Creating and Dissolving 'Identity' in Global Mobility Studies
A Multi-scalar Inquiry of Belongingness and Becoming On-the-move

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Avant-propos

collecting snippets, perceiving factions of multiple realities, distributed across uncounted planes of consistency. reflecting on similar but different problems, sensing the imperceptible and understanding the unknowable. knowing that time is out of joint and that one never returns, one never returns in the same way, never returns through the same door. writing this doctoral dissertation was like homecoming to a place where I have never been before, but which seems to know me well.

to all the people, close or distant, nearby or afar,
for being who they are

to those who are close to my heart,
those who left and those who left their mark

to those who opened their office-door when I felt locked-out,
those who *always* have a minute, even if they don't

to those who taught by example, taught the arts and the crafts
'it's like carving a sculpture, be patient, stay on'

to those whose conventions made me resist *and* comply,
not to those whose compliance made me want to cry

to those who endorse that 'thinking needs time'
those who make space for debates to take place

to all the shining superstars who dare to unwind,
who linger and care and go for a beer

to those who make mokka and share a delight,
those who restore the circle and feel peace inside

to those who show up for gelato and a walk in the park
those who switch the lights off and tell me to pause

to the many voices who fill this piece with life
and to those who can't move or are being displaced

to all the many people who look out for light,
go seek places like this one,

where the wind and the sea allow you to be

come

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Abstracts & contents

English abstract

An increasingly diverse, highly qualified *global workforce* and the emergence of non-conformist, *self-directed transnational pathways* compel to question the prevalent comprehension of professional and personal identities. For centuries, modern conceptualisations of *'the self'* and *'identity'* have been fostered alongside individualist theories and nation state logics. However, as contemporary 'movers' lead their professional and personal lives across a plurality of social fields and locations, *sedentarist metaphysics* inhibit the apprehension of the 'mobile self'. Enhanced boundary-crossing professional moves, when recurrent and self-directed, i.e., when not initiated, steered and controlled by employers, entail major *epistemological challenges* and spark *ontological interrogations*, which remain to be addressed in management and organisation studies. Whilst *'global mobility'* and the attraction and retention of highly qualified employees constitute a strategic endeavour for employing organisations, the term 'migration' describes macro-economic and foremost political manifestations of the same phenomenon: geographical human movement. Despite distinct taxonomies, economic affairs and state affairs are increasingly intertwined when it comes to the attraction and retention of so-called

'global talent'. In an attempt to address these late modern complexities, the author demonstrates how *ascribed analytical and administrative categorisations* that designate professional 'movers' diverge from lived experience and self-identifications. A conceptual essay and three interconnected, but independent empirical studies demonstrate how *post-structuralist methods*, such as *discourse analysis*, *evocative writing* and *non-representational interpretation,* allow for new insights on *mobile ways of belonging and becoming*: normative, ascribed categorisations appear to be constitutive for the social creation of difference in 'destination countries'; the collapse of the *shared imaginary* of mobility during the pandemic composes ephemeral and affective ways of belonging beyond traditional structures of the workplace; singular 'moments' of mobile lives that are narrated as 'liberating' or 'revelatory' allow to take a glimpse at the *intensities* of *becoming on the move*. By allowing for the pragmatist inquiry to evolve around the phenomena of mobility as such, the here-developed approach contributes not only to global mobility studies in the field of management and organisation, but also to the *mobilities and migration nexus* more broadly. Together, the four core elements of this thesis provide openings for theorising the 'mobile self' beyond monolithic identities and human capitalist logic.

Dansk resumé

En stadig mere mangfoldig og højtkvalificeret global arbejdsstyrke samt fremkomsten af non-konformistiske, selvstyrede transnationale veje tvinger os til at sætte spørgsmål ved den gængse forståelse af faglige og personlige identiteter. Moderne konceptualiseringer af 'selvet' og 'identitet' er igennem århundreder blevet skabt sideløbende med individualistiske teorier og nationalstatslogikker. Men i takt med at nutidens 'movers' leder deres professionelle og personlige liv på tværs af en række sociale områder og steder, hæmmer 'stillesidende' (sendentarist) metafysik opfattelsen af det 'mobile selv'. Forbedrede grænseoverskridende professionelle skridt, især når de er gentagne og selvstyrende, dvs. når de ikke er initieret, styret og kontrolleret af arbejdsgivere, indebærer betydelige erkendelsesmæssige udfordringer og udløser ontologiske spørgsmål, der stadig skal behandles i undersøgelser inden for ledelse og organisation. Mens global mobilitet samt tiltrækning og fastholdelse af højtkvalificerede medarbejdere er en strategisk bestræbelse fra arbejdsgivende organisationers side, så beskriver terme 'migration' makroøkonomiske og frem for alt politiske manifestationer af samme fænomen: geografisk menneskelig bevægelse. Trods diverse kategoriseringer er økonomiske anliggender og statsanliggender i stigende grad forbundet, når det kommer til tiltrækning og fastholdelse af såkaldt 'global talent'. I et forsøg på at tackle disse kompleksiteter i den sene modernitet viser forfatteren, hvordan tilskrevne analytiske og administrative kategoriseringer, der betegner professionelle 'movers',

afviger fra den oplevede virkelighed og selvidentifikationer. Et konceptuelt essay og tre sammenkædede men uafhængige empiriske studier viser, hvordan poststrukturalistiske metoder såsom diskursanalyse, 'evocative writing' (stemningsskabende / stemningsfuldt skrivning) og ikkerepræsentativ fortolkning giver mulighed for nye indsigter i måder, hvorpå 'movers' kan høre til og blive og blive: normative tildelte kategoriseringer synes at ligge til grund for den sociale skabelse af forskellighed i 'destinationslandene'. Sammenbruddet af den fælles forestilling om mobilitet under pandemien skaber flygtige og følelsesmæssige måder at høre til på ud over traditionelle arbejdsstrukturer. Enkeltstående 'moments' (øjeblikke) i mobile liv, der indgår i en 'befriende' eller 'åbenbarende' fortælling, kan give et glimt af intensiteten i at 'becoming' 'on the move'. Ved at lade den pragmatiske forskning udvikle sig omkring mobilitetsfænomener bidrager nærværende udarbejdede tilgang ikke kun til globale mobilitetsstudier inden for ledelses- og organisationsområdet, men også til mobilitets- og migrationsneksus bredere set. Sammen åbner de fire kerneelementer i denne afhandling op for teoretisering af det 'mobile selv' ud over monolitiske identiteter og kapitalistiske menneskelogikker.

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INTRODUCTION

The share of humans living outside their country of birth is currently estimated at 3.6 per cent worldwide, corresponding to one person out of thirty or 281 million people (IOM, 2022). Within the EU-28 (including the UK in 2019), 4.3 per cent of EU citizens of working age lived in an EU member state other than their citizenship. Out of the population of approximately 513 million in the EU in 2019, third-country (non-EU) nationals constituted a share of around 5,5 per cent (Eurostat, 2020). Intensifying migrations on a global scale and long-term international mobility have significant implications for individuals, communities and societies. Numerous individuals from various backgrounds have led trans-locational lives, crossing not only national borders but also social, organisational and professional boundaries. They experience long-distance commutes and long-term physical parting from friends and family, from familiar places and well-known plots. Movers' social interactions, activities and intimate ties span multiple social fields. In the past century, diplomates, engineers, seconded teachers, researchers, expatriate managers and medical doctors have represented a growing international elite of highly qualified individuals who temporarily moved places for professional reasons. More recently, people from various educational backgrounds and with diverse competencies and skills have joined the 'global workforce', opting for a life abroad or being forced to do so due to persecution, war or economic necessity.

Those who voluntarily move for work and life and whom I presently suggest designating as 'movers' are at the centre of attention of employing organisations who recruit in a globalised labour market. Governments of nation-states, as well as supranational institutions, such as the European Union (EU), establish policies and 'talent attraction campaigns' in order to support the attraction of 'highly qualified' and 'skilled' professionals and to foster geographic mobility thereby

addressing shortages of qualified labour. Macro-level implications and interdependencies of migrations and mobilities are studied more broadly and in-depth by state institutions and labour agencies. Particularly since the so-called 'migration crisis' in Europe, substantial public funding has supported academic policy research. At the same time, labour mobility is a strategic matter for the EU (European Union) and at a global scale, as the background of the here presented dissertation exemplifies: three years of this research project were funded within the project 'Global Mobility of Employees' and under the 'Horizon 2020' framework by the European Research Executive Agency (REA).

The interest in international movers and 'transmigrants' 'ways of being' and 'ways belonging' (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004) remains a significant field of interest in the social sciences, most notably in the study field of migration studies, but increasingly so in management and organisation studies. The quest of national governments for migrant integration is a recurrent theme in the public sphere, even if the concept of 'integration' is increasingly questioned and critiqued by scholars in reflexive migration studies (Favell, 2019; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023; Schinkel, 2017). Within employing organisations, the management of 'global mobility' is part of the Human Resource Management (HRM) function and entails assigning and supporting employees to various positions across subsidiaries abroad. Goals are, for example, to occupy vacancies at other locations, to foster knowledge transfer processes or to provide opportunities for learning and leadership development (Caligiuri & Dragoni, 2015). Regarding the latter, there is a need to better understand employees' preferences, personal goals, and mobility experiences in order to tie the global mobility function to the strategic objectives of global talent management (Collings, 2014). Thus, the insights of the present thesis shall encourage a more thorough interest in mobile ways of being and identifying, beyond the orchestration of relocations, beyond the administration of contractual conditions of global assignments.

In the academic field of management and organisation studies, several research streams, such as International Business (IB), International Human Resource Management (IHRM), Intercultural Management (ICM) or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) address questions of identity and belonging of the 'working self', however, *without necessarily accounting for mobility* as an underlying condition or central phenomenon. As will be discussed in the literature review, the field of Global Mobility (GM) research tends to address 'expatriate adjustment' from a psychological or socio-psychological perspective. The comprehension of 'identity' in this context is often circumscribed by monolithic categories, which oppose, for example, 'home country identity' and 'host country identity', as these correspond to the logic of corporate assignments in multinational enterprises (MNEs). Mobile and migratory life modes in their entirety, that is, beyond organisational boundaries, are more explicitly investigated in the neighbouring field of migration studies and by scholars who support the 'mobilities turn' in social sciences.

This doctoral dissertation suggests apprehending human mobilities of highly qualified individuals from a *multi-scalar perspective*, which means that it is situated at the intersections of several study fields. It contributes to the *mobility and migration nexus* more broadly, all whilst drawing on and contributing to the field of management and organisation studies. The problematisation of 'identity' as an analytical device and the reflexive-critical approach that characterises the four paper contributions further makes this thesis relevant for the streams of reflexive migration studies (Dahinden, Fischer & Menet, 2021; Löhr, 2022), critical cross-cultural management (Romani, Mahadevan, & Primecz, 2018) and critical career studies (Chudzikowski, Bristow & Schmidt, 2023; Robinson, Bristow & Rattle, 2023). It draws for example on the work of scholars who assert that monolithic conceptualisations and the instrumentalisation of identity for political and economic interests are constitutive of social division,

stigmatisation, and violence (Brubaker, 2013; Sen, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2010). I suggest that in order to better comprehend underlying issues, interdisciplinary efforts are needed, in order to foster knowledge about the organisation of difference via the ascription of migrant labels. The normativity of analytical and administrative categorisations, for example, are of high societal relevance and are a concern for global ethics. Therefore, the overarching research question that motivates this dissertation is multi-scalar, which means that it exceeds the boundaries of employing organisations:

> What constitutes ways of belonging and identifying of highly qualified 'geographic movers' in relation to macro discourse and lived experience? What are ontological underpinnings of the 'mobile self'?

A major underlying assumption, inspired by transnational and mobility scholarship (Dahinden, 2016; Anthias 2013; Salazar, 2018), is that identifications and ways of belonging 'on the move' are *processual*, *fluid* and *multiple*, that they can be trans-locational or bound to social imaginaries. As will be demonstrated, identities are discursively ascribed, constructed or dissolved, and they are recomposing according to individual subject positions, intersubjectivities and collective strategies of belonging across life spheres and locations. In contemporary, late modern societies, ubiquitous communication technologies and fast modes of transportation allow for social ties and professional activities to be maintained across physical distance, all whilst intertwining with local interactions. Therefore, feelings of belonging and the salience of social identity categories are ephemeral, and they can suddenly shift according to places, situations and significant events, that is, lived experience. The everchanging perceptions of 'the self' in mobility situations would make it utopian to fixate and objectify

'identity' in scientific inquiry (Hannerz, 2002; Delanty, Wodak & Jones, 2011).

Overall, four distinct stand-alone academic papers contribute to the above-mentioned overarching research question whilst responding in an interconnected way to distinct analytical levels. The subsequent research questions and brief paper summaries shall give the reader an initial idea of the themes addressed before conducting a broader literature review that situates these contributions within the theoretical landscape.

Research Question 1

Do the established categories of analysis that are prevalent in global mobility studies retain their validity and explanatory capacity despite the multiplicities involved in contemporary human mobilities? What are specificities to be considered when exploring identities and ways of belonging of 'movers'?

(cf. paper 1: 'Exploring the mobile self: Shifting from monolithic categorisation to dynamic identifications')

Research Question 2

How do the large variety of ascribed migrant categorisations in public discourse and the fragmentation of labels contribute to the organisation of social difference in 'destination societies'?

(cf. paper 2: 'Global talent or labour migrant? - exploring the discursive organisation of difference in the competition state')

Research Question 3

How do events of crisis, that is, the radical rupture of geographic mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic, affect highly qualified trans-locational professionals in their ways of being and belonging?

(cf. paper 3: 'Isn't it ironic...!?!' Mobility researchers go sedentary: a group auto-ethnography on collective coping and care in pandemic times')

Research Question 4

> How does the lived experience of 'extreme mobilities', that is, where occupational, organisational and geographical mobilities superpose and intersect, affect movers? How does the multiplicity of mobile lives compose processes of becoming? (cf. paper 4: *Making moves meaningful: Towards an ontology of intensity across 'mille plateaux'*)

Those who are, in an economic context, labelled as 'mobile employees', 'labour migrants', 'expatriates' or 'international workers', who are designated as 'internationals', 'immigrants' or 'foreigners' in public and lay discourse, cannot be understood through the monolithic ascription of categories alone. Thus, it is crucial to deepen our understanding on how externally ascribed categorisations occur and how they influence processes of identifying and belonging in the context of mobilities and migration. As *paper one* suggests, *analytical categorisations* in academia are often discipline-specific and functionalist by definition, thereby limiting, at times, the horizon of comprehension and theorising. Moreover, inconsistent and manifold utterances and *acts of labelling in public discourse* in destination countries constitute *'discursive noise'* to which movers are subjected, as shown in *paper two*. As will be discussed, this has not only implications for processes of self-identification on a micro-sociological and individual level, but it also reveals how categorisations are constitutive for the organisation of social difference between migrants and non-migrants and amongst migrant 'types'. Situations of crisis and unexpected events, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions, added to the uncertainties that transnational live modes entail.

As *paper three* illustrates, the disruption of physical mobility and travel and the collapse of individual and professional routines affect movers and their ways of belonging. In addition, it discloses processes of

meaning-making through mobility that are less evident, less visible during times of stability. Moreover, the importance of collective belongingness and group identity will be addressed in this context. <u>*Paper four*</u> emphasises that recurrent and superposing occupational, locational and organisational mobilities increase identity complexity. I propose that this requires to question taken for granted assumptions, which are marked by *sedentary metaphysics*. In an attempt to exceed structuralist reasoning and to decentre from individualist and dominant human capital lenses of analysis, the philosophical underpinnings of *Nomadology* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) allow us to position mobility as the main phenomenon of interest. The very materiality that is experienced through the alternation of movement and rest actualises in experiences of intensity, as empirical accounts illustrate. This perspective allows to grasp rhizomatic, i.e., non-linear, multidirectional processes of movers' *becoming* and encourages future research and theorisation under consideration of *nomadic ethics*.

1 / LITERATURE REVIEW

When reviewing how individual ways of being and belonging are addressed in situations of geographic, international mobilities, it becomes obvious that the fragmentation of knowledge production across disciplines and across study fields inhibits coherent theorising on this matter. The 'mobilities and migration nexus' and questions of mobile identities and transnational belonging more specifically are spread across the fields of migration studies, area studies, cultural studies and sub-streams of management and organisation studies, such as international business (IB), international human resource management (IHRM) and intercultural management (ICM). Given that the continuous rise of migration and work mobilities in Europe and at a global scale, coincides with a high demand for qualified labour force, superpositions and entanglements between study fields have been highly densifying over the past years. Amongst the four papers that constitute the core of this thesis, three are addressing readers in subfields of management and organisation studies (*papers <u>one</u>, <u>three</u> and <u>four</u>*), and one is positioned in the field of 'reflexive migration studies' (*<u>paper two</u>*).

All four articles contribute to the *mobilities and migration nexus* in social science more broadly, whilst addressing distinct facets of 'mobile identities' and whilst deploying distinct research approaches. Therewith, the present dissertation cannot be confined within the boundaries of a specific study field. Instead, as the four papers together with the following thematic literature review demonstrate, this thesis defends the need to embrace distinct disciplinary and paradigmatic angles when attempting to explore and further theorise the phenomenon of mobilities and related creations and dissolutions of identities. As each of the four papers is standing on its own, the here presented overarching literature review has to be regarded as *complementary* to the paper-

specific reviews. Some references are mentioned in the papers, as well as in the following overarching review. As the four papers (cf. section three) are either published (paper one and paper three) or submitted (paper two and paper four), the reference lists of each paper contribution is preserved as separate, according to style guides of journal outlets. The overall reference list at the end of this dissertation exclusively lists references that are mentioned in the overarching document, i.e., all sections except section three.

Despite the ubiquity of the term 'identity' in everyday life, as well as in social research and management and organisation studies more specifically, scholars encourage us to systematically reflect on underlying assumptions of *identity concepts in context* and to adjust our understanding to the research purpose (Descombes 2013; Jenkins 2014; Sen 2006). They suggest, for example, to investigate and to apprehend personal identity and social identities with respect to situational settings, events, interactions and relationalities, in order to surpass essentializing concepts and structuralist approaches. Whilst Coupland and Brown warn us that 'identity studies may become overly myopic, introspective and detached from broader debates' (2012: 2), Knights and Clarke (2017) support this statement when pinpointing weak historical consciousness and lacking interdisciplinary lens as dangers for identity studies in our field. Inspired by these reflections, I propose to review at first how the notions of identity and self have been addressed *in the social sciences and humanities in general*, before exploring understandings of identity *in relation to the phenomenon of mobility* at large and in management and organisation studies, i.e., international human resource management, more specifically. This shall allow to decentre from management logics and to question taken-for-granted assumptions, in order to engage with the specificities that *movement and mobility* entail for individual movers, for contemporary societies and for the theorisation of identities more broadly. I propose that sidestepping to other study fields and oscillating amongst academic disciplines is necessary in order to continue

problematising underlying assumptions with regards to identities and belonging in situations of mobility. In this way, the researcher's and reader's *mobility of the mind* metaphorically aligns with the topic in question.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUMPTIONS

thinking the self as modern subject

Before the 20th century emergence of sociological, psychological and psychoanalytic ways of apprehending the human 'self' as such and in its societal context, philosophical traditions and ancient wisdoms have for millenaries questioned the 'I', the 'self' and human ways to relate to oneself. Presocratic *Heraclitus*, for example, is often cited when it comes to illustrating the flux of the universe and the impermanence and transient nature of human beings: 'No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.' In that, Heraclitus promotes the *transformational nature of the human self* (cf. Van Bryan, 2013). Around the same time, Vth century BC, writings that are attributed to Taoist *Lao Tse* refer to a *unified 'primal identity'* (Mitchell, 1999), which only appears in its entirety when being shielded off from the outside world: 'Close your mouth, block off your senses, blunt your sharpness, untie your knots, soften your glare, settle your dust. This is the primal identity.' (Tao Te Ching: 56).

Over time, in the attempt to grasp human 'being' in rapport to human action and thought, to changing environments and to the 'Other', thinkers evoke options of *continuous change versus permanence*, a transient self versus an identical, though immaterial, substance. Still, there is no full theory of subjectivity and of 'being self' in philosophical theory today, as Klemme (2017) and others emphasise. Therefore, here presented condensed review does neither claim exhaustivity, nor 'one truth' with regards to modern philosophical presumptions *regarding the*

self, notions of *identity* and *processes of identification*. Instead, it shall merely illustrate the difficulty that *thinking oneself* entails for human ways of knowing in general. Moreover, it shall prompt to the close interdependence between socio-theoretical and philosophical ideas of the self during the transformation of societal order in Western modernity, such as pointed out, for example, by Charles Taylor's (2004).

Indeed, since the 16th century and the period of Reformation, the philosophical and later sociological comprehension of the modern 'self' evolves in interrelation to societal and historical conditions. In the seventeenth century, *Descartes* asserts the human ability to think rationally and thereby positions the *rational subject* that observes and makes sense of the world within the centre of the quest for truth and existence. For Descartes knowledge is constituted by the *consciousness of the self* and by relating to one's own thoughts ('cogitatio'). During the century of Enlightenment, 'Aufklärung' (ger.) or 'Lumières' (fr.), Descartes (1637) and other cartesian thinkers after him, claim an ontological view of the self where *the self is a thing, a substance*, without in any way conceiving of the self as constitutive for a person and without giving any unitary account of individuality. As Thiel points out, Descartes 'assumes the *soul's individuality as given* and fails to give an account of what brings about this individuality' (Thiel, 2011: 1.1; emphasis added). For Descartes the self, 'le soi', is constituted by reasoning: I think, therefore I am ('Cogito, ergo sum'). Moreover, the essential 'I', the self or soul is understood as substance, independent of matter, and thus *not necessarily linked to a body*. For Descartes, as per Thiel, 'the real self is a simple, immaterial, "pure" substance: its body and its "accidents", i.e., its thoughts, may change, but it does not thereby lose its identity' (2011, 1.1), or in Descarte's words: 'For even if all the accidents of the mind change, so that it has different objects of the understanding and different desires and sensations, it does not on that account become a different mind' (1614: 10).

In turn, up to the 20th century other philosophers in the 'field of modern subjectivity', as depicted by Bürger (1998), such as early modern *Montaigne* (1580) or *La Rochefoucauld* (1678), conceive of the person not as an object of abstract thought, but rather as one of psychological observation, where personal qualities and emotions are subjected to constant change, characterizing *the self as elusive and intangible*. Montaigne speaks of *variation and contradiction* that play out in ourselves and, in the subsequent quote, he suggests that we are all made of fragments and constituted in varied and diverse ways, in that every piece, every moment makes its game. He asserts that there is as much difference between us and ourselves than between us and the Other:

> Nous sommes tous de lopins et d'une contexture si informe et diverse, que chaque pièce, chaque moment, fait son jeu. Et se trouve autant de différence de nous à nous-même, que de nous à autrui. Magnam rem puta unum hominem agere. (Montaigne, Livre Second, cited by Lahire 1998: 51).

With the last phrase Montaigne refers to Seneca, emphasising *the difficulty that consists in existing continuously as a unified and same human*. In the 18th century, *Hume* (1739), like Descartes earlier, generally supports that the human being is constituted by rational thought and by ideas, though with the exception of knowing the 'self'. Hume dedicates a section of the 'Treatise of Human Nature' to 'personal identity', demonstrating that *the sameness of the self over time is an illusion*, created by human imagination and mental constructions, an effort that removes the variations between different impressions, events and emotions in order to 'run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation' (Hume, 1739: 253-5). He puts forward that humans are *more essentially sentient beings than rationale beings*, and he thereby dismisses the human ability to be conscious of the self, of the 'I', to think rationally of one's personal identity, as Mossner (1968) summarizes. In the chapter 'of personal identity' Hume argues that the

variability of 'impressions' and 'perceptions' speaks against the substance of an identical self:

> It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently, there is no such idea. (Hume, 1739: 251-2)

This is to say that, in contrast to Descartes, Hume *rejects the 'sameness' of the self over time* and affirms mankind to be 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement' (1739: 252-3). Similar to Descartes and Hume, Kant comprehends the self as connected to the process of reasoning and thinking and he considers that the phenomenon of self-consciousness emerges through the process of thinking. However, recent interpretations show that, beyond consciousness, *Kant's* understanding of subjectivity emphasises *self-determination*, which pre-supposes a *free will* (Klemm 2017; Waibel 2017). Indeed, Kant (1787) conceives of the self ('eigentliches Selbst') in relation to freedom, in a positive sense, that is, the autonomy of pure, practical reason ('reine, praktische Vernunft'), rather than independence from material, exterior constraints. For Kant, the self is not merely an object of the hermeneutics of human life, but a core concept of his moral philosophy. As such, *self-preservation* and *self-reflection* give room to design one's *individual life* ('Möglichkeitsraum freier Lebensgestaltung'), and to spontaneously constitute an unchangeable, solid identity of the self through thought ('unwandelbare Identität des Selbst'). Accordingly, being capable of freedom in an empirical world of manifold influences and social bonds entails an act of *self-identification*, a relatedness to the self *and* to the world. In a Kantian sense, identity and experiences constitute and condition one another, as the continuous

change in the empirical world is reflected in relation to the consciousness of one's own identity (Waibel, 2017). However, even if Kant supports that one is conscious of the self ('Bewusstsein seiner selbst') and of one's existence through thinking, he suggests that it is unreachable to think *how* oneself exists: 'dass ich mir meiner selbst […] bewusst bin, *dass* ich bin, aber nicht, *wie* ich existiere' (Kant KrV B158, cited by Klemme, 2017: 265). Hence, for Kant, the understanding of *the self cannot be objectified through thought*.

The creative process of continuous change that is constituted through interactions, between the self and the 'outside world', as per Hume, is likewise described by Rimbaud (1871) when he states 'Je est un autre' (the self is Other). He refers to his own poems and writings, which he feels are not a result of the 'I', not mirroring his identity, his self, but multiple others, 'another self'. Likewise, through a creative-reflexive process of narration and writing, such as accomplished by Proust (1913-1927) in his epic novel 'À la recherche du temps perdu' (In search of lost time) a multitude of considerations regarding identity and the self in society are being made sensibly accessible to the reader, as Velinova's (2014) analysis demonstrates. Proust in his philosophical curiosity for 'being' (l'être), narrates the *unconscious sense of self*, experienced through *emotions, desires and passions*, aside from rationality. In addition, he depicts the characters' relational and collective identities, situating the self in an historical and societal context at different places and throughout a lifetime. Velinova (2014) demonstrates how Proust's artistic creation can be understood as a renascence of identity, after all the quirks and examples of its obliteration, somehow completing a circular process of metamorphosis, the rebirth of all living phenomena and events through the narrator. Proust distinguishes between *different facets of a persona* in distinct contexts and depicts *the 'interior diversity'* of the narrator and the writer, as per Lahire's (1998) interpretation, in contrast to the 'exterior self' that appears in society and is perceived by others. He thereby develops a *theory of plurality of social*

actors throughout his oeuvre. Depending on context, that is, a variety of life worlds within society, the individual is comprehended as *drawing on experiences and resources to accommodate* a situation, which is later conceptualised by sociologists as 'identity strategy'.

Within the numerous examples of modern philosophical and literary accounts that treat the question of the self in high modernity, one can mention Woolf, who explores how the 'freedom of the mind' and the possibilities of the self have been delineated for centuries for poor and underprivileged populations, as well as for women, notwithstanding their 'social milieu'. Her novel 'A room of one's own' (Woolf, 1929) traces the history of writings about women and explores the reasons for a lack of women writers in Western patriarchal societies since the fifteenth's century. Early on in her novel she describes the thought process of the narrator, who wonders about the effects of tradition, poverty and access to education on the self in general and on the mind of the writer:

> I pondered […] what effect poverty had on the mind ; and what effect wealth has on the mind; […] and I thought of the organ booming in the chapel and of the shut doors of the library; and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse perhaps to be locked in; and thinking of the safety and prosperity of the one sex and of the insecurity of the other and of the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer […] (1929: 42)

Woolf narrates how *fixed societal roles*, exclusionist public and educational spaces, as well as a lack of even a minimum of material possessions have *limited women's mind and self*, and hence restricted the *capacity to think themselves* beyond decreed societal roles. A lack of *identification* with male writings, for example, and a general absence of women writers has hindered women for millenaries to project themselves into the role of the writer of fiction or poetry, as the novel's protagonist suggests: 'It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male

values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible' (1929: 136). Woolf asserts 'that five hundred a year [of earnings] stands for the power to contemplate, that a lock on the door means the power to think for oneself' (1929: 142). More than writing about human beings in relation to each other, she encourages to live in the presence of *reality* that one encounters in a dusty road or in a newspaper scrap, reality that 'lights up a group in a room' and 'overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars'. Here she refers to emotion, to *sensations* t*hat cannot be grasped through rationale thought*, and she asserts that readings such as Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu' allow to see 'more *intensely'* after reading, when 'the world seems bared of its covering and given an *intenser* life.' (Woolf, 1929: 149; emphasis added). The term intensity shall occur again in the following section of the review, allowing indeed to transcend the subject-object divide.

Early 20ᵗʰ century modern novels of Woolf, Proust and others seem easily accessible, seem to resonate in contemporary times, as they anticipate late modern societal *fragmentation* and individual *emancipation.* As Dubois (2016) suggests, late modern novels exceed the determinism of social structures such as described by Durkheim and beyond the 'habitus' of a specific milieu (Bourdieu, 1977). They elaborate on philosophical understandings of the self and give insights into dynamic life courses, and *passages* between distinct contexts, between roles and 'états-d'âme' (states of mind). They shed light on variations of the self through romanesque personas who transcend boundaries between social fields, and who play roles on the social stage, a metaphor likewise leveraged by Goffman's (1990) explanation of interaction in society. As Dubois (2016) points out, the raise of the 'new science' of sociology with Durkheim and Tarde in the early twentieth century most likely inspired modern novelists during that period. Even if prosaic accounts do not follow standards of scientific sociological analysis, their strength, as per Bourdieu (1992), is that sociological

structural complexities are metaphorically conveyed and condensed in the singularity of a figure and its individual adventures.

Beyond the theoretical value of philosophical ideas, it seems crucial to recall that these were often closely entangled with political projects of societal transformation. This is one of the reasons why the understandings of the self might seem, still today, ambivalent and at times inconsistent or contradictory. As exposed in great detail by Taylor (1994; 2004), the *notion of individuality*, which has emerged in early modernity is closely interconnected to society in its historical context. Society in modernity is understood as 'extra politically organised in a (market) economy' and as 'society as a "people", that is […] thought to pre-exist and found the politically organised society' (2004: 101). The *freedom* of humans who 'consent to and thus constitute society' and who thereby *'build their own social world'* is therefore a central good in the modern *moral order*. Moreover, the ideas of the 18th century 'Enlightenment' promote 'productive, material aspects of human activity in the name of the benefits that would accrue to individuals and to society as a whole' (Taylor, 2004: 45).

The rebuilding of society and the *disenchantment* of the world through reason-centred ways of approaching the self, as per Weber, go along with what Taylor (2004) calls 'The Great Disembedding': beside a focus on economic *performance and productivity* the notion of the individual in Western societies has been fostered over centuries through the insistence on *discipline* and religious devotion, thereby increasing the *'disidentification'* with regards to ancient rituals and belongingness. In pre-modern times, humans were *embedded* members of societies and of the cosmos, in that 'their most important doings were the doings of whole groups (tribe, clan, subtribe, lineage)', which is why Taylor affirms that humans could not imagine themselves 'as potentially disconnected from this social matrix' (2004: 54). Thus, *social embeddedness* is not only a matter of *social imaginaries*, but as well of *identity*, of collective *social realities*, *rituals* and other practices. These constitute *limitations for the*

sense of self as well as for thought and for the philosophical imagination of the self in societal context.

transcending subject-object dualism

In modernity and post-Kantian philosophical thought, social sciences and psychology have a tendency adopt the binary split between the self and the other, the subject and the object, the body and the mind. Thus, a dual focus on similarity and difference still dominates theorisations of 'identity' today. In this case, identities are explored by distinguishing between the knowing subject and the world it knows: the individual subject is conceived as a substance, as a unified and solidified entity, which *possesses* an identity, and which is separated from the outside world (objectivist perspective) or unified with it (subjectivist perspective). Comparatist works on intercultural philosophy demonstrate that distinct ideas have exerted mutual influence on each other over centuries, even millennia, across geographies and civilizations, for example regarding European and Eastern traditions of thought (Ghilardi, 2015; Ma and Van Brakel, 2017). Indeed, *Zen tradition*, instead of taking the 'true Self' as an 'ontological identity – permanent, unchanging, and separate from all the manifestations of the world', as something that an individual possesses, suggests that the self of a sentient being is '*a field of different forces, drives and events* that aggregate and produce *a feeling of continuity*' (Ghilardi, 2015: 39). As Ghilardi points out, it thereby differs from *Hindu traditions*, which consider the presence of the inner soul, the *Absolute Self*, as 'lying beyond any single identification with phenomenal manifestations' (2015: 40). Whereas inherent cleavages and tensions remain, the philosopher Jullien (2016) who oscillates between Hellenistic and Sinology, proposes to avoid declaring 'differences' between thoughts and cultural traditions, as those mechanisms of distinction would hinder dialectical processes and paradigmatic evolutions. Instead, he suggests using the notion of '*écart'* (distance,

void), and to conceive this distance between traditions of thought as *fertile tensions*, as a *field for thinking the unthought*.

The Japanese philosopher Nishida (1870-1945) attempts to counter and dissolve in his work Kantian dualism, and to reconcile the separation between the self and the other, between identity and difference, for example when framing 'the self identity of the absolute contradiction' (Ma & Van Brakel, 2017). Nishitani (1987), Nishida's student, states that Western philosophy is 'plagued by 'two-world theory' (nisekaisetsu)', distinguishing between a sensible and an intelligible domain, between experience and the real. 'The two-world theory makes it almost impossible to establish a standpoint of transcendence without abandoning either experience or fact', he asserts (Nishitani, 1987: 9, 1010). According to scholars in the field of intercultural philosophy Nishida was the first who framed 'a non-dualistic paradigm in philosophical language' (Kopf, 2004: 78, cited by Maraldo, 2019). He states that Nishida was convinced that dualism had infused all philosophical discourses and would only allow for binary thinking, including when it comes to understanding the notion of 'self' - either from an objectivist perspective that detaches the self from the world or from a subjectivist perspective, which falls into a monism proposing that the subject and the world are unified through interaction. To overcome the dichotomy Nishida proposes the concept of *'pure experience'* as unifying activity: 'what I call pure experience possesses a psychologistic feel, but nevertheless it does enable me to think the objective world from a standpoint that transcends the subject-object distinction' (cited by Nishitani, 1987: 85).

In contemporary philosophy, underlying ontological assumptions and historical framings of the abstract notions of 'identity' and 'the self' are most thoroughly questioned and problematised by philosophers like Jullien (2016), Levinas (1991), Ricoeur (1991), Sen (2006) and many others. Sen emphasises, for example, the divisive and incendiary effects of monolithic, decreed identities: 'theories can

influence social thought, political action, and public policies. The artificial diminution of human beings into singular identities can have divisive effects, making the world possibly more incendiary' (Sen, 2006: 178). The emergency of further thinking and understanding the functioning of 'identity' as concept and as instrument becomes evident in Sens writings. Moreover, in the essay 'Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle' (There is no cultural identity) Jullien (2016) demonstrates, for example, that the dynamic, constantly changing nature of cultures stands in contrast to the etymology of the word identity (lat. idem), which makes the notion of 'cultural identity' in his eyes unsustainable. Levinas (1991), in his philosophical theory of the 'visage de l'autre', (the face of the Other), brings into focus the *genuine encounter* of two individuals as a possibility to experience the interconnectedness of the whole, beyond cognitive understanding and without qualifying the other person, thereby reducing the risk of being reductionist and judgmental. For him, the Other is not object of understanding first and interlocutor subsequently, but both relations are merged. In Levinas' philosophy, personal relations and ties are a pre-requisite for mutual comprehension and the foundation for an evolutionary vision of otherness and of the self. Levinas understands the face as the identity of 'being': 'Le visage, c'est l'identité même du être.' (1991: 43). In the same context, he describes the encounter with a 'transcendent' human-being from 'outside the system' as a potential opportunity to embrace and to mitigate the whole. As such, Levinas' philosophy can be understood as an encouragement for individuals to move beyond one's 'social field', country, culture or community, in order to embrace the entireness of human live through human encounters. Like Nishida's 'pure experience' Levinas' philosophy exceeds sociological and psychological reasoning and the subject-object dualism.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) descriptions of *nomadic becoming* as perpetual movement across blurred, smooth space ('espace lisse', 'ensemble flou'), enable to think temporary, ephemeral, *rhizome-like expressions of becoming*. This differs from movement across

structural, striated spaces which limit movement, set boundaries and guide movement along pre-defined traces. The concept of territory as understood in 'Mille Plateaux' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) implies space, but does not refer to political borders or geographies, thus it is not political, but derives from *ethology*, as Zourabichvili (2004: 28) clarifies. This means 'territory' is not a representation of any socially constructed institution, like the nation state or a delimited property. Instead, ethology and non-representationality allow to comprehend *territory* as an intimate investment in space and time. It can be perceived as an inside, i.e., as the *contour of lived experience* or as an outside, as 'line of flight' and *zone of experiences*. There is a rapport of appropriation of – or distance with – a territory, which constitutes subjective identification. Nomadic distribution in space is thus understood as *'errance'* and *'dispersion'*, where things are being deployed across a plane of being, rather than the Being devising itself according to representations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). In the case of the investigated empirical examples in *paper three* and *paper four*, a 'territory' is therefore not equivalent to places, but it is a *plane* that is widening, expanding through *intense compositions* of movement. These compositions are composed of *lines of flight*, which in the cases of *paper four* consist of intersecting and superposing physical, occupational and imaginary mobilities.

