage: in both research locations, women's childcare-related im/mobilities began with their role as sisters and cousins; shaped much of daily life in adulthood; and continued into older age. 17 of 32 participants in Malate and seven of 10 in Newham were grandmothers contributing care for their adult children's young children. Their mobility biographies thus entailed at least two periods during which childcare shaped everyday im/mobilities to a significant extent. For those women who had brought up many children of their own, this positioned childcare work as an inter-generational commitment, nearly uninterrupted over several decades:

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<sup>5</sup> A sari-sari store (from the Tagalog word for variety) is a small neighbourhood convenience store, frequently located within the ground floor of the owner's home.

*Having worked as a domestic worker and then food server, Malate resident Lidya quit her employment to become a mother. “I have five children. They have their own families as well. The eldest is 41 and the youngest is 36. I have over 20 grandchildren. The eldest is 24, the youngest is three.” Lidya’s youngest child was 12 when her first grandchild was born. She is now 59 and lives with her youngest daughter and her family. Lidya helps with childcare, works as a part-time street sweeper, and also sells fruit outside the house in the afternoons.*

The sites where grandmaternal care for young children took place depended on housing arrangements, which tended to vary in both Newham and Malate. Caren (Section 4.1.1.), who travelled across London daily to help with minding her baby granddaughter, represented an exception among the Newham participants. She was involved in an intricate daily routine of negotiating presences and absences: making herself available for care duties whenever needed, but never staying longer than necessary, ensuring the young family had time to themselves. While complex negotiations were also present for the other Newham grandmothers, in seven cases their children and grandchildren had settled within the local area. Yet, the Newham grandmothers all lived in dwellings that were physically separated from those of their children, which stood in marked contrast to their Malate counterparts.

In Malate, the absence of affordable housing and a different set of socio-cultural meanings and norms around extended families meant that adult children often remained in the parental home after having children of their own. The homes of 17 out of 32 research participants housed three or more generations. Thus, for most Malate-based grandmothers, looking after young grandchildren also involved immobilities: staying in the local area, and in their case, staying within the same house.

Due to the limited employment opportunities available locally in both Malate and Newham, many parents were absent for long hours each day, commuting to jobs far away and leaving grandparents providing long ‘shifts’ of childcare. The impact of these commutes was more acutely felt in Malate households. Manila’s notorious traffic congestion (Andong and Sajor, 2017) meant that even finding work a moderate distance

away led to parents spending hours commuting. Thus, for periods of paid employment outside the home – whether they be extended or intermittent – congestion shaped the mobilities of those commuting, but also circumscribed the immobilities of household members staying at home.

In addition to commuting, international travel and migration often shaped these intergenerational arrangements around care and income generation. Eight of the 32 Malate households had members who were parents and who worked overseas for long periods, while their young children were looked after in Malate by relatives (on childcare, gender and migration in the Philippines, see Asis, 2006; Margold, 1995; Parrenas, 2000). While the links between international migration and daily caring im/mobilities are not articulated in the current mobility biographies framework, they demonstrate the extent to which the long term and the everyday are woven together in complex and continuously shifting arrangements:

*When her children were little, Marina used to accompany them to school. Later on, they would walk with a group of local kids who all studied at Aurora Quezon Primary. Marina started a small business to complement the family income – she prepared food at home and sold it at a stall outside. She had plans to increase her earnings, however, as her children gradually became more independent. “When they grew up and went to high school, I went and worked in Hong Kong as a domestic helper, for 10 years.” As her daughters finished high school, first one, and then the other, joined her in Hong Kong, and Marina helped them find employment as domestic workers. The three of them kept each other company on their days off and sent money home to support the rest of the family. “After my daughter had been working in Hong Kong for about four years, she got married, and she asked me to go back to the Philippines to take care of her children.” Marina left her job and returned to Malate, where she now lived with three of her children, twelve grandchildren, and several great-grandchildren. “One of them is only three months old. His mother works in the night [in a call centre], because the company is based in America. I look after him. I am the one to take care of all the children and grandchildren.” Marina also cooks the meals for everyone in the household, during which time her other daughter and her daughter-in-law look after the*

*younger children. Marina is also responsible for the care of two teenage grandchildren, whose father works in Saudi Arabia and sends money home for school fees.*

The above account complicates the idea of everyday im/mobilities as spatially limited to a few familiar routes within a particular locale such as a city or a neighbourhood. It also demonstrates the diverse trajectories through which change in mobility biographies unfold. Relying on hierarchical distinctions between long- and short-distance travel, and long- and short-term mobility decisions (see Salomon and Ben-Akiva, 1983), offers limited theoretical scope for engaging with experiences such as those of Marina and four generations of her kin. For them, care relations define interconnections between the local and the international, the temporary and the long term, stability and transformation, which together make up everyday im/mobilities.