Thereby, physical 'moves' from one country and city and job to the next are not simple 'changes' (of place, of occupation, etc.), but on the background of Deleuzian thought they can be understood as *acts of absolute deterritorialization*. They are *becoming*. They are lines of flight that have *a direction but no destination*, no distinct goal, no point of arrival. Every change entails a becoming, which allows to escape. – Can we, thus, conceive of mobile lives, such as illustrated in *paper three* and *paper four* as composed of line of flight? – *Becoming* in nomadology does not mean abandoning something, in order to become something else. It is *not imitation of* something or someone, *nor identification with* something, somewhere or someone else (Zourabichvili, 2004: 30).

Becoming is the content of desire. And desire is defined in a positive sense, not in the sense of lack: 'it is defined by the expression of its *capacity to make connections'* (Boundas, 2006: 16, emphasis added).

To further characterize nomadology, Braidotti's (2013) interpretation of Deleuze's and Guattari's (1980) *nomadic ethics* is helpful. Braidotti suggests that the ethically empowering relation to others increases the '*empowering force'* and creates joyful energy in the process' (2013: 343; emphasis added). She refers to this creative force as 'zoe', a force that generates possible futures, in correspondence to Deleuze's 'actualisation of the virtual'. She underlines in her perspective on nomadic theory, that lived experience of nomadic subjects, is constitutive for sustainable alternatives, which allow for 'subversive moves of detachment from the dominant system of representation' (2011: 4-7). The collective auto-ethnography of *paper three* would have certainly not been possible without a creative, empowering force. The sensations of *connectedness and joy* that emerged throughout the process and during online gatherings actualised in our writings, despite (or thanks to) the pandemic shock. The 'ethics of joy', which inspire Deleuze's work refer to Bergson and the energy that emerges during the process of becoming is similar to Bergson's *'élan vital'*. The broader idea of an *assemblage of contrary forces*, of a cosmic energy that dynamically unfolds in multiplicity is closer to non-binary wisdom's such as Zen tradition and Taoist thought, than to modern Western philosophy. It is further inspired by Einstein's idea of conceiving of movement and rest as one and the same phenomenon, whereas high speed movement is a sort of rest (Vergeley, 1993).

In the process of becoming, according to Deleuzian thought, the individual is not subject, there is no subject-object distinction. Instead, there is a 'differential quantity of forces' in play, which is called 'intensity', and as Boundas (2006: 4) formulates it, 'intensities - or better intensifications – are the real subjects of processes', but without being subjects in an ordinary sense: intensities are not entities. Intensities

generate entities though, as they actualise in state of affairs, which means in 'bodies, in their mixtures and in individuals existing in the present' (Boundas, 2006: 4). In other words, in a process that is composed of sensations, which resonate with an individual or group, *intensities actualise* in bodies, and they become graspable through '*events'*, through moments. But even though individuals perceive intensities through the intermediary of affects in the very *present* moment, *events* are understood as related to the past *and* the future, they are 'untimely'. – This understanding of the untimely present is similar to Levina's 'entirety' that occurs when deeply encountering another's face, le 'visage de l'autre' and to Nishida's 'pure experience'. – The *present moment* during which the event is embodied is freed from the constraints of the past and the future. There are no objective-subjective coordinates in the event. The closest verbal mode to express the 'event' would be the infinitive, as per Deleuze, referred to by Boundas: the infinitive of a verb (to green, to grow, to die) stands 'for forces, intensities and acts, rather than substances or qualities' (2006: 6). Thus, Deleuze's processual, materialist understanding prevents the past from being reified as a 'cause' for becoming. The past is *'pure past'* and the future is blurred, it might never occur, it is just a direction. Thus, one can say that not a series of distinct moments are responsible for becoming, but *becoming is a continuous process* where the virtual and the actual, the object and the subject, the past and the present are in fusion. Becoming has no history, it is '*nomadology'*:

> We write history, but we have always written it from the point of view of the sedentary, and in the name of the unitary apparatus of the state, even when narrating nomads. What is missing is a nomadology, the opposite of history. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 34 ; own translation).

Nomadology, even if blurred in its meaning, even if counter-intuitive when contemplated through the lens of sedentary metaphysics, allows us

to consider a way of living and becoming that is not historical, not traced, not linear, but *rhizomatic*. Hence, it allows for a *shift* in our way of thinking: *becoming*, according to Deleuze's philosophy, dissolves the notion of identity, it prevents reifying and objectifying identity as substance. Instead, identity can be comprehended as illusion, turned away from reality. Identity is representation, but difference in Deleuze's understanding is 'pure difference', which cannot be represented (Deleuze, 1968). For the topic of international mobility, which will be related to Deleuzian thought in further details in *paper four,* this means that the 'difference' that is constituted through movement cannot be represented either. Wanting to depict, for example, a person's identity 'before', 'during' and 'after' expatriation or migration would be a flaw, as much as rigidifying the distinction between 'the stranger' and 'the local', as the following statement on 'geo-philosophy' confirms.

> The autochthone and the stranger do not split up into two distinct persons anymore, but they distribute themselves like one and the same dual persona, which then takes its turn to double itself into two versions, present and past: what was autochthone / autochthonous becomes strange / stranger, and what was strange / stranger becomes autochthone / autochthonous. (Deleuze & Guattari 1991: 121; own translation[1])

Instead, Deleuze and Guattari's joint work, as well as Deleuze's *cosmic philosophy*, allow to think movement *and* rest together, to confuse the mover and the sedentary and to appreciate the singular rapport to

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[1] 'L'autochtone et l'étranger ne se séparent plus comme deux personnes distinctes, mais se distribuent comme un seul et même personnage double, qui se dédouble à son tour en deux versions, présente et passée : ce qui était autochtone devient étranger, et ce qui était étranger devient autochtone. (Deleuze & Guattari 1991: 121)

existence that human mobility entails. Thinking of mobile, neo-nomadic life modes, therefore requires to momentarily *suspend* static conceptualisation that have developed from sedentariness, in order to allow for 'intellectually mobile concepts' (Deleuze, 1990).

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSTRUALS

settling the self in society

In stark contrast to ideas of 'nomadic ethics', and 'pure experience', which attempt to dissolve subject-object dichotomies, the framework of the nation state and associated 'modern social imaginaries' (Taylor, 2004) have steered and fostered for more than two centuries a constant and solid identification of individuals with a given, 'settled' societal context and with the nation state. Within the framework of the nation, *identity is understood as rooted* in local societal structures and in *home-grown employment relations*, where *class and profession* are the foundation for further socially ascribed identity categories (Lahire, 1998). As Taylor (2004) summarizes, 'the original importance of people working steadily in a profession came from the fact that they thereby placed themselves in "settled courses"', as he says in reference to Puritan expression:

> everyone had to become ordered and serious about what they were doing, and of necessity had to be doing, in life, namely, *working in some productive occupation.* A truly ordered society requires that one *take these economic occupations seriously* and describe a discipline for them. This was the political ground (2004: 73; emphasis added).

Still today, the nation as *'imagined community'* (Anderson, 1983) remains a reference, and 'national identity' is a major filter in numerous contemporary research studies, due to the persistent economic

competition amongst nation states. The myth of national unity and of continuous progress within a bordered territory constitute the 'continuous narrative' of the nation (Bhabha, 1990). Macro level discourse and grand narratives about the uniqueness of nationhood can easily derive in nationalist claims, as history demonstrates, and the term 'identity' becomes politicized accordingly, such as observed in the contemporary context of international migration and mobility. The instrumentalisation of singularized and *divisive identities* has resulted in violence throughout colonial history and its manifestations and segregating effects are undeniably present in contemporary, post-colonial societies (Sen, 2006; Bhabha, 2004).

Moreover, the tension that occurs around the structures of *national borders*, which demarcate the inside and the outside of a national territory, is not only of geopolitical and macro-economic relevance for nations states or for the European Union, as theorised by Balibar (2003), but it directly affects individuals (Garelli, 2018; deGenova, 2019). The existence of boundaries plays out in daily lived experiences at physical borders and expresses the tension that occurs between individuals, the nation state and broader cosmopolitics. As Agier (2018) suggests, border experiences entail moments of loss of sense and *deidentification,* of distancing from places, properties and people, which are constitutive for identities. In his perspective regarding the 'foreigner' who comes 'from the outside' into a new society, the mover's perceptions and lived experiences change significantly depending on *how* they are welcomed: Agier (2018) emphasises the concept of *hospitality.* In contrast to transactional and human capital understandings, he describes that there are indeed ethics of hospitality that embrace the newcomer, without expecting anything in return. This sounds like an exceptional way of interrelating with 'foreigners', when comparing to contemporary discourse. As a matter of fact, institutions, organisations and border regimes contribute to the *reification of ascribed identities* through administrative procedures and selective,

discriminatory mobility regimes, where labels such as 'migrant', 'expatriate' or 'global talent' discursively attribute, or refrain from attributing, *symbolic capital* to individuals who come from the 'outside'. The attributed label and value depend on the qualifications and the 'human capital' that they bring in exchange. In that sense, institutions and public discourse actively contribute to social sorting and to the *social organisation of difference* (Vertovec, 2021).

The title of Heinich's (2018) book 'Ce que n'est pas l'identité' (what identity is not), illustrates the difficulty of theoretically and historically circumscribing and defining the notion of 'identity' and its theoretical underpinnings in consistent and universally acceptable manner. Her book is one of many contributions to broader societal debate about 'identity' and identity politics in general and in France more specifically. During the 2007 presidential campaign, national identity (l'identité nationale) became closely associated to right wing political claims. When a few years later special issues of academic journals state that identity is 'problematic' (e.g. 'L'identité problématique', Bagla et al., 2010) and scholar Descombes (2013) titles his book 'Les embarras de l'identité' (the embarrassments of identity), the confusion and unease that goes along with the term *identity* in societal and political contexts becomes palpable. These examples illustrate, that contemporary considerations of what individual identity is, or is not, are not merely founded on discipline specific research traditions or schools of thought. They depend as well on contemporary *discursive practices* and situational *speech acts* in various political, economic and institutional settings. Anthias (2013) confirms that locations and political environments, as well as ideological public discourse, continuously influence the prevailing understanding of the *term identity* in society, amongst researchers and research subjects. Knowing that *Zeitgeist*, 'situated imaginaries' (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2011) and 'creative imagination' (Castioradis, 1987), influence our perception and interpretations of concepts and theories as researchers means that we

need to be alert when conceptually leveraging worn-out terms, such as 'identity' or when addressing related topics with peers, students or research interlocutors. Moreover, everyday public discourse and acts of labelling in academia shall trigger reflexivity and alert us in a research pragmatist fashion, in order to pursue the problematisation of 'identity', such as exemplified throughout this dissertation in general and in _paper one and paper two_ more specifically.

Even within disciplines, such as psychology or social psychology, distinct traditions relate to different, but nonetheless interrelated terminologies. Northern American social-psychologists like Stryker and Burke (2000) emphasise the notion of the 'self', drawing on pragmatist, *symbolic interactionalist* and *social behaviourist* thoughts, in line with James, Dewey, Mead and Blumer. This tradition of symbolic interactionism considers situational influences and internal dynamics of self-processes and examines 'how social structures affect the structure of self and how structures of the self influence social behaviour' (Stryker and Burke, 2000: 285). Indeed, interactionist and constructivist approaches identify interests and sense-making as endogenous to agent-structure interactions. From this perspective, meaning emerges through interaction between individuals and systems, experience and behaviour patterns (Watzlawick, 1977). Moreover, in an interactionist understanding self-awareness and self-images play a crucial role in mediating all kinds of social relationships and human interactions. Vice versa, social interaction and communication constitute meaning making amongst actors, leading for example to closer social ties or to labelling the other (Mead, 1934). 'What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity — and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour' affirms Giddens (1991: 70), all whilst claiming the importance of narrative identity that continuously integrating every-day events and experience into the personal 'story'.

While a person's *concept of self* may remain fairly consistent over time in our own perception, *identity* when comprehended as a process, undergoes shifts and adjustments when playing out in everyday life. Identities in a person's 'repertoire' vary in importance and depend on circumstances, as social theorists like Giddens (1991) and Goffman (1990) show: identities are more or less salient depending on life situations, cultural environments and social interactions. In parallel, *structuralist* socio-anthropological and psychological theorisations of identity have been nurtured during the 20th century and are still very much engrained in contemporary, anthropocentric ways of comprehending and interpreting the social world. Levi-Strauss' ideas, for example, still resonate. He conceives of *identity as a 'virtual space'*, which is a crucial reference for the self, in order to understand oneself and the world, all whilst considering that identity has never 'real existence' ('L'identité est une sorte de foyer virtuel auquel il nous est indispensable de nous référer pour expliquer un certain nombre de choses, mais sans qu'il ait jamais d'existence réelle', Lévi-Strauss, 1987: 332). Similarly, Erikson's psychological theory is leveraged in applied psychology in management studies nowadays. Erikson suggests a *'threefold identity'* (Erikson, 1972), to apprehend individual psychological development from childhood over youth to adulthood, which aligns with Freud's psychoanalytical tryptic. Moreover, he distinguishes between the identity of the self or 'ego', personal identity that takes into account the context, and group identity that goes along with feelings of belonging. He opposes external, 'objective' identity marks and individually experienced 'subjective' ones, all whilst considering identity as a dynamic process of co-construction and mutual recognition between society and the individual. However, a rigid interpretation of Erikson's work might have contributed to the *reification* of identity in management studies, as will be discussed in the subsequent section of this review. Other approaches, such as Lacan's psychoanalytics seem to be less applicable to mainstream management

and organisation studies, as Kenny (2020) and Brown (2017) suggest: 'a Lacanian account of subject formation is difficult to reconcile with the idea that identities exist and that they are "actively and often self-consciously constructed in social contexts", requiring repeated acts aimed at maintenance' (Brown, 2017: 298). These scholars confirm that the idea of 'identity work' and consciously constructed identity strategies prevails in management and organisation studies.

Even though social fields change, are increasingly diverse, even 'super-diverse' (Vertovec, 2019) and fragmented in a context of migration and globalization, the idea persists that an individual belongs to and continuously identifies with a nation state, with one or several social 'milieux' and with specific social identity categories (ethnicity, gender, religion). As such, Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus' and the performance and reproduction of *'symbolic distinction'* (1984) still allow to apprehend the construction of social strata and status in rather homogeneous societal settings. As per Bourdieu, symbolic distinction is mediated through '*symbolic capital*' that delimits social identity boundaries. He clarifies that 'symbolic capital is any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents, endowed with categories of perception, which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to attribute value to it' (Bourdieu 1998: 47). Thus, symbolic capital provides individuals and groups with a capacity to define the legitimate value of other forms of capital and it thereby allows to conceptually apprehend how different other forms of capital are translated into *power and privilege*, *status and authority* (Bourdieu 1990). Despite a certain critique of the notion of 'habitus', Jenkins (2014) supports its contemporary applicability to understand social identity, as it 'is simultaneously collective and individual, and definitely embodied' (2014: 44). In situations of international or social mobility, that are of interest in this dissertation, the concept of symbolic capital allows to understand *external acts of labelling* in so-called 'host societies' or 'destination countries', as well

as the possible *self-appropriation* or *rejection* of labels, such as 'expatriate' or 'migrant' by movers. Ascribed identities, such as discussed and exemplified in _paper one_ and _paper two_, contribute to the creation of symbolic, as well as economic boundaries that are socially shared, repurposed and internalized (Lamont and Molnar 2002). They are mediating acts of *inclusion* and *exclusion*, as supported by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, SIT. However, when defocusing from the narrow social field ('champs social') of the nation state, numerous social actors are 'hors champ', as Lahire observes, drowned in a large social space, where the only structure that persists as pole of reference is the structure of possessed economic and cultural capital (Lahire, 1998: 56).

Beyond the theory of the individuated self in psychology, theories in social-psychology put forward the importance of 'the Other' for the definition of the self-concept, which is stipulated as 'the person's sense of unique identity differentiated from others' (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Scholars further account for interpersonal aspects of self-construal, as well as for the co-existence of different self-construals, that become salient according to contextual and situational factors. By entering in relationships with others, individuals are extending their sense of self through feeling of belonging and the fostering of social identities (Brewer, 1991; Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Most importantly it is to note that social-psychologists agree that *individual self-concepts evolve* throughout the course of a lifetime. Belonging and attachment are created through interpersonal relationships, adding a higher degree of complexity, to otherwise 'depersonalized', collective social identities. It seems reasonable to assume that this is particularly relevant in volatile times or when individuals are frequently moving between different socio-cultural settings, groups and locations. Roccas and Brewer (2002) demonstrate how a person's collective identity, i.e., attachment and sense of belonging or non-belonging, is reflected in the ways in which the individual perceives other individuals and groups. According to their

study, social identity is more complex if an individual belongs to several, non-overlapping or only partially overlapping groups: 'when an individual acknowledges and accepts, the non-overlapping memberships of his multiple ingroups, his/her subjective identity structure is both, more inclusive and more complex' (2002: 89). Further, the more complex the individual's social identity, the higher the perceived degree of homogeneity of the other or the group. Moreover, Roccas and Brewer's (2002) findings state that complex social identity allows individuals to react in a more balanced way to outside threats or painful events related to their sense of identity. The individual's awareness of *multiple belongings* is therefore affirmed to be an effective pre-requisite to reduce inter-group prejudice. This suggests that multiplying group attachments to several non-overlapping social categories or groups over time through geographical mobility conducts the individual towards *a more inclusive world view*, perceiving less differences and gaps between individuals and groups than individuals with low social identity complexity.

Group memberships in general allow for collective agency (Cerulo 1997), which means that entities can act in a collective 'cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution' (Poletta & Jasper, 2001: 285, cited by Brekhus, 2020). Scholars further state the importance of affective responses for the creation of mental representations, cognitive strategies and meaning analysis. Even if individuals in international mobility situations were, for example, exposed to the same organisational discourse, to the same host national behaviour and comparable reactions of family and friends, every person might interpret similar situations in a different manner. Zajonc (2000) emphasises, for example, the role of *relational stimuli* for meaning creation and evaluation. This indicates that individual perception transforms situations into either an event of crisis, an event of success or into a 'non-event', according to its meaning for the actor's personal narrative and sense-making processes (*see papers three*

and four). Moreover, there is a consensus in social anthropology that in contemporary times of globalisation, complex systemic configurations and geographical mobilities result in *highly dynamic interactions* amongst individuals, which affect social and personal identities and feelings of belonging (Cuche, 1996; Dervin, 2012; Wolton, 2003). From an anthropological perspective the sense of belonging and identity evolve in relation to places, objects, communities, and foremost in relation with the Other. A large variety of situations encountered in professional and private lives, as well as social interactions and intimate relationships influence movers' self-images and their relational and locational attachments over time (Anthias, 2018; Urry, 2007; Wikan, 2002). Moreover, from a constructivist perspective individual interests are shifting, according to how relevant they are in specific situations. Identity categories become more or less salient according to situations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus, an individual 'identity set' is understood as a presentational 'resource' composed by a variety of roles (Goffman, 1990), and as Berger states, a certain degree of role discrepancy is socially permitted and psychologically bearable, but there are pressures to achieve a certain level of consistency in the role individuals play and in identities they therefore assume (Berger, 1963).

In order to surpass the opposition of *structuralism* and *constructivism*, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) suggest abandoning identity as concept in the social analysis in general: 'identity is too ambiguous, too torn between "hard" and "soft" meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demands of social analysis.' (2000: 2). Generally, it is important to note that structuralist conceptualisations, such as reflected in monolithic national identities, have been questioned by social scientists for several decades, especially when it comes to the empirical investigation of individual identities (Anthias, 2002, 2018; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Brubaker's and Cooper's (2000) encourage to go 'beyond identity' and claim in their eminent critique that 'social sciences and humanities have surrendered to

the word identity'. They underline the ambiguity and multidimensionality of the term. Likewise, Anthias (2002) argues that 'identity has a tendency to function as a *disabling concept* that limits the focus and moves the analyst away from context, meaning and praxis' (2002: 493; emphasis added). In line with Brubaker and Cooper (2000), she encourages the use of the concept of 'belonging' as analytical device, rather than identity.

Despite an often heterogenous theoretical and paradigmatic landscape, some scholars defend the relevance and utility of multiple, distinct identity related frameworks in the social sciences. Yuval-Davis (2010), for example, is less absolute when affirming that 'the complementary use of different theories of identity in the literature can add to, rather than detract from, its validity, as long as their boundaries in specific social contexts remain clear' (Yuval-Davis, 2010: 262). One could deduce that the grand range of debates and narratives around what identity is or is not, is mirroring the very vitality, multiplicity and vacillations that identities entail. In any case, Yuval-Davis' suggestion to be open to different theoretical underpinnings is well noted and put in practice in this thesis, as the presented contributions leverage distinct philosophical and theoretical presumptions (cf. *paper one* for the disentangling of social and analytical categorisations; *paper two* for performative speech acts and the discursive construction of difference; *paper three* for ephemeral collective belongings and affective identifications; *paper four* for the dissolution of identity and subject-object dichotomies through nomadic ethics).

opening-up for mobility across social fields

Dynamic and steadily evolving identifications, attachments and detachments lived by international migrants and mobile individuals in contemporary times, are only partially considered in social theory and anthropology. Without a particular focus on mobilities, scholars like

Lahire (1998) or Aubert (2004) pinpoint the importance of considering the *hypermodern* human condition in globalizing societies, and the *plurality of being*, when wanting to explore individual life modes empirically. Socio-anthropologists emphasise the transformation of feelings of belonging through globalization in general and observe the advent of more complex social and personal identities. Abélès (2008) states, for example, an individual *attachment to a global world*, beyond territorial attachment. For Hannerz (1990), belonging to a 'world culture' opens one unique network of social relationships, favours *interconnectedness* and lets 'collective structures of meaning' emerge (1990: 239). Referring to Gouldner (1958) and Merton (1957) he picks up on the notion of *cosmopolitanism*, describing it as 'a state of mind', a perspective or 'a mode of managing meaning' (1990: 239), independent from mobility or territory. Scholars assume that shared ecological risks and the ubiquitous availability of communication technologies will continue to nurture a cosmopolitan perspective and identification of individuals. This kind of forced cosmopolitanism, which is not an exclusive identity, but rather a state of being and a state of mind, intertwines with local situations and concerns.

Cosmopolitanism is therefore not comprehended as a consequence of global mobility and migration, but as political and societal responsibility, that embraces sedentary individuals as well as neo-nomads. It influences in various ways human experiences in a contemporary context (Beck 2009; Calhoun, 2003; Remaud, 2014). Sociologists have defined contemporary cosmopolitanism as 'societal project' of cosmopolitan modernity (Beck 2000, VI; Freitag, 2004), affirming that the term has been (mis)used to oppose 'liberal' internationalism and 'illiberal' localism, to stigmatise cultural or ethnic settings (Calhoun, 2003). Beck (2009) asserts that the term 'cosmopolitanism' is used in an inappropriate manner, that is, as a synonym of globalism, 'glocalism', universalism, multiculturalism or imperialism. Instead, he associates contemporary cosmopolitanism with

increasing awareness of otherness and difference, in combination with new forms of democratic power, beyond the nations state. Beck defends the importance of the concept for globalised societies and acknowledges a complex genealogy of the concept, from Enlightenment, over culturalist and nationalist philosophy in the 19th century, up to a positive alternative to the power of the market in nation states. Whereas cosmopolitanism, according to the Kantian tradition is understood in a normative way and as a conscious, somehow idealistic choice, as a task often reserved to an elite, Beck and Levy (2013) speak of *'thick' cosmopolitanisation* under the surface of declared national identities, and Kymlycka's and Walker's book (2012) of locally 'rooted cosmopolitanism'. This indicates that the concept of *cosmopolitanism* is not necessarily associated with nomadism or mobility.

Appadurai (1990) uses the metaphor of *fluid landscapes* to describe 'the imagined worlds […], the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups across the globe' (Appadurai 1990: 297), thereby reminding us of historically and culturally constituted landscapes of difference. He calls out deeply perspectival constructions, 'inflected by historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors' (1990: 296), leading to inequality and *radical disjuncture* between global flows. He sees the central feature of global culture in the 'politics of cannibalization between sameness and difference' (Appadurai 1990: 308). Giddens (1991) points out that modern globalization is accompanied by '*reflexive constructions of the self*' and observes 'time- space distancial,' as social relations are dis-embedded from fixed places, and Liogier (2012) argues that the emergence of '*individuo-global narratives*' constitutes a new expression of the individuals' desire to be and to become. Overall, scholars agree that the phenomena of globalisation and acceleration through mobility and communication modify contextual and systemic variables, intensify interconnections, reorganise temporality, raise consciousness and allow individuals to share experiences from a

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distance, all whilst *alienating* them in return (Rosa, 2012; Abélès, 2008; Giddens, 2007).

The concept of 'transnationalism' confirms that social relationships and personal ties, as well as economic, cultural or political activities are not limited to a specific local national sphere in the country of settlement, nor to a purely bi-directional 'host country' – 'home country' connection. Migration researchers attempt to overcome 'methodological nationalism', a term that was coined by Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2003) and deployed by numerous political and social science scholars since (Beck, 2014; Yildiz, 2018). It is commonly agreed that mobilities and migrations lead to *enhanced interactions* and *transactions* between individuals and groups across locations and beyond socio-cultural boundaries. This is politically supported through the construction of *transnational citizenship*, for example in the European Union (Balibar, 2004). In the context of transnationalism scholarship Anthias (2002; 2018) pleads for using the notion of narratives of location and positionality as analytical device. As a result of their research Anthias (2002) and Ghorashi (2004) affirm that belonging can be 'trans-locational' and that a person can identify with multiple national, cultural or ethnic identities at the same time, as already supported by Woodward (1997). In order to comprehend individuals and their mobile and migratory practices in late modern societies, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) suggest distinguishing 'ways of belonging' and 'ways of being' of transmigrants and state that

> *ways of being* refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in rather than to the identities associated with their actions. [...] In contrast, *ways of belonging* refer to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group.' (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004: 1010; emphasis added).

When Dahinden (2017) reviews the importance of Portes' and colleagues' theorising regarding transnationalism, she underlines that transnationalism requires a 'multiplication of activities that require cross-border travel and contacts' and a 'high intensity of exchanges' (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt 1999: 219). Accordingly, 'transnationalism' does not allow for simple 'lifestyle' considerations. Glick-Schiller (2003) refers to transmigrants as 'persons who, having migrated from one nation-state to another, live their lives across borders, participating simultaneously in social relations that embed them in more than one nation state' (2003: 105). Waldinger suggests that the meaning of 'ism' in the word transnationalism is constituted by 'transmigrants, engaged in a complex but fundamentally closed set of relationships' who thereby 'virtually erase the distinction between "here" and "there"' (Waldinger, 2008: 5). Despite the statement that transnationalism is constituted by stable and sustainable ways of acting and being (Dahinden, 2017; Portes et al., 1999), ad-hoc practices and ephemeral social ties deserve some additional attention. As _paper three_ suggests, certain ways of belonging merely come into light in situations of crisis or significant life events. Moreover, as demonstrated in _paper four_, cases that I qualify as _'extreme mobilities'_, that is, where geographical and occupational mobilities intersect, are constitutive for continuously changing ways of identifying and belonging. Most importantly, I argue that the value of identity as analytical device diminishes with increasing mobility complexity. Therefore, I defend that, in order to understand transnationalism or neo-nomadism in situations of recurrent, extreme mobilities, it is crucial to open-up to epistemologies and ways of theorising beyond the historically, sedentarily conceived notion of normative 'identity'. Hence, Stuart's (1996) question 'do we really need identity?', is very much à propos in the context of extreme mobility and transmigration.

The event of change, as it occurs in the case of geographic mobility, triggers questioning and even crisis for the individual. As

already observed and analysed by Schütz, being a stranger 'interrupts the flow of habit and gives rise to a changed consciousness', as the individuals' 'relatively natural conception of the world' does not make sense in the new situational context (Schütz, 1944: 502). This increasing *reflexivity* can be understood, according to Kaufmann (2004), as *'a logic of openness'* and identity construction is therefore understood as *'integration of sense'*. The possibility to settle or to move on entails a notion of *perceived freedom*, as suggested by Simmel (1908) with the figure of 'the stranger', who 'comes today and stays tomorrow', but who remains a *potential wanderer*. 'Although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going' (1908: 509). Whereas contemporary sociologists continue emphasising the emergence of phenomena such as neo-nomadic and mobile lifestyles and ways of belonging in hypermodernity (Maffesoli, 2016; Shin, 2014; d'Andrea, 2006), the *mobilities turn* in the social sciences accounts for increasing complexities in organisational, relational and individual identification (Cresswell 2006; Elliot and Urry 2010; Urry, 2007; Salazar 2018). As elaborated on in *paper four*, the 'mobilities turn' proposes to approach social and societal matters through the lens of *mobility*, in order to adjust distorted perspectives and to revise social theory that is based on the assumption of local, sedentary and often monolithic societies. Cresswell confirms that the very phenomenon of mobility leads many scholars 'to question more rooted and bounded notions of place as the locus of identity' (Cresswell, 2011: 551).

    This opens the way for *post-structuralist* and *non-representational* considerations. Considerations that allow to think of identities as unbound and of identifications as fluctuating, ephemeral and dissolved. It calls for an ontology of the 'mobile self' as some scholars argue (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Calas, Ou & Smircich, 2013), an ontology where humans are engaged in a continuous process of becoming, constituted by and constitutive of mobilities, rather than subjected to reified, sedentarist identity categories. As thoroughly discussed by

Bauman (1997; 2000), systemic constraints and *inequalities* in contemporary, neo-liberal and globalized societies force individuals to compose with 'fluid' identities and to strategize, in order to be able to position themselves. He points to the existence of individual agency to pro-actively resist and to construct *identity strategies*. For Bauman,

> having an identity solidly founded and resistant to cross-waves, having it "for life", proves a handicap rather than an asset for such people as they do not sufficiently control the circumstances of their life itinerary; a burden that constrains the movement, a ballast which they must throw out in order to stay afloat. (Bauman, 1997: 26).

In Bauman's understanding, the fixation of identities induces suffering. Complexity theorists likewise affirm that the ubiquity of information, cross-border relationships and global networks accelerate the dissemination of cultures and values in late modernity, nurturing feelings of multiple belongings that exceed nation states or local bonds (Axelrod and Cohen, 2000; Byrne and Callaghan, 2013; Morin, 2008). Increasing multidimensionality, fragmentation and liquidity of individual identities are seen as indicators for a shift towards 'late modernity' (Augé, 2008), 'postmodernity' (Bauman,1997; Baudrillard, 1987; Lyotard, 1979) or 'hyper-modernity' (Aubert, 2004; Lipovetsky, 2006). Postmodernity and neoliberalism, as per Foucault, offer an increasing choice and infinite possibilities for individuals to compose with these choices, towards a 'plurality of existence', where the individual becomes more and more autonomous, reinventing multiple, superposing modes of existence, beyond institutional or disciplinary systems. The postmodern being is multiple, interconnected and continuously changing its relations to the self, to the Other and to the world and, consequently to time and space (Lahire, 1998; Maffesoli 2018). Organisations, networks, communities and systems, constituted and constructed by social actors in general, are increasingly decentralized, thereby broadening personal latitudes. The

postmodern human is said to be composed of and to compose 'meshworks' (DeLanda, 2002), 'communities of destiny' and 'tribes', which exceed institutional structures and which organise around *affinities* and *affect* (Maffesoli, 1993). Avant-garde thinker Lyotard (1984) emphasises the importance of interconnectedness and communications in postmodernity when he affirms that

> a self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be' (1984: 15, own translation).[2]

Based on this reasoning, late-modern society, as well as physical and imaginary mobilities can be comprehended as a condition, which forces individuals to develop new forms of social interaction and belongingness: a 'fabric' (Lyotard, 1984) or 'rhizomatic composition' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), rather than a network. Alternatively, mobility can be understood as a means for symbolic distinction, as suggested in *paper 2,* as a catalyst of expanding the rhizomatic force of one's life, of actualising the virtual, of experiencing a higher degree of lived intensity, as proposed in *paper four.* Either way, the need to deepen our understanding of the 'postmodern' human condition in situations of *mobility* with and beyond this dissertation appears crucial.

Bauman's (2000) and Glick-Schiller's and Salazar's (2013) critical approaches towards mobility are particularly enriching. Salazar reveals the romanticized idea behind 'becoming through mobility' (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013) and affirms that Western individualist

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[2] Le soi est peu, mais il n'est pas isolé, il est pris dans une texture de relations plus complexe et plus mobile que jamais. Il est toujours, jeune ou vieux, homme ou femme, riche ou pauvre, placé sur des « nœuds » de circuits de communication, seraient-ils infimes. […]

imaginaries and 'colonial imaginaries' are re-enacted (Salazar, 2011). As demonstrated by Huang, (2022) in reference to Bauman (2000), Cresswell and Merriman (2011), the neo-liberal discourse of hyper-mobility and its association with individual *freedom*, *resistance* and *cosmopolitan capital* is not only reflected in public discourse, but self-appropriated by movers in their individual narratives. Thus, I suggest that *scripted narratives* of research participants require to adopt a meta perspective during empirical investigation and analysis. Accordingly, *paper four* explores how the adoption of a non-representational epistemology can contribute to further theorising of mobile ways of being and becoming, beyond 'sedentarist metaphysics' (Cresswell, 2001). Moreover, investigating the very phenomenon of *workforce mobility* in late modernity, though a *mobilities lens*, rather than through a management and organisation lens, shall raise awareness of normative discourses in our study field. As the last section of the review shows, global mobility in management and organisation studies is often associated with individual acculturation and career success, with human capital accumulation in organisations and nation states. Therefore, a transdisciplinary approach, as conducted in the present threefold literature review, contributes to continuously *problematising* and loosening-up monolithic, essentializing identity categories and conceptualisations, which have been constituted by nationalist, political and economic interests in the framework of the nation state.

MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION PERSPECTIVES

managing identity?

The conceptualisation of identity in management studies increasingly exceeds monolithic understandings and supports processual views of individual identification (Black, Warhurst, and Corlett, 2018). Scholars emphasise the *temporariness* and *continuous construction* of identities (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008; Villesèche, Muhr and Holck,

2018). Still, the fluidity, plurality and fragmentation of individual identities in hypermodern times is not systematically accounted for, as employers' strategies for staff retention and development are often conceptually tied to the 'solidity' of identity. Scholars argue, for example, for the importance of psychological identity awareness as *'stabilizing force'* (Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs, 2014: 35), and position identity as '*a foundation'* of human resource development (Black et al., 2018).

In fact, since the introduction of participatory models of management and 'human relations' in the 1920s, a basic objective has been to 'make organisational members feel a useful and important part of the overall effort' (Miles 1965, section 3). The later fostering of a '*human resources*' perspective in the United States in the 1960s by McGregor (1960) and others led to conceive of members of organisations as a reservoir of resources that 'include not only physical skills and energy, but also creative ability and the capacity for responsible, self-directed, self-controlled behaviour' (Miles, 1965, section 4). Accordingly, fostering 'identity at work' *facilitates management and social control* through organisationally led identity constructions, as Alvesson and Willmott affirm (2002). Thus, still today, a 'human resource perspective' goes along with the rigidification of 'identity' and forces individuals, for example, to distinguish between their 'working self' and their 'authentic self' (Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen, 2009). For Foucauldian scholars in management and organisation studies 'HRM' is part of a discursive formation, as Weiskopf and Munro (2011) point out, which 'moves *competitiveness* to the centre of business and labour agendas and reconstructs the employee as an active economic subject, as an entrepreneurial self that calculates costs and benefits' (2011: 692). As they emphasise, the constructed subjects of HRM are 'entrepreneurial selves' who are *decreet to be responsible for the maximization of their own human capital*. Moreover, the 'centrifugal' forces of globalization and human geographical mobilities and

migrations are regulated through passport regimes, which enable border-crossings for some populations and restrict it for others. Those who possess the 'right' passport or whose labour force and competencies are in demand in the country of destination, experience relatively free geographical movement, whereas less privileged populations are tied to their countries of birth. Even if the region of the European Union allows for free movement for EU citizens, border regimes have been reinforced over the past decade.

One might concede that the association of the diffuse notion of 'identity' with managerial objectives, might allow for the 'operationalization' of the concept for management and organisation research and practice. However, I suggest that framings such as 'career identity' (Briscoe et al., 2018), 'working identity' (Ibarra, 1999; 2004) or 'managerial identity' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) overemphasise the organisational and professional self, thereby separating it deliberately from broader social identifications and plural ways of belonging, beyond professional roles. Hence, the *centrality of 'work' and 'career'* in individual lives is normalized and the idea of productive occupation as major constituent of the individual self continues to be nurtured, in line with 'modern social imaginaries' (Taylor, 2004), as discussed in previous sections of this review. Statements of organisational sociologists confirm this claim: 'work is a core-activity in society. It is central to individual identity, links individuals to each other, and locates people within the stratification system' (Kalleberg, 2009: 1). This structuralist understanding contributes to the objectivation of identity and cultivates an instrumentalist understanding: identity as 'tool' for human resource management. Human capital management is understood by Weiskopf and Munro (2011) as more and more designed for the controlled *circulation* of human capital: a neoliberal concern.

According, to Watson (2008) and Ybema and colleagues (2009), a continuous tension in management and organisation studies consists in the distinction between *personal identity* and *discursive social identity*,

between self and other. This points to the struggle of determining *either structure or agency* as sources for identity construction: 'self-other talk articulate can be seen as discursive reflections of the more fundamental relationship between the individual and sociality' (Ybema et al. 2009: 299). Indeed, extended identity concepts that are leveraged in management research, such as *'identity work'* (Brown, 2017; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003), *'identity strategies'* (Pierre, 2003) or *'identity development'* (Black et al., 2018) lead to assume that identity is consciously and *strategically produced*, constructed and performed by individuals in interaction with their professional environment, in order to position themselves within an organisation and to respond to employer's expectations. However, as investigations with regards to *tactical identity work* show, self-identifications are not necessarily consciously enacted. Instead, self-labelling and the labelling of others can as well occur through *daily routines* in a rather natural way (Knapp et al. 2013; Kreiner, 2006).

Overall, one comes across various understandings and hermeneutics of personal identity in management and organisation studies, in general, which build upon distinct paradigmatic stances. Yet, Knights and Clarke (2017) affirm that *broader reflections*, beyond the self-imposed boundaries of the field, are lacking consideration in research design and subsequent theoretical conclusions. As a matter of fact, the need to go underneath and beyond paradigmatic believes and restraining, discipline specific classifications in identity research has been reiterated by organisation scholars for some time (Corlett, 2017; Coupland and Brown, 2012; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Scholars affirm, for example, the necessity to *critically engage* with intra-disciplinary assumptions (Corlett, 2017) and to *question assertions* instead of taking them for granted, in order to reframe meta-theories. Several scholars agree on the need to explore multiple perspectives on identity and belonging *in relation to the phenomenon under investigation*, as several explorations show. Villesèche, Muhr and Holck

(2018) discuss, for example, the validity and relevance of different paradigms and perspectives on identity for *diversity research* at the workplace. Cloet and Pierre (2017) develop multi-paradigmatic proposals on how to approach individual identity in globalized firms and in the field of *intercultural management research*, and Dervin (2008) evaluates complementary theoretical frameworks of identity, when investigating the implications for *student stays abroad* in higher education.

Management and organisation scholars remind us that not only national borders, but also organisational boundaries have become 'more permeable, more fluid, more dynamic, and less distinct' (Weick, 2001: 207), leading to alternatives modes of organizing and to non-conventional, self-directed occupational pathways, value-based professional attitudes and vocational career behaviours (Briscoe and Hall, 2006), as will be discussed in further details in *paper four*. Most recently, in the advent of new work modes, such as digital remote work in the knowledge industry, 'distinctions between organisations and their environments as objective determinants seem to be fading into irrelevance, as business strategy focuses on creating new environments rather than adapting to existing ones' (Sumati, Nikolova & Clegg, 2020). In other words, when work settings become increasingly de-centralized, according to employees' locational preferences, and disconnected from organisational bricks-and-mortar premises, identifications with places and organisations might lose their primacy. In sum, hypermodern life modes and contemporary changes in globalized labour markets, together with human mobilities and migration, necessitate to account for a *plurality of ways of belonging and identifying,* beyond the nation state and beyond the work-setting.

Despite changing conditions of work in late modern societies, 'nationality' is still leveraged as one out of several sampling criteria in global mobility research in management and organisation studies, whilst intersections with other social identity categories or intertwined and

ephemeral ways of belonging are often neglected. The *essentialization of national identity* seems to dominate over processual understandings of multiple, fluid identification (e.g. Berry, 2009; Kraimer et al. 2012; Lee, 2010). *International employee's identity* is frequently comprehended in a binary way as composed of 'host country' and 'home country' identity, thereby reinforcing the reification of the concept 'identity' more broadly. When studying intercultural effectiveness of individuals at the workplace Lee (2010), speaks, for example, of 'dual cultural identity', which according to his definition 'distinguishes identity with one's culture of origin (*home-identity*) and identity with the host culture (*host-identity*)' (2010: 57; emphasis added). Lee aligns his vocabulary, assumptions and research design of this study, with earlier works, from Phinney and colleagues (Phinney, Jacoby & Silva, 2007). They refer to home-identity and host-identity as levers for an individual's *security*, *wellbeing* and *cultural adjustment*. In line with Benet-Martinez et al. (2005), Berry (1990; 2009) and others, Lee (2010) admits a certain degree of integrative, cognitive complexity that goes along with what is designated as dual cultural identity, though without accounting for behavioural or affective complexity. He merely conceives of four possible configurations of 'dual cultural identities', distinguishing 'high/high', 'high/low', 'low/low', 'low/high' degrees of identification with 'home' vs. 'host' national culture and claims that this essentialization of national culture and the relative simplification of reality allows to explore broader patterns across groups of individuals in various organisational settings. However, small sample sizes, random sampling, hazardous survey participation and self-reported declarations are seen as major challenges with regards to the reliability of empirical studies on identity, as Lee (2010) underlines. Even when maintaining a positivist lens, it seems problematic not to consider any alternative ways of identification, for example with other social identities, which might be more salient than national identity (Salk & Brannen, 2000). Moreover, the isolation of 'national cultural identity' as independent variable is questionable, given

the complexity, dynamic nature and the lacking conceptual clarity that has been re-iterated by anthropologists and intercultural philosophers for some time, as mentioned previously (e.g., Appadurai, 1996). As compared to this example, Bolten (2011, 2013) defends an open notion of culture and refers, for example, to 'fuzzy' cultures, expressing lacking conceptual clarity. He develops the metaphor of the Sandberg ('dune'), to underline the continuous movements of cultural constituents (sand grains). In this vein numerous management and organisation scholars attempt to disentangle culturalist understandings in MNEs, and encourage more complex, dynamic ways of cultural identification (Karjalainen, 2020).

Briscoe and colleagues' (2018) study on the positive implications of international mobility on identity, investigates subjective perceptions of career success and 'career identity' of so-called 'global careerists', in reference to Ibarra's (2003) and Pratt's (2012) frameworks of identity learning. However, on a meso and macro level, Briscoe and colleagues (2018) base their findings on country comparisons, country development states and the national culture comparison of the GLOBE study (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour) by House and colleagues (2004). This suggests anew a *culturalist approach* with regards to individual identities, even in cases of protean and boundaryless careers, thereby *fixating identities along the lines of nationality* and neglecting multidimensional and fluid considerations of identification. Similarly, Mee (2019) investigates cross-border mobility and 'Malay identity in Indonesia', Andrianto and colleagues (2018) explore the 'role of professional identity for *Indonesian* Returnees', Goulahsen (2015), addresses identity complexity of '*French* female migrants in Manchester and London' and Kohonen (2008) the 'identity construction of *Finnish* expatriate managers', thereby using nationality or country of origin as unique identifiers and decisive sampling criteria. Despite a multitude of empirical studies, the large variety of psychologically based research approaches and conceptualisations, Hippler, Haslberger and Brewster

(2017) conclude in a review that the 'rather extensive expatriate adjustment literature is riddled with inconsistencies and contradictory findings', due to *simplistic models*, 'failing to take into account the complexity of the topic' (2017: 98). In this vein I suggest that a possible reason for the oversimplification based on national identity is the inconsistent application of socially and administratively ascribed categorisations, analytical categories and categories of practice. Moreover, as pointed out by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), institutions, such as MNEs or the nation state, policies and legislations strongly contribute to fostering and objectifying codified categories and categorisations that are imposed on target populations. Koveshnikov, Tienari, and Vaara's (2020) work 'National Identity in and around Multinational Corporations' confirms this observation.

Other scholars distinguish amongst different 'acculturation domains' in situations of international mobility, beyond the professional context. Traditionally, Black and colleagues differentiated, for example, between adjustment to work, adjustment to interactions with host nationals and to the general environment (Black Mendenhall & Oddu, 1991). In an extensive review of acculturation models, Navas and colleagues (2005) account for the macro sphere, the sphere of daily interactions (political, work, economic, family, social, religion and ways of thinking) and position these vis-à-vis the 'the prevailing world view at the host location'. Still, understanding the group of host country nationals as separate from home country nationals, and concluding on ideal 'acculturation attitudes' and real 'acculturation strategies' risks rigidifying the identity concept. The suggested model, which states to be an extension of Berry's (1990) approach, is based on an inquiry alongside a 5 point-scale in order to measure the degree of acculturation, i.e., the degree to which individuals 'wish to maintain their own identity' vs. the degree of 'interaction with host country nationals'. Nationality is equalled to national identity and host country national identity is defined as an attribute that can be acquired, but which is opposed to nationality

of origin. Therefore, even though Navas and colleagues (2005) consider interactions and belonging across different life worlds, they maintain a culturalist perspective as central filter, which leaves little room to think of alternative ways of individual identification of movers.

Maintaining static, monolithic understandings of national identity, advancing national identity as primary, salient identity category is described as 'methodological nationalism' by sociologists Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2009), thereby drawig attention to the distortion that these taken for granted assumptions provoke. In sum, approaches that essentialize national identity and national culture when investigating implications of geographical *mobility* of employees miss to appreciate the large variety of other social identity categories that constitute personal identities. Furthermore, they omit to account for *emic* perspectives, that is to explore how identifications and belonging are constituted by lived experiences or discourse, by relationalities to places, people and the self. Instead, they conceive of the individual mover as isolated psychological entity, with limited capacity and little agency to navigate heterogenous, volatile environments. One of the reasons for an overly strong focus on nationality as a filter for etic studies might be the way in which international mobility and expatriation are organized and administered in employing organisation: employment contracts, compensation and benefits schemes as well as visa requirements and tax regimes are closely tight to national legislations, and employees are categorised accordingly. In order to advance theorisation with regards to identities in situations of mobility, however, I propose that scholarly research needs to be detached from administrative logics of mobility management on the ground.

Overall, 'expatriate adjustment' studies are generally based on a means-end rationale, assuming that socio-cultural adjustment of expatriates is critical to expatriation success and employee performance, i.e., to the achievement of organisational goals. As different scholars state, there is little evidence, however, for the general validity of this

assumption (Lazarova and Thomas, 2012; Harrison et al. 2004). Moreover, Hippler and colleagues (2017) doubt that adjustment should be treated as a goal in itself. Likewise, the assumption of adjustment as lever for 'integration success' is contested from an underlying sociological perspective. Sociologists point out that other forms of social anchoring might be more relevant for well-being and identity construction than adjustment to host country societies or cultures (Ager and Stangs, 2008). Grzymala-Kazlowska (2016) challenges the notion of 'integration' and underlines, for example, the general importance of points of references in situations of migration, but not necessary requesting adjustment to host country cultures. She states that 'the concept of integration originates from structural and functional assumptions that immigrants constitute an alien element needing adjustment and connection to a society perceived as an integrated social system.' (2016: 1127). This leads us to question the need for socio-cultural adjustment and connection with host nationals, so-called locals, for expatriates and highly qualified migrants. Meanwhile, the notion of *social anchoring* (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2016) and the processual framework of *'embedding'* and *'disembedding'* (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015; Mulholland & Ryan, 2023) allow for perspectives that exceed the structures and ideologies of the nation state.

In addition to *culturalist*, *essentializing* tendencies of identities of international, mobile employees, the earlier discussed study (Lee, 2010) illustrates the *objectivation of 'identity'*. When Lee (2010) interprets social identity theory, SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), and social categorisation theory, SCT (Turner et al. 1987) he suggests that social identity is 'a self-regulatory socio-psychological structure in that it directs attention, processes information, determines attitudes, and orients behaviours' and he further states that 'cultural identities play a far-reaching role in determining one's cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses' (Lee, 2010: 57). This interpretation   leaves little room for individual agency, in contrast to Tajfel and Turner (1979) who account

for individual agency and emphasise the importance of social interaction, as they comprehend categorisations as context-related and relational. Even though Lee (2010) states regulating effects of national identity on cognition, emotion, and behaviour, he does not evoke how lived experience or social interactions might be likewise constitutive for multiple, more complex identities. Instead, he argues that the 'lack of strong cultural roots' is a 'negation of one's own history' that represents a risk of *'losing the sense of self'* and triggering a 'feeling of insecurity' (Lee, 2010: 60; emphasis added).

Identity 'struggle' and the need to develop 'coping mechanisms' are commonly claimed to be inherent to professional and international mobility and migration, as different conceptualisations in management and organisation studies claim. 'Adjusting' to the 'host country' or 'integrating' into 'local society' are comprehended as prerequisites for stable identities and professional performance, even when there is lacking evidence on the effect of adjustment on performance in mobility situations (Lazarova and Thomas, 2012). Other studies which address 'national cultural identity' in the context of *global mobility* in management and organisation studies, *rigidify and objectify identity*. Several scholars state that identity can 'get lost' in situations of international mobility (McNulty and Moeller, 2017; McNulty 2012; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001), 'sacrificed' and 'relinquished' (Salomaa, 2018) or is 'under threat' and 'threatened (Collins & Bertone, 2017; Petriglieri, 2011; Sharma & Sharma, 2010). Studies on 'expatriate spouse adjustment' also contribute to the objectivization of identities when nurturing the term 'threatened identities' (Collins & Bertone, 2017), likewise in the tradition of Lazarus' and Folkman's transactional stress and coping theory (1984) and Breakwell's (1983, 1986) psychological perspectives on 'identity threat'. At other occasions management scholars and coaches coin the notion of a 'portable self' and 'portable identities' (Bryson and Hoge 2005; McNulty, 2012; Petriglieri, Petriglieri & Wood, 2018). In a similar vein cultural and psychological

adjustment studies, which address changing social roles (from 'working spouse' to 'trailing spouse'), confuse functionalist assumptions with social roles, social identities and personal identity. Hence, there is a lack of conceptual clarity overall.

Some studies in IHRM and global mobility studies are less essentializing, but a majority draw on psychology or social psychology. There is a tradition to investigate the potential *positive impact* of international mobility on the individual's capacity to develop distinct 'coping strategies' and to foster psychological resilience more broadly (Selmer, 2001; Stahl and Caligiuri 2005), suggesting that defensive coping strategies and psychologically founded problem- and emotion-based strategies, are accessible to individuals, depending on their available personal resources as well as environmental constraints. Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) underline individual variations in coping strategies, emphasising in reference to Feldman and Thomson (1993) that 'expatriates are able to draw from a potentially large repertoire of coping strategies to regulate stressful emotions, bring situational problems under their control, and be proactive agents of change' (2005: 604). They concede a certain degree of agency and pro-activeness to the individual, beyond defensive coping. Moreover, they analyse the moderating effects of contextual factors, such as power discrepancies and hierarchical levels in the organisation, time on the assignment, and 'cultural distance' have on expatriate adjustment and on the intention to stay.

Other scholars explore the effect of situational factors and multiple stakeholders' influences on individual coping strategies, therewith accounting for intersubjective processes. Takeuchi (2010) defends for example the importance of mapping and analysing interdependencies between expatriates and primary stakeholders, which he groups into 'family domain', 'host country national domain' and 'parent company domain', describing them as those who can affect expatriates or are affected by them. He applies a person-situation interactionist perspective to the three interfaces between expatriates and

the stakeholder groups and thereby develops a methodology that is more distanced from national identity as stand-alone attribute. Liu and Shaffer (2005) likewise include psycho-sociological considerations when analysing the effect of social capital such as networks, opportunities (access to information and resources), motivation (trust and norm of reciprocity) and abilities (intercultural competencies and reliable task performance), stating a weak impact on adjustment, but a significant impact on expatriate performance. The study of environmental conditions and overall 'hostilities' in 'host countries' likewise accounts for intersubjectivities and thereby broadens the understanding of processes of settlement and adjustment (e.g. Raupp et al., 2020)

Other interpretivist studies on expatriation in the field of IHRM investigate links between identity narratives and international and global career attitudes (Näsholm, 2012; Kohonen, 2008; Scurry, Rodriguez and Bailouni 2013), exploring therewith alternative self-concepts from the individuals' perspectives. Kohonen's research (2004, 2008) on subjective expatriate experiences is one example. When observing identity balancing, shifts and non-shifts amongst Finnish repatriated managers, she refers to the malleability of the self, regarding cultural and professional identities, by reflexively analysing individual narratives. Näsholm (2012) focusses on international itinerants and so-called 'global careerists' of Swedish origin, i.e., individuals who moved several times internationally for the purpose of their work. He concludes on interdependencies between the length of assignments, organisational identification and host culture identifications. Scurry, Rodriguez and Bailouni's (2013) study is insightful, as it points out the highly complex and volatile nature of identity narratives of self-initiated expatriates from various national origins in Qatar. They highlight the link between narratives on professional identities and the specific local context and regulatory constraints. Even if all three studies explore individual life narratives through an interpretivist lens, some are essentializing national culture, as mentioned earlier, and all leverage etic analytical

categorisations, such as 'expatriate', 'international itinerant' and 'self-initiated expatriate', without accounting for 'categories of practice'.

When personal identity is conceptualised as something that someone possesses, or does not possess, as something that individuals risk losing or are asked to rebuild, the concept of identity is *rigidified and reified*. Especially the monolithic and often binary use of social identity categories that are commonly leveraged to characterize membership in a sedentary societal context, such as nationality, profession, gender or educational background, restrict the understanding of identity and belonging with regards to those who move across borders and boundaries to ascribed labels. No matter how 'movers' are labelled in a local administrative context or in everyday life – migrant, mobile employee, foreign worker, expatriate or global talent: in the interest of epistemological consistency and conceptual coherence I assert with the present dissertation that it is crucial to distinguish between analytical scholarly ascribed categories, decreed administrative categories and every-day acts of labelling in public discourse on the one side and processes of self-identification and ways of belonging that occur through social interaction, lived experience and self-reflection o, the other side.

'expatriates are not migrants'

As the 'global workforce' has become increasingly *diverse* and *multilocational*, various analytical categories and externally ascribed identities such as 'international itinerant', 'global careerist', 'self-directed professional' are reiterated in the international human resource management literature (Dickmann, Suutari & Wurtz, 2017; Näsholm, 2012; Mutabazi & Pierre, 2010). These and other attempts to *analytically regroup* multiple constellations of geographic mobilities in organisations, have generated numerous and ever more granular categorisations of international 'career types', which can serve as orientations for practitioners when developing and accompanying international careers. At the same time, the constant emergence of *study*

field specific, *instrumentalist categorisations* does not help to resolve cross-disciplinary inconsistencies. As debates in the field of IHRM illustrate, some theorisations do not systematically stand in dialogue with founding disciplines like sociology and anthropology or in the neighbouring field of migration studies. Taxonomies around types of mobile individuals, attempt to classify and regroup according to types of contracts (local, expatriation, local+), length and frequency of stays abroad, as well as with regards to an appreciation of skills and qualification 'levels' (low/high). However, in such an attempt of classification *hierarchical distinctions* of foreign workers are being nurtured. Moreover, by creating subgroups and extensions and by adding attributes such as 'self-initiated', coined by Suutari and Brewster (2000) or 'non-traditional' (McNulty and & Hutchings, 2016) to the term 'expatriate', scholars in the field of IHRM research account for non-organisational careers, all whilst being resolved to maintain the 'expatriate' category, even for populations that would fall into the overarching category 'migrant' from a macro perspective.

As of today, management researchers agree on the lack of theoretical and methodological foundations underneath the label expatriate and emerging subcategories. However, debates exemplify the attempt to preserve the 'expatriate concept' as *separate* from the label 'migrant' (McNulty and Brewster, 2017), despite changing macro conditions, evolving migration and mobility regimes, and despite blurred boundaries between the terms. Discussions are too often based on reviews, which exclusively relate to conceptualisations within the field of IHRM (e.g. Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld & Dickmann, 2014; McNulty & Brewster, 2017). When neglecting theorisations from the broader *mobilities and migration nexus*, segregating effects of the label 'expatriate' occur, for example when determining what expatriates 'are' (highly qualified and needed workforce) vs. 'what they are not' (labour migrants), thereby excluding contextual specificities and individual perspectives, experiences and discursive practices.

Whereas some scholars agree to consider so-called 'self-initiated expatriates' as a type of migrant (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Al Ariss & Özbilgin 2010), or accept 'migrant' as overarching category (Andresen et al., 2014), others insist that 'migrating means moving from one country in order to settle in another for a long period of time or *permanently'* (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014: 1288; emphasis added). The latter implies that the category 'migrant' would not apply to self-initiated expatriates, as the Cerdin and Selmer claim that 'self-initiated expatriates', as compared to 'migrants', generally would have the prospect of returning to their home country, 'deciding' on the timing themselves. This interpretation is inconsistent with definitions in the field migration studies and it ignores that Dorsch and colleagues (2012) found that many of the so called 'self-initiated expatriates' never return to their country of origin, which means that one could as well classify them as 'skilled migrants'. When clarifying the entanglements of terminological and conceptual foundations with regards to the term 'self-initiated expatriate', Cerdin and Selmer acknowledge that 'the self-initiation process is tricky to capture' (2014: 1291) – as is the process of migration in general, one could add. In reference to reflexive migration scholarship, e.g., Favell (2007), it seems crucial to consider that time frames and intentions to stay are arbitrarily constructed on the basis of what is considered 'normal'. In addition, an initial decision to stay can be revised frequently by the concerned individual and choices are evolving over time. It seems therefore important to reflect on individual agency, before applying and rigidifying categorisations.

In reference to Harrison et al. (2004) and Shaffer et al. (2012), Brewster and McNulty (2017) suggest that 'business expatriates' shall be defined as 'legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organisation, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host-country'. When explaining their reasoning, they further state that 'the definition implies

that employment by an organisation is a key characteristic, thus distinguishing business expatriates from non-business expatriates', they state that 'we are IHRM scholars and therefore interested in the management of people who work for organisations.' – Organisations being understood here in a very narrow sense. It is commonly acknowledged that the field's research focus has been laid on traditional, long-term assignments in Multinational Corporations, MNCs, with little considerations of other organisational forms (Suutari, Mäkelä & Wurtz, 2018). Brewster and McNulty (2017) state further that, as management scholars, 'we are interested in individuals who: (a) engage in international geographical mobility; (b) who have legal employment; (c) with organisations and businesses; and (d) in a country where they do not hold citizenship.' All these conditions, however, may likewise be an argument to align with the canon in political sciences and economics, as well as with UN and IOM definitions, i.e., one could apply the term 'labour migrant' or 'business migrant', instead of 'self-initiated expatriate'. Andresen and colleagues (2014) similarly claim that 'the concept of expatriation is tailored to the organisational context of working abroad, whereas the concept of migration is tailored to the general context of crossing geographical borders'.

As compared to McNulty and Brewster (2017), Andresen et al. (2014) include expatriates into the broader category of international migrants, however, in an overview figure they distinguish those who are 'expatriates' from those who have 'still only migrant status' (2014, 2023, figure 1); the 'only' indicates the underlying hierarchical understanding that is applied here. They further state 'our analysis of the literature shows that the term migrant is an umbrella term for all expatriates, but that some migrants – those who do not work or who are illegally working – are not expatriates' (Andresen et al. 2014). The statements of McNulty and Brewster (2017) to 'legally working' individuals as expatriates, and Andresen's et al. (2014) to 'illegally working' and 'not working' individuals as not being expatriates are in alignment. However, during

onward mobility and transmigration, the employment status continuously evolves, and other occupations might alternate with employment over a mobile life course. This leads me to conclude that the categories 'expatriate' and 'self-initiated expatriate' are inadequate as overarching categories for internationally and occupationally mobile professionals. On a side note, it might be worth mentioning that the international community encourages the use of the terms 'undocumented' or 'irregular' as an alternative to the term 'illegal'. As per a statement of the UN General Assembly Resolution 3449 'irregular' is preferable, as 'illegal' carries a 'criminal connotation' which is against migrants' dignity and undermines the respect of the human rights of migrants (UN Measures to Ensure the Human Rights and Dignity of All Migrant Workers, 1975). The chosen wording of 'illegal work' stated by the above cited IHRM scholars, thereby attaches a negative connotation to migrants, whereas 'legal work' conveys a positive connotation of the expatriate 'status'.

This brief review of expatriate and migrant categorisations in the IHRM literature confirms critical scholarly stances that call for a more conscious and socially responsible use of labels such as 'skilled migrants' (Guo and Al Ariss, 2015) or 'non-traditional expatriates' (Guttormsen, 2018). It will in addition be beneficial for the different theoretical and analytical framings of this thesis, especially under consideration of the 'symbolic status' (Guo and Al Ariss 2015: 1288) that various categorisations imply. It also reminds Al Ariss' and colleagues' affirmation of a general lack of reflectiveness amongst IHRM scholars when it comes to analytical categorisations (Al Ariss, Koall, Özbilgin & Suutari, 2012). Like Al Ariss and Crowley Henry (2013), they point out that migrants, as opposed to self-initiated expatriates, are perceived in this literature as a population that lacks agency to self-direct their professional pathway. They emphasise that the broader context such as migration history or postcolonial relations are not accounted for as influencing factors. Indeed, the logics of a specific discipline, as well as

historical constructions are conventions that deserve being problematised and deconstructed going forward, amongst others within this thesis. Along with recent assertions of Crowley-Henry, O'Connor, & Al Ariss (2018), Guttormsen and Lauring (2022), Ozkazanc-Pan (2019) and others, I support that the lack of interdisciplinary considerations with regards to analytical categorisation limits our field's horizon of theorising significantly. Only recently it was made explicit that expatriation studies have focused over decades on a 'traditional population of managers and executives', which is understood as a population of Western, male, senior managers, in their late 40s or 50s, with an accompanying female spouse and children (McNulty, 2015; McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). Not only intensifying globalisation, as discussed earlier, but also positive outcomes of organisational inclusion and diversity politics facilitated access to international and global careers for various other individuals. An evident link, for example underlined by Ozkazanc-Pan (2019), with the field of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is therefore to be pursued in the future. As will be shown as follows, there is a 'need to acknowledge the imbalances of power and implicit assumptions which shape IHRM research and practice', in Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin words (2017: 18).

Overall, in order to broaden the theoretical understanding of how global mobility is lived, experienced and embodied by those who are on the move, by those who I suggest designating as 'movers', I suggest that it is necessary to go *beyond externally ascribed labels* and social identity categories, as they do not necessarily consider professional becoming and meaning making across locations and over time. Thereby, as elaborated in *paper one*, it is crucial to distinguish between analytical categories and categories of practice when planning empirical studies. Moreover, emic perspectives, such as adopted in the auto-ethnographic study in *paper three*, help to see emerge categories of practice and processes of collective identification, rather than categories of analysis. They allow to take into consideration individual perceptions, affect and

lived experience, based on a phenomenological ontology and ethnographic methods (Headland, Pike & Harris, 1990; Pike 1993).

resisting categorisation and reification

Arduous attempts and ambitions to grasp, circumscribe and demarcate 'identity' as a concept are stretching across academic disciplines, whilst various extensions have emerged across study fields in the applied sciences. When selectively applying social theory to practitioner preoccupations and to operational requirements of policy makers or multi-national enterprises (MNEs), for example, one runs the risk of instrumentalizing and reifying 'identity', of overemphasising certain categorisations and neglecting others, as critically assessed by scholars in both, migration studies (Crawley, & Skleparis, 2018; Dahinden et al., 2021; Favell, 2007; Zetter, 2007) and management, as will be detailed as follows. Indeed, scholars in management and organisation studies point to the importance of considering *multi-scalar perspectives* with regards to categorisations of skilled migrants, to question prevalent assumptions in human resource management. They promote reflexive approaches, which account for the interrelations between the national, macro context, organisational and institutional needs and individual considerations and characteristics of labour migrants (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauwe, 2014; Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2017; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). In line with Tatli and Özbilgin, these scholars support the fluctuating nature of migrant categorisations, all whilst being conscious of underlying ideologies in an effort to 'frame workforce diversity as a dynamic and empirical construct which attends to temporal and geographic contextuality of relations of power, privilege, inequality and disadvantage' (Tatli and Özbilgin 2012: 180). As compared to other management and organisation scholars Ozkazanc-Pan (2019) inscribes her explorations on 'transmigrants', 'hybrids' and 'cosmopolitans' as the 'new subjects of work' into a tradition of transnational scholarship, all whilst contributing to the field of diversity, equity and inclusion. The

deployed analytical categorisations are distanced from practitioner jargon in global mobility management and therefore allow to reconsider identifications of movers more broadly. As she states 'few organisation scholars adopted theoretical frameworks that can attend to the mobile, complex subject and the novel ways in which individuals define and differentiate themselves in the contemporary context of migration and globalization.' (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019, 10)

Cranston (2017) exemplifies how the use of the term expatriate can be based on a racialized understanding of migration and others pinpoint that the combination of structural constraints and stereotypical representations constitute discriminations and processes of 'Othering' in organisations and institutions (Mutabazi & Pierre, 2010). The social construction of labels and the lack of inclusiveness in the IHRM literature has been reiterated over the years (Berry & Bell 2011; Guo & Al Ariss, 2015; Crowley-Henry, O'Connor, & Al Ariss, 2018). When McNulty and Hutchings (2016) suggest the rather questionable analytical category 'non-traditional expatriate', in order to describe four different types of international movers: single parent, overseas adoption, split family, and lesbian assignees, they reify and stigmatise gender and family constellations. Guttormsen (2018) asks in his critique whether the non-traditional expatriate even exists, and he argues that this extension underlines unconventionality, rather than signalling a distinct typology. As formulated by Collins, Simon-Kumar & Friesen (2020), identity 'is a production that is historically complex, contingent, and occurs through formations that do not honour analytically distinct categories' (in ref to Brown 1997 and McCall 2005: 1772). They further point to McCall's (2005) view on 'anti-categorical' intersectionality, underlining that the issue is not only about 'how to constitute the social groups of a given social category', but rather, given the hyper-fluidity of identity constructions, 'whether to categorize and separate at all' (McCall 2005, 1778).

Another problem of essentialization occurs with the ascription of national identity categories. National frames of reference may still apply to some centralized international organisations, but poly-centric and geo-centric organisational set-ups make it more and more difficult to clearly correlate organisations to nation states. Further, if 'home location' means, for example, the point of departure of a mover, we cannot automatically assume that this mover is a 'home country national' or that she automatically identifies with this specific national culture, even if holding a national passport. Further, in times where at least 40 percent of all organisationally assigned mobile employees are 'permanent transfers' (IAC, 2018), the country of destination may become a country of definite settlement, instead of a 'host country'. National culture and national identity have long been conceptually conjoined and ascribed to individuals without question or examination, as Ybema and Byun observe (Ybema & Byun 2009). As Hanek (2018) states in reference to Isogai et al. (1999) and Fitzsimmons and colleagues (2010), researchers need to consider 'those who 'feel at home everywhere and nowhere' (Isogai et al., 1999: 493), so-called marginals, or 'individuals who have internalized more than one culture, yet do not identify strongly with either or any of them' (Fitzsimmons et al., 2010: 3). As stated by Boussebaa (2021), 'the study of culture in cross-cultural management (CCM) and international business (IB) has been approached in a way that foregrounds 'differences' between nations and that then directs attention to analysing the impact of such differences on various aspects of corporate globalization' (2021: 383). He underlines that the continuous effort of MNEs to 'transcend national-cultural divides through cultural-normative means' has fostered transnational norms and ways of interacting in organisations and professions. The relevance of national cultural attributes, which were way overemphasised in the past, has thereby decreased. Boussebaa (2021) encourages management scholars to refocus on 'cultural globalization', and to de-focus away from national cultural differences. This means, as he suggests, for research to be

informed by macro-level realities, such as international political economy (IPE) or postcolonial theory. Boussebaa and others persistently contribute to the critical assessment of culturalist and essentializing research practice in management and organisation studies (Baskerville, 2003; Chanlat & Pierre, 2018; McSweeney, 2002) and defend the need for a more pluralistic and organic conception of 'culture' both, in organisations and in micro-sociological research studies (Chanlat, Davel, & Dupuis, 2013; Gertsen, Soederberg & Zoelner, 2012; Gustafsson & Blasco, 2004;). 'The idea of one coherent and uniform culture within the boundaries of the nation seems by now inadequate', state Gertsen and Soederberg (1995: 7) decades ago when calling for conceiving of cultures as dynamic and continuously changing. The interest in complex, multidimensional process of identity construction in transnational, multicultural work settings has led to question the primacy of national identities though. Taking a multiple-cultures perspective, scholars like Sackmann and Phillips (2004) assume that people hold membership in and identify with a number of cultural groups simultaneously.

As developed in a conference communication[3], scholars challenge the assumption that national cultures are the only and central dimension constituting individual identities in situations of international mobility (Mutabazi & Pierre, 2008; Primecz, Romani & Sackmann, 2009; Dervin, 2012). They pinpoint the capacity of individuals and multicultural groups to construct not only a multiplicity of meanings according to social interactions and context, but they also emphasise individual agency over identity constructions. Here identity is understood as multi-dimensional, continuously evolving and more or less salient to the individual, according to situations, personal interests, and power constellations. Mahadevan (2011) and Pierre (2003) suggest that organisations and collective identities are made up of more than national

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[3] three paragraphs of this section have were partially published in IACCM conference proceedings (Martel, 2019)

identities, including professional identities, ethnic identities, site identities, etc., as supported by anthropological theory. Whereas Mahadevan (2011) focuses on multiple layers and expressions of *collective identities*, Pierre (2003) studies simultaneously the organisational and the micro-sociological level in multinational corporations and sheds light on a *variety of identity strategies* that are composed of various 'resources' that constitute an individual repertoire. When analysing socialisation processes of international managers during corporate assignments abroad, Pierre (2003) therefore goes beyond a culturalist assumptions. He considers the interconnectedness of private and professional relationships, community membership and networks of international managers, as well as their power advantages.

With regards to individual identities in situations of global mobility, Pierre (2014: 235) explores if and how it becomes possible for an individual to construct one's individual identity in other ways than through the opposition of national cultural differences. Based on qualitative, interpretive inquiry he explores individual resources and five sets of identity strategies, in line with Camilleri's (1998) theory of defensive and offensive identity strategies and Sainsaulieu's (1977) theorisations of identity at work. Personal resources allow to uplift and compensate for feelings of uncertainty and anxiety and to develop, or not, specific strategies. Pierre (2003) as well as Sainsaulieu (1977) in their large-scale sociological studies show that an individual's capacity to develop physical, social or professional mobility depends on available resources or advantages ('atouts'), such as personal and family resources or community bonds with those who live through similar experiences and difficulties. Moreover, intersubjectivity and personal affinities are fundamental from Sainsaulieu's perspective: 'There is an entire dimension that entails the contact between two individuals, which manifests itself always on an intersubjective and affinitive level: this is

[…] the sphere of action of the mobile individual.' (2019: 302).[4] The role of intersubjectivity and interaction with the Other are further explored in *paper three*.

Dahan-Seltzer and Pierre (2010) suggest in line with Friedberg (1993) and Sainsaulieu (1977) that behaviour and conduct at work are linked back to two main dimensions: to the individuals' *past experiences* and the resulting *personal narrative* which influences attitudes, preferences and behaviour in certain situations; furthermore individual conduct is closely linked to *actual constraints* and *opportunities* in the present, i.e. the specific situation of interaction and power constellation in which the person is involved in at a certain moment in time. Mahadevan (2011) likewise supports a processual, anthropological conceptualisation of culture in reference to Geertz (1973) and Ricoeur (1991; 2013), when defining collective identities as 'an open process of sense-making in interaction with changing boundaries' and when affirming that 'the making of the collective "We" always takes place in interaction with the making of a group of the "Other"' (as per Mahadevan, 2011: 89). Mahadevan (2011), as well as Pierre (2003) and other colleagues (Mutabazi and Pierre, 2008; Cloet and Pierre, 2017), are some of few management scholars who account for power relations, for example between headquarters and subsidiaries, when referring to inpatriates' or re-patriates identity strategies at the headquarters. Similarly, Ybema and Nyiri (2015) demonstrate how individuals deploy cultural difference or similarity strategically.