#### *4.1.3. More-than-transactional childcare im/mobilities*

When Caren travelled for two hours each way every day, and Marina gave up her job in Hong Kong, their im/mobilities reflected the care needs of grandchildren, as much as their continued maternal commitment to their grown-up children. These arrangements highlight the way caring is rarely transactional, as it brings together several generations in ways which both place demands on, and benefit, each one (Wheelock, Oughton, and Baines, 2003). This also has implications for conceptualising the interdependencies and on-going renegotiations of mobility biographies, often obscured when thinking of everyday journeys as individualised activities. Both Caren in Newham and Marina in Malate made possible their daughters' work-related mobilities (whether the daily commute to the office, or the extended employment in Hong Kong), by engaging in intricate daily im/mobilities of their own.

Nearly all grandmothers in the sample were, or had been, accompanying grandchildren on their journeys to school. Children starting school is recognised as a milestone in household mobility biographies (Scheiner 2014). However, school-related mobilities have been framed as belonging to a distinct life-course stage, reflecting this literature's focus on nuclear families. By contrast, intergenerational relations of care in the

extended family highlight that the journey to school can be a recurrent practice in mobility biographies, also negotiated as part changing im/mobilities in later life:

*Susana has lived in Malate all her life. She currently shares her house with her three children, their partners, and her two grandchildren. She has never been in paid employment. "I just stay in the house. In the past too, I was looking after the house. Before I used to take my children to school. Now I take my grandchildren. Because they might get into an accident crossing the street. Crossing the street on the way to school really is a problem. My grandchildren can be late [for school] because of waiting to cross the street."*

The dangers of crossing busy streets on foot were a key concern in both research locations, meaning most participants felt grandchildren needed escorting at least until they finished primary school (see also Porter et al. 2010). As the grandchildren of all interviewed grandmothers attended, or had attended, primary schools nearby, the trip was generally undertaken on foot. However, perceptions of this pedestrian journey differed. In Newham, walking with a caring adult such as a grandmother was considered sufficient to ensure children's safety. In Malate, several respondents felt that despite being adult pedestrians, crossing roads posed significant risks to them too, possibly as a result of being older women. Ideally, the journey to school would be accomplished by pedicab or tricycle. Since the associated cost was prohibitive for many, this was possible only some of the time, with accompanied pedestrian journeys considered the next-best strategy:

*"We go to school riding a pedicab or a tricycle. I then walk home. Because of the cost. It's 20 pesos for each journey. The cost is a big thing for me. In the afternoon, we just walk. But when it rains, we ride the [tricycle] going to school, and also going home."*  
(Lisa, 55 years old)

In Newham, parents taking children to school in the morning, and grandmothers collecting them in the afternoon, was reported by seven interviewees. Separate dwellings were the likely explanation for this: in Malate, multiple generations

inhabiting the same house made it more likely that grandmothers were on hand to take responsibility for both trips. With several grandchildren in the house, and local schools operating a morning and afternoon shift, the trips could amount to a significant time commitment for the grandmother:

*“I wake up at 4 o’clock. I pray. Then I cook. I prepare the food for my grandchildren. Then I wake them up. I prepare them and take them to school. Then I wash my clothes. At 10 am, I go to another grandchild, take her to school. Her school time is 11.45 to 5 o’clock.” (Lisa, 55 years old)*

Previous research has demonstrated the various meanings associated with grandmaternal help with childcare in a UK context (Wheelock and Jones 2002; Wheelock, Oughton, and Baines 2003). Grandmaternal care is not only an alternative to formal provision, which is often unaffordable for households with limited financial resources; it is also “the next best thing” to parental care in terms of affection, nurturing and reliability (Wheelock and Jones 2002). However, the women interviewed for this study in Malate and Newham did not only look after children in their roles as mothers and grandmothers. In more than half of the households, older women also provided childcare to more distant relatives, friends and neighbours (as in the case of Caren, who collected her neighbours’ children from school). Women’s im/mobilities thus reflected a wider web of relations of care. Unlike the intergenerational help provided by a grandmother or an older neighbour, the mutual help with childcare between two working mothers in Newham was directly reciprocal, ensuring both women fulfilled similar im/mobility arrangements over the same period:

*Emma is 68 years old and has lived in Newham ever since she got married in 1971. She has one son. “On the two days that I was at home, I used to pick up my husband’s nephew from school and bring him home for lunch. And the three days I was at work, my sister-in-law picked up my son and it sort of worked like that.”*

Whether a household’s relations of care are directly reciprocal or more complex depends on a range of factors, such as the geographical, economic and cultural settings

households inhabit. In addition, the web of care relations is not static, but continues to change over time. In the next section, we examine the ways in which participants in Malate and Newham negotiated their positions as household members who increasingly needed care too – and how this was reflected in the im/mobilities of the household.

## **4.2. Ageing**

### *4.2.1. More-than-transactional im/mobilities of elderly care*

As the grandmothers in our sample continued making and performing care arrangements, they were increasingly encountering the need for support with their own mobility, through health problems and declining bodily capacities due to advancing age (see also Hanrahan 2018). As a result, their transforming needs for care reconfigured also those of other household members, through gradual processes of change as well as sudden turning points.

In the context of the Philippines, Peterson (1993) demonstrates that the organisation of elderly care by low-income households follows strategies of generalised exchange rather than reciprocal or transactional arrangements. Drawing on the notion of organic solidarity, Peterson describes household strategies of collectively coping in the face of scarce resources, without quantifying ‘amounts’ of care individual members may give or receive as a result. Peterson’s approach provides a helpful conceptualisation of the multi-directional, diffuse and non-transactional care arrangements described by Malate respondents, but is also evocative of the experiences of many women in Newham. The im/mobilities of elderly care were the spatial expression of such arrangements, while also serving as the basis for creating and sustaining other everyday im/mobilities. For instance, living in close proximity – often under one roof – with one’s extended family enabled some older women to be accompanied on everyday journeys by household members, while on the other hand their relative immobility in the home allowed others to be away, as the older woman minded the children or the home-based business. Three of the Malate participants pointed out that while childcare was predominantly carried out by women, elderly care was often the responsibility of men. However, 13 of the

participants across the two research locations were widowed, and two had partners who were house-bound due to long-term illness. These gender differences in mortality and morbidity in both locations meant participants were often relying for mobility assistance on younger male members of the extended family:

*“I have a health condition, coughs, for about 2 years. I have regular check-ups at the health centre. I go by tricycle – my son-in-law is a tricycle driver, and he brings me.”*  
(Joy, 55 years old, Malate)

*“I get tired. When it’s really hot, I can find it difficult to go out. When I go out, if I want a pedicab, I ask my nephew to go and call one of those pedicabs that stop not far away, to come and pick me up. My nephew lives in the same house as me, so that’s not a problem.”* (Merily, 60 years old, Malate)

Many of the women living in Newham also described relying on support from their immediate and extended families for making trips outside the home. However, spontaneous arrangements such as those which Merily and her nephew accomplished through living under one roof were generally unavailable to them.

#### 4.2.2. Negotiating changing im/mobilities

In cases where family members were not available to assist a research participant in her daily journeys, she could draw on her own capacities for adapting im/mobility practices to the changes associated with ageing. For Caren, such adaptations reflected a progressively growing sense of vulnerability:

*Caren’s biggest health-related worry is her eyesight, which has deteriorated in recent years. She remains very active and involved in the local community but is wary of the way poor eyesight makes her vulnerable. “On the bus, I’m forever thinking – does anyone on this bus know that I can’t see very well? Who’s following me? I don’t accept invitations for late night activities. The latest I’d be out is nine in summertime, and dusk*



*in wintertime. For activities put on by my church, other members of the congregation live nearby, so I walk with them.”*

However, vulnerability was not always described in terms of gradual deterioration of health. For Emma, daily im/mobilities were circumscribed by vulnerability temporarily, as a result of being the victim of theft:

*“I got mugged and I wasn’t physically harmed but he took my bag and ran off and that was pretty horrible. I got my bag nicked in [local street]. I got right to the end of the road and I could hear somebody walking behind me. At first [it did affect me]. It don’t bother me now but it did for a while and every time I heard somebody walking behind me... (shakes head).” (Emma, 68 years old, Newham)*

These two accounts reflect the multiple temporalities through which im/mobilities change over the life-course. Caren’s deteriorating eyesight and growing sense of vulnerability did not come with a particular life event but were woven into a gradual reconfiguration of daily activities. The seasonal changes in daylight, and the timing of church activities exceed the notion of a linear decline in mobility. For Emma, the distressing episode of the theft represented a discrete turning point, but its impact on her sense of vulnerability softened over time. The next section further complicates the idea of older age as a distinct life stage of physical decline and reduced mobility, by focusing on the inter-linking of work and leisure im/mobilities in retirement.

#### *4.2.3. Complicating ‘trip purpose’: im/mobilities of leisure, work and older age*

Mobility biographies research has predominantly focused on mobilities around going to work and raising children, although retirement is generally recognised as a key life-course event (Chatterjee and Scheiner 2015). However, retirement is often not a clearly demarcated point in time – let alone a milestone – at which work-related trips are replaced by leisure trips. This was certainly the case for the participants in Malate (see below) but also extended to some of their Newham counterparts. For Sylvia, a

participant from Newham, for example, this transition was gradual, going from full-time to part-time paid work before retiring two years later.

Apart from the different trajectories of change in everyday im/mobilities which retirement can entail, these transitions also served to complicate strict typologies which categorise everyday trips according to purpose such as work or leisure. In Newham, all ten participants reported engaging in more diverse activities such as going to church, volunteering, and exercise classes – types of activities which have been assigned secondary importance in mobility biographies research to date, but which participants described as central to their everyday life. Four of the participants stressed the importance of the free public transport pass in making such trips possible. The resource of the Freedom Pass meant that when nothing else was available or feasible, the bus journey itself constituted the leisure activity (see also Green, Jones, and Roberts 2014): *“When I don’t have a planned activity, I would get out there and walk about or ride about. It’s lovely. I love it.”* (Caren, 78 years old, Newham).

While some Malate participants also mentioned taking pleasure in a long bus ride, these had to be paid for, and no interviewees spoke of journeys as a form of leisure activity in themselves. On the other hand, 15 out of the 32 Malate residents continued to engage in income generation after reaching the official retirement age of 60. The paid work which was available to retired women in Malate was part of the informal economy and generally very local to their homes, mostly involving trade in groceries or cooked food among one’s neighbours:

*“I am still working, since I had to send my kids, and the kids of my kids, to school. But I am still happy, since I was able to see the fruit of my efforts.”* Angelica is 71 years old. She had worked as a cleaner and then as a factory worker, but once she got married, was discouraged from working by her husband, who felt his own salary was sufficient. Angelica disagreed and opened a small sari-sari store on the ground floor of their house. *“The store was my way to help my husband. I was able to use it to help my children finish their studies and get into universities.”* Angelica’s husband died 18 years ago. She currently shares a house with three of her five children, and their

*families. They do some of the selling, when they are not at work, but Angelica buys the stock and brings it from the market. "I wish to continue the store for another five to ten years, as I am still helping my children, especially grandchildren." The sari-sari store is more suited to what Angelica feels she can do in later life. She was offered a job as a cook but declined it due to her deteriorating eyesight. Unlike the demands such jobs would place on her, she can adapt her work in the store to her changing capacity for physical work. "During my younger years, the sari-sari store had a more extensive supply. Before, I used to sell sacks of rice, as well as wine and beer. But now I sell whatever I can carry, like soft drinks and packs of coffee."*

Angelica's account problematises the implicit framing of retired persons' staying at home as a life stage of economic inactivity and immobility. In addition, the everyday im/mobilities of Angelica and her household reflected continuous renegotiations of care around changing care needs and intergenerational relations. This included the im/mobilities associated with paid work. While declining physical strength gradually limited Angelica's capacity to work, the nature and prevalence of informal employment in the area meant an income-earning activity could be organised locally, even on one's doorstep. Enterprises such as sari-sari stores could be sustained as an intricate household arrangement, continuously renegotiated over the short and long term depending on the ability, availability and commitments of household members.