Within the *spatial turn* in social research, management and organisation scholars even show that national identity is not always present when it comes to individual sense-making and self-(re)definition in multicultural settings or situations of geographic mobility. In their

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[4] Own translation from French (4th edt. 2019: 302): "Il y a toute la dimension du contact entre deux individus qui se manifestera toujours au niveau de l'intersubjectif et des affinités, et qui sera en quelque sorte le champs d'action de l'individu mobile. »

research study on hypermobile, international workers in the consulting profession Muhr and Lemmergard (2011) show, for example, in reference to Augé's (1995) concept of 'non-lieux', that 'consultants working across cultures feel a great sense of belonging at "non-places" and in solitude.' (2011: 24). They put forward the potential meaning of culturally generic spaces for individual identities, in the individual's search for 'neutrality' whilst being temporarily mobile and staying in different places. In line with Anthias (2018; 2002) and Gorashi's (2018) understandings of 'trans-locational' belongings, Ozkazanc-Pan (2019) insists on spatial, material aspects of mobility, as they allow to question and go beyond static epistemology. Identifications and ways of belonging of the geographically mobile individual, of the transmigrant or 'mover, as I suggest designating them, go beyond monolithic social identity categories such as profession, social class or nationality – even though externally ascribed categories are omnipresent in public discourse and are at times leveraged strategically by individuals. Thus, when the meaningfulness and salience of some identity categories vanishes during recurrent mobilities and migrations, standardized social identity categories are no longer sufficient to achieve deeper insights and advance theorising on mobile identities. Overall, scholars recognize that the mobile self (Calas et al., 2012) can be comprehended as complex, multiple and in constant flux. They emphasise the need to rise further awareness about mobile ontologies in management studies, in order to foster our understanding of the 'mobile subject' in increasingly globalised, super-diversified professional settings (Calas, Ou and Smircich, 2013; Ozkazanc-Pan and Calás, 2015; Sontag, 2018; Özkazank-Pan 2019). Together with scholars who call for distancing global mobility studies and the study of international movers from essentializing nation state perspectives, I propose with the present thesis to further *resist the reification of identity* in management and organisation studies.

2 / RESEARCH APPROACH & PROCESS

As follows, I am going to elaborate on the overarching research approach and paradigmatic assumptions that are supporting all four papers. Given that each of the four paper contributions can as well 'stand-alone', the methodologies and methods will be addressed in more details in each article. Presently I suggest summarizing the underpinning *epistemological assumptions*, the *post-structuralist framework* that interconnects the four contributions, and the crucial components of the *research process*. I show how the *researcher's positionality* and *ongoing reflexivity* are constitutive for the iterative, inductive-abductive research process. Moreover, the process of problematisation of 'identity' as analytical device in mobility studies is positioned as underlying goal of the broader study. This process accounts for the literature, for pre-understandings, and for insights retrieved though data analysis and ongoing contemplation and intersubjectivity.

EMIC & POST-STRUCTURALIST WAYS OF KNOWING

The preceding threefold literature review problematises the ambiguities and uncertainties that occur when trying to apprehend '*identity'* and *'the self'* in general and in the context of mobility more specifically. Without pretending exhaustivity, it provides an illustration of how ancient thought and philosophical ideas of 'the self' have evolved and influenced each other over time and across civilizations, all whilst being embedded in historical evolutions of human societies. Moreover, it reminds us that the more recent idea of the '*individual'* is closely associated with modernity and its objectives of societal transformation, where *productive occupations* of each member of society are promoted alongside *professional specialization* and *sedentary life modes*. With the primacy of rationality and the 'disenchantment' of the human world, 'new sciences' emerge in the early twentieth century, such as sociology and

psychology. These have nurtured *structuralist* understandings and a *rational analysis* of the human in society and established the notion of personal, psychological and social '*identity*'. Still, doubts about the human capacity to 'think oneself' persist.

Despite the fluctuating and complex realities of transnational, trans-locational lives, some studies draw on rigidifying, monolithic *identity categories* as analytical device. As will be discussed in *paper one*, the traditional focus on national cultures and ascribed identities in subfields of management and organisation studies and the reification of 'identity' as something that movers can 'possess' or 'lose', is highly problematical. *Essentialism* and *methodological nationalism* overemphasise singular categorisations, all whilst neglecting the multiplicity of lived experience. Moreover, the *normalization of sedentary ways of life and work* within bordered national territories limits the understanding of movers from *their* perspective, i.e., from a 'neo-nomadic' stance (d'Andrea, 2006). Overall, I propose that the increasing complexity, liquidity and fragmentation of identities in late modernity in general (Bauman, 2005) and in situations of global mobility more specifically, call for multi-scalar investigations. Deliberately creating a distance to dominant perspectives on international careers and global mobility and migrations entails challenges: how can we account for human *becoming* in contemporary society beyond individualist, identity lenses, without equalling them to growth or human capital accumulation? Is there a way of exploring and exposing what mobility entails, how it affects movers and what *mobility as a phenomenon* sparks, without constantly delimiting the thought process to analytical categorisations or national territories? I propose that the complexity that human movement across various life spheres and locations constitutes and the multiplicities of which it is composed, deserve approaching the phenomenon in its entirety, beyond the dichotomy of structure and agency.

Empirically apprehending hypermodern, mobile lives therefore entails *going beyond etic research approaches* that leverage externally

ascribed analytical categories. For this purpose, ethnographic methods provide *emic approaches* which are built on a *phenomenological perspective* as an epistemology towards 'conscious knowledge' (Pike, 1993). Therefore, rather than further nurturing the *dichotomies* between mobility and sedentariness, I initiated empirical inquiry in a pragmatist fashion, that is, based on different *manifestations* that the very *phenomenon of mobility* brings about at different analytical levels:

- multiple external categorisations and epistemological challenges (*paper one*)
- state / non-state entanglements and discursive fragmentation (*paper two)*
- forced non-mobility and collective ways of belonging in situations of crisis (*paper three*)
- superposing, intersecting mobilities across multiple locations and occupations (*paper four*)

Emic approaches allow for denser insights from the inside out and they are most relevant in contexts of high diversity (Risberg & Pilhofer 2018; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). The empirical data in papers *three* and *four* was retrieved through an emic epistemology based on collective auto-ethnographic inquiry and 'mobility conversations'. Both investigations were conducted inductively, and the retrieved narratives and conversations on mobility experiences, perceptions and world views of movers allow for a deeper understanding. Emic research designs give *room for non-instrumental insights* to emerge, therewith creating openings for theorisation. In the present dissertation they moreover facilitate a terminological detachment from dominant categorisations and *sedentary metaphysics*.

Structuralist ways of knowing, i.e., explaining 'the self' as being constituted and determined by social structures, are based on the analysis of social strata, class and institutions. *Constructivist* epistemologies, in turn, are processual and apprehend the self and personal identities as

constructed through, for example, intersubjectivity, social interactions or 'identity work'. The individual is not understood as solely being subjected to societal structures, but as having *agency*. Both paradigms are most applicable to apprehend social identities and processes of self-identification in relatively stable and homogeneous societal and organisational settings. Contemporary complexities and mobilities call, however, for a 'sociology beyond societies', in Urry's words (2010). Another response to complexities goes beyond sociology: *post-structuralist epistemologies* suggest to deliberately embrace volatility and ephemeral relationalities and to consider fluid and fragmented ways of belonging. 'Transmigrants', the 'new subjects of work' (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019), that is, those who simultaneously experience professional, organisational and geographical mobilities embody this complexity (cf. *paper three* and *four*). Thus, I propose that movers for whom different kinds of mobilities intersect and superpose represent 'extreme cases' *of the postmodern human condition.* For *movers,* the disconnect from normalized, conformist and sedentary life modes goes along with numerous social interactions and ties across locations, resulting in a large exposure to a variety of public discourses at distinct locations (cf. *paper two*). Following Butler's reasoning, movers are *subjected to* categories that enable or inhibit identifications, that is, individuals can be *submissive or resistant* to dominant categorisations. In one way or the other, ascribed identity categories are constitutive for the 'mobile self'. Becoming aware about the performative power of dominant discourse and meta narratives, through the explorations in *paper one* and *paper two*, was constitutive for the way in which I conducted 'mobility conversations' in *paper four*. The conversational, open mode of inquiry avoids imposing categorisations and concepts of identity on the interlocutors. Moreover, scripted responses that reflect human resource discourse, for example related to 'global mindset', 'growth mindset' or 'career capital' could be more easily identified during data analysis. This allowed for emic categories to emerge. As Alvesson (2002) confirms: 'An awareness of

how dominant Discourse and conventions for expression can lead to script-following might […] lead to interview interventions in which familiar, institutionalized ways of talking about things are discouraged' (2002: 118).

In general, the advent of communication and information technologies, of accelerated modes of transportation and intensifying economic globalization in post-industrous societies, indicate for many scholars in the social sciences and humanities a shift in terms of social and economic systems. For some, it involves even a 'radical break' with a dominant modern culture and aesthetics, as Jameson (1984) states, i.e., a shift to 'postmodernity'. This has strong implications for our *ways of knowing*, as Lyotard anticipates (1979). Since the 1960s Derrida affirms a contemporary 'rupture' of central structures and reproaches structuralist, 'empiricist' methods to be caught in the 'ethics of presence' and in the 'nostalgia of origin' (Cusset, 2005: 40). As stated by Jameson (1984) in the foreword of the English edition of 'The postmodern condition', Lyotard's work is a 'thinly veiled polemic' against Habermas' 'vision of a 'noise-free', transparent, fully communicational society' (Jameson, 1984: vii). In contrast to Habermas, Lyotard (1979) comprehends language utterances in science and society as *performative*, as participating in the maintenance of social order and in social reproduction. He refuses to see *narratives* as simply denotative, well-regulated speech, but comprehends them as 'central instance of the human mind and a mode of thinking fully as legitimate as that of abstract logic' (Jameson, 1884: xi). Lyotard, like other early post-structuralist scholars, e.g., Derrida (1967), affirms that even fragmented, *small narrative units are performative* and operate *everywhere and locally* within late modern social systems. This provides the epistemological underpinnings for *paper one* and *paper two*, which respectively elaborate on the *performativity* of categorisations and ascribed labels in academic and in local public discourse.
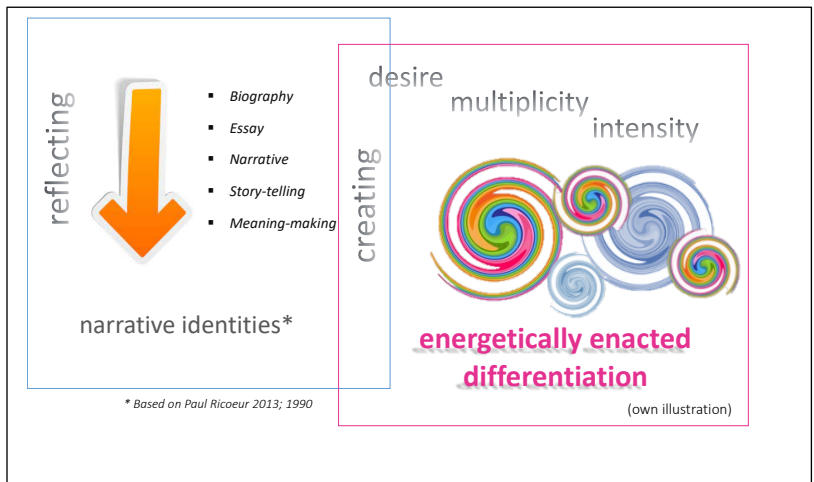
FIGURE 1 – Illustration of energetically enacted intensification (right) as compared to linear narrative identities, as per Ricoeur (2013; 1991, 1990).

Indeed, the use of *narratives* in empirical research studies cannot fully escape the representational nature of narratives. Nonetheless, the *collective auto-ethnographic narratives* in <u>paper three</u>, as well as the interpretation of narrated '*significant events*' in the vein of *nomadic ethics*, attempt to exceed representational stances. The practice of *evocative writing* and *Nomadology allows* to translate, to transpose mover's lived experiences for the reader. These methods attempt to make *social imaginaries* and *illusions* palpable, they go under your skin and try to convey 'what it is like'. The interpretation of movers' narratives will never represent a 'truth' about the mobile self, because narratives, according to post-structuralist tradition, are always marked by *instabilities*. In a sense, the fragility and intensity of these narratives evokes the instabilities and vulnerabilities of the 'mobile self'. However,

they might contribute to the dissolution or the de-construction, or even the re-construction of social *imaginaries* or 'myths', as Levi-Strauss calls them. Going *beyond representation*, adopting a cosmic philosophy of 'pure experience', might succeed in succinct, elusive instants, before our thoughts are fetched by patterns and routines and seduced by structure. Despite all, side stepping, *displacing* thought via nomadic ethics, *moving and being moved* during the thought process opens '*lines of flight*', allows to transcend realities. *Imagining intensities* as the subjects in our lives is refreshing; is an act of resistance, maybe.

> *The inclination to cluster, to regroup and to label research subjects, will catch you right away, when defining your sampling strategy, and it will always catch up on you throughout the stages of data collection (interviewing, observing, identifying documentation), analyses (memo writing, "coding" themes, selecting insights) and writing (choices of wording, style and conventions). No worries, do it, classify, categorise along social class, education, profession, gender and age and you will soon let go: as soon as you realize that the boxes bound to context. The thoroughly established categorisations are rapidly overflowing, and the most significant things you sensed during data collection mysteriously distort or even disappear: because international movers and their representations span across diverse locations, settings and contexts where these categories are ambiguous or even meaningless to them. – This is the time for the researcher to step back, to move on, to move along, to accept that the subtle, yet perceptible phenomena are nomadic and transient, ephemeral in nature… (memo, 2022)*

In Jameson's words, narratives constitute 'the illusion of an imaginary resolution of all contradictions' (1984: xix). Even if the researcher-writer, as well as the mover might regularly succumb to this illusion, I argue that *affects* and the *perpetual swaying between* self-

confidence *and* self-doubt *and* contemplation *and* interaction, during the research process, during the work on this thesis, are a pre-requisite for the *mobility of thought*. Swaying and embracing multiple perspectives means practicing *reflexivity*. This is the subject's process of intellectual *de-centring*, of enabling non-conformist thought that attempts to resist grand narratives and dominant discourse. Continuous de-centring (Derrida, 1979) in line with post-structuralist practice goes along with multiplicity. Jullien (2012; 2016) speaks of the 'écart' or void between two cultural traditions as *fruitful tension* that allows to approach alterity, that allows to reflect and understand. *Critical management* scholars propose in a similar vein to work with tension, or liminality (Muhr et. al, 2019), to achieve reflexive research practice. Janssens and Steyaert state, for example, that 'reflexivity is inherently connected to learning to use tensions among different perspectives to expose and connect different assumptions and to open up new ways of thinking' (2009: 152). Cunliffe & Karunanayake (2013) describe the researchers' reflexivity as 'hyphen-spaces': hypen-space 'engagement - distance', 'insider - outsider', 'sameness - difference', 'neutrality - activist'.

My suggestion is that moving back and forth between two subject positions, between binaries, as proposed here, does *not* procure the same *intensity* as *multidirectional movements across multiple planes* of consistency, as per nomadic ethics (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). Nomadic ethics are conveyed through *nomadology*, which is the opposite of history. Nomadic thought is not arborescent, that means it is not 'tree-like', not 'roots-like', but *rhizomatic*. So is memory, and so are narratives that are based on memory and that draw on imaginaries and on sensations. For *nomadic thought* to exist *there needs to be multiplicity* and there needs to be movement *and* rest, together. I argue that reflexivity conceived as tension between two poles is insufficient when wanting to relate to Nomadology. Instead, I propose that philosophical practice and ethical considerations allow for the *multidirectionality* of thought *and* senses: contemplation, reflexivity and intersubjectivity are said to be 'the

three figures of philosophy' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991: 110). The multidirectional mobility of thoughts and senses was at times part of the set-up and at other times deliberately provoked, as will be described later.

SPACES, AFFECTS & MULTIPLICITY

The tension between structure and agency, object and subject, is persistently debated in management and organisation studies. The aim to dissolve the boundaries between subject and object 'remains somewhat vacuous', as Urry confirms, when stating that 'in order to concretize the role of the body, it is essential to develop a more detailed *examination of the sensuous constitution* of various hybrids' (Urry, 2010: 78; emphasis added). Thus, when the authors of the collective autoethnography in _paper three_ share their *bodily sensations* whilst being in non-mobility and 'locked-in' during the pandemic, when they describe the *atmosphere*, a *mood*, an *attunement* that occur within the shared 'virtual space'; the individual, the group and the experience seem to fuse, and instants become tangible in their 'entirety', an *illusion* of 'sameness' occurs amongst individuals. The quality of the virtual space in question, the way it is constituted, what it feels to be present in it, to enter it, to leave it or to see it dissolve when the pandemic fades out, *can hardly be represented*. From a theoretical perspective this accounts for the 'multiplicity of space' and to what is *not representable and absent*: 'not just absent to be eventually filled with presence, but meant as impossible to fully represent', as stated by Beyes and Holt (2020: 11), in reference to Giovannoni and Quattrone (2018). The *'unrepresentable space'* (Massey 2005), characterized by multiplicities 'carries an ungovernable excess that cannot be tamed by the customary representational moves of scholarship', as Beyes and Holt (2020) assert, when introducing the *'poetic' space*.

Earlier depicted philosophical presumptions on Nishida's 'pure experience' (Ma & Van Brakel, 2017) or Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) 'Nomadology', propose to transcend the subject-object divide and to

consider *non-representational understandings*. Non-representational methods emphasise *process* over psychical or psychic substance, and as per as per Braidotti's understanding, this requires not to address bodies and thought as if they were 'entities' that can be explained or defined, as Olkowski (1999) relates. She puts forward that 'articulating bodies and thoughts as extremely complex processes that often incorporate incommensurate elements does not exempt us from making sense of them conceptually and theoretically' (Olkowski, 1999: 46). In his vein, *paper three* leverages *evocative writing*, to transmit research participants' joint experience of non-mobility, to understand the meaning of 'togetherness' in a *virtual space* in times of crisis. Individual vulnerability remains, but whilst being admitted and shared, joint helplessness is complemented with collective strength and care. Conceptually, the interiority of each individual remains, as their *emotions* can be conceived of as an object inside the self. Still, 'interiority' as concept is structuralist, as Derrida reminds in his critique of Levi-Strauss (1967). Thus, it is the processual perspective that allows to transcend structures and entities. 'Affective praxis' with its 'ongoingness', as per Wetherell (2012: 23), allows for a dynamic, processual perspective of 'affect' that exceeds the individual subject: 'affect is always interacting, intersecting', it is 'a response to a situation and to the world' (Wetherell, 2012: 24). This exceeds the individual as psychological entity and allows to explore collective ways of belonging and, what Deleuze calls 'assemblages' or 'compositions' that are constituted by sensations *and* relationalities.

The notion of 'affect' is crucial for nomadic ethics as well, which are the philosophical underpinning of *paper four*. In nomadic ethics *affects* (in plural) are understood as intensities and *intensities as the conjunction of multiple affects*, as per Deleuze and Guattari (1980). 'Affects' or 'intensities' indicate processes of *becoming*, that do not pursue an 'outcome', but which are multidirectional and multiple. Without having accounted for 'intensities' during data collection, an abductive-inductive iterative process of analysis led me to interpret

certain narrated 'events' or 'moments' as intensities. This materialist interpretation liberates the research exploration from being captured by individual research participants' life 'stories', from enumerated cities, countries and from socio-economic contexts. It thereby allows for a *non-representational understanding of the 'mobile self'*, as composing with the perpetual alternation between movement and rest, in the largest sense. By deliberately accounting for a large diversity of research participants in the empirical study of *paper four*, I avoid theoretical biases toward uniformity of the overall sample of 'repeat movers'. The diversity of socio-cultural backgrounds, of locations of residence and origin and of professional pathways of research participants is constitutive for a large variety and density of lived experiences and narratives. The research participants commonality resides therewith solely in their mobile life modes: despite the sociologically heterogeneous sample they all have experienced *'extreme mobilities'*, i.e., intersecting and superposing locational and professional mobilities. This is decisive for the research process and the analysis, as it forces the researcher to focus on how movement and rest constitute the mobile self, beyond socio-cultural and structuralist considerations.

As suggested by Patton (2001; 2015), extreme cases that are identified through purposive sampling augment the chances of retrieving *information-rich data* and *unexpected insights*. Although the specific findings obtained from purposive sampling cannot be generalized as representative for other populations, the suggested methods of 'collective auto-ethnography' (*paper three*) and 'mobility conversations' (*paper four*), as well as conceptual insights on 'collective care' of 'intensities' are transferrable to other investigations on intersecting mobilities in future research (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014).

'WONDERLUST' & EVERY-DAY RESEARCH

Given the importance of multi-scalar entanglements that constitute and are constituted by global mobilities, I propose to address with this thesis

certain 'fragments' of complex mobility compositions, amongst others by leveraging my own, i.e., the researcher's 'insider position'. Inspired by Dewey (1929) and the pragmatist tradition, as well as Maffesoli (1993), I deliberately and 'hyper-reflexively' observed and constantly documented seemingly random manifestations of mobility and mobile life modes in my immediate environment and daily life. 'For scientific inquiry always start from things of the environment experienced in our everyday life, with things we see, handle, use, enjoy and suffer from', suggests Dewey (1929: 103). In fact, _paper one_ and _two_ initially emerged out of my observation of acts of labelling in housing adverts that I was personally confronted with when I moved from Paris to Copenhagen late 2018. Via my own search for an apartment and the struggle to find a place, I became aware how segmented and segregated the local housing market was. Not only were the available budget and salary, a selection criterion, but due to my limited 'cultural capital', i.e., lacking local social network, no knowledge of local legislations and Danish language, my search was limited to English speaking adverts that exclusively address foreign newcomers. My initial consternation about headlines such as 'for expatriates only', in combination with the prevailing anti-migration discourse in Denmark at the time, quickly evolved into an energetic mix of irritation and curiosity, which motivated the research _paper two_. Schütz (2010) calls this 'sociology of common sense' and explores 'life worlds' of intersubjectivity and individual experience based on Husserl's phenomenology. Heeren (1970) remarks, however, that rather than describing the density of daily life, Schütz adopts an approach of 'scientistic sociology', where the common sense of daily life is subverted and replaced by rigorous scientific attitude.

The overall newness of the city that I had moved to and the variety of people I met over time, locally and in the broader research environment, repeatedly reminded me of how places and capital cities like Copenhagen and workplaces like universities are composed of and dependent on internationally mobile (knowledge) workers. I had never

doubted about the benefits of moving, of learning about new environments and making encounters, but this suddenly changed when I explained the purpose of our broader research programme 'global mobility of employees' to a Danish colleague. I stated that it was important for the EU to attract workers from other regions and to motivate Europeans to move across the region. 'But why would it be a good thing to convince people to leave their homes and places where they feel comfortable?'. At first, I did not understand the question at all. I did not know how to answer it, probably because I was not humble enough to understand it. I was most enthusiastic about and convinced of our project's cause. Only months later it started to resonate, I appreciated the sense of the question and started to appreciate the slight sarcasm that was delicately hidden in her question. I realized that I, as a repeat mover and 'generation Erasmus' had been normalizing geographical movement for as long as I can think; or at least since I left my parents' home and my place of birth after A-levels. So, I started wondering: 'why is it that all these internationals are willing to move, to leave places and people behind and to dive into the unknown? Why did I do 'it' …?' In his book 'Eurostars and Eurocities' Favell (2008) analyzes narratives of EU movers, those who live in capital cities and whom he designates as 'Eurostars'. He describes their function in the neoliberal system, but also underlines the idealism that motivates their moves:

> In their banal, everyday adaptations to the challenges of living in a foreign city, they are generating enough innovation to keep the dynamo of an integrating Europe alive. Pioneers of a better, more cosmopolitan Europe, they embody the kind of liberalism that is, in these darker days of the early twenty-first century, in danger of being lost. (Favell, 2008: 223)

Throughout the research process, whilst going back and forth between empirical observations, different literatures and my pre-understandings, I have slowly become to realize that I might have been caught by the

utopia of European peace and integration, that I grew up with in the 1980s and 1990s. I was reproducing the European discourse on free movement, the grand narrative of a Europe that is 'united in diversity'. This realization was accelerated by the sudden rupture of EU mobility during the COVID19 pandemic: I was so used to move 'freely' across Schengen borders and suddenly I had to stick to place #stuckinmobility! Salazar picks up on Favell's study and pinpoints that these movers, 'a small minority of (hyper)mobile Europeans' are 'highly symbolic' for a unified, post-national Europe: 'they embody the process, flux, and change that the EU has released, albeit around the edges of European society' (Salazar, 2018: 169). I reckon that the question of 'why' we move, why I moved and keep on moving is impossible to answer. There is no good reason, it seems, there is no cause-relationship, we did not flee, where not forced to leave. To find answers I had to be attentive to the 'signs of the time', as Maffesoli (1993) affirms: to be able to appreciate the force of *social imaginary*, he says, one must be attentive to the 'signs of the times' and one has to know how to interpret all the particular, rather uneven and *emotionally highly charged events* which make up everyday life. In this vein, I captured my wonders, bewilderments, confusion and excitements, that is, emotionally charged 'everyday' instants and observations, amongst other ways, in photographs and tweets. For example:

–   excitement when meeting far-travelled researchers for the
     first time during the EU project kick-off workshop ('glomo
     buddies'; Hamburg, September 2018)

‒ satisfaction about working whilst sitting on a plane ('zooming out', November, 2018)

Kerstin @kerstinmartel · 20 nov. 2018

Stuck in #mobility ? Wandering and wondering about liquid solidity. And #home. @glomo2020 #glomobuddies #homemaking #horizon2020 #investeuresearch #globalmobility #homemaking
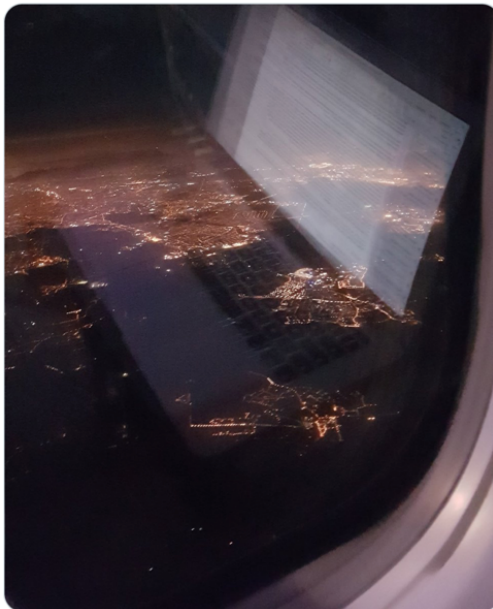
- surprise about the nature of 'Christmas wishes' that international colleagues, stick on the tree at a Xmas party ('whish for snow'; Copenhagen, December, 2018)

– perplexity, smile and curiosity sparked by a poster in a shop window ('please don't', Copenhagen, September, 2018)

– my wondering about a tattoo of geographic coordinates on the
skin of a young woman on the metro in Copenhagen ('under
your skin'; Copenhagen 2019),

– empathy and curiosity when perceiving this poster for an exhibition ('homeless souls', Copenhagen, July, 2019)

– upset about systematic passport controls on the train from Germany to Dennmark, despite Schengen agreement ('Sankelmark', Flensburg, 2019)

Kerstin @kerstinmartel · 20 sept. 2019

Feeling upset! - Adieu #Schengen ?!? - systematic ID control by Danish police in the train from Germany to #Denmark. #EUborders - #freemovement and #euvalues suffering from anti-immigrant sentiment … ?
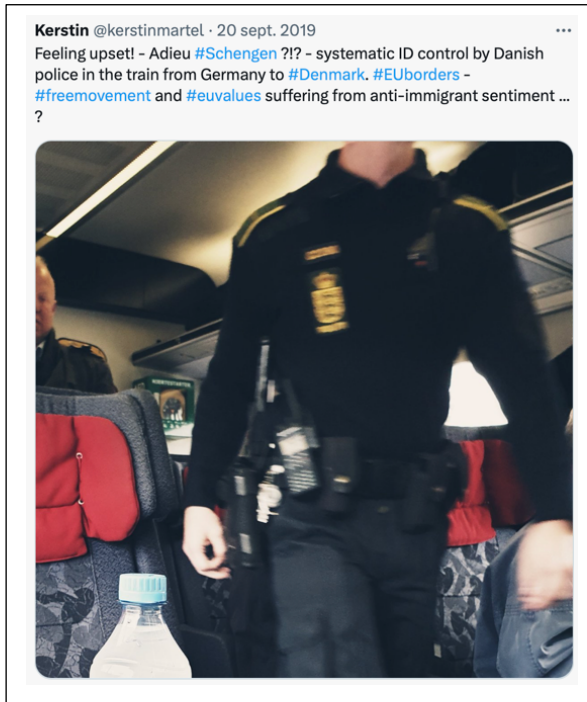
– reflective on why the unexpected appearance of these three flags, side by side, struck me when walking to the Institute for Labour Market Research ('IAB', Nürnberg, 2020)

Kerstin @kerstinmartel · 26 févr. 2020

today the #French and EU #flags were waving in front of my temporary work place, the Institute for Employment Research in Nuremberg, Germany. this unexpected encounter was a little heartwarming - but why?? @iab_news #francoallemande #deutschfranzose #european @glomo2020

–   desperation and anger about Schengen border controls when
    returning from Munich to Copenhagen airport during the
    pandemic ('rebordering', Copenhagen, October 2020),

- feeling free when travelling by bike to the first 'real'
conference after two years of pandemic online-only
meetings ('slow life', Helsingborg, June 2022).

Kerstin @kerstinmartel · 14 juin 2022
from Copenhagen to Helsingborg, Sweden #crossborder #localmobility
#NPBC2022 - connecting #places
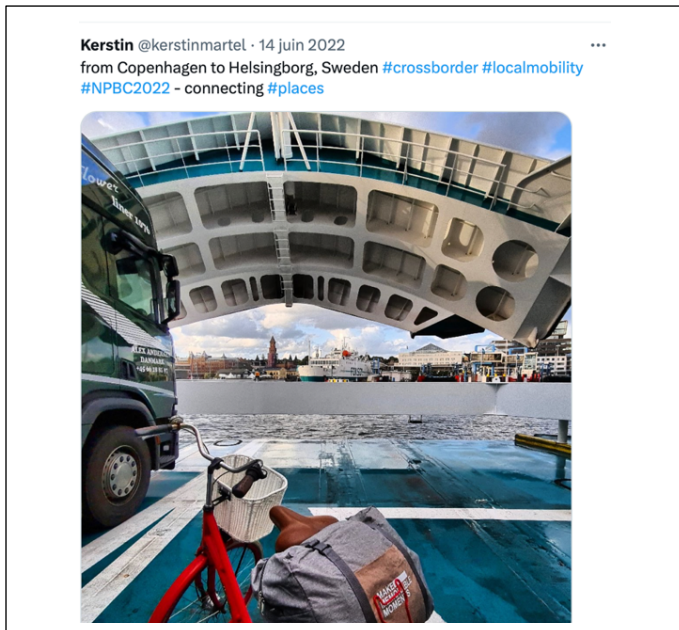
These and numerous other visuals captured instants where I felt affected, in various ways. The photos and tweets above illustrate a continuous process of contemplating, embodying, sensing and reflecting on the meanings of movement across various dimensions. They are 'subjective' from a positivist point of view, yet, they are real. They are 'agentic mobile subjectivities' (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019: 11). They enabled and

empowered me to reflect on mobility and on non-mobility, on freedom of movement and re-bordering and on my own sense of belonging to this world on the move. Many instants made me realize how *embodied* the continuous moves and travels had become, how entangled they were with *how I think* and with *who I think I am*. Simmel's 'sociology of the senses' (1907) declares the sense of vision as a central sociological achievement, not only because it allows for sociological observation, but as well because the reciprocal look into 'the eye of the other' constitutes social connections and most 'pure interaction' and intimacy. But the visual sense is probably one of our senses that has most changed in late modernity, due to interactions with technology and accelerated movement of the body across space, as Urry (2000) and Rosa (2005) suggest. For the empirical inquiry of human mobilities and of related ways of being and belonging, it is therefore noteworthy that *vision* has had a crucial role 'in the disembodying of people's relationships with space' (Urry, 2000: 103). With the acceleration of movement and transportation 'sociological observation' has evolved significantly since the beginnings of sociology a hundred years ago. Photography as part of anthropology in the mobilities and migration nexus 'fixates a fluid field' as Vium (2017) affirms. Thus, ethnographically going beyond visual perceptions, e.g., photographs that fixate a moment, entails to describe and analyse *intersubjectivities*, *relationalities*, *bodily experiences* and *sensations*, moments of shock and wonder and to appreciate that they are part of a process, of a composition of multiplicity, rather than unrelated snapshots.

All the tiny instants and micro-observations in my own life and in my direct living and working environment helped me to realize that the question that should be given primacy is: *'what does mobility do?'*. Whilst the contours of this question sharpened slowly over the years, I 'moved' my attention to other research fields, to *anthropological mobility studies*, for example, and I discovered the works of scholars who support the 'mobilities turn' and who recently developed ethnographic

'methodologies of mobility' (Elliot, Norum & Salazar, 2017; Salazar, 2018). My attention moved across fields, captured everything that had to do with human mobilities and movement and migrations. Out of curiosity or intuition? Yes, but certainly as well because it was hard to find similar angles in management and organisation studies when I started this piece of research in 2018. The broad pluri-disciplinary set-up of our EU research project and the interdisciplinary 'MOS' research groups at Copenhagen Business School certainly helped to take away the 'fear' of crossing academic boundaries. Nonetheless, in addition to my 'research questions' another pressing question imposed itself since the early days of my doctoral research: *where do I belong academically?*

When entering a room and taking a glance at *yet a different world* of research and thought, when temporarily joining workshops and conferences of *other research communities* 'outside' and in addition to management and organisation conferences like EURAM or EGOS, it felt a little schizophrenic at first, somehow like a shadow activity. Attending my first out of a series of IMISCOE migration conferences in Malmö in June 2019, for example, was a revelation nonetheless: I could relate to many debates, and some seemed most relevant to our field. The vocabulary was utmost different; indeed, I learnt a lot about 'their' jargon and literature. Then there was OMICS 'Organizing Migration and Integration in Contemporary Societies', a transdisciplinary conference that was held for the first time in Gothenburg in November 2019 at the School of Business, Economics and Law and where I presented a very early version of what became 'paper two'. The theme 'privileged migration' resonated with me and proposed a space to discuss my work. Then, within the framework of the EU project GLOMO I was hosted for a three-month research stay at the German federal agency for employment and labour market research (IAB) in early 2020: again, a very different 'world' of work and thought, a public research institution. During the pandemic years I attended several (virtual) workshops of the very welcoming Swiss NCCR project consortium 'on the move'.

Throughout the years many excellent multidisciplinary PhD seminars were most comforting in times where I was craving for *belonging*. Last, but not least, during the years of affiliation with the French-German interdisciplinary research institute Centre Marc-Bloch, at the Humboldt University of Berlin, unknown scientific perspectives from the humanities and social sciences opened-up to me, via the research group 'Mobilities, Migrations and Reconfiguration of Spaces' and 'Critical Thinking in Plural'. There, the possibility to speak, to listen and to think in 'my languages' makes me feel at ease, despite the institute's dense and challenging intellectual programme.

So, where *do* I belong academically? Do I belong? Is this just *vagabonding*? *Errance*? – I did not *really* feel at home in any specific academic space, but now that I listed-up some of them, I think that I am belonging to all of them, somehow. *I am only a tiny little fragment* in these institutions and ephemeral communities. But as my *errance* is unwrapping as a *perpetual circulation* across diverse academic spaces, as a mobility of thought, I become to realise: together *we are composing* my academic, mobile self, maybe… I have realized over the past months that entire research process was accompanied by *swaying* along and *leaping* across:

- not only across three institutions and an EU project that was constituted of 15 PhD researchers and organized by seven universities, but also, across
- six subsequent homes and numerous 'airbnbs' in three countries,
- three languages when reading, writing, learning, thinking, conversing
- various disciplinary understandings of identity, belonging and becoming in sociology, anthropology, social psychology and philosophy
- migration studies, management and organisation studies and the mobilities turn

- the streams of IHRM, global mobility, cross-cultural management, critical management studies and reflexive migration studies
- positivist, functionalist, culturalist, constructivist and post-structuralist paradigmatic assumptions

The choice (in paper four) to constitute a purposive sample of movers who simultaneously, repeatedly and in an intersecting manner moved jobs, locations and professions seemed just a necessary choice, to further increase the mobility entailed complexity of this process.

PRE-UNDERSTANDING & PROBLEMATISATION

'It is claimed that 'we see' something when we understand it' states Urry (2000: 80), which suggests that our research observation, the way we 'look' at phenomena, and if we perceive them at all, is necessarily influenced by our *pre-understanding* of a given subject matter or life world. Not only our cognitive understanding, I would like to add, but as well our embodied and affective understanding, such as illustrated through my photographs above or in the auto-ethnographic *paper three*. Accordingly, I propose that living a life 'on the move' as 'mobility researcher', having experienced repeated geographic and occupational moves, as well as a sudden disruption of physical mobility during the pandemic, has contributed to scientific inquiry and reflexivity. Moreover, it opened-up a space of three distinct, but nonetheless interconnected empirical fields.