The limited opportunities for home-based, small-scale enterprises in Newham, and the wider spatial, economic and cultural circumstances in which London respondents lived, meant such an arrangement was generally not available to them. This difference was also predicated on the extent of economic need, as Angelica's account demonstrates. Nevertheless, five of the 10 Newham participants felt that they were facing increasing economic precarity in older age as a result of rising cost of living, and cuts in the funding of local healthcare and support services.

The diverse experiences presented in this and the previous section trace everyday im/mobilities as a series of interdependencies and negotiations over the life-course, beyond a linear decline in unencumbered movement, or a progression through pre-

inscribed stages of paid work, care-giving and retirement. In the final section of the paper, we discuss some of the wider implications of these findings.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

To date, mobility biographies research has made important contributions in developing a life-course approach to everyday mobilities. Mobility biographies have highlighted that, first, everyday mobilities are not simply repetitive, but undergo significant changes over the long-term, and second, that the mobilities of individuals are shaped by household arrangements around navigating shared concerns and constraints.

This paper has aimed to advance mobility biographies research through two theoretical contributions, taking a relational approach to households' im/mobility arrangements and their reorganisation over the life-course. First, we sought to problematise the ways in which individuals negotiate their own and others' im/mobilities to fulfil the shared and competing needs of the household. Reflecting the need for more inclusive definitions of the household in mobility biographies research (see also Wheelock and Oughton, 1996; Hanrahan, 2015a), we sought to move beyond those which emphasise co-residence and which are limited to parents and children. We found that among our respondents, cohabiting multi-generational families and close ties – familial and otherwise – to people living in another street, neighbourhood, or country, were some of the relations which shaped everyday im/mobilities (Parrenas, 2000). We thus approached the household as an entanglement of care relations, and everyday im/mobilities as reflecting how these are negotiated in time and space. Having demonstrated that care-related im/mobilities encompass both 'productive' and 'reproductive' activities, we explored the gendered and intergenerational relations which underlie them. While mobility biographies tend to rely on strict categorisations of trips as work or non-work related (Scheiner, 2018), we have highlighted how diverse mobilities and immobilities are entangled and always in negotiation.

At the same time, the concept of gendered and inter-generational care relations does not neatly replace the idea of the household as it has been used in mobility biographies research. For instance, this paper has not addressed issues such as the growing commodification of care (Milligan and Wiles, 2010; Bowlby, 2012) and its impact on how im/mobilities are negotiated. Similarly, the care relations lived through participation in communities, religious activities, institutions and friendship circles warrant further engagement in mobility biographies (see also Lopata, 1987). In addition, further research is needed to conceptualise the many complex interplays between co-residence, living apart, and care-related im/mobilities.

The second contribution relates to the conceptualisation of change over the life-course. The paper has moved beyond an exclusive focus on key life events as moments of transformation of im/mobility arrangements. While the discussion was organised around the themes of childcare and ageing for the sake of clarity, we sought to demonstrate that the im/mobilities of care relations are not confined to pre-defined periods of the life-course. Everyday im/mobilities change in complex and multidirectional ways, through sudden leaps as well as gradual flows (Schwanen, Hardill and Lucas, 2012). They reflect continuous renegotiations of care relations, which are in turn shaped by evolving economic, emotional, health and other needs. In particular, precarious living conditions and the limitations of transport infrastructures circumscribe choice when it comes to changing im/mobility arrangements. Importantly, while mobility biographies tend to prioritise moments of change over stability, we have sought to demonstrate the importance of a theoretical engagement with persisting im/mobility arrangements.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to articulate a comprehensive framework for understanding the stabilities and transformations of mobility biographies, our study offers some methodological and conceptual insights for future work in this field. Given the complex nature of households and the diversity of im/mobility arrangements, travel behaviour survey data can offer only limited insights (Lanzendorf 2003; Müggenburg, Busch-Geertsema and Lanzendorf 2015; Scheiner 2018). More diverse methodological approaches, including various qualitative methods, can make an important contribution to mobility biographies (see also Greene and Rau, 2018; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). In

terms of theoretical development, we propose that future research takes gendered and intergenerational care relations as a starting point, in order to a) question the givens of nuclear families, single-family dwellings and assumed household roles, and b) theorise with households who negotiate daily im/mobilities in the face of precarious economic and transport resources in different locations across all regions of the world.

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