Overall, the unprecedented and unexpected event of the COVID-19 pandemic led to change the initial research design of this Ph.D. thesis and had implications for the methods and modes of inquiry deployed. A planned ethnographic research-stay of several months at the headquarters of a multinational enterprise in the Netherlands had to be cancelled, as only 'business critical functions' were allowed to work on premise between spring 2020 and summer 2022; HRM and global mobility functions were not considered as such. The method of inquiry

for _paper four_ was thereby limited to 'mobility conversations', which took mostly place through video calls. However, the sample of research participants largely exceeded the initially targeted organisation setting. Quite like a mobile life and its various unforeseeable constraints and opportunities, the present research is a composition of _intensities_ and _lines of flight_. _Paper three_ would not have been possible without the COVID-19 pandemic. It was simply unimaginable before March 2020. Nonetheless, the method of autoethnographic exploration imposed itself on us 'naturally', without ever having planned for it. This illustrates not only the unforeseeable character of social research, but it also exemplifies how macro level instabilities and political decisions can unexpectedly restrain human freedoms of movement. Employers impose travel restrictions and nation states arbitrarily change border regimes, establish rules and exemptions for some happy few, in the event of assumed threats for life or health. It reminds us that restrictive border regimes remain an exceptional occurrence for EU citizens and for other holders of privileged passports.

It is worth noting that the context of the peculiar context of the 'field work'– a pandemic where all conversations were conducted virtually, whilst all of us movers, i.e., the researcher and all interlocutors were confined in their homes, somewhere in the world. The most unusual atmosphere of border-crossing solidarity, probably facilitated a mood of openness and intimacy during conversations: 'we are all in the same boat', 'you know how this feels', etc. Therefore, the experience of having these conversations in winter 2020-2021 with movers who are neither permitted to leave their homes nor their countries of residence, was an _embodied practice_ of non-mobility. This reinforces the underlying 'radical empiricism' of the study: the researcher's own mobility and non-mobility experiences create a connivence with the interlocutors. In _paper three_ the researcher-movers' cognitive 'pre-understanding' of mobility is paired with an _embodied sense_ of forced non-mobility, which strengthens the emic approach and empowers the evocative writing

process. Even if a researcher's pre-understanding 'inevitably shapes knowledge production' as Alvesson and Sandberg (2022: 398) affirm in reference to Jarvie and Zamora-Bonilla (2011) and Mir and colleagues (2016), it shall as well be recognized as something 'genuinely positive for knowledge development', as they affirm in reference to Gadamer (1960). In their recent article, they assert that 'a more *deliberate, active, and systematic use of our pre-understanding* can significantly enrich studies, from idea generation to evaluation of findings and theory' (Alvessson & Sandberg 2022: 396). This pinpoints the relevance of non-academic knowledge and pre-understanding, which is constantly generated through researchers' everyday participation in society and organisations. They demonstrate that

> pre-understanding 'provides an extensive *source of inspiration* to think differently about things relative to theory and data; significantly *broadens the empirical base*; and offers additional *resources for evaluating* the relevance and novelty of formal data and established theory, as well as of emergent findings and theory (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022: 397).

As mentioned earlier, *paper two* and *paper three* drew on *'pre-specific* elements' of pre-understanding, such as researchers' lived, personal mobility experience and every-day observations contributed to the awareness of the studied problems: the segregation and social organisation of difference through discursive labelling in *paper two*; the de-stabilizing effects of border closures and non-mobility for transnational professionals in *paper three*. During the auto-ethnographic analysis in *paper three* the multidisciplinary and high socio-cultural diversity of involved researchers contributed moreover to vivid debates and critical questioning regarding the research and writing approach. In addition, professional knowledge linked to social sciences research and to mobility and migration research, were combined with more personal pre-understandings of all researchers. For *paper four*, where the researcher interacted during data collection through 'mobility

conversations' with international movers, *'pre-specific elements'* (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2002: 400) were crucial to establish trust and openness with research interlocutors. In addition, '*pre-frame elements'* about multinational organisations and intercultural communications that the scholar had accumulated through previous international work experience allowed to deploy context specific jargon and, hence, smoothened conversations.

Across the three different, multi-scalar empirical settings, a dialogical, iterative process took place during the research process, where I questioned my own pre-understandings and my personal relation to and experience of mobility, because 'a criterion for the successful use of pre-understanding is that it is not just reproduced, but actually changes' (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022: 402). In the literature review and throughout all research papers, I have been problematising identity as analytical device for mobility research, thereby leveraging the problematisation as generative, iterative process of reflection and critical questioning. This means as 'an endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of what is already known' (Foucault, 1985: 9)[5]. In line with Sandberg and Alvesson (2011), I use the approach of problematisation 'as a methodology for challenging the assumptions that underlie not only others' but also our own theoretical position, and, based on that, to construct novel research questions' (2011: 252), thereby disrupting the use of taken-for-granted beliefs. In addition, I forward an understanding of problematisation as being 'not simply a methodology, but an object of the study in itself' (de Salies, 2013). In this sense, it allows to perceive the lines of fragility, to identify where the strengths are situated and where power is anchored[6]

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[5] parts of this paragraph were published in IACCM conference proceedings (Martel, 2019)

[6] own translation: 'qui permette de repérer où sont les lignes de fragilité, où sont les points forts, à quoi sont rattachés les pouvoirs', Foucault, 1975 : 1627, cited by de Salies, 2013)

(Foucault 1975). The problematisation of neo-liberal mobility discourse and identity as analytical device in this context is therefore a contribution in its own right. When Foucault (1968) describes problematisation he also states that the response to the process of problematisation are *factions of objects*, types of formulations, concepts and theoretical options, that are deployed in institutions, in individual and collective conduct, in political operations, in scientific activity, in literary fiction, in theoretical speculations. [7]

Furthermore, an ongoing political and historical problematisation of terminologies in the mobilities and migration nexus can, according to Favell (2007) contribute to a theoretical renewal and *post-disciplinary perspective*. However, as previous critical reflections and problematisations in the field of HRM demonstrate (Syed, 2008; Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2017), the process of problematisation of migrant worker categorisations, for example, will never be exhaustive or terminated, as their manifestations dynamically transcend multiple spheres and situations across time and space. Overall, the dialogical conversation with distinct literatures in management and organisation studies, migration studies, and the mobilities turn, as well as the process of questioning the relatedness of applied sciences to disciplinary underpinnings was at times fastidious, but necessary and eventually fruitful. It allowed for interpretative unpacking of meanings, which, according to Alvesson (2015) allows to reconcile different theoretical positions: 'It is possible to be open about, looking for – considering interpretations and readings – patterns and ambiguity, trends and

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[7] own translation: 'tout un ensemble d'objets, de types de formulation, de concepts, d'options théoriques qui sont investis dans des institutions, dans des techniques, dans des conduites individuelles ou collectives, dans des opérations politiques, dans des activités scientifiques, dans des fictions littéraires, dans des spéculations théoriques', Foucault, (1968 : 751, cited by de Salies, 2013)

variation, order and fragmentation, regularities and disorder.' (2015:11). Overall, the inductive-abductive oscillation between philosophical underpinnings, everyday observations and empirical data allowed to expand possibilities for theorising identities and becoming 'on the move'.

3 / PAPER CONTRIBUTIONS

Before presenting the four papers in their original published or submitted form, the following table gives an overview of the current status of publication. [8]

P1: Exploring the mobile self: shifting from monolithic categorisation to dynamic identifications	Martel, K. (2022). Exploring the mobile self: shifting from monolithic categorisation to dynamic identifications. In: Andresen, M., Anger, S., Al Ariss A. et al. (Eds.), *Wanderlust to wonderland? - Exploring key issues in expatriate careers: Individual, organizational, and societal insights*, 123-139, University of Bamberg Press. https://doi.org/10.20378/irb-55773
P2: Global talent or labour migrant? – Exploring the discursive organisation of difference in the competition state	submitted, single-authored
P3: "Isn't it ironic…!?!" Mobility researchers go sedentary: A group auto-ethnography on collective coping and care in pandemic times	Martel, K., Raupp, M., Abdul Hadi, A., Oleškevičiūtė, E., Mello, R., Biswas, T., & Milani, G. S. (2021). "Isn't it ironic…!?!" Mobility researchers go sedentary: A group auto-ethnography on collective coping and care in pandemic times. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 273-300. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12734
P4: Making moves meaningful: towards an ontology of intensity across 'mille plateaux'	submitted, single-authored

TABLE 1 – Paper overview (1/2) titles, authors, publication status

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[8] NB: citation styles of each article are in line with journal requirements and might therefore differ from the other sections of this dissertations.

P1 - Exploring the mobile self –

shifting from monolithic categorisation to dynamic identifications

Kerstin Martel

ABSTRACT

When planning to investigate the topic of *individual identities* through empirical research, a very extensive choice of conceptual and theoretical underpinnings is available. Multiple academic debates in the social sciences and humanities pro- vide distinct perspectives, which sometimes complement each other, but which can as well seem contradictory. Therefore, the specific circumstances, such as those that individuals face when frequently moving in-between places and cultural settings, or across political, institutional and occupational boundaries, require attention when designing 'identity research'. It appears crucial to account for mobile ontologies, i.e., ways of being in the world, which go beyond established life modes in sedentary societies. For example: certain social identity categories, such as social class, gender or profession that are salient in one very particular location, become more or less relevant for the international mover over time, they transform their meaning according to the changing context and to evolving individual situations. Lived experiences, specific events and turning points throughout a life course, such as separations, encounters or professional achievements, become most significant in individual narratives, whereas certain externally ascribed categorisations might fade. Therefore, this chapter draws attention to specificities when studying identities of 'movers', by confronting conceptual framings with paradigmatic changes that are supported by the *mobilities turn*. Whilst building on previous scholarly discussions, I propose to nurture *emic* research perspectives in the future,

in order to prevent reductionist and essentializing categorisations of individuals. The here proposed dynamic and multidirectional notion of *mobile identifications* allows for a more thorough understanding of non-linear, non-sedentary individual life courses and, thus, for the appreciation of mobile ontologies.

Introduction

The quest for a highly qualified workforce resonates stronger than ever across geographies and sectors of activity in various local settings. Representatives of nation states, cities and employing organisations attempt to position locations as appealing places to work and to live, thereby entering into an exasperated competition to attract and retain so-called 'global talent'. Large scale international surveys and rankings evaluate, for example, the 'talent competitiveness' or 'liveability' of countries and cities (EIU, 2021; INSEAD, 2021), and employer branding initiatives try to capture the attention of potential employees at a global scale. Increasingly fragmented talent pools and emerging forms of work relations, such as gig work or platform engagements, are adding to the challenges that employers are facing. Anecdotes about top talents who suddenly resign, in order to settle elsewhere, despite extraordinary compensation packages and utmost promising career trajectories, point to a deficient understanding of "who these international movers really are", as practitioners point out. Indeed, analytical classifications of the international workforce in global mobility studies neglect at times to conceive of identities as dynamic assemblages that are 'in flux' and that lead to *ephemeral identifications*. Essentializing accounts of, for example, national identities or professions limit our comprehension and research horizons. Fixed categorisations of "mover types" can lead to distortions, as they might fail to provide a deeper understanding of a person's *situated belongingness* and relatedness to mobility itself.

What does it take to grasp transnational, 'neo-nomadic' life courses, such as labelled by d'Andrea (2006), in all their specificities and contemporary complexities? How can researchers and practitioners foster their understanding about what is commonly referred to as 'identities' of international movers? Comprehending what one could call 'mobile identities' is an endeavour that does not solely require the critical questioning of static, monolithic identity conceptualisations and underlying theoretical assumptions. First and foremost, broader analytical perspectives, beyond the individual as stand-alone psychological entity, may allow for more extensive explorations and provide thorough socio-anthropological and processual insights (Salazar, 2018). When elucidating life-courses characterized by repeat-mobilities, organisations and other 'social fields' (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), it appears crucial to embrace relational and affective ties across places and beyond organisationally constructed rationales or social norms. This means that the investigation of professional and geographical moves and its evolution over time entails more than condensing apparent features, which can be retrieved from employment data or individual curricula vitae, i.e., through an *etic* approach. Locations, time periods in-between moves, professional positions or frequency of moves can certainly give an indication about 'mobility patterns' and 'global career types' (Dickmann et al., 2018). In addition, social identity categories such as nationality, gender, family status or educational degrees are handy analytical filters, that are often leveraged to circumscribe individual identities, such as demonstrated by Briscoe and colleagues (Briscoe et al., 2018). When complementing such analytical segmentation with cognitive rationales about 'motivations to move', as retrieved in large scale surveys and in various sorts of psychological profiling, the typification of international movers allows, indeed, for general distinctions. However, the resulting ascribed categorisations, conceal the very *meaning* that individuals attribute to their own moves and to nomadic life modes, be- yond normatively encouraged scripts that focus

on mobilities as a means to achieve 'career success', 'job performance' or a 'global mindset' (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009; Ramsey et al., 2016; Zhao & Zhou, 2020). Analytical categorisations tend, thus, to reproduce normative, sedentary expectations, thereby limiting the possibility to generate novel insights with regards to mobility-related specificities. They prevent recognizing international movers as distinct societal group, whose world views and views of themselves are marked by their experiences.

Moreover, the organisational context with its career opportunities and its demand for geographical mobility, coincides with socio-economic and political macro environments, as well as with individual life spheres, both of which are constitutive for the international mover's lived experiences and, thus, identifications. As physical moves reinforce the need to face negotiations and arbitrages across multiple life spheres, or "domains of existence" (Bertaux, 2016), individuals are forced to reflect on the *meaningfulness* of their moves and mobile lives in an intersubjective manner, in close relation to "significant Others" (Mead, 1932). Mobility choices are not merely rational, and they are not made in a void. They emerge through dense, entangled life situations and lived experiences 'on the move'. Indeed, the attribution of meaning, as well as *identifications* are influenced by family histories and interactions in context. As Salazar reminds us, mobility research "calls attention to the myriad ways in which people become parts of translocal networks and linkages" (2018, p. 2), and thus, it demands for research epistemologies that consider movement as a social process, which dynamically enacts a person's rapport to the world, to life in general and to work more specifically. Therefore, rather than attempting to explain mobility rationales through an *etic* approach, from an outside perspective, I suggest that an *emic* approach to- wards "mobile identities" seems more sensible. Such a perspective allows for thick descriptions, whilst giving room for unexpected individual narratives to emerge.

Accounting for the grand diversity of individual life courses and *identifications* which transpire or evaporate along the way, involves to empathetically dive into spheres of mobility, movement and trans-locality and to understand how they are lived by those who are close to it, who are in it and into it. Therefore, rather than conceptualising *identity* as a static construct or a substance that one can at-tribute, possess or lose, I propose ways to explore the everchanging assemblage of experiences and events, of encounters that affect the "mobile self", whilst moving physically or imaginarily. Inspired by Villesèche and colleagues (Holck et al., 2016; Villesèche et al., 2018) who explore the relevance of different paradigmatic perspectives on 'identity' for determining adequate diversity, equity and inclusion policies, this essay attempts to propose a more fluid, processual conceptualisation of identities in global mobility studies. The goal is to understand *identifications* and their temporal, spatial or situational expressions inductively, without imposing belongingness to pre-defined identity categories and groups (nationality, gen- der, profession). By paying attention to *how* certain situations and events of inter- national mobility unfold in conversations with international movers, by tracing their ways of attributing *mean*ing and by noting *affective turns* in narratives, one might observe adherence or alienations and therefore generate dense insights. When analysing conversations with movers, it appears helpful to proceed in an iterative manner and to go beyond addressed themes. This allows to reflect on processes and loops that emerge from individual narratives, and which point to *multidirectional modes of identification*.

Global mobility practitioners and service providers who accompany individual geographic 'relocations' in various ways, might likewise benefit from momentarily stepping-back from conventional assumptions and operational jargon, whilst nurturing an empathetic understanding of movers. This again would allow to develop additional support services for movers at pivotal stages of their lives. Overall, it

appears insufficient and largely unsatisfactory to categorise and to point out commonalities and differences amongst those who are moving or are being moved: despite their similarities they are not alike, despite their distinctive traits and ventures they are connected in manifold ways. Thus, to gain more nuanced insights for theory and praxis, I wish to encourage future investigations on *what it means* for individuals to move, how mobilities *affect* movers and their life and work modes. As follows, I expose different disciplinary understandings of identity and identifications, whilst addressing the limitations of static identity categorisations when it comes to comprehending the mobile self, mobility experiences and related world views. Overall, in the light of future investigations, I wish to draw the reader's attention to alternative perspectives and epistemologies that may provide a deeper understanding of *mobile ontologies* for the field of global mobility research and praxis.

Static identity conceptualisations are not flawless – but what are the alternatives?

Management and organisation scholars note the inflationary use of the term identity when stating for example that "identity is one of the most popular topics in contemporary organization studies" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1163). Echoing these voices, Corlett and colleagues (2017) recently re-iterated a call to further critically engage with the registers that constitute our own disciplinary assumptions on identity. Others encourage to steadily interrogate and problematise believes and restraining classifications of identity in management and organisation studies, by building on well-established knowledge from other disciplines (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Knights & Clarke, 2017). In response to their call, I suggest to not only build the understanding of "mobile identities" on recent studies in the applied sciences, such as migration or management and organisation studies, but to pay tribute to decades of socio-anthropological work that ad- dresses globalization

related phenomena in late modern societies. Over the past decades social scientists have conducted various debates about the theoretical value, the conceptual clarity, as well as the empirical applicability of the concept "identity". The extensive range of interpretations and applications of the term is due, amongst others, to distinct contextual frames, political influences and different philosophical underpinnings. This article does not allow to explicate paradigmatic distinctions in detail, nonetheless it seems crucial to point to a few conceptualisations that give ground for many contemporary discussions, when exploring empirical implications of the notion "identity" in general and in the context of human mobilities more specifically. Scholars like Descombes (2013), Jenkins (2014) or Sen (2006) encourage us to reflect on the concept of identity more systematically and to explore meanings and underlying assumptions of identity concepts for a specific context and for distinct phenomena, before leveraging them for empirical research or theorising. The following brief review shall therefore initiate further critical reflections and help to "interrogate the underlying assumptions [regarding identity] rather than re-producing them", as postulated by Corlett and colleagues (2017, p. 351).

Indeed, from a psychological perspective a person's self-concept embraces intra-personal aspects of the self, including values and beliefs, preferences and habits, traits and aptitudes, that make the individual feel distinct from others (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1991; Schwartz et al., 2010). However, one cannot neglect the *social dimension of identity*, the human need to identify with other human beings, to identify with a group or belong to a community, where intra-personal aspects resonate within a collective. Social identity is therefore as much about commonalities as about distinctiveness and difference, or, in Jenkin's words 'differences and similarities are implicit in one another; one does not make sense without the other' (Jenkins, 2014: 4). Understanding identity and identification therefore entails to account for

social processes and interactions, as well as for its meaning for "the self". Despite the general agreement about the social dimension of identity, its empirical applications differ across research traditions and according to epistemological assumptions within study fields. Neighbouring disciplines, such as psychology and social psychology relate to distinct, but nonetheless interrelated terminologies. Erikson's (1972) psychological theory on individual psychological development is, for example, built around the concept of a "threefold identity", that corresponds to psychoanalytical perspectives: the identity of the self ('ego'), the personal identity (integration of context) and the group identity (feeling of belonging). He distinguishes between external, "objective" identity marks and individually experienced "subjective" identity marks, which reflects the traditional dualism in Western thought as fostered historically by Descartes and Hume. It seems important to note though that Erikson conceptualises identity as a dynamic process of co-construction and mutual recognition between society and the individual.

In the European tradition of social psychology, social identity theory (SIT) is the most broadly known and frequently cited paradigm in management studies. It coins the notion of "identity", rather than "self" and encourages to explore group interrelations and collectively shared identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Social identity in SIT is being defined as ''that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership'' (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). This tradition further distinguishes "personal identity" and "social identity" marks in self-categorisation theory (SCT) (Turner, 1982; Turner et al., 1987). In comparison, Northern American social psychologists (Burke & Stets, 1999; Stryker & Serpe, 1982) rather refer to the notion of "self" than "identity" and emphasise the importance of exploring "the self in

context", drawing on pragmatist, symbolic interactionalist and social behaviourist thought of the Chicago school (James, Dewey, Mead & Blumer). This tradition pays thereby greater attention to situational influences and its inter-relatedness with internal dynamics, by examining "how social structures affect the structure of self and how structure of the self-influences social behaviour" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 285). Thus, in symbolic interactionism self-awareness and self-images do play a crucial role in mediating all kinds of social relationships and human interactions. Vice versa, social interactions and communication are conceptualised as constitutive for meaning making amongst actors, leading, for example, to closer social ties or to labelling the other (Mead, 1934). Brubaker and Cooper (2000) further insist on relational and processual characteristics, and prefer therefore referring to identifications and categorisations, rather than identity. When claiming that identifications are "intrinsic to social life", they oppose earlier structuralist logics of identity. They reiterate, "how one identifies oneself and how one is identified by others may vary greatly from context to context; self and other identification are fundamentally situational and contextual." (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 14). Moreover, sociologists recognize that an individual might refer to collective social identities, such as nationality, ethnicity, age or gender at times, however, complex and dynamic social interactions, such as mobilities and migrations, contribute to the dissemination, hybridization or confluence of cultural traits and make these categories more or less salient (Axelrod, 1997; Cuche, 1996; Dagnino, 2015; Wikan, 2002). Consequently, increasing fragmentations of life modes and life courses in con- temporary societies leads scholars to reflect on individual identities beyond the opposition of structure and agency, by recognizing the fluidity and ephemeral nature of identifications and, thus, of the "mobile self".

Furthermore, hypermodernity and neoliberalism offer, according to post- structuralist thought, an increasing choice and infinite

possibilities for individuals to compose with these choices, towards a plurality of existence, as Foucault suggests, where the individual becomes more and more autonomous, reinventing new modes of existence, beyond institutional systems. The late modern being is comprehended as multiple, complex, and continuously evolving in its rapport not only to the world, but as well to the self (Bauman, 2005; Lahire, 1998; Maffesoli, 2016). Such contemporary societal complexities, paired with the megatrend of globalization, demand greater reflexivity from individuals, in order to understand and give meaning to their lived experiences. Socio-anthropologists confirm, in- deed, the transformation of ways of being and ways of belonging (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) through globalization and migration and observe the advent of more complex social and personal identities. On the other side, for Hannerz (1990), belonging to a "world culture" opens one unique network of social relationships, favours interconnectedness and lets "collective structures of meaning" emerge (1990, p. 239). Abélès (2008) likewise observes individual perceptions of belonging to a global world, beyond attachments to territories or cultural identities, whereas Appadurai (1990) calls out deeply perspectival constructions, "inflected by historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors." (1990, p. 296).

As this brief review illustrates, there are manifold ways of analysing and interpreting individual identities and the "self" in context. Yuval-Davis (2010) underlines quite rightly that the use of different theories of identity is complementary and that it "can add to, rather than detract from, its validity, as long as their boundaries in specific social contexts remain clear." (2010, p. 262). In the given context it seems therefore important to interpret different conceptualisations of identity under consideration of the very phenomenon of 'mobility', where specific research problems guide our reflections about their empirical utility. I therefore suggest retaining the interactional and processual

character of identifications in context when exploring highly fragmented and possibly ephemeral identifications and categorisations.

Conceiving of "mobile identities": shifting from the monolithic to the polyphonic

Although sedentariness is deemed to be the societal norm, the ways in which social identities are constructed through discursive practice, in and to the benefit of local settings and populations, are not necessarily universally applicable. Indeed, locations where the majority of people stays in or nearby a specific location and socio-cultural setting throughout a lifetime may provide rather stable societal and identitarian conditions. In such a setting one may identify others as a member of a particular social class, a professional guild, an organisation or a religious or ethnic community, as Lahire (1998) conveys. Perceptible identifiers, such as apparel, chosen words, dialects, or traditions and rituals do not only orient the observer, but they likewise guide individuals' identifications with a social group. However, someone who moves to a given local setting "from the outside", and who even might move on to other places at a later stage, does not necessarily know and understand culture specific meanings in the same way as "locals". From a sociological standpoint and along with Bourdieuan theorising, they do rarely possess the needed social, cultural nor symbolic capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). To start with, she or he is perceived and probably classified as the newcomer, the foreigner, the stranger. In addition, someone who newly settles in is not as easily "readable" by local fellows and not easily categorisable according to local standards, which may affect self-identifications and potentially broaden the options for "identity strategies" (Pierre, 2003). Under these circumstances, conceptualising identity as a solid and substantial core of a per- son's selfhood seems to be somewhat illusionary in fluctuating settings, even more so when the phenomenon of individual movement

comes into play: be it social class mobility, occupational or geographical mobility. When movement across borders or socially constructed boundaries of any kind occurs, individuals are exposed to new situations, and they interact in unfamiliar settings. They are simultaneously dissolving and fostering relational ties, they may distance them- selves from some groups wile adhering to others, which means that identifications are oscillating accordingly. As sociological studies show, the sphere of action and agency of individuals who move between different social or professional do- mains manifests in intertwined, intersubjective affinities and relations (Sainsaulieu, 2001). Personal resources and experiences are brought into play in unfamiliar settings and allow the individual to identify, or not, with the other in a very specific situation and context.

As stated earlier, in a hypermodern context marked by economic, social and cultural globalization, by international migration and instant worldwide communication, individuals and groups are increasingly exposed to the Other: unfamiliar life modes, dress codes, modes of interaction and communication in private and professional spheres seemingly intertwine and hybridize with the familiar. While, at the surface, life and work styles across national borders have become more similar, individuals must continuously arrange with distinct conditions and societal expectations in their local environments and across different life spheres and spaces, as anthropologists demonstrate (Appadurai, 1996; Augé, 2008; Hannerz, 1990). Movers re-invent their life modes, re-articulate who they are and how they narrate their choices and encounters: in a polyphonic and dynamic way, to exist or to resist, as Glissant (1981, 1990) suggests. They multiply their identifications across national and cultural boundaries and develop identity strategies in a more or less conscious manner (Camilleri, 1992; Camilleri et al., 1998; Pierre, 2003), be it in the case of physical or imaginary mobilities. Strategies and relationalities of the mobile individual are multi-layered and in

continuous flux, rather than inert. They are constituted and applied translocationally (Anthias, 2012) and situationally.

Whilst constraints, as well as opportunities, are said to emerge from multi- scalar contexts, which are imposed on international movers along the transnational chain (Dahinden, 2017), the degree of individual agency to create and develop "identities" remains equivocal. Environmental factors and macro contexts, such as migration regimes or migrant status in a society may favour or inhibit identifications with a place or a nation state and thereby affect ways and feelings of belonging – momentously or constantly. However, only few management scholars investigate processes of mobile identifications beyond static categorisations. Özkazanc-Pan (2019a) confirms that "mobile ontology has yet to impact the ways in which management and organisation studies as a scholarly field conceptualises and studies people, difference and work contexts." (2019, p. 478). Calás et al. (2013), as well as Özkazanc-Pan and Calás (2015), attempt developing a "mobile ontology" from a transnational lens, articulating an optimistic vision of the "mobile self". Indeed, management scholars tend to refer to identity in mobility situations rather in precarious terms, for example when reifying identity as something that is "threatened" (Collins & Bertone, 2017; Petriglieri, 2011), that can "get lost" (McNulty, 2012; McNulty & Moeller, 2017; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001) or is "sacrificed" and "relinquished" (Salomaa, 2018) through international moves.

In order to determine how to conceptualise identities in global mobility studies and how to empirically explore categorisations and identifications of the "mobile self", research epistemologies condition further choices. As such, deductive, explanatory approaches require to establish analytical categories, for example to define associated sampling criteria and to demonstrate how specific "groups" act, decide, move etc. Standardized categorisations allow to a certain extent for comparative

studies, such as country comparisons or large-scale longitudinal studies. However, the very grouping of individuals under specific categories in functionalist approaches derives often from a jargon that has developed historically and is strongly influenced by research scales and perspectives, often marked by the lens of the nation-state (macro) or the organisational (meso) lens. With regards to organisational perspectives on global mobility of individuals, one can observe a well-established jargon. However, certain categorisations such as 're- pat', 'inpat', 'expat', 'local+' or permanent transfer are mainly adequate when organizing contractual, compensational or visa schemes administratively. They are poor guides though, when it comes to enlightening the black boxes of mobile life modes from a socio-anthropological perspective, as they omit underlying processual and interactionist dimensions beyond the organisational sphere.

In this regard, McPhail et al. (2012), in line with Cappellen and Janssens (2005), call for recognizing the diversity of international profiles and the variety of social groups and mobility constellations, for a better understanding of distinct needs that occur, for example, within a pool of 'expatriate managers'. Likewise, contemporary typologies that designate international movers on a macro scale as, for example "qualified migrants", reflect economic and political interests as well as legal regimes. Moreover, categorisations in public discourses point to the entanglements between state and economy and have thereby a performative function (cf. Martel, forthcoming). Categories like "migrant", "refugee" or "asylum seeker" have been discursively established over time, but they often leave micro- sociological specificities and individual life courses and constellations aside, which limits alternative segmentations and novel insights. Thereby, semantics, as well as the politico-historical emergence of categorisations deserve to be taken into account (Espahangizi, 2022), so that underlying

assumptions become explicit and ascribed social categories, as well as analytical categories can be adjusted accordingly.

Some scholars demonstrate empirically that externally ascribed categories, such as nationality, are not always present nor systematically decisive for individual meaning creation in multicultural settings (Muhr & Lemmergard, 2011). Nonetheless, numerous studies in management and organisation studies still tend to ventilate results according to nationality - an approach that anthropologists Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2003) describe as "methodological national- ism". This does not only provoke stereotypical constructions of the "Other", as well as potential power inequalities in organisations (Barmeyer & Mayrhofer, 2010; Mahadevan, 2011), but it simply assumes without questioning that 'national identity' is central for individual identifications. To prevent "methodological nationalism" and other essentializing assumptions, migration and mobility scholars propose indeed alternative epistemologies. Inductive-abductive, socio- anthropological studies require to elaborate research approaches that allow to de- scribe, interpret and comprehend empirical expressions of 'identity', by replacing the concept with analytical cognates, such as belonging, or similar concepts that account for relationality (Dahinden, 2017; Davis et al., 2018). Moreover, Anthias (2018) proposes to use the notions of location and positionality as they are narrated by international movers. Together with Ghorashi (2004) she affirms that belonging can be trans-locational and that a person can identify with several national, cultural or ethnic identities at the same time. Both scholars leverage location as analytical device, to avoid ascribing fixed, standard categorisations to their research subjects. In a similar way, other scholars propose to use the very phenomenon of "mobility" as analytical devise, to go beyond sedentarily marked social categorisations. As Salazar quite rightly summarizes, "mobility invites us to renew our theorising, especially regarding

conventional themes such as culture, identity, and transnational relationships" (2011, p. 576).

Exploring 'mobile identifications': methodological hints and practical implications

Elliott and Urry (2010) confirm that "the paradigm of mobilities is becoming increasingly central to contemporary identity formation and re-formation", for the sedentary as well as for the mobile individual. Thus, physical mobilities and transnational moves constitute individual realities, self-identifications and perceptions of time, place and of the Other (Augé, 2008; Rosa, 2012). Especially for those who have personal or professional ties and activities in other places around the world, the representations that are ascribed to foreigners and new- comers, such as stigmatising and categoric identifications can be either reflexively embraced, remain unconscious or be leveraged strategically. Adopting a "mobilities" lens, we can assume that historically or socially constructed categories, like "national identity" may alter their meanings for the transnational mover. How exactly individuals relate to such constructs deserves being explored by taking on the movers' perspective, i.e., an emic research approach. In addition, by experiencing mobility oneself, as global mobility manager or as a researcher, one can enrich understanding and "thicken" descriptions through auto-ethnographic complements, as per Geertz (2000) and as demonstrated by Salazar's (2018).

When initiating research on mobile identifications and ways of belonging, it seems sensible to take a glance at the broader context, in order to better comprehend the specific environment of the target sample. How do public, academic, and organisational discourses classify the research subject in a specific spatio-temporal, political or organisational context? What labels are discursively per- formed and applied from the outside within a given setting, for example the "country of destination" -

in the local language and in English? Furthermore, in order to understand processes, loops and oscillations of self-identification of the internationally mobile individual, to grasp "ways of belonging" and "ways of being" (Levitt & Schiller, 2004) of the transnationally acting professional, it seems crucial to recognize along with Callás and colleagues (2013) that the meanings of socially ascribed categorisations such as gender, ethnicity or class change as they travel. This means social identity categories that are projected, for example on foreign workers, depend on societal and cultural norms and traditions. This shows what I propose to call the *dynamic and multidirectional* nature of mobile identifications. According to distinct situations and different societal and cultural backgrounds across locations, individuals are subjected to a multitude of possibly contradicting meanings and interpretations of categories they are subjected to. In addition, while being on the move or settling abroad, individuals are regularly exposed to stereotyping or stigmatising public discourse or to historical and ethical discriminations. This needs to be considered in empirical studies as well as in organisations. By leveraging "mobility" as analytical device, researchers and practitioners can explore how individuals experience their journeys, without referring to standard categorisations that have been forged through a sedentary lens. In conversational settings this means for example to ask for "how" a person experiences / experienced the arrival in a new setting after a move, rather than suggestive questioning, such as "do you rather identify with your home country or your host country?" - For practitioners in multinational organisations this calls attention to the socio-cultural *elasticity of social categorisation*s, which needs to be considered in global diversity, equity and inclusion policies.

Thus, the distinction of analytical categories versus categories of practice can be a helpful step towards a deeper understanding of mobile subjectivities. In line with Bourdieu (1977) and Brubaker and Cooper (2000) we can distinguish between *analytical categories*, which

are statically applied, such as gender, nationality, age or social class, and so-called *categories of practice* which are enacted and interpreted in social interactions: "categories of practice", as coined by Bourdieu, are "categories of everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors, as distinguished from the experience-distant categories used by social analysts (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 4). As discussed, labels and categorisations might, nonetheless, be strategically deployed by the individual when narrating mobility experiences. Nonetheless the researcher can ask to reformulate or to further describe what is meant by such or such label. This allows for novel insights on the understanding of the "mobile self" to emerge inductively. Most importantly, during the research phases of data analysis, thematic coding and data interpretation the utilization of specific self-describing categories needs to be related to the situational, cultural and temporal context. The so gained insights go not only beyond standard social categorisations, but beyond the conceptualisation of the individual as psychological entity. Through individual narratives one can derive a better comprehension of immediate and extended relationalities and be-longing and about societal processes of moving and settling more broadly.

As suggested, an *emic* research approach (Pike, 1993) allows to account for processes of self-identification as they are lived, experienced and narrated by the transnationally mobile individual. For researchers this implies to ask for significant situations and events, meaningful places and encounters, for shifts and turning points that were memorable for the person. Throughout one or several conversations the researcher can explore ways in which movers identify cognitively and affectively with places, people, objects or situations. It allows to sense the person's way of being in the world, of relating to mobility in general and their motions and emotions more intimately. It is worth noting that when applying an emic approach, research questions that aim at exploring mobile

identifications shall be detached from analytical categorisations and sedentary, normative reasoning, as mentioned earlier. Similarly, sampling criteria such as nationality, social class or hierarchical position may limit the richness of cases and lived experiences and distort the choice of research subjects to the benefit of those that are "easily categorisable". A purposive sampling approach appears more adequate, as it seeks to identify cases that are extreme in terms of the phenomenon of interest. In our case the phenomenon could for example be described as "life and work courses marked by transnational mobility". As suggested by Patton (2001), extreme cases that are identified through purposive sampling augment the chances of retrieving information-rich data and unexpected insights. The same applies for questions that may guide an open and trustful conversation with the research subject: without referring to analytical categorisations (such as expatriate, labour migrant, returnee or foreigner) and without pointing to social identity categories (worker, manage, engineer, mother) the interlocutor will be given room to narrate in her or his own way. It allows for categories of practice and terms to emerge, as they are used by the individual to self-describe and to describe others. Moreover, concepts that are subjected to different interpretations (e.g., performance, success) or that are outmost abstract (identity, integration) may reproduce employers' perspectives and meta-narratives, which is misleading, when trying to under- stand the perspective of the person in front of us. Empathetic comprehension will emerge by genuinely listening and attempting to understand meaningful in- stances, narrated choices and relational entanglements.

Conclusion

As discussed, scholars in the field of migration studies have been reiterating for many years the need to avoid essentialist identity conceptualisations and methodological nationalism. Numerous are those who assert that nation state centred perspectives and instrumental,

functionalist research paradigms limit scholarly horizons for knowledge creation, oversimplify social realities and distort research insights. Indeed, as the present essay demonstrates, the rapport of an international mover to a place, such as the country of origin or country of residence, is not simply a function of binary linkages between the individual and a location, or between an employee and a subsidiary of a multinational corporation. It entails the contingencies of macro environments, of trans-locational social linkages and networks, of boundary crossings, as well as memories of encounters, significant events and turning points along a life course. This affects not only individual self-identifications and world views, but as well the meaning of work and the personal, momentary rapport to an organisation or a profession. As the population of international movers is increasingly trans-locationally entangled, it is crucial to suspend organisation-centred or state-centred logics in global mobility research. Clustering research populations around monolithic categories, such as country of origin / nationality, "repat", "expat" or "international transfer", appears misleading, when attempting to understand various mobility constellations and the meaning of movement for the future global workforce.

Global mobility practitioners can benefit from exploring "the mobile self", i.e., the international employee, without necessarily aspiring to grasp all the complexities of contemporary mobile life modes and identifications to a full extent. When conducting conversations with international movers during empirical studies, I frequently encounter comments such as "This was the first time I ever spoke about my moves, thank you for asking." Making the effort to ask questions, even as global mobility or talent manager, such as "what were the encounters / moments that were most significant during your assignment abroad" or "how do you think that moving to different places has changed the way you see our organisation?" allow to go beyond relocation logistics and career related talks and, thus, open-up for novel, qualitative insights that are

substantial for strategic talent management. It allows to derive an understanding about potential future intentions and aspirations of individuals, but most importantly it allows to establish organisational learning processes, in times where a grand variety of alternative work relationships and professional pathways is on the rise.

Potential employees, with 'atypical' pathways and neo-nomadic life courses, seemingly by-pass classical societal expectations and social hierarchies of class, professional status and other sedentary rationales that are rooted in local employment relations within the boundaries of the nation state. International movers are "newcomers" from the point of view of the local, sedentary host populations. But they are as well accustomed re-settlers, for whom the meanings of the new places transcend local realities. To explore these realities shall be our research aspiration. They might be identified as but cannot necessarily identify with certain groups. Approaching human mobilities with regards to a start and an end point, e.g., a country of origin and a country of destination, prevents us from acknowledging spaces of in-betweenness and liminal identifications. In- stead, by exploring the movement and the distances that movers are experiencing, be it spatial, temporal, cultural or metaphysical, orients investigations towards the continuous process of individual becoming, a route with a direction, but no dis- tinct destination.

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P2 - Global talent or labour migrant? -

Exploring the discursive organisation of difference in the competition state

Kerstin Martel

Abstract

This paper explores how labour migrant categorisations are reified, reproduced and at times dissolved across distinct discursive terrains. It contributes to the *reflexive turn* in migration studies, all whilst providing insights on possible intersections with other study fields. Through problematisation the author demonstrates how human capitalist variations of designating labels exceed the economic sphere and infuse every-day public discourse and the sphere of the state. Multi-scalar inconsistencies of taxonomies, as well as examples of acts of labelling from the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, allow to apprehend state / non-state entanglements with regards to labour migration in general. The paper suggests that the performativity of labels as categories of practice is fluctuating and context dependent. Moreover, a multitude of fluctuating, inconsistent acts of labelling interfere with individual self-identifications, lead to disturbances and tend to operate beyond the intention of the interlocutor. The author argues that the fragmentation and repetition of labels across discursive spheres constitute an assemblage that is *performative* as such, in its entirety. She proposes to conceptualise the dense and at times disturbing composition of categorisations that exceed the initial intention as *'discursive noise'*. The denser and the more fragmented the assemblage becomes, the less perceptible the ideological underpinnings are. It shows how the human capitalist lens is infused in

ascribed migrant identities, normalized and, therefore, dissimulated. Discursive noise of inconsistent labels becomes an ambient theme that organizes social difference and incites individual aspirations for distinction.

'For scientific inquiry
always start from things of the environment experienced in our
everyday life,
with things we see, handle, use, enjoy and suffer from'
(Dewey, 1929: 103)

INTRODUCTION

Migration, as a theme, has matured within and beyond the boundaries of the designated field of *migration studies,* as scholars observe, and is thereby subjected to a multiplicity of conceptualisations, as well as to disciplinary and paradigmatic specificities (Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). Fragmented and at times contradictory analytical categorisations of 'migrants' circulate in academic work, all whilst being distinct from designations that occur in every-day discourse of laypeople (Božič et al., 2023). In general, sociologists observe that meanings and applications of *categories of analysis* diverge from so-called *categories of practice*, which are dynamically deployed by multiple actors across society (Bourdieu 1977; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). However, with regards to terminologies in migration and mobilities studies, scholars state that

analytical perspectives are infused by political interests of 'receiving' nation states, for example in policy-driven research. The *reflexive turn* in migration studies (Nieswand and Drotbohm, 2014), as well as critical scholars in neighbouring fields like *management and organisation studies* or *law studies,* elucidate how underlying ideological stances are mirrored in migrant categorisations in academic research, categorisations which at first sight appear innocent and neutral (Dahinden 2016; Crowley-Henry et al., 2018; Achiume, 2019).

The present problematisation was motivated by these insights and by the consciousness that text and public discourse in general operate as 'vital sources of power' (Alvesson, 2002: 140). Scholars point out that social sciences seem to be trapped in *labelling biases*. For example, in management studies where the term 'migrant', as opposed to 'self-initiated expatriate', is applied 'when discussing the work experiences of unskilled individuals, having less educated backgrounds, and originating from less-developed countries' (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013: 28). Along this vein, studies confirm that ethnicity, racialization and stereotyping come into play when distinguishing 'migrants' from 'expatriates', revealing social hierarchies and a lack of inclusiveness more broadly (Bell, Kwesiga and Berry, 2010; Cranston, 2017). However, only few works examine how specific labels are used in broader public and popular discourse in the field, in practice, beyond academic taxonomies (Božič et al. 2023; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).

My interest in the linguistic categorisation of 'labour migrants' *in situ* was moreover triggered by personal everyday observations, from the standpoint of a 'newcomer', a 'labour migrant' or 'international mover'– the designating label might be chosen depending on the meaning one seeks to convey. Vignettes from a specific local context, the city of Copenhagen in Denmark, illustrate (in section three) how distinct labels are performed when deployed in *speech acts* across public spheres*,* across a variety of *'discursive terrains',* in Butler's (2015) words. What do they reveal about the current situation of labour migration in this

specific context? And why do these labels feel confusing and at times disturbing? It appears intriguing that the illustrative sample of labels that occur in a given field, e.g., the city of Copenhagen, add to the inconsistencies that scholars observe with regards to academic classifications in migration and management studies. What does the increasing fragmentation of labels indicate? I argue that the multiplicity and inconsistency of labels across various discursive spheres (academia, state, economy, supranational institutions etc.) reveals the deliberate creation of difference with regards to migrants within the context of the 'competition state', a term coined by Cerny (1997).

The occurrence of management jargon such as 'expatriate' in housing adverts or 'global talent' in political discourse suggest how economic and political spheres are not only discursively interwoven, but in fact increasingly entangled. It indicates that state affairs, i.e. migration policies, are infused by human capitalist logics, and that migration industries, such as real estate businesses, mirror and reinforce the segregation of citizens that selective migration policies initiate. Despite, and maybe because of conceptual inconsistency, the fluctuation of meanings and the multiplicity of *categories of practice* (Bourdieu, 1977; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) are intriguing: what do they reveal and how do they contribute to the *discursive organisation of difference* amongst migrants in today's globalised, economically driven societies? Thus, instead of diving into debates about the theoretical validity or non-validity of certain categorisations in a specific scholarly field, or about the boundary conditions of a specific label, I suggest problematising the *fragmentation of labels across discursive spheres.* This fragmentation deserves to be further problematised, as the deployed categories are not mutually exclusive and distinctive, but the underlying meanings are fluctuating and *performative*.

My own pragmatist observations (Dewey, 1929) are illustrated in a catalogue of example speech acts and labels (see appendix), which I encountered during my personal experience of settling-in and which

occurred in housing adverts, discourses of mayors or speech acts of industry confederations since 2018. This sample is not meant to be exhaustive or representative of all labels that circulate in the given context. It is rather to be understood as a *collage* of visual snippets, of labels to which a non-Danish speaking international knowledge worker is possibly exposed when settling in the capital city of Copenhagen. The *collage* informs the argument of a high degree of *fragmentation* with regards to ascribed labels and is meant to further trigger the reader's reflexivity, beyond the interpretation of the present paper. The fact that many of these utterances felt disturbing to me and others, as will be exposed, leads to question *how* they resonate when standing side by side, when seemingly competing against one another. What does the multiplicity and the *fragmentation* of labels that are circulated in public speech acts reveal about the overall context and about actors who ascribe these identities to 'foreign workers'?

In sum, the following exploration supports the effort of exposing the role of categorisations in the nation state apparatus, including administrative and academic discourse, as a means of reifying migration related difference (Dahinden, 2016). In addition, it underlines how hierarchies amongst migrants are discursively constituted depending on their decreed economic value, depending on the 'human capital' they bring to the competition state. The approach of *problematisation* embraces the aspiration of scholars in reflexive migration studies to deconstruct and question conventional categorisations, to be attentive to what we observe and sense: the situatedness of real people who move across real space, with all the complexities this may entail (Favell, 2007; Horvath, Amelina, Peters; 2018; Zetter, 2007). Moreover, this contribution complements recent studies that explore labelling acts amongst non-expert populations (Božič et al., 2023), emphasising the importance to further deepen understandings about colloquial acts of labelling across social fields. It provides insights on debates on conceptual clarity in management studies (Guttormsen, 2018; McNulty

& Brewster, 2017), by suggesting that categorisations need to be understood as fluctuating, situational and contextually intertwined. Overall, by conceptualising the phenomenon of fragmented, inconsistent migrant categorisations across discursive spheres as *'white noise'*, I suggest that designated actors and others are submerged in stimuli, in a force that operates in the background, at times disturbing, barely noticed.

As follows, I start by explicating the research approach of discourse related *problematisation* in section one, before problematising the inconsistencies of migrant labels in macro and meso discursive spheres in section two. Section three complements the approach of problematisation on the basis of ambiguous empirical snippets, all whilst leaving more room to proceed with the process in future research. The discussion develops the concept of discursive 'white noise', whilst attempting to clarify how discursive ambiguities occur, how they operate and what they are constitutive of.

Research approach: problematising along discursive factions and in situ reflexivity

Making *politically contested categories* an object of analysis has been a major aspiration of scholars in reflexive migration studies in the past years (Brubaker, 2013; Dahinden, 2016; Löhr, 2022), when questioning mutually constitutive categorisations in academia and in policy making (Bakewell, 2008) and when pointing to the 'categorical fetishism' during the so-called European 'migration crisis' (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Whereas macro-policies are the frame of reference for migration studies, scholars from the neighbouring field of management and organisation studies relate to terminologies of meso-level private corporations. As a matter of fact, the use of categorisations in the literature of 'Human Resource Management' (HRM) in general and talent management more specifically, reveals the historical construction of beliefs (Bevort et al. 2018), as exemplified through Inkson's (2008) provocative question 'Are

Humans Resources?'. In the context of migratory, diverse societies organisation scholars investigate 'the imbalances of power and implicit assumptions' that are conveyed through dominant discourse (Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2017: 1157). In the vein of these studies, I propose to *problematise the human capitalist twist* in migrant labels – labels, which have been taken for granted and which are rarely contested, such as 'global talent' or 'expatriate'. Exceptions are more recent investigations on the distinction between the terms 'expatriate' and 'migrant' in sociology (Beck et al., 2023) and human geography (Cranston, 2017). An ongoing *political and historical problematisation* of terminologies in the mobility and migration nexus can, according to Favell (2007), contribute to a theoretical renewal and to a post-disciplinary perspective. In addition, I argue that underlying *economic reasoning and private sector logics* are crucial to be considered when problematising migrant labels, when apprehending their meaning in globalized labour markets. [Nimer and Osseiran (this special issue) further investigate how labour, as key theme, serves to construct migrant/citizen binaries.] I suggest that the *problematisation* and partial *deconstruction* of discursively conveyed difference of migrant groups based on their *presumed economic and symbolic capital*, shall allow to reveal what Derrida (1968) calls 'false hierarchies': these constitute the basis for processes of othering, exclusion and stigmatisation.

Thus, in line with Foucault's (1968) approach of *problematisation,* I propose the present paper to be enrolled in a broader *ongoing, iterative process* of scholarly reflexivity across study fields and disciplines. Foucault (1968) states that the response to the process of problematisation are factions of objects, types of formulations, concepts and theoretical options that are deployed in institutions, in techniques, in individual and collective behavioural conduct, in political operations, literature, scientific undertaking, as well as in theoretical speculations. Thus, the problematisation of categorisations of migrants, as it is undertaken at a small scale in this paper, will never be exhaustive or

terminated, as their manifestations dynamically transcend time, space and multiple societal spheres, and as meanings are situationally and individually constituted. Furthermore, I suggest understanding labels as 'organizing devices' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011) that contribute to form groups and denote connections. Insights from *discourse analysis* allow in this context to assess what a categorisation *does* in a given context, i.e., supposing what reactions it might produce and how it possibly constitutes migrant representations across societal spheres. Exemplifying and problematising discursive practice and their performativity does *in fine* allow for *deconstruction*, because, as Derrida emphasises (referred to by Butler, 2010), only when one or several of the reiterations of discourses fail to perform, the deconstruction of the term becomes possible.

As will be illustrated, the researcher's position as mobility researcher, paired with the researcher's lived experience as international mover and newcomer nurtures a marginal, observatory insider-outsider position that makes a *pragmatist*, hypersensitive approach an adequate choice (Carling, Erdal and Ezzati, 2014). It exemplifies how the 'researcher-mover-newcomer' lens can be leveraged as a method of *everyday-sociology* (Maffesoli, 1989), in order to initiate reflexive research in the mobilities and migration nexus. Personal accounts, lived experiences and ethnographic observations generate an *emic* understanding that complement the process of historical or disciplinary problematisations. Bewilderments and perplexities, sparked by everyday events invite to reflect on and to question academic assumptions in a *postdisciplinary* way that 'surpasses the boundaries of disciplinary thinking and opens up the possibility to question established phenomena that we take for granted' (Pernecky, Munar and Wheeller, 2016: 390). Dewey (1929) was certainly aware of the advantages that an insider viewpoint entails when he suggests 'for scientific inquiry always start from things of the environment experienced in our everyday life, with things we see, handle, use, enjoy and suffer from'. When observing

the social world as researchers and something affects us as a person, when moving to an unfamiliar place, the marginal position of '*the stranger*' challenges our world views and amplifies our reflexivity, as Schütz (1944) discerns. Indeed, the plurality of *designations* attributed to foreign workers and working migrants in political and economic public discourse are intriguing when experienced from the inside, when observed through the eyes of the newcomer, the outsider.

Hence, I suggest understanding problematisation as being not simply a method, but *an object of study in itself* (de Salies, 2013). This allows for complementary methods to serve the purpose of problematisation, such as analysis of theoretical positions in section two or discourse analysis and pragmatist data generation in section three. Rather than focusing on exhaustively debated definitions or static *boundary conditions* of analytic migrant categories, this approach allows to investigate *how* and under which circumstances categories occur in the field. In this sense, it enables to 'perceive the lines of fragility, to identify where the strengths are situated and where power is anchored' (Foucault 1975, 1627). The condensed review of scholarly debates and macro level categorisations in section two, combined with exemplary speech acts in a local context in section three, is based on the observation that underlying assumptions are often dissimulated and not explicit, thereby calling for typologies to be problematised along a *continuum* where 'in-house assumptions form one end and field assumptions the other end' (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011: 255). Overall, this research approach is in line with the present special issue, as the present paper in its entirety can be apprehended as *reflexive practice,* as a means to nurture reflexivity on the *discursive organisation of difference*.

1 | *Contextual problematisation*

1.1 Categorisation and de-migranticization in the reflexive turn

As conceptual understandings are not always in tune across study fields, drawing on debates from different fields appears to be precious when attempting to problematise labels. 'The boundaries of a given field do not lend themselves to be generalized, once and for all qualifications', as diversity scholars Tatli and Özbilgin affirm in reference to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), when stating that 'they can only be understood empirically at a specific point in time because these boundaries are in a dynamic flux of contestation.' (2012: 194). Thereby, all whilst problematising discursive entanglements between *state affairs* and *economic affairs* with regards to the categorisation of 'highly qualified migrants' in different *discursive spheres*, the present paper aims at nurturing conversations between two fields: migration studies and management and organisation studies. [The globalization of labour markets is further explored by Nimer and Osseiran (in this issue), when they demonstrate how the concept of refugee labour is articulated and studied to provide ground for a wider critique of migration-related knowledge production.]

Migration scholars elucidate how the use of analytical categories in an academic discourse contributes to the reproduction of power relations and exclusionary practice, how acts of labelling can reify neocolonial perspectives (Dahinden et al., 2021; Schinkel 2018, Cranston and Duplan, 2023). Likewise, critical scholars point to the importance of considering a multi-scalar lens in diversity management and regarding categorisations, inviting to reflect on prevalent assumptions (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013; Mahadevan and Kilian-Yasin, 2017). They support the fluctuating nature of categorisations, all whilst being conscious of underlying ideologies in an effort to 'frame workforce diversity as a dynamic and empirical construct which attends to temporal and geographic contextuality of relations of power, privilege, inequality

and disadvantage' (Tatli and Özbilgin 2012: 180). Overall, diversity scholars recognize the importance of avoiding essentialism and of recognizing historical and structural dynamics (Zanoni et al. 2010). [Bartels and colleagues further address the significance of economic rationalities and material dimensions of knowledge production   in this special issue.]

As an example, one can affirm that the phenomenon of differentiating between those who are established in a place and referring to them as 'locals' versus those who moved to that place from other geographies as 'immigrants' exceeds purely linguistic considerations. Explicit categorisations contribute to the organisation of difference in local society and influence self-categorisation (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Brubaker, 2013). They are 'relational and contextual phenomena that have local consequences on intergroup relations', as suggested in social identity theory (Villesèche et al., 2018). *Analytic categories* in general, such as used in academia, contribute to the construction of difference in a societal context and to the reification of societal power relations (Berger and Luckmann, 1969; Nieswand and Drotbohm, 2014). Nonetheless, Dahinden and colleagues emphasise that 'how categorisation works remain[s] vague and undertheorised' (2021: 537). Calls for a more reflexive and, hence, decentred application of categorisations in different study fields goes along with the observation that formerly class-centred designations and associated emancipative efforts in local societies shifted towards culturalized and individualized categorisations, for example with regards to the migrant/native dialectic (Romani, Zanoni and Holck, 2020). As migrants within the 'national container' are understood as 'anomaly', diversity research and social science investigations in general work with the assumption that the label 'migrant' signifies 'difference' (Dahinden, 2016). The reflexive use of *categories of analysis* in academia and a 'de-migranticization' is therefore, as Dahinden (2016) suggests, crucial to distance academic research from nation state interests. In order to achieve a more decentred

perspective she emphasises in the vein of Bourdieu (1977) and Brubaker (2013) the need to distinguish between categories that are used by actors in everyday life - *categories of practice* or *'common-sense categories'* – and those that serve a conceptual purpose, *categories of analysis*. Exploring *emic categories* or *categories of practice* provides deeper insights on social realities and relationalities in a given context and will allow in the case of this paper to trace how categories are dislocated across discursive spheres (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2013).

1.2 *The competition state and multi-scalar infusion of human capital 'talent' lense*

Employing organisations have been competing for skilled and highly skilled employees over many years, claiming the scarcity of 'talent'. Strategy and management consultants, as well as business universities, coined the expression '*war for talent*' in the early 2000s (Michaels et al., 2001), and the idea of needing to 'combat' for 'talent' has been a taken for granted assumption in the business world since. The growing influence of international and multinational corporations has accelerated global workforce mobility in general (Mazzella 2016). Favourable governmental policies and multilateral agreements, in the European Union (EU) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regions, attribute the privilege of geographic mobility to citizens and encourage labour force mobility. Programmes of the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the International Organization for Migration (IOM) encourage temporary labour migration on a supranational level. However, the involvement of nation states as active actors in 'talent attraction' and 'talent retention' is more recent, as macro-level private rankings such as the '*Global Talent Competitiveness Index'* (INSEAD) and the '*Global Talent Ranking'* (IMD), both established in 2013, indicate. On a macro level two editions of the recently established OECD policy report '*Indicators for Talent*

Attractiveness' (2019; 2013), claim to provide insights on which countries 'provide the best talents' to the 'global labour market'.

National admission schemes in OECD countries such as Canada, the US, the UK or Germany have been applying attributes such as *(highly) skilled* and *(highly) qualified* for several decades, when designating migrants to whom entry shall be granted. Whilst the European Union Bluecard directive regulates the 'entry of highly qualified workers' across the region, numerous national legal frameworks co-exist in the EU and member states compete with regards to attracting highly qualified individuals, labelled as '*talent',* from outside the region as immigration policy initiatives exemplify (e.g. 'competent and talented', France, 2006; 'talent boost', Finland, 2020; 'SpAIn Talent', Spain, 2023). The competition for foreign investments, as well as for qualified foreign workforce, manifests in what Cerny and others call 'the competition state' (Cerny, 1997). When investigating the notion of the *'competition state'* for Denmark and Norway, Angell and Mordhorst (2015) recognize the nationalist orientations of nation branding initiatives and affirm that these 'move nationalism out of its traditional political, cultural and ideological field and into the domain of global competition for prosperity – that is, *into a commercial field'* (Angell and Mordhorst, 2015: 186; emphasis added).

Indeed, 'nation branding' initiatives (Anholt, 1998) with a global reach and activities to enhance 'national image reputation' (Fan 2010) have been in place for more than twenty years in Nordic countries (Cassinger et al., 2021). They increasingly embed so-called 'talent attraction campaigns', as documented in the report 'FuturePlaceLeadership' (2021; 2022) and as initiatives such as the 'European Talent Mobility Forum' (2021) indicate. Another sign of the infiltration of economic concerns into state affairs, can be found in publicly funded programs like 'Supporting Denmark to integrate and attract *global talent*', which is funded by the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument program (2021-2024). This program

legitimizes the term *'global talent',* and thus its commercial connotations and private economic interests. It contributes to nurturing the increasingly prevalent *human capital lens* on migration. [The integrationism of mobility governance and control by the EU's policy and funding apparatus has it flaws, as Dodevska confirms in this issue, for example when the proliferation of concepts and of a specific jargon are mutually constitutive across societal spheres.]

Hence, the demand for so-called 'foreign labour' has been favouring *functionalist and contributionist classifications* of migrants in macro discourses, i.e. migrants are categorised according to their economic contribution to the 'receiving' nation state, as well as according to their potential to be granted membership as a citizen (Triadafilopoulos, 2013). Whilst the accountability of attracting foreign labour is discursively transposed to the 'macro level', state-economy entanglements, as well as nationalist interests with regards to migration become most tangible: 'Denmark's competitive strength depends on its ability to attract and develop *human capital'* (Minabaeva et al., 2018). Academic discourse in the field of management and organisation studies aligns with this shift, as the book 'Macro Talent Management' (Vaiman et al., 2018) illustrates:

'Macro Talent Management: A Global Perspective on Managing Talent in Developed Markets is the first book to focus specifically on *country-level activities* aimed at attracting, developing, mobilizing, and retaining *top talent* for economic success in developed markets. The book serves as a guide that orients the reader toward activities that increase their country's global competitiveness, attractiveness, and economic development through *strategic talent management'* (Vaiman et al., 2018: iii; emphasis added).

This description perfectly illustrates the phenomenon of *the competition state*, for example by emphasising 'countries' global competitiveness'. It legitimizes country level public spending for the attraction of 'top talent'

from abroad and supports that the state acts as 'quasi enterprise association' (Cerny, 1997).)

2| *In situ problematising of labels – a collage*

2.1 *'Expats only' - how experiencing everyday labelling in situ sparks reflexivity*

My motivation to investigate the labelling of foreign workers in context was triggered by *casual observations* made as foreign newcomer and flat seeker in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, when moving by the end of 2018. As per recommendations from other international colleagues I initially relied upon housing listings in English written websites[9]. To my surprise, multiple adverts were very explicit about to whom they would allow renting the offered flat. Claims (see appendix #1) such as 'The best view in Copenhagen – only for expats', 'Nice villa in Gentofte – for expats', 'Expats only, with no residence requirement' or simply 'Expats only' made me wonder: who is meant by *expat,* who is targeted with these offers? Precisions such as 'only rented to *international* customers', as well as up-scale pricing and time limited rental periods (24-36 months) suggest it to be those who move to Denmark for a limited time, assumingly for a professional position that requires a higher qualification and regular moves, possibly supported by the same employer. Probably the upper scale rents and three months-worth of deposit allow for self-selection, I thought. I was wondering if Danish citizens could rent such a flat if they wanted to, if they happened to land on one of these websites that are exclusively written in English. Is it even legal to discriminate against and exclude those who do not fall into the 'international customer' category? And regarding my

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[9] e.g. www.danishhomes.dk; www.capitalhomes.dk

apartment search, was I, for example, eligible for it, even though I merely have a local contract with a local employer, without any housing allowance or other 'expatriation benefits' from a large multi-national corporation?

When visiting some of these apartments in despair of not having found a place to stay, I learnt that it did not matter if I had a valid local working contract or a minimum salary, as nobody ever asked me for proof. Being European mover, Nordic looking and simply stating that I worked for the local, prestigious business university seemed to be sufficient to enter the pool of potential candidates. To conclude, however, one would need to accept the most uncommon financial requirements, all while signing a time-limited contract. This sparked my *reflexivity*: 'why do I feel uncomfortable with the idea of having to fit into the 'international' or 'expat' category, when being offered an apartment in this city? Isn't it uplifting, to be *perceived* as a high-status foreigner, a high net-worth individual?' These adverts and associated rental practices affected me as a newcomer in this city and the initial confusion transformed into a researcher's curiosity on the working of these labels. How can *commercial speech acts* convey a sense of segregation and exclusion? At a later stage, once I was already sensitive to the topic of labelling, I came across another situation which led me to pursue my explorations on the *representations* of foreign workers in the local context of Copenhagen. In reaction to a housing offer shared by an international colleague via an email to a group of 400+ international staff members I read an upset email reaction. The offer stated:

> '*A potential home for expats, who are eager to explore the Danish Capital from within and living in a spacious and classic property. This apartment will allow you to enjoy all*

the nice restaurants, shops etc. of Frederiksberg and Copenhagen. [...]'

Within six minutes, a colleague replied to all:

'Can I please be removed from any communication about unimportant and narrow-visioned things like luxury for (a minority of privileged) expats? Thank you.'

Whereas some following comments classified this reaction as harsh and angry, others were supportive:

'[...] when the assistant professor salaries are what they are, announcing a rental property on international club that costs almost as much as one month's salary is bound to offend some people.'

As this ordinary conversation shows, it is not the *designation* 'expat' itself that affects people and upsets them as such, but *the category in a commercial context* (luxury goods tonality of the advert), as well as the *symbolic and economic status* that it conveys within a specific *economic and structural setting* (the tense housing market and increasingly expensive and often unaffordable rents in Copenhagen). The reactions exemplify that the label 'expat' in combination with a high-priced rent does not systematically resonate with all highly qualified foreigners (here: academics). Instead, it apparently creates anger, is *perceived* as offensive by those who do not identify *as* expat, nor *with* the 'minority of privileged expats'. It unveils a (possibly prevalent) frustration, triggered by a socio-economic situation (highly qualified academic with 'assistant professor salary'), which does not allow to rent the offered upper-scale apartment. Despite the *prestige* and *high symbolic status* associated to a professorship at university, it is disjointed from the individual's financial means. I wondered: 'How would others lower income workers be affected by such

exclusive advert?' The available economic means might determine if migrants and refugees from different backgrounds feel eligible or not. Stereotypical and essentializing categorisations of foreigners as, for example, 'expats' may indeed be disturbing when it sparks feelings of non-belonging or exclusion. Above all, these everyday observations were a starting point for exploring and problematising the *discursive organisation power relations and hierarchies*, beyond the common binarism local/foreigner or native/migrant.

The confusion triggered through these and similar discourses has stayed with me since I arrived in Copenhagen in 2018. I have been witnessing times were hostile political announcements against immigration and immigrants were continuously re-iterated in the public and political sphere, , all whilst glossy nation branding campaigns advocated the country's lifestyle and shared Denmark's urgent need for 'global talent' with the world, as further illustrated as follows.[10] The stark contrast triggers discursive dissonance when observed from a distance.

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[10] The Global Detention Project report (2022) states that Denmark had adopted more than 70 legal amendments to tighten its immigration laws between 2015 and 2018 and rejected the UN quota of 500 refugees in 2017 and in 2019 it announced a goal of 'zero asylum seekers'. Asylum seekers would certainly not fall into the category 'international customer' of the housing adverts above (section 2.1), even if they had the necessary financial means. In 2018, right when I was searching for a flat in Copenhagen (2.1), the right-wing Danish government announced in December 2018 a highly symbolic measure. Media relate: 'Denmark plans to isolate *'unwanted' migrants* on remote island'. A photo of the island in question below the title is followed by the explanation that 'Denmark's government struck a deal to move *'unwanted' migrants* to a remote uninhabited island once used for contagious animals.' (CNN, Dec. 6th 2018). Around the time the 'Global Talent' webpage of the Confederation of Danish Industry stated: 'A stronger Denmark with Highly Skilled International Employees […] ensures that

2.2 *'We need you!' – discursive dissonance in situ*

The overview in table 2.1 shows labels used in English speaking press and public communications in the city of Copenhagen when designating labour migrants (see appendix for detailed accounts). These samples do not only exemplify the *economic and work-related organisation of migrant difference* through discourse, but as well a focus on skills, qualifications and 'talent'. The commercial space within the migration industry, e.g. real-estate adverts, associates a high purchasing power to international customers and presupposes temporary settlement when ascribing the label 'expat' (table 2.1-B). Similarly, salary levels determine who is labelled as 'top talent' by employer confederations (D.2). The Academy of Technical Sciences states, for example, that they 'understand *international talent* to be *highly qualified employees* who are typically eligible for a residence permit in Denmark on the [legally defined] Pay Limit scheme, i.e., persons who have been offered job in Denmark with a high salary around at least 400,000 DKK / 54,000 EUR per year' (ATV, 2019). This definition illustrates the close intertwinement between the demand for qualified labour in organisations and the national immigration scheme ('pay limit scheme'). It emphasises *economic capital* as underlying labelling criteria (rather than skill level, education or other relational criteria). Both, up-market housing adverts and pay level criteria, introduce a *class-centred perspective* that contributes to the organisation of difference amongst migrants and within the labour pool in general. These and similar classifications exclude all foreign individuals without corresponding skill levels, pay levels or work permits (e.g. refugees). Furthermore, the label 'expat' supports the

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Denmark is an attractive country for *highly qualified foreign employees* to live, work and study in."

assumption of temporary stays of 'international customers' and performs exclusion of local citizens and of those who envisage long term settlement (beyond 24 or 36 months). Property managers explain to homeowners who wish to rent out their homes that 'many consider foreigners as good tenants, as they often move to Denmark for a shorter period due to work, and therefore move back home. We typically experience that an *expat* stays in Denmark between 12 months and 3 years' (homeconnector.dk; see table 2.1 -B.2). These and other stereotypical perceptions and stigmatising descriptions of 'expat' tenants are formulated in Danish language, not in English. Nonetheless it seems that labels such as '*international labour'*, '*global talent'* or '*expat'* attribute a certain *symbolic capital* and prestige to a selected group of migrants.

A.	National political announcement [engl.]
	('unwanted') migrants - refugees - immigrants
B.	Real estate agencies / housing websites [engl.]
	expats - international customers
C.	City of Copenhagen, 2019/2020 [engl.]
	international citizens - foreign *talent* - eligible international labour - foreign labour
D.	Industry Confederation, 2019/2023 [engl.]
	***global talent* - international labour - international employees - *highly qualified* foreign employees**
	Danish Academy of Technical Sciences, 2019 [engl.]
	international *top talent* - *highly qualified* employees' - *highly qualified* labour - *top executives*
E.	Private talent rankings
	***Global Talent* Competitiveness Index' (INSEAD, emphasis added)**
	***Global Talent* Ranking (IMD, emphasis added),**
F.	Supranational institutions: indicators and entry schemes
	OECD policy report 'Indicators for ***Talent*** Attractiveness' (emphasis added)
	EU Bluecard Directive for third country nationals (2021)
	highly qualified* workers - *highly skilled* professionals – *talent

TABLE P.2.1: Examples of registers of labels attributed to foreign residents in Copenhagen (own illustration, emphasis added; see appendix #2 for vignettes in context)

One can observe that these terms are not only leveraged in a commercial context. They are similarly present in public and political discourse and in speeches that address newcomers in Copenhagen. The 'welcome' address of the mayor of employment in an English-speaking newspaper (C.2) confuses personal address of new residents with a macro-economic label when she says: 'we need you! […] eligible international labour' (C.2). This utterance normalizes an underlying contributionist rationale with regards to international newcomers. Several other vignettes (see appendix #2) show how local Danish politicians (C) and industry confederations (D) focus on the economic value that foreigners produce in order to maintain the 'Danish welfare state'. Being designated as a 'producing workforce for a stronger Denmark' (D.1) or being 'welcomed' in order to 'provide for the welfare that all Danes recognize and appreciate today' (C.3) might operate in an alienating manner when read by those who are designated. The confederation of Danish Industry (D.2) declares to their members that '*global talents* bring value, knowledge and growth to Danish companies.' This instrumentalist, human capital perspective stands in contrast with the designation '*international citizen*', which is used in communications of the city's entity that supports administrative efforts of international newcomers (those who are financially autonomous and have a valid working contract and residence permit): the 'International House Copenhagen'. The associated annual event 'International Citizen Day' and the 'International Citizen Service' (C.1) emphasise a membership perspective through labels that relate to 'citizens', which on first sight suggest a closer alignment of this administration with state affairs, rather than economic affairs.

3 | DISCUSSION

As demonstrated, the ascription of identities through labels, which contain references to a human capitalist ideology is present in multiple 'discursive terrains' of society. The phenomenon exceeds micro-economic private sector organisations where the logics of humans as 'resources' originated. Generally, labels within a specific discursive terrain are *informative,* in the sense that they inform about the interlocutor's interest and intention, as well as about the general context. However, they only are *performative* when perceived and understood in a certain way. The use of buzz words and jargon from economic and business environments, e.g., 'global talent', beyond the boundaries of this specific discursive terrain generates ambiguity. If a label occurs in a context where one does not expect it, for example when being 'welcomed' in the speech of a city's mayor as 'foreign labour force', it creates disturbance: in this example one can observe a *shift* from the register of *hospitality* (welcoming) towards the register of *economic contribution* (maintaining the Danish welfare system). Moreover, in a foreign context the perceivable discourse for newcomers depends on linguistic capacities and in the case of Copenhagen, Denmark, this is limited to communications in English language. Within the ecosystem actors are subjected to political discourses that they do not necessarily understand, but which further contributes to the densification of the ambient *'discursive noise'*, as I suggest calling it: a superposition of distinct more or less valuing and more or less denigrating designations of non-native residents. With the term '*discursive noise'* I propose conceptualising the *disturbance* and *confusion* which multiple omnipresent labels may create in sum, for example when superposing with alternative self-identifications. *Discursive noise interferes* with how international movers perceive themselves, with how they self-identify and forces to position oneself within the hierarchy of foreign workers.

As mentioned, the concepts and labels that are explored in sections two and three are anchored in the grand narrative of *globalization* and *global*

labour mobility. Moreover, one can affirm that the phenomenon of globalization manifests in the *competition state*, as well as in labels that are derived from the micro-economic notion of 'global talent management', coined by private sector practitioners and management and organisation scholars (Al Ariss, Cascio and Paauws, 2014; Vardi & Collings 2023). When observing that international movers are designated or addressed as 'global talent', 'labour migrant' or 'business expatriate', one might get the impression that these terms designate distinct types of people. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive, but *equivocal* from an epistemological stance: all of these terms may potentially be ascribed to the same individual – not only at different moments during a life course, but as well at the same place in one specific point in time. From a sociological perspective in line with Bourdieu, the attributed labels and underlying symbolisms may reveal, but also dissimulate or distort power relations. As soon as a certain non-economic capital, such as education or professional experience, are explicitly recognized as valuable, *symbolic power* is attributed to the individual who holds the skill or qualification.

The exemplified labels or 'categories of practice' as Bourdieu (1977) calls them, are *performative* when used in public and commercial discourse in the sense that they contribute, both, to forming and dissolving privilege and social status, i.e. *symbolic capital*, within the boundaries of the nation state. The presence of social and cultural capital, along Bourdieuan tradition, strongly depends on individual relations within a given socio-cultural context, but economic capital allows to literally acquire status – and thus symbolic capital – in multiple places, for example by renting up-market housing, as illustrated earlier. Labels (e.g. 'expat') in everyday speech acts (e.g. housing adverts) function as *operators,* which segregate individuals and groups (e.g. potential tenants) according to their origin (non-Danish), their mobility status (temporary settlement), as well as on the basis of their assumed economic capital (e.g. special tax scheme). Categories in this context are *performative,* as

they either grant or deny access to a service (rental apartment) and, thereby, grant access to housing in a high-status neighbourhood within the urban space. The introduction of a *class perspective*, attributed through economic purchasing power and, thus, through access to housing in upper-class local neighbourhoods attributes *symbolic prestige* to certain labour migrants. It is questionable, however, if purchasing power and a high-status employment alone are sufficient to exit the linguistic category of 'labour migrant' or 'economic migrant'. It seems worth exploring in future studies the role of origin and ethnicity with regards to the performativity of labels to which a high symbolic value is attached. What are other underlying, implicit criteria of exclusion and discrimination, such as whiteness or Europeanness or social class that 'discursive noise' of migrant labels dissimulates? This is a discussion to be addressed in future studies.

As demonstrated by Vertovec (2021), social actors are not only surrounded by an ecosystem in which they interact and which *organizes difference*, but interactions and, thus, acts of communication, contribute to the social organisation of difference. In addition, I argue that it is crucial for social analysis to consider the fact that actors are embedded into a variety of discursive terrains beyond local society, i.e. across social fields, that may create *dissonance* and *alienation*, rather than adherence. Vertovec's (2021) model on the *organisation of social difference* contributes to the understanding on how given societal configurations and encounters of actors contribute to shaping representations, deliberately or not. The question remains, nonetheless, how deliberately chosen political narratives (e.g., against immigration) perform in a social ecosystem when *economic interests* (e.g. attracting foreign labour force) are prevalent and intertwined with *state affairs*. The relevance of discursive utterances and their performative function in the competition state leads me to propose that an individual's *symbolic capital* in the new context is created and reified through *discursive repetition* of categorical labels. I thereby suggest that *the organisation of social difference* is not

only mirrored in public, commercial or academic discourse, but that acts of labelling through discourse contribute to the *reification* of social difference, even if targeted outcomes cannot always be ensured, and even if the source of the strategy remains ambiguous. They support the materiality and power of language as operating force. In the illustrative case of Denmark, the discursive distinction between 'migrants' and 'global talent' seems deliberate and is embedded in the state's entry rules that decreet who is granted the privilege of residing on the territory and who not. In this context the label 'global talent' stands out, as it is repeated across discursive terrains. The term is rather vague and appears less administrative, less rigid than the term 'labour migrant' and more all-embracing and positive. The associated symbolic representations are difficult to grasp in its entirety though, but it conveys a meritocratic ideology.

At times, utterances and visuals that are tied to labels, e.g., '*expat*', might indeed contribute to an optimistic, rather than fatalist, self-identification and construction of the mobile self on a micro sociological level as some scholars suggest (Cranston, 2017; Ozkazanc-Pan & Calás, 2015). By accepting to be addressed in a certain way, by responding to 'expats only' housing adverts, for example, actors are committing to the logics of the competition state and they thereby constitute the system that their role as productive labour force is constituted by. It might as well deliver room for individual identity strategies for those who arrive from the outside in the new context (Pierre, 2003). The interpretation of speech acts infuses meaning systems on the receiving end, possibly sparking self-identifications, resistance or rejection, as exemplified in the case of highly qualified foreign knowledge workers rejecting being addressed as 'expatriate'. Those who are designated might admit or refute the suitability of the categorisation for oneself as it occurs (Beck et al. 2023; Božič et al., 2023; Cranston, 2017; Brubaker, 2013). For the mobilities and migration nexus, this leads us to affirm that migrant representations and the performativity of classifications are *context-dependent and*

situational. Whereas some labels continue nurturing the dialectic migrant/non-migrant, (e.g., 'expats only'; 'foreign labour'), others contribute to *dissolving* this opposition to some extent (e.g., 'international citizen'; 'global talent') by attributing *symbolic capital* through *semi-inclusive categorisations*.

Nonetheless, as Butler emphasises, we need to acknowledge that 'lines of demarcation' will always remain (Butler, 2015), resulting in the inclusion of some individuals and the renewed exclusion of some others – especially as we understand categorisations as repeatedly enacted in a boundaryless and organic manner. Butler's comprehension of *performativity* comforts the present effort of problematisation and reflexive practice in that it is crucial to consider that acts of delimitation and differentiation *operate* 'according to a performative form of power' (2015, 6). The question, where the performative power is anchored, which Foucault suggests addressing through problematisation, cannot be answered in a univocal manner, when it comes to the discourse of 'global talent attraction'. But when understanding *performativity* along the vein of Butler it helps to be not only aware of the *intentionality* of the interlocutor, but as well *all that exceeds intentionality*. Discursive reiterations of labels such as 'global talent' - in macro political, as well as in micro commercial spheres - can be understood as perlocutionary speech acts. This means that their performance does *not* solely depend on the actor who pronounces it, but that the discursive practice needs to be apprehended under consideration of general conditions, which allow for performativity as Butler elucidates (2010: 151). With regards to the phenomenon of a globalized labour market, the general condition is a high labour market demand.

The question arises if the repeated citation and iteration of specific labels in discourses across distinct societal spheres, such as academia, business or politics indicates performative patterns *per se*. Are categories performatively constituted or, in Butler's words, are they 'constitutive

for the identities they are purported to be?' (Butler, 1997: 24). As stated earlier, the claimed economic value of 'skilled' and 'highly qualified' foreign individuals for local society is not only *discursively performed*, but also *symbolically conveyed* (see for example visuals of up-market housing, appendix #1). As such, the repetition of labels and visuals which support a *human capital lens* in public speech acts contribute to the *transvaluation* of migration as a phenomenon, when associating positive values (skills, talent) to the so-called 'migrant'. In a literal sense this can be understood as *'de-migranticization'* (Dahinden, 2016), even if the distinction from non-migrant populations persists. However, the fragmentation and co-existence of a multitude of categorisations across various discursive terrains can be perceived as *disturbing*, due to the *incongruence* between the situational context and the meanings that a label conveys in the eyes of the perceiver. Without necessarily being able to grasp the origin of the disturbance, one might sense that there is something wrong or inconsistent: there is an ambient *'discursive noise'*: ambiguous and vague labels create perplexities when standing alone, amongst those who are meant to be included *and* those who feel excluded.

I argue that the concept of *'discursive noise'* can be extended to *'white noise'* when a multiplicity of inconsistent, fragmented labels performs together as a *dense assemblage*, rather than as stand-alone labels. '*White noise*' of migrant categorisation is *performative,* even if stand-alone labels fail to perform, but it's performativity is omnipresent and *diffuse*. Indeed, as per Butler, performativity is 'a set of processes that produce ontological effects, that bring into being certain kinds of realities.' (2010: 147). Only when one or several of the reiterations of discourses *fail to perform*, as per Derrida (1968), the deconstruction of the term becomes possible. Thus, the degree of performativity of labels that are conveyed in speech acts in distinct discursive spheres is *fluctuating*: it is embedded into a discursive terrain of *white noise,* which produces dissonance or, to the contrary, provides an ambiance for

deploying individual identity strategies in a specific context. This suggests that a deeper understanding of how categorisations, which are dislocated across discursive terrains operate and perform is not only of epistemological value, but it nourishes *ontological* understandings. The ontological nature of competing labels that are *infused by human capitalist logics*, as problematised in sections two and three, becomes tangible through empirical illustrations: those who are labelled as 'economic migrant', in search of a better economic outcome of their professional activity, 'spark suspicion and hostilities' (Achiume, 2019), despite making life decisions based on economic logics, whereas those who are granted entry to the nation state via a 'skilled labour attraction scheme' are positioned as 'global talent' or 'self-initiated expatriate', in the case of Denmark. Their skills correspond to the current economic demand of the *competition state*. Butler (2010) clarifies how certain notions of *state* or *economy* are produced through state or economy effects:

> 'If such notions of the state are produced through state effects, then we must rethink the basic ontologies with which we operate. And the same goes for 'the economy' which only becomes singular and monolithic by virtue of the convergence of certain kinds of processes and practices that produce the 'effect' of the knowable and unified economy.' (2010: 147)

Hence, as the accountability for attracting foreign labour is shared or even delegated from private corporations to the state, the selection of 'eligible international labour' is organized through the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. By naming this process 'macro talent management' (Vaiman et al., 2018) it produces *'economy effects' within the state apparatus*, which means that it legitimizes the inflow of non-nationals into the state only *if* they 'add value'. When being repeatedly exposed to various labels that attribute *symbolic value* and *status* to the highly qualified labour force, which an individual represents, the labels

'global talent', 'international' or 'expatriate' spark a *desire for distinction* in a specific situation (e.g. ,when settling and participating in an unknown societal setting). This does not necessarily mean that individuals identify *with* this category, but in the specific situation and in the regime of the competition state they identify *as* 'global talent'. I further propose that the notion *white noise* allows to conceptualise the multi-scalar formation of a reality. A reality, which suggests that some individuals are 'valuable', thus wanted, others as 'less valuable', thus unwanted in the competition state. *White noise* of labels nourishes the myth that global mobility and international work create wealth, privilege and social status for the mover and for the receiving nation state. In other words, and as an extension of Löhr's and Reinecke's (2020) statement that migrant categories support the acceptance of migration as 'social fact', I suggest that the *discursive fragmentation of labels* supports the positioning of global mobility and migration as *salvation* and as individual life *aspiration*. Thereby, discursive state-economy entanglements that manifest in migrant labels, i.e. the infusion of human capital logics into the state apparatus through categorisation, do not only *organize social difference*, but they *produce ontological effects*.

In their entirety, as a dynamic assemblage which is omnipresent in the public sphere, fragments of speech acts perform as a *manifestation of the competition state:* a nation state that competes globally for human capital. As a stand-alone utterance a label might feel disturbing ('expats only'), but as an assemblage across multiple discursive spheres the juxtaposition of multiple labels may have a calming and vertiginous effect. *Discursive white noise* of labels *normalizes* the human capitalist lens and overwrites alternatives, such as citizenship as model of membership.

The increasingly colloquial use of terms such as *global talent*, *expat* or *international labour* reveals the dominance of a *human capital* perspective, across academic, political and commercial discourse with regards to migration. Labels *organize social difference discursively* as they attribute symbolic capital and status to foreign newcomers who are of economic value for the nation, whilst declining to grant this privilege to others. The multidimensional repetition and entanglements of speech acts within an ecosystem and across discursive spheres, reifies labels on the one hand and favours the internal consistency of speech acts within the competition on the other hand. The presented multi-scalar problematisation of labels across discursive spheres informs the argument that the *multiplicity* and the *fragmentation* of labels constitutes a *performative assemblage of discursive noise*. This dense composition acts as a force that entails the interests of the competition state and embodies the grand narrative of global mobility as salvation. I suggest that this intertwinement of state and economy affairs produces ambiguities that are to be investigated in future research. It becomes evident that migrant representations and difference are not only constituted through societal configurations, structures and interactions. In addition, as this contribution demonstrates, performative acts of labelling, reify representations and create hierarchies of difference amongst residents through a dense assemblage of discursive noise. The enactment of labels and possible strategies of self-appropriation or rejection by individuals and groups deserves further scholarly attention. The presence of human capitalist logics in migration and mobilities is diffuse and dissimulated, but nonetheless *disturbing and dizzying* at times. Quite like *white noise*, which exists, but goes unnoticed after a while. The continuous reiteration of labels across distinct discursive terrains shapes perceptions of otherness and organizes difference amongst residents. Overall, the reiteration of certain labels, like 'global talent', which convey privilege, reifies and *legitimizes the claim that*

humans (from abroad) are capital. The ontological effects that this produces deserves additional attention.

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P3 - "Isn't it ironic...!?!" Mobility researchers go sedentary

- a group auto-ethnography on collective coping and care in pandemic times

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ABSTRACT

We moved places and places moved us, until force majeure detained us on the spot. Signed-up to be hyper-mobile Ph.D.-candidates, we became hyper-reflective pandemic intimates. We moved together into a space that felt safe, OUR safe space. Suspended. Did the pandemic open this door, or had this space always existed, even back in the old days? Probably the latter, although we were not sensitive enough to perceive it, too busy to push the door, too lonesome to CARE. Not attentive to its possibilities, not imaginative of its POWER, too confident to be capable of succeeding alone. Even if we might have secretly wished for this space to exist. The present piece of work, and JOY, might be described by others as a "side-step," a "hobby project," a "shadow activity." For us, it is a recollection of shocks and wonders, a sentience of precious, ephemeral instances that last. We are a group of eight early career researchers who study global mobility and labour migration from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. With prior international mobility experience, we left our previous countries of residence in 2018 to join an EU-funded research project, whilst being located in different European cities. One could classify us, for example, as highly qualified, privileged migrants. The present paper is the outcome of a collaborative, auto-ethnographic study, conducted in 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19

pandemic, when we suddenly were forced not to travel anymore. We got together online every week to "refaire le monde," and we conducted virtual, dialogical self-interrogations and group reflections. Based on an emic approach, in line with Chang et al. (2013), we applied an iterative process of data collection and analysis. Our weekly conversations naturally emerged as a safe space for exchange and understanding, as we were facing similar situations, despite staying at different places. Suddenly, as the privilege of "always being on the move," "always socialising and networking" disappeared due to closed borders and pandemic threats, we experienced anxieties and isolation and had to re-evaluate our perceptions on life, work, and international mobility. The very purpose and meaning of our broader research endeavours and employment perspectives suddenly faded away. We realized more than ever before, what it means to us to be allowed to move, to travel freely across continents.

A mood can be what assails from the outside; deciding for us what we can and cannot do. A mood can imply something that hangs around, despite our best intentions, despite even our own selves. (Ahmed, 2014: 13)

1 | TELLING OUR OWN STORY? WHAT FOR...?

When all the tiny things and wonderful whereabouts that made up the big picture of your transnational life suddenly disappear, when the passion for being on the move transforms into claustrophobia, the horizon darkens and your arrangements and plans convert into utopia: you just want to scream, to cry out loud, letting the universe know that you will not accept this to happen! Fear, rage, anger, sadness. Maybe you are lucky, and some of your fellow colleagues and friends are feeling the same, and you start chatting about what is happening, "what this pandemic is doing" to you, what it all means for society, for humanity. You meet every week and speak about your thoughts, opinions, and feelings regarding "the situation," which suddenly makes your world appear completely unknown and hostile. You share your experiences about the new living and working, about ways of coping, resisting ... and performing. When connecting to your "buddies" over the months, you connect "virtually" as well as mentally, emotionally, and professionally. You are reading faces and bodies, start seeing beyond the screen and grasp the unarticulated. When you are feeling down, they pick you up. Comfort, jokes, confidence, joy. You start sensing the *mood* immediately each time you reconnect. Beyond geographic distances, whilst being spread across space, you start understanding what it is like when life is out of joint, when nothing falls into place anymore, when everything seems to be falling apart. You can keep going because you have a go-to place, a safe space that saves you. You are becoming aware of how you are affected individually, how seeing your colleagues' struggles affect you, and you start realizing that you care for each other.

But what is it that motivates us to write this all up, to share what we have lived through since the beginning of the pandemic, to voice "our story"? Aren't we just experiencing what millions of others do, too? With other "knowledge-workers" we have in common to be forced to work from home—to have the *privilege* of being able to do our work from home. With countless other "foreigners," we share the situation of unexpectedly being bound to a place that is quite unfamiliar to us, where we do not speak the local language, to be tight to a city where we barely know anyone, where we are passive observers, rather than active participants in local society. We lost our highly dynamic, intense lifestyle, a life in motion. The "horizontal sense of being on the move" described by Urry in "Mobilities" (2007: 8) was a present for us, which seems to belong to the past. By losing the physical movement and ability to travel, it seems as if we lost a major source of our energy, of our inspiration, our *élan vital* (Bergson, 1907). Simultaneously the very foundation and purpose of our work, of our research, the phenomenon of global mobility, suddenly vanished.

We have realized over the past months how strongly the content of our work is intertwined with our personal affinity for borderless mobility and the international lives that we have led, how our curiosity for global migrations is entangled with how we make sense of our transnational life. We lost it. Something that we will never ever catch up on, a special time of our life. A time that we had imagined as one of our best, that we had prepared for: conducting mobility research whilst constantly being on the move. Is it right to claim that we "lost something," to reify time, mobility, and purpose? We shall rather affirm that the external constraints and restrictions have forced us to reflect and to become more conscious about what movement, social contacts, travel, family connections, etc. meant for us. We can recomfort the reader, and ourselves, about the bright side of the encountered constraints: over months of immobility, multiple layers of our existence have been in motion—confused, mixed-up,

questioned, disentangled, and re-assembled, so that it all will make sense... one day. Whatever we have done for this paper, this paper has done a lot for us! We are grateful.

As "global mobility researchers" the processes of globalization and its ever more complex implications for societies, organizations, and individuals are in the centre of our work. Given the stark implications of pandemic-related travel restrictions on mobility in general and for transnational workers across the globe more specifically, "our story" might as well generate additional insights and questions for future research. Anteby (2013) encourages organisational researchers to "relax the taboo" that has apparently built up amongst scholars in this field of study, when it comes to "telling their own stories." She says that she uses the expression of "telling our own stories" as "a proxy for field research projects that, in their written form, explicitly rely on a scholar's personal involvement in a field" (2013: 1277). She further defines this approach in reference to Elias (1956) as engaging with a set of mental activities that "connect" the researcher to a field. For us, such a connection with the field exists, indeed. We are identifying with the idea of free movement within the EU and globally, from a personal standpoint and as academics. "Engaging with the world intellectually" as suggested by Christensen and colleagues "can be framed as empathic intellectual work [...] while acknowledging the position of academic as a privilege" (Christensen et al., 2018: 866).

The re-erection of borders, surveillance and limitation of movement on a local level are described by Yuval-Davis et al. (2018) as re-bordering process, a phenomenon, which we have intensively experienced ourselves, fuelled by the pandemic, and it is not over. When re-bordering activities appeared and have been fostered by nation states since the early days of the pandemic in the first quarter of 2020, they were most visible and tangible for us and felt most threatening. In a recent statement,

Wemyss and Yuval-Davis (2020) underline that [...] everyday bordering, from the lockdown of individuals in their homes to the lockdown of regional and national borders, is at the heart of the technologies of control used to try to contain the pandemic and it is thus hard to believe that free movement would be restored any time soon. (Wemyss & Yuval-Davis, 2020: paragraph 2)

This process has deeply affected us, shocked us. It immediately got under our skin and sparked the urgent need to reflect and to discuss amongst us. Suddenly, the *privilege* that we had shared with millions of other travellers and in-betweeners, thanks to the quality of our passports and qualifications, has evaporated. Now and in the near future, our capacity to travel across borders and to join places and people that matter to us will be conditioned by our body temperature, by our financial and organizational capacity to testify our momentary sanitary status with a "PCR," and by our ability to prove an act of Covid-19 vaccination. And at times, despite all precautions and guarantees, we will continue to be locked-in at a place, just because another "wave" on national territory commands governmental restrictions. This makes it palpable how *privileged* we have been in the past. Since we have found ourselves physically stuck, our restless minds were caught in the minefield of forced sedentariness. We sensed the end of an era and the threat of being forced to surrender to a new biopolitics chapter, such as Foucault (1978–1979) anticipated, where "inequalities and the transgressive politics [...] saturate our early experiences with be(com)ing humans and living during the pandemic," as Plotnikof et al. (2020: 805) describe it in their collage of academics' individual experiences at an early state of the pandemic.

2 | IS THIS SOCIAL SCIENCE?—16 HANDS TO WRITE A PAPER

Before we narrate "who we are and why this is so ironic," we would like to examine the overall consultative process that led us to choose our approach and the research design. In the case of the present piece of work—and bliss—we can affirm that it is the result of total immersion into the world of eight knowledge-working labour migrants who happen to prepare their Ph.D. theses during a worldwide pandemic. In this so-called auto-ethnographic or endo-ethnographic study (Goulet, 2011), We, researchers, are the exclusive informants of ourselves and the overall process that we have been through as a group and individuals characterized by steady reflections, confrontations, and debates within the group. Through this collective voice and an evocative writing style, we are able to embody both our individual and group struggles, and turn them into words, as demonstrated in other collective writing projects, for example, by Ahonen et al. (2020). We are insiders doing "at-home research" (Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2016; Karra & Phillips, 2008; Merton, 1972)—in the most literal sense and despite living abroad. While positivist convictions guide a substantial share of organizational and management scholars, ethnographic work in this field does emphasise the need to take researchers' positionalities into account, especially with regards to so-called "at-home ethnography" (Alvesson, 2009). Being acutely aware that understanding the researcher's relation to the research field and topic is crucial, we will elaborate on our positionality as follows.

As a matter of fact, in our broader individual research projects, we address labour migration and organizational expatriation, thereby investigating various aspects of global mobility from distinct paradigmatic stances. Some are, for example, researching return-migration and repatriation, others psychological well-being and coping

strategies in hostile environments or the processes of identification and belonging across time and space. In addition, all of us are representatives of the population that we are studying, we have been internationally mobile employees for some time. After having left our previous countries of residence in 2018, frequent travels for international workshops, academic conferences and research stays were on the Horizon 2020 for the entire duration of our 3-year contracts. Most of us had lived and worked somewhere in Europe before, but half of our team joined from "overseas": the Americas, India, or South-East Asia.

Of course, we are not, "just" a homogenous, unified group, but individuals at different life stages with multiple background stories, from distinct socio-cultural environments who contribute with diverse attitudes and perspectives to their work. All of us are plurilingual; none of us is a native English speaker nor writer. For some of us Europe is "home home," for some others the EU is at times just a working station, where administrative instances require regular updates of visas and residence permits. In addition to the geographical distances covered, the cross-disciplinary nature of our work adds to plurilinguism and multicultural ways of being, thinking and perceiving. The colourful mix of psychologists, economists, political, and social scientists in our work environment has forced us to suspend judgment and to listen before taking a stance. Each of us was challenged to choose, cultivate, reflect on, and eventually defend a positioning. Understanding—wanting to understand—other disciplinary angles, convictions, and underlying epistemologies is not as obvious as it seems though, despite the fact that we are all investigating interconnected phenomena triggered by globalization and global mobility.

During our first gatherings, we did not know about all the things yet to come in 2020 and beyond. Back in March 2020, when we still thought that the "*new virus*" was only going to be around for a couple of weeks

or months, we felt in a rush, wanting to do research on the situation, wanting to decide on a research question, sometimes discussing very seriously:

[...] what type of study can we conduct in relation to the pandemic? Maybe let us start with theories on coping strategies and hostile environments, look into the literature first (March, 2020)

[...] let us just collect ideas and start recording our meetings, we will see where it brings us. (March, 2020)

Did we realize back then that the deductive/inductive choice was brought up, that our research interests and knowledge on methods and epistemologies haunted our debates and our ways of interacting with each other, of envisioning this joint effort? After several rounds of discussions, we concluded that we would continue to record all future conversations and see where it would lead us. After all, the situation was very specific, unique, extreme to a certain extent, and many things that have become normalized over the past nine months were still unimaginable in March 2020. At the time we were curious to understand: "what is this doing to us?" and "how are we coping with work under these circumstances?". For several researchers in the group, a qualitative, inductive, and interpretivist approach was unfamiliar. Not starting off with a hypothesis or a model to be tested felt uncomfortable, for example, for those who usually base their research on psychological theory.

It was an adventure to discuss and to try understanding the purpose and underlying epistemology of ethnographic work within a group of eight researchers with different social science backgrounds. Throughout the process we frequently questioned methodological and ethical choices, but nonetheless some misunderstandings might remain blind-spots for good. Conducting a collective auto-ethnography under these conditions

meant to go through many iterations of opening up and fostering mutual acceptance and respect. It meant composing with the tensions of a fragmented "We," that was evolving kaleidoscopically. An ongoing process of coming together and splitting apart, which has lasted from the initial discussions over data analysis workshops until the act of writing. On the surface, we were "all in it together," "sitting in the same boat," given the professional ties between fellow researchers on an EU-funded project on global mobility. However, the obvious common ground and similarities created an illusion of sameness that called for deconstruction.

Through iterative dialogical self-interrogations and group reflections as per Chang et al. (2013) approach, we have explored a unique way of reflecting on our interactions and circumstances, as a collective, as individuals, and in smaller formations and pairs: our *modus vivendi*. We identified patterns, took care of inclusiveness, without forcing anyone to participate at all times in all get-togethers. We believe that this *freedom* to join the discussion, or not, was very precious and beneficial for the overall process. Having the room to decline, the *freedom* to drop out and come back in, somehow reproduced our former lifestyle of being on the move, of checking in to different places, with different groups of friends—or not, depending on our *mood*. Probably it was not the fastest way to "produce" a paper, but it left us time to mature, and to—perhaps— "become what we are" (Nietzsche, 1908).

We reckon that we are potentially biased and selective with regards to what we see and what we do not see, what topics we choose to address, and in what way. We have at least eight different ways of interpreting our person- al and professional situations, as well as our conversations, according to the *mood* of the day and to the vibes that surround us. Memo writing, reflexive journaling and doodling helped us to decentre and to enrich our discussions. Indeed, we are aware of the subtle differences in our individual voices, and intuitively we were attentive to allowing

everyone to express oneself—one of the conditions mentioned by Whittemore et al. (2001) to ensure the validity of auto-ethnographic work. During our conversations, we were intuitively reacting to our fellows' comments and questions, thus allowing us to explore our personal situations in rapport to the collective, thereby approaching ourselves from new angles throughout a long series of unprecedented instances of sharing and of identifying with the other. We believe that we have been fast in opening up ourselves, in expressing personal hesitations and intimate fears, encouraged by sympathy and empathetic questioning within the group. This again triggered new debates and nurtured common ground.

The multiple loops that we, as research informants of our own research went through allowed us to be reflective and even hyper-reflective (Goulet, 2011, "sur-réflexivité"): with regards to the research design, to our situation and to the development of individual and group dynamics over time. We can further demonstrate the validity of our findings based on conscious decision making with regards to the research design. Most of us were trained to preserve a certain distance to the research subjects of our studies, especially as they work in organizations and environments that are rather unfamiliar to us, thereby ensuring what Weber et al. (1949/2011) calls "axiological neutrality." When some of us suggested conducting a collaborative, auto-ethnographic study, concerns arose from fellow perspectives, such as:

[...] shouldn't we look at all this, at the data, as if we were outsiders to the question, in order to be neutral and objective? Shouldn't we anonymize the conversation before we analyse? (September, 2020)

[...] why should our personal emotions and feelings matter with regards to the analysis? (April 2020)

Some suggested theoretical frameworks of emotional coping; others saw the major topic being analysed around the concept of hostile environments and the implications of external factors on individuals. But then we realized: the entire world had just become a hostile environment due to the pandemic! – Maybe we could start with exploring how this exceptional and unusual event, and the occurring circumstances, affect us in our current life span...? Not only as individuals and "psychological entities," but as a group, as a constantly evolving, interacting network of mobility researchers within a given setting. As individuals with agency, as actors who contribute to the construction of their environment—do we really have agency? Understanding psychological patterns of trauma, anxiety, and resilience (Bonanno, 2020) and uncertainty regulation (Griffin & Grote, 2020) was certainly beneficial for a deeper understanding of underlying schemes during pandemic times. However, we needed to account for additional complexity due to the close entanglements of our trans-locational life worlds with the phenomenon of boundaryless global mobility and the purpose of our work. Our life and career plans were heavily disrupted when pandemic restrictions hit.

Our positions as Ph.D. fellows and foreigners on time limited contracts, separated from significant others, appeared, all of a sudden, *precarious*. We immediately sensed the potential damages that the pandemic could cause, and we felt that it affected us in similar ways. The mentioned entanglements affirmed our preference for an interactionist, socio-anthropological approach, in order to account for "affective practice" for the "ongoingness" and patterns in process (Wetherell, 2012: 23). Thus, the emphasis of this paper lays on relationality and emotions as "complexes," in line with Wetherell's understanding, where "affect is always intersecting and interacting" and where "an emotion like anger or fear is not an object inside the self [...], but is a relation to others, a response to a situation and to the world" (Wetherell, 2012: 24). In 2018 all of us had moved to a foreign country for our new employer, and at the

start of the pandemic, we were all in a third country for a research stay, that is not in our country of residence, nor in our country of origin, which brought up some additional questions: "what can we learn about experiencing external hostilities or disruptions (like the pandemic) as a labour migrant?" and "what are the resources that we have left when our *privileges* of *free movement* and international relationships vanish?" The exceptional situation that we were all in triggered our curiosity as researchers right at the beginning of the pandemic:

We have, as you say, such a diversity of backgrounds and conditions. But at the same time, **we have this unique natural experiment where we were all sent** *[abroad]* **at the same time***... so we have that big unifying factor... (Meeting, March 30, 2020)*

And at the same time, it affected us and generated fears about the deep changes that darkened the horizon:

I am scared. *More scared to get out than to stay inside.* **I feel small. Feels like I'm slowly getting crazy**. *I don't want to sit inside alone anymore. And I don't want to get outside.* **I am scared of the changes**. *Of things that are happening now and of the things that are about to happen. I just want to hide away from reality. What is reality? Everything is in my head. I know.* **I just want a hug**. *(Journal entry, March 28, 2020)*

These excerpts stem from our early conversations and journal entries in March 2020. Since then, we have record- ed and documented more than 30 informal and formal encounters of a group of eight fellow Ph.D. researchers, from March to December 2020. Accepting the fact that we, as researchers, are strongly cognitively involved in the topic and are, in addition, feeling passionate about mobility and migration related phenomena led us to express our auto-ethnographic observations through multi-vocal writing. As recently stated by Einola et al. (2020), a multi-

vocal form of writing can well capture "our" changing lives throughout the current world crisis. Along with affective tensions, we would like to address our collective experience, "our story" in this paper, whilst oscillating between closeness and distance with regards to the research phenomenon, between the "hyphen-space *engagement-distance*," as described by Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013). When suggesting four "hyphen-spaces" of assessing researchers' positionality they ask among others the question "to what degree is the researcher emotionally involved?". In the present case, our affective engagement with the phenomenon of global mobility not only underpin our research activities and our personal way of life. In the specific situation of a pandemic, where all of us are immobilized and feel "stuck" in more or less "foreign" places, our emotional involvement becomes even more visible and most salient. In addition, the overall aversive situation and different pandemic related disruptions have exposed us to various psychological stressors that reinforce negative affective experiences.

In parallel, the time that has passed between group conversations and its interpretivist analysis lay between 1 and 6 months, which has allowed us to take some distance, to "step back" and to adopt different lenses before re-engaging with the content in depth. As researchers who are personally familiar with the field, we are not only oscillating between the "hyphen-spaces" *engagement-distance*, as mentioned earlier, but as well between that of the *insider-outsider* and the "hyphen-space" *sameness-difference*, thereby taking a stance regarding *political activism versus active neutrality* (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013), for example, when addressing precariousness of professional isolation and limited contracts in early career research career. As stipulated by Gosovic (2018), these oscillations necessitate a ethnographic posture that allows for "fluctuating researcher identities," which are at times intuitively, at times purposefully chosen.

Given that our weekly meetings were most interactive, we realized after a few weeks, that our conversations and virtual "hang-outs" contributed significantly to our well-being, that it brought moments of delight and faith during the "first wave," during the very first period of "confinement" of our lives. We realized that, together, we had created a safe space where we could freely share what preoccupied us in that specific moment or week. A space where we felt shielded from omnipresent performance pressures and from the gravity of the pandemic, simply by expressing, by voicing the heaviness of it all. Thanks to the similarities of our professional situations and lifestyles, our worries and struggles resonated within this space and in the minds and hearts of our companions. During all these months, before proceeding with data analysis, pre-writing or writing, our gatherings were characterized by an intimate atmosphere and friendship, which might be difficult to imagine or appear romanticized for the reader. Debates and constructive frictions rather occurred at a later stage, when it came to disclosing our experiences through auto-ethnographic writing, as multiple external influences and authorities had to be accounted for.

In addition to amiable chats, a hyper-reflexive environment was nurtured throughout the autoethnographic pro- cess, mainly reinforced by our familiarity with conducting research in the field of international mobility and migration and by our awareness about various frameworks and theories in the field: adjustment and acculturation, psycho- logical coping with separations, well-being when working abroad, and questions related to language, belonging and identities. We have been "alternating, juggling, and entangling" (Richard-Frève, 2017: 5) ourselves in our feelings of belonging, swinging between the group and the self and all the insignificant and significant others that surround us, between the breaking news, the fake news, the shocking events and the many decisive happenings that have been transforming our world(views) throughout 2020. We have recorded and transcribed major parts of our video

conversations (60 to 180 min each) that were conducted via Zoom and Skype. In combination with individual journal entries and WhatsApp group conversations these constitute a rich data repository, complemented with memos, written during a preliminary round of interpretative analysis and broken down by "coding" various themes. During our heart-to-hearts talks we spontaneously addressed many different topics over the months that were of concern for us personally and as a group, as synthesized in the following overview (see Table 3.1).

Within each of the meetings we observed shifts in terms of tonalities and *moods*, which were interrelated with the topics addressed or with the affective patterns expressed by individuals: "from short duration bursts, like panic at- tacks to semi-continuous background feelings which are longer lasting—all of which are embodied." (Wetherell, 2012: 23). In the early weeks and months of the pandemic we were obviously shocked. Nonetheless, our discussions convey a certain excitement and curiosity about the newness of the situation and its consequences for the social world within the first month, in combination with darker *moods* and fear. Early summer, with upcoming holidays and the prospect to travel, even "just within the same country" led to more optimistic conversations whereas after summer, when it be- came apparent that we had to let go of the dream of "going back to normal," a gloomy, less lively *mood* started to settle in during fall, with a strong focus on getting work done. Over the winter months and with new lockdowns and even stricter constraints, the accumulation of social isolation and separation, of blocked field research and vanishing career prospects in our field dominated the tonality of our conversations. Figure 3.1 illustrates these evolutions over time. It is noteworthy though, that momentary external events, such as pandemic news of the day, work related conflicts or personal sorrows—as well as personal feats—appeared to strongly influence the choice of topics and *vibe* of a session, whereas the overall, *fundamental mood* was rather fluctuating over longer cycles.

The *intense affective experiences* that occurred in our lives and became apparent throughout our conversations over a period of nine months are crucial findings that guided us in determining the framework and format of this paper. We agreed on wanting to share lived moments and sensitivities in a manner that brings it closer to the read- er, whilst maintaining an interpretivist rigor. Wetherell's (2012) social science perspective on affect and emotion confirmed our choice of transmitting *what it is/was like*, rather than explaining why it might have been, like it was. "Rather than have to think, always and endlessly, what else there could be, we sometimes seem to connect with a layer in our existence that simply wants the things of the world close to our skins." (Gumbrecht, 2004: 106, cited by Wetherell, 2012). We accepted and enjoyed writing without compromising on the affective dimension of our life and our work as researchers. We agreed to understand affect as a dynamic, *embodied process* about sense and sensibility, where "bits of the body get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, personal histories and ways of life" (Wetherell, 2012: 24). In this way, intertwined complexities of our individual lives and the mood of the group were taken into consideration.

We chose to write the following sections of the present paper in a tone of voice, that mirrors the character and tone of voice of our conversations, the flows captured in our memos and the affect that still remains with us in our bodies. We wrote most of the central part "in one go," highlighting words whilst writing, in order to convey the tone. In a second round, we inserted verbatims into the text, whenever suited, to illustrate specific situations, without major editing of the initial writing. In an additional round of revisions, we spent some time arguing and "wrestling" around the value and necessity of certain statements and related situations, which might potentially be misinterpreted by some readers, especially when expressed by Ph.D. fellows who are situated at the bottom of the academic hierarchy.

Corona News	lockdown rules, health, behaviour of others, masks, guidelines, infection curves, testing, quarantining, conspiracy, travel restrictions...
Mobility & Travel	plans, vacation, going 'home' or 'home home', restrictions, tests, swaps, quarantine requirements...
Places and Locations	secondments, research stays, where are we now, where to go, where to stay, with whom, visa issues, restrictions and rules...
Home and 'home home'	what is happening back home, distance, separation, country situation, family, friends, concerns, how we keep in touch...
Activities/distractions	cooking, drinking, netflix, gym, travel, meditation, walking, therapy, flexibility, food delivery, social support...
Social life	going out, meeting friends, meeting colleagues, ties and relationship amongst us...
Institutions	university rules, university support, latest covid19 guidelines, office- lock-downs...
Broader Research Context	meetings, emails, politics, deliverables, pressure, expectations, deception, frustration...
Ph.D. Research	this 'collab' project, Ph.D., other papers, other deliverables, conferences, current work, readings, writings, publishing...
Virtual/Home working	online conferences, online meetings, online interviews, cancellation of confs, screen time...
Organizing Work	workspace, noise, productivity, hours, flexibility, attention span, concentration, motivation...

Mental and Physical Health – embodied emotions	headache, insomnia, fatigue, shaking, doctors, psychological support, therapy...
Feelings and Emotions observed/expressed	anxious, frustrated, upset, lonely, feeling of failure, feeling pressured, feeling insecure, confused, not feeling respected, felling lost, proud, happy, relieved, being sarcastic, cynical, ironic...
Future Outlook & Sense of life	travel, dreaming, moving, meeting again, going to Tallin/Vaasa/Dublin/Canada for conferences...or not? - future of global mobility research, careers in academia or not, economic outlook, private life, places, visa issues...

T A B L E P.3.1 Conversational themes (Developed by the authors.)

We did not always agree when wondering to what degree and in what depth it was legitimate to share our lived experiences perceptions about systemic constraints or power constellations in our environments. Events that deeply affected some of us, appear neutral and inoffensive, "normal" when observed from the outside. There are things that are part of the story, but that cannot be told. There are conditions that nurtured an activist "We," but that are difficult to grasp (Horowitz, 2017; Just et al., 2018). Throughout the consensual research process, we started to understand this difficult balancing act that auto-ethnographic research entails: walking on a fine line between self-censorship and research integrity, voicing challenges, and precarities, that are to some extent embedded into institutional structures and academia. Only a unified voice and the closeness and trust amongst us as a collective of "early stage researchers" allows us to express our experiences. We agree with Christensen et al. (2018) when they suggest that "it is essential that we do not become atomized within a system that sees collective action as a threat" (2018: 869).

In line with Pullen et al. (2020), we claim that some type of social science research legitimates a writing style that is atypical for academic papers, that can be described as progressive or just "different." We are convinced that "writing differently" contributes to accentuating and nuancing the findings of our collective auto-ethnography.

please see the following page for:

F I G U R E P.3.1. Over-time perspective: Themes, dominant moods and affective patterns. (*Developed by the authors – please see online version for colour nuances*)

March-December2020

work pressure, anxiety, online fatigue, joy, hope

"phase" N°1: initial '*lock-down*'

- Moving/ finding a place to stay
- Following the news
- Trying new daily routines
- Staying in close touch with far-away significant others
- Setting-up a work space

"phase" N°2: re-arranging life

- Making travel and meeting plans
- Understanding restrictions and measures
- Meeting some people
- Worrying about work-flow and research design

"phase" N°3: disillusion '*2nd wave*'

- Deciding where to be for lock-down #2
- Taking responsibility for significant others
- Realizing that this is not over, isolation
- Seeing career opportunities & purpose vanish

pessimism, anxieties, isolation, "left alone", silence

fear, insomnia, headache, loneliness, boredom, nostalgia

Legend:
- Mobility
- Covid related
- Life modes
- Work modes

Like Pullen and colleagues, we do not wish to abandon academic rigor, by which I/we mean the reflection and interpretation that develops understanding of the world. Without academic rigor we become journalists, and trained journalists are far better reporters than are we. Rather, in the place of the stultifying format we must use if our stories are to be judged "good social science," we will tell those stories in formats through which they can be understood, valued, cherished and passed around from reader to reader. (Pullen et al., 2020: 2)

After several rounds of iterative review of our data, it became clear that a semantic and positivist analysis of themes and formulations is certainly insightful, but as well somehow reductionist. Our experience is not about the choice of conversation topics, nor about psychological stressors of the pandemic or the impact on our academic performance over time. It is more. Holistic. All embracing. We sensed the need to voice how deeply we have been—and still are—affected, how we dis-connected and re-connected ourselves, without referring to "phases" or "stressors" or "coping strategies," without artificially reifying and alienating the organic, the embodied, the lived experience. We speak with a voice that shares the rhythm of our lives and the pace of our hearts, that carries an intensity which is more easily perceivable in laughter and tears, in tired faces and silence than in words. A voice that speaks to all the restless minds, forced upon a place. A voice that confuses time and space, the inner and the outer worlds, that bursts the unifying force of our conversations apart into vagabonding fragments. A boundless voice that conveys the elasticity of our souls.

We were apparently **in the right place at the right time**—spread all over the globe, at different stages of our respective lives and careers—when we were recruited for an international research program. We, the authors, are eight Ph.D. fellows, so-called early-stage researchers (ESRs). Becoming part of an international social sciences research project, funded by the European Unions' Horizon 2020 program: **a privilege, an achievement**, an important step on our professional path. We felt very **proud** when hearing the good news that our applications and individual research proposals were accepted. *We?* Yes, every single one of us, in total 15 fellows, in their places, without ever having met, probably felt that this was **something relevant and meaningful to them— personally**. It seemed to be the perfect alignment between our personal international profiles with the research topic of "mobility" and the aspiration to perform a Ph.D. dissertation and to, maybe, join academia. We were utmost motivated and keen on investigating and **experiencing mobility** for three full years, from September 2018 until August 2021. This was maybe the first instant that connected us, **the moment where a first glimpse of a *We* surfaced**, without being expressed explicitly, there was this sense of purpose and positive outlook into the future that we had in common.

It was time to not only **pack our bags**, but also to move properly to another country, to our employing universities' cities where we were enrolled as Ph.D. candidates in the UK, Denmark, Finland, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The "Mobility Rule" in the research agreement stipulates clearly our **obligation to move**: "Researchers must not have resided or carried out their main activity (work, studies, etc.) in the country of the recruiting beneficiary for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately before the recruitment date." (Grant Agreement, 2018). Obligation? For us this **opportunity to discover and live in yet**

another place was not an obligation, but our mobility and the trav- els to come were one of the key motivators to apply for this job for most of us!

The *We* materialized during the first month of employment in September 2018, during a joint kick-off seminar for a bigger research project. Despite different ages, genders, nationalities and various cultural, professional and social backgrounds, **it felt easy for us to "connect"** and to relate to each other: our curiosity and desire to academically explore international research topics, our travel records and pluri-linguism as well as the many left-behind places and people... *We***, the "internationals"**... The "large we-context" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996: 90) seemingly sparked a high level of inclusiveness that felt just natural. This initial week of meet and greet in a research environment was certainly **an experience** that brought us closer, made us "buddies" right away: we still remember the joyful social gatherings amongst us after a day of workshop somewhere in Europe, which stand in stark contrast to a relatively **rough landing** when arriving to this new social space, the power field called "academia," which already intrigued Bourdieu (1990) when exploring the *homo academicus*. We had to present our first individual pitches to a broad committee of senior researchers right at the start. **Pressure.** "ESR number 2, 3, ...15 please present." **Alienation.** Not being called by our names was... surprising, at least. For some of us, it felt really awkward, especially for those who had worked for many years in private organizations. This was our first glimpse into an unfamiliar professional culture, our start as researchers in a context where the **demarcation line** between "us" and "them" seemed to be unmistakably drawn in the very beginning. At that point in time, we did not realize if we might have landed in an environment that Søndergaard (2001) describes as a social space "where the combat of others at times becomes more important than producing one's own work" (2001: 145), a

dissensual university culture, or a consensual one, where one could debate for the stake of intellectual curiosity and responsible scholarship...

We were just looking forward to the many new, international experiences to come, impatient to explore and curious to learn more. Happy to be in a context where we could research the phenomena that we live and breathe every day ourselves, **grateful** for the dynamics and the **intensity** that is concurrent to mobility and migration. Many shared moments and experiences re-connected us multiple times, allowing for **enriching oscillations** between the voluptuous "*We*" and the isolated "I's," tackling their individual Ph.D. voyages, discovering the world of academia in local institutions and in various disciplines. To speak from a socio-psychological perspective, common bonds and shared experiences have rapidly fostered our group identity (Prentice et al., 1994). There are multiple, interrelated processes and transformations that *We*, as a group and every single one of individually, lived through, experienced and shared: as **researchers,** as women, as men, as cosmopolitans, as highly qualified labour migrants, as experienced professionals, as transnational career-starters in academia, as **foreigners,** as adults...

And then this! Covid-19 is making the round...

Adults whose vagabonding lifestyles and passion for researching international careers and mobilities have been **promptly disrupted**, held up, even proscribed. Suddenly we were **stuck.** Shock. "It's a bit like post-apocalyptic..." Where did our *freedom* go? What does it do to us that we suddenly cannot move around anymore? Do you feel how it hurts? **Claustrophobia. SEDENTARIOPHOBIA**. How can we continue to be motivated for our research when the mobile world that we have known is about to disappear? Schengen adieu? We suddenly did not have any agency for our lives and careers anymore, it seemed. Isn't this ironic? Mobility researchers who are stuck, who suddenly be- come **simply**

sedentary. Researchers whose limited-contract-clocks are ticking, whilst they find themselves **mentally STUCK in mobility**. We literally lived through what our research subjects—internationally mobile individuals and labor migrants—are going through in general and specifically in the present period. Maybe this is why we have been always so **cynical** during our conversations: we have seen the **sense and purpose** of our lives vanishing with every cancelled flight and every closed border.

Just so you know, my flight's flight back to the UK got cancelled, so I'm staying in Germany until at least the 18th of May. Because on the 18th of May there's the first direct flight from Munich to the UK. And, yeah... If it doesn't get cancelled, then, when I will come back on the 18th. Otherwise ... no idea [laughter]. (April 28, 2020)

Cynicism as a coping mechanism in double and **triple fold hostile environments**? Maybe. For sure, our cynical comments and black humour often **transformed the *mood***. "So good to see your smiling faces." **GRATEFUL.** We can confirm Ahmed's claim that "attunement becomes a way of being for, as well as being with others in a relation of harmony" (2014: 18). Here is where the **irony** of our situation kicks in once again: during the first year of employment some fellows were facing the rule to be in the office all day, every day, without any exceptions. The practice of working from home or remotely from time to time was encouraged by some employers, proscribed by others. Nowadays, 2 years later, most of us had to work from home and were literally banned from their offices for a big chunk of 2020. **Unprecedented times**. Funny how situations can just **flip around**, how suddenly power fields are shifting... We are wondering: what else is this pandemic good for, other than changing opinions on telework?—In any case, virtual meetings have become the norm... "Do you remember the first "virtual aperitivo," with all fellows, by the way?" This is how what we now call a paper commenced. During an informal virtual touch base "aperitivo" during

lockdown with 15 of us in March 2020. After various pandemic related chitchat one of us affirmed: "the current situation is crazy, especially when you are working like me on 'hostile environments': guys, **the entire world has just become a hostile environment**...! I don't even know where to start with my research." And as the discussion went on, two fellows proposed to "look into this Covid-19 crisis and maybe even write a paper on it." Some were enthusiastic confirming the "need to explore how people are coping with this. What are the **coping mechanisms and strategies**, what is the **organizational support** that people are getting...?" Others were less aflame about yet another paper and "all this covid-paper hype" in the profession, some asked to "just join the conversation, without committing to produce anything." And off we went, eight of us. **Ever since we have been getting together virtually** once a week (or rather every other week).

When it all started, back in March 2020, we suddenly were all in **"lockdown,"** all forced to work from home (or, let us call it, from a rented apartment), with more or less strict coercive legal reinforcements, depending on the **state of emergency** declared in our respective countries of residence. At the time when lockdowns and travel restrictions were announced, we were all on a 3 to 4 months research stay in a partner institution in another country—some of us managed to go back to their universities and homes in a rush, others stayed in temporary homes in host countries due to **cancelled flights**, and again others chose to stay with a family member at a third place, decisions made under pressure and at the very last minute: searching for a flight, finding a way out. **"Survival mode"**. What flights are not cancelled yet and **what country allows me to enter based on my visa or citizenship**? The sudden restrictions and bans of any travel within and outside Europe for several months: **traumatizing.**

*"Yes, you are an #EUcitizen, of course, my friend! You and 4% of your fellows live and work outside your country of birth. You are a minority, indeed. For decades you have embraced the cozy #illusion of unlimited #freedom of movement. You live and breathe #Schengen. But in times of hardship you realize that no one seems to care how #EUROPEAN you feel... Yes, until yesterday you truly believed that your ID card allows you to settle wherever you find #work, #friends or #love: today in Paris, tomorrow in Sofia and next month, who knows, maybe in Helsinki. Hold on, I have to stop you right here, amigo! This was before #covid19 joined the show. Today it's time for a #realitycheck. You have to decide within the next THREE HOURS or so: where do you want to go, to be? Physically, I mean. Not just today, or tomorrow, but for the coming three, six or many more MONTHS to come... #Where do you want to be during #lockdown? And with whom, by the way? Your partner is European, but does not share your nationality... too bad! **Erasmus just died, you know**. Try to reconvene wherever you can! #Move now, tomorrow might be too late. Where do you #belong? Your decision. Your call now. See you on the other side! - - - #yourflightiscancelled"* (Personal social media post, March 2020)*

Being stuck! For how long? The fears and anxieties that emerged were numerous and the baseline was similar to all those fellow knowledge workers around the world who found themselves working from home (a luxury that not all workers had during that time, by the way). Feeling **disoriented,** and **worried** about their health and that of their loved ones, feeling **lonely.**

So it's like it feels like I am living the Matrix. You know, I'm locked to those wires. *I can go outside only via Skype or I don't know via Simms, whatever. So that's kind of scary. Yeah. (April 3, 2020)*

And here is the specificity that was new for us, but that many less privileged migrants and refugees have certainly gone through many times: the **FEARS** about those who are not with us, who are far away and even unreachable. Every single phone call and video call is important, the only way to keep in touch, to get a feel of what is going on "there." "How can I help, even though I am far away?" "Can they manage without me?" "Normally I would just take a plane and tensions would resolve once I arrive..."

I had three very bad weeks then I had two good weeks. And then I have a feeling that it's bad again. Maybe, maybe, I'm not sure, but what could have triggered it could be the situation in my real home country. (April 28, 2020)

It is just is just a time that we spend your entire energy. You try to help. And I feel guilty because I'm far away, you know? And all this is some kind of things I know. And I'm supposed to feel like that, it's not my fault. (April 28, 2020)

A deep **sense of responsibility** are surfacing and taking all your mental and affective space. **Worries** about our significant others abroad were peaking with every single horrific news, captured on multiple channels and reiterated in our minds during sleepless nights: the **macabre counting** in the international and local news outlets of number of sick and number of deaths, as well as the warnings for "risk groups" to take special care scared us—many of our parents are in the risk group.

*But for example, tonight, **I didn't sleep** the entire night and I woke up and just in the end, I was sitting on the sofa and reading for three hours from, I don't know, from 2:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the morning. And then I went to bed. I couldn't sleep and I don't know. Yeah. And I had a*

*meeting this morning, which I canceled because I got up at eight and I had a feeling that **my head was banging** [...] (April 3, 2020)*

The more you feel helpless the deeper it goes: the record-breaking **cyclone** Amphan in the Bay of Bengal devastating hometown Kolkata, the **economic collapse** and record inflation in home country Lebanon and then the **dreadful explosion** in Beirut, raising **authoritarian ruling** in home country Brazil... the **passing away** of a godmother and a brother's forceful **separation** from his only child, the need to find a care home for a **mother overseas**, and the hope to meet your grandmother at least once again in her lifetime. The fear that your family's restaurant will be closed for good and the helplessness when listening to your **friends' voices full of despair** after having lost their jobs... And the list is getting longer every day.

We are tired. Maybe overworked. Certainly overworked. Maybe just bored. **Feeling GUILTY**? Our families and friends are asking again and again "when will I see you again?" **"are you coming home for the holidays?"** whilst we are pushing our limits to deliver, to **get papers ready** for journal submissions; whilst we are wondering **how to transform** our multi-methods field research designs into **pandemic friendly** online interviews; whilst some of us are facing surprising emails from senior scholars. Fullstop. Obviously, we are trying to be mindful. **Strong. Resilient. Outwardly**. Do you think we are allowed to be weak, to be vulnerable from time to time? **We are *privileged*. Why should we be complaining?** Maybe to learn about power, to open the door for a conversation and for new collectives, as suggested by Ahmed (2021). Are we allowed to put things on hold for an hour or two, to enjoy that we encountered open ears, to face honest eyes and to hear some comforting words from fellow colleagues? It is in our own interest to find the time we need to succeed. We are not counting the hours. Is this a "shadow activity"? A clandestine research activity? **Speakeasy.** From time to

time, no matter if in the midst of a storm, of a pandemic or of paper "deadlines" **are we allowed to pause** for a second?

But the pressure is coming from the fact that there is nothing else to do. So I should be like super productive, why wouldn't I be productive? And this itself is stressing me out. I mean, I'm kind of upset this [the lockdown] would end too soon before I manage to do something! [laughing]. This is... crazy! (April 4, 2020)

*I worked today in the first part of the day and then when having lunch started watching Gilmore Girls. And did that until the evening. I somehow got very anxious. Starting to ask myself what is it about? I think I was frustrated as well. **What is it that makes me anxious and blocks me from working?** I did stick a note to the wall yesterday saying, **"give yourself more credit"**. And it helped. It also helped to work this morning. And yet, there was something more. **But there's a big part of pressure coming out from myself. It is a difficult job. And I know not everyone can do this.** (April 24, 2020, journal)*

I'm trying not to care so much, but I feel like somehow they're going to twist and make me feel like I'm not doing the work... (June 9, 2020)

So I'm trying to focus on my work, but as I said, I'm a very anxious person and I don't know nothing. I don't know nothing... (June 9, 2020)

We are not production machines. (November, 2020)

We allow each other to **be what we want to be** for the time of our weekly conversations. Exposing oneself. Feel- ing **VULNERABLE.** Staying **strong,** staying fragile. **SENSITIVITY. Losing our face or winning a smile?** Shouldn't we feel a little bit **ashamed** for complaining? We realize how ***privileged*** we are. We are not out there in the hospitals, car-

ing and seeing people die of this illness. We are not the ones sitting at the cashier of the supermarkets. And we have a decent enough salary to **pay our flights "home home",** if there happen to be flights. We have valid passports and visas that allowed us to travel during our entire lives across the world. Others are not that lucky. We are not exiled, we were not forced to leave our homes, **we chose to do so**. We have to be a little patient these days, but it can work out:

*Yesterday I came back from Germany to Lithuania. The journey was long but everything went smoothly (apart from the fully loaded plane). Now I am at my dad's place in quarantine for 14 days. I will be tested for Covid-19 tomorrow morning. I already heard [...] that the procedure (at least in France) is very quick and straight forward. That's why **I feel calmer** about it. **It feels strange** to see my family, but not to being able to hug each other. **I am fine. Just very tired.** It's a big change for me. Many things are happening. Life is happening and **it feels like I go through it by being wrapped in a plastic film. It's fine but it's just strange.** (May, 2020)*

*The impact this has had on our lives, on many, many different aspects. But I think we all agreed that the biggest impact is the **loss of choice**. So... we cannot choose either to stay or go... (April 3, 2020)*

4 | THIS IS NOT ABOUT WRITING A PAPER

Can we meet next week again? - It is sooo good to see you! (May, 2020)
It is like a therapy talking to you guys every week. (June, 2020)
It really motivates me for the week when we are having our chat. - I am so glad I joined. (June, 2020)

Why don't we just leave it there, **why do we want to write this paper?** Yes, certainly, it is always nice to have an ad- ditional publication, if this

works out. But all of us are already experiencing a lot of pressure, many requirements to **"produce",** to "deliver" and to "publish" papers in line with the research project's requirements and for our doctoral dissertation. But we sense that **there is something that is worth to be shared**, described and discussed, amongst us and with others. This growing sense of **comfort** when getting together as a group, the attention and empathy that we all brought into our conversations seems to be **something precious** these days. **SOLIDARITY.** And something new: maybe something that we had missed out on in the past, during the first year in academia, something we had missed, even without knowing that this type of peer-support existed. **CARING COLLECTIVELY**.

Well, you were not on your own. I got out of bed before the call and otherwise I wouldn't have been out of bed today. It was really a bad day. So you're not alone. Don't worry. (April 28, 2020)

Sure, we could argue from a very instrumental perspective, with a means-end rationale that our conversations helped us to deal with our daily struggles. Trauma psychologists emphasise indeed the importance of **social bonding, distractions, fun** and **LAUGHTER,** as potential resources to maintain mental health and reduce isolation during a pandemic (Chen & Bonanno, 2020). They state that human **resilience** develops over time, depending on the severity of the disruption for individual functioning and the nature of aversive circumstances. Indeed, they point out individual psychological differences as one predictor for resilient outcomes, but in reference to Bonanno (2004), they attribute crucial importance to social context and **family and COMMUNITY interactions** as valuable resources to develop re- silience and flexibility when coping with stressors and traumatic experiences. Somehow intuitively we had taken the initiative of regular get-togethers, pretexting the objective to study the pandemic situation, but quickly we realized that it really **FELT GOOD** to chat, to speak, to grumble and to grouse. The

presence and attention of the other **shifted our *mood*** and affected us in a very positive way.

When we shared our concerns about **increasing pressure** on us to "deliver" papers and research outputs, de- spite all of us experiencing difficulties and personal **disruptions,** we discussed the sensation of deep **DECEPTION** and **FRUSTRATION** about lacking recognition and missing empathy around us. When some, for example, political games, power abuse or other upsetting events happened in our surroundings, we could observe a similar pattern of interaction and coping repeating itself during our conversations: we pick each other up, by joking, by being cynical, mimicking the cynical tone and injecting some **IRONY, laughing together: "communities of feelings"** (Scheler, 1970). We confirm that "attunement and connection overcome the isolation and alienation of being disconnected from being" (Kossak, 2007: 2019, cited by Ahmed, 2014).

We experienced **IRRITATION** and **ANGER** that we certainly share with all the millions of **migrants and mobile individuals** who witnessed their only flight connections to their preferred places and significant others cancelled and who suddenly realized that the **precious visas** and passports might have lost their value for the years to come—they were once a guarantee to move, our **passports,** a **decent salary**, **paid vacation**: in this sense we were ***privileged,*** we could **freely move and travel** for work and leisure. What else did you need in the past, before Covid-19, to be able to change places and to spend some time with those whom you left behind? This is certainly an important motivation: **a sense of COMMUNITY** that we have developed and imagined since we entered this new world, since the **time is out of joint.** Most of us joined the academic world only a few years ago, some changed professions and all of us were living in a new country and facing the very unfamiliar situation of a pandemic:

It's the first time I actually feel limited by my nationality, because they are in the administration, I rely on them now to get my documents. I haven't started the process yet, but I'm seeing the website and how chaotic it looks today. (May 12, 2020)

For me, as I have the Brazilian Italian citizenship, but then I had to go back to Brazil and somehow, I put my passport in my travel luggage and then I had to unpack it in the beginning in the plane. So they explained to me that because I was a national, I could present a different passport even though it was expired, because they cannot forbid my entry. (May 12, 2020)

It's strange because I'm wondering if I need to be a resident to enter [the country]... I don't have work or residence in France or in Germany, but I have both passports. When I was in [city], I couldn't even borrow books at the library because I didn't have a permanent residence in Germany, even though I have a German passport and was willing to give my credit card and everything, I couldn't. (May 15, 2020)

Sharing these and other practical concerns raised awareness about the usefulness of citizenship and nationality, for example. A matter that several of us had not to worry about in the past. Beyond the practical concerns many of us realized that new conditions to travel had shifted somehow the value of their passport(s) and thereby limited their *freedom*. We had already established a certain **TRUST** amongst us during informal and formal meeting occasions **"before Covid"** and many of us had developed friendships and close fellowship with some others. But **at times this basic level of trust was not sufficient**: "can I say this, can I share this, without my fellow repeating this to anybody outside the group, to our supervisors...?", "doesn't this jeopardize my career?". We all signed a **nondisclosure** agreement quite early in the process, which seemed crucial when starting. Over time, our trustful relationship seemed

to be fostered through the many conversations and iterations of sharing quite personal stories, feelings and thoughts— within a space that felt very safe and more and more comfortable. We started **knowing each other** even better, our environments, for example, to the point where we recognized small changes in the backgrounds ("did you paint your wall?") and got sensible to the others' states of mind and **WELL-BEING** and **HEALTH** ("you look tired, are you okay?").

5 | FEELING GLOOMY—FOREVER?

Needless to say, that the external **threat** of the pandemic and **endured restrictions triggered ANXIETIES** for all of us. Similarities in our professional situations and the specific ongoings on our research projects facilitated mutual under- standing for issues that some of us were facing. Recognizing the **suffering** endured by every single one of us **in our distinct ways**, resulted in **CARING.** It was a true effort to **win back our inner SMILES**. We truly hoped that they were not lost forever! At times, our upset discussions and debates, and jokes and laughter, were replaced by ... **SILENCE.** In October it was. Silence. Long silence. And all eight of us in the meeting. We just had discussed the **bad career out- look** for "people like us" and the **new peaks of the** *virus*, and aggressive, **totalitarian politicians** ... **SILENCE.** Someone said *"let's talk about something positive."* **SILENCE.** *"Something, anything guys!"* We did not come up with anything for minutes. It felt like eternity, it felt as if **time just froze. SILENCE.** Until suddenly someone announced the possibility of maybe being accepted as a trustworthy dog parent: *"I am in the second round of interviews to **adopt a puppy**."* **SMILES.** Wow, this was truly something positive that **shifted our perspectives on POWER:** it is not the human choosing or buying a dog: in this country the wishful adopters need to prove their aptitude! "Is there a hidden meaning here that we could learn from?" **LAUGHTER.** Humor still worked over all these months, luckily! **COMPLICITY.**

Ahmed (2014: pp. 14–15) reminds us that Heidegger thought about *moods* as being transmittable like a germ from one organism to another. "We do indeed say that attunement (*Stimmung*) or **mood is infectious**" bringing about "an emotional experience which is then transmitted to others..." In current pandemic times one would easily be tempted to compare the transmissivity of a *mood* to that of a ***virus***. Once the subject is "contaminated" the mood sticks around and the subject might develop symptoms of the *mood*—a smile, laughter or bright eyes in the case of a good *mood*—whereas other subjects might not demonstrate nor feel any relevant symptoms ... They are stuck in their own *mood*, **resisting not shifting**, insisting to maintain the status quo, remaining in their sphere. **DROWNING.** In pandemic times one wishes to be able to **RESIST** not only to the *virus*, but foremost to the **negative ambient *mood***, which surrounds us in media and seizes us in daily life. "We are caught up in feelings that are not our own," states Ahmed (2014: p. 15), caught, for example, by a lively atmosphere that a **body** brings into a room, that can be picked- up or not by others, that sometimes leaves when a person leaves a room or that lingers around. **Does this work in the virtual room?** Probably. While the metaphor of infection, something that happens to us without being conscious, is passive, the **"communities of feelings"** that Scheler (1970) exemplifies in "The Nature of Sympathy," are constituted when sharing a feeling, affect in relation to a specific situation or object: in our case the pandemic, or work, or formerly mobile life. From a social-psychological perspective our conversations affected us positively: "positive affect (PA) reflects one's level of pleasurable engagement with the environment. High PA is composed of terms reflecting enthusiasm, energy, mental alertness and determination" (Watson, 1988: 1020). How did our collective *mood* evolve over the past 9 months? How did the **ENERGY** change? How did ***We*** change the **ENERGY?**

FLASHBACK: Early on it felt as if we will never cope with spending all this time **at home alone**, to cook our own meals, not to go to the gym, the movies or to university. And on top of it we could not even travel! We were very optimistic in the beginning that things will be back to normal soon. No doubt.

"I think it's going better. I'm finding more energy to focus on the positive things. My girlfriend and I managed to find a better routine to exercise in the apartment. That really gives me a lot of energy to actually burn some energy. It was a big problem in the beginning. I felt tired. I was sleeping, falling asleep early, being tired in the morning. Now I feel that's maybe not as bad anymore because you just cope in some ways, figure out routines." (April 28, 2020)

But there was this **FEAR** to catch the naughty, some would say pestilent, *virus*. Getting sick in a country where you do not speak the language seems terrible. When "it all started" we were under **SHOCK,** but in a way as well **excited:** there were so many **novelties** going on, news to be understood, announcements to make sense of. We were certainly upset, but as well **intrigued** by the situation. We were trying to comprehend its complexity by joining the dots, by sharing what we knew from local and social media, from hear-say, from governments in our countries of residence or other places that we are connected with. At that time, in March and April we still had vast hopes that we could simply "go back" to our life after a few months, that this was just an uncomfortable new experience, a **parenthesis** that we would joke about soon when gathering in Dublin in a few months.

We had differing opinions, of course, about the origin of the *virus*, considering or distancing from conspiracy theories, about the potential implications for economies and social systems. But we mutually persuaded ourselves during our conversations that this "situation" was

not going to last, that the *virus* would probably go away as it came or that *we*—humanity—would find a cure very soon. **DENIAL.** During those days it was difficult to focus on work, impossible to formulate a clear train of thought, to continue our research as if nothing had happened. **No mental space** was available and attention spans were minimal. **OVERLOAD.** Everything was about the pandemic. It caught us by surprise and affected all of us in a most negative way. State of emergency. **DISRUPTION.** Back in March 2020 a martial vocabulary of **war, attack** and **battleground** made the round amongst political leaders and monarchs speaking on TV at prime time, first time since World War 2. Our enemy, the *virus*, invisible, sparking long **forgotten FEARS**, awakening grandparents' narratives in our minds and archaic **ANGST in our bodies.** This was about **SURVIVAL.**

Our work suddenly felt insignificant. Management and organization studies: what for? Our **work lost its SENSE** overnight, as societal priorities shifted from business and employment to health and care. In the early days, videos about solidarity and self-irony went viral: musicians and singers on balconies, hilarious clips about creative ways of hoarding and spending time during lockdown were soon replaced with standing ovations for care workers and **coffin counting** in protective gear. Caught by **news and social media** and by getting in touch with everybody you know, weeks went by. When being locked-in for the very first time in your life, **days are endless**! You watch the plants growing new leaves, see the sky changing colours, you focus on a raindrop running down the window. You can hear the **silence.** Hear the birds singing, for the first time since you have moved here. **PRESENCING.** Sleepless nights are endless, too. Watching dusk at four in the morning: feeling **PEACE.** Only late at night you might dare to go for a walk, attempting to avoid any potential carrier of the *virus* on your way. **PARANOIA.** Some of us picked-up work after a few weeks, others were still following the curve and the cures or calling family overseas during

night-time, trying to catch up sleep in the afternoon. Most of us did not find the necessary resources to keep going, to pick-up data analysis or paper writing as if nothing had changed. No energy, no mental space available. **EMPTINESS.** And the more our days felt unproductive the more did feelings of guilt and failure grow. **ANXIETY.** As stated by Watson (1988: 1020), "negative affect (NA) is a general factor of subjective distress and subsumes a broad range of aversive *mood* states, including distressed, nervous, afraid, angry, guilty, and scornful." *Mood* factors can be measured "either as traits, that is persistent differences in general affective level or as states, that is, transient fluctuations in *mood*." (Watson, 1988: p. 1020)

We were complaining about being "stuck" at home and about the sudden **BOREDOM** and new daily routines that the situation imposed on us: working in private spaces, preparing and eating all meals at home. During the first couple of weeks during the first lockdown, we complained about restricted *freedom* and the lost privileges of moving around freely, about staying at home during Easter vacation! Virtual meetings were not new to us, as we all worked internationally in the past, and it was nice to reach out to friends, family and colleagues through one click:

[...] my family feels very close now, because I live with my husband again after one year of separation and my sister is self-isolating with my parents [...] It is easy to spend time together in just one call (April, 2020)

We were looking forward to meeting in Dublin for a conference in July, but as this was cancelled, we thought that at the latest we would meet in Finland in September:

I think that when we meet in person, at least, I have this excitement of seeing everyone again in person and having the coffee breaks and I like the international environment and things like that, even though it might

*be physically more exhausting because I have to prepare and go and blah, blah, blah. The whole experience is, I don't know, **it is more worth it, I would say.** But in here [in the virtual meeting] **my head was exploding** in the middle of the meeting with a **headache** because like staring at the screen for so long and speaking and listening and participating. (June 9, 2020)*

Honestly, it just felt like circus online, you know, instead of live performance you are just watching it... (June 9, 2020)

And, you know, my reply, what I miss from our meetings is that we're going to have beers virtually because when we're together, we go out together and then we can...gossip. (June 9, 2020)

As weeks went by, days got brighter, **spring** was coming, spending light on us. We had picked-up work in one way or another. Paradoxically, our collective **complaining** about precarious working conditions and lacking institutional support comforted us during that time. **RESISTANCE.** Listening to your fellow buddies' sorrows and **FRUSTRATIONS** helps to open up yourself, to admit that you are struggling, too, that you are **less productive**, that you **cannot perform** as you wished. **NODDING.**

I can identify with what you just said. I just cannot focus. (April, 2020)

At times I randomly started crying. Never ever I felt so angry. Sometimes I cry out of... deep sadness, too. Never before I felt so helpless. (April, 2020)

VULNERABILITY. Sometimes one is just not in the mood to talk. **CYNICISM** is dark and sharp, but it makes us laugh, releases some tension. Watching the reactions and listening to smart comments and jokes brings you back, dissolves the knot in your stomach, eases your

migraine. **RELIEF.** Time flies and you stay online for the entire meeting, for one hour or two... Warm words and attentive ears make you realize that they care. You feel touched when they look sad or exhausted, you realize that you care about them. **CONNECTION.** In the early months of lockdowns easing, in June–July 2020 we have been (and still are) sharing stories about **HOPE** to travel again, vacation plans, plans to meet at a conference next winter:

Well, I really hope it's going to be possible to go to Norway this summer because Denmark and Norway are kind of they have similar trajectories in the pandemic. They actually Norway's actually faring even better because it's a more scattered country. So you have less concentrations of the population. And I would really love to see my parents because it's been a while. (May 12, 2020)

Now, up till now, it's like the all the airports are closed. So the only flights that are being allowed right now are the ones that are flying in all the stranded tourists from US or from the Middle East or from the Europe. So there are no passenger flights that I can get on and go back. And even if they had I don't think I would… would have wanted to go to India at this point. I don't know. I mean, my father is over 60 and he's in the target group who can get it from me if I do get it while traveling. And then it's the number of cases and the mortality rate is really, really going up in India right now. So it's... it's... it's not looking so well.... So maybe it won't be a good decision for me to travel right now or over the summer, I guess. (May 12, 2020)

So it's actually pretty safe to be inside the plane while the airlines have made similar statements about their airplane models. So, yeah, I wouldn't I think the problem with planes is if they if they overfill, it's so good to have someone sitting right next to your breathing down your neck. But

many people are worried about the air filtration system in the beginning. But I don't think that's too much to worry about. (June 9, 2020)

Even though all group members appear to be **negatively affected, shocked, sad** or **anxious** with regards to the pandemic, the specific reasons that trigger the negative *moods* are distinct and at the same time diffuse, difficult to identify: **"it is just everything that goes wrong at the moment."** The following vignettes from a group conversation in May and June 2020 are a few examples of **how "a *mood* becomes an affective lens, affecting how we are affected"** (Ahmed, 2014: p. 14). The quality of the emotional state and the overall attunement affect how the environment affects us. Our work does make less sense, we are wondering if there is any point in continuing, given all the catastrophes happening. All eight of us experienced a similar downturn, wondering why suddenly everything goes wrong, how it can be that everything bad seemingly just falls on me, that I attract all of it? This was the general *mood* after the first shock and over the summer, that is from May to August 2020.

*I know **I'm supposed to be writing and everything like that.** Well, last week I was having a **headache for like five or actually six days in a row**, which was really crappy. And **I couldn't sleep at night,** like **nightmares** and then could not fall asleep. So, like falling asleep at six in the morning, four in the morning and things like that. And now I have my sleeping pills again. So that's better at least to sleep. But yeah, I don't know. It's like **I'm doing basic things what I need to do, like I get up, I brush my teeth, I cook, I do like mandatory things for work**, I do meetings, I, I force myself to write and but at the same time it's like, you know, it's like you're doing this because you know that at least this is **the minimum that you have to do**, like to at least know that you are doing something. But at the same time, it's like, I don't know, it feels like why, why am I doing any of this? Like, I'm thinking about my career and like thinking, you know,*

international aspects of this project was one of the biggest, things that attracted me there. And now that aspect is like... you know, we cannot travel, we cannot go out. And I think, yeah,...It's been quite heavy on me lately, so. Oh, yeah. Anyways, so that's me. (May 12, 2020)

*So the pandemic has already so many months now. I'm living here, my parents are back in India, whatever. But now there's **so many more elements, environmental elements that are adding on to the situation.** For example, India is kind of political tension with China, so there is some talk that there might be some kind of... between the two and then... I still have friends and family there [in USA] and it's crazy out there...! The cities are burning because of the Black Lives Matter movement and everything that's going on. So it's really...* ***I really don't know how to feel about the thing that's been going on these past three, four months. It feels like I'm living like in a movie.*** *Like anything that I find that can only happen in a movie or in the fictional environment is actually happening.* ***So everything that can go wrong is actually going wrong.*** *It's... I cannot wrap my head around the situations that's going on. So, yeah, it's... it's kind of.... hard to take on as soon as you kind of added one issue something else is arising, kind of. Hmm, I don't know. But hoping for the best,* ***I guess****. (June 2, 2020)*

So I'm feeling very hormonal. And with that, I think this is a very feminine thing, it is strange to me to adapt again to this country. ***I'm feeling a little bit incapable****. This is the feeling [....] I'm feeling hormonal. So there is this a bit of feeling that* ***'why it's always me ?'*** *All the changes [...] ... and will I be able to afford my place with all this? Anyways, yeah. So it's a bit too much and I'm feeling that way.* ***It's always me, you know, like it's unfair*** *and I'm not sure how much of it is true and how much is made of me being hormonal right now. So, I'm trying to distract myself and be productive with the interviews. So, this is how it is being productive... (June 6, 2020)*

The pandemic and its restrictions have generated an **underlying depressive and negative *mood* that lingers around**, that has caught us over time, so that even events that are unrelated appear to be part of a series of bad news that are adding up endlessly. It significantly affects how we feel, it generates **DOUBTS** and attacks, not only our well-being, but our self-confidence as well. Possibly, without the underlying **GLOOMY** mood that has built up around the worldwide pandemic, various unconnected events like geopolitical tensions or frustrations at work would not have affected us in the same intense and negative way. But now, in a situation of isolation paired with physical distance from loved ones and restrained *freedom*, every additional event seems to be a confirmation for the **"down- ward spiral" that dominates our minds.**

With all of our research meetings being cancelled or turned into virtual meetings we were starting to realize that the situation might last for longer. **FATIGUE** generated through multiple long virtual meetings and conferences and cancelled vacations appeared increasingly heavy. The **PRESSURE** to continue delivering project results and academic papers was maintained, despite the challenging situations we were all in. When looking back and listening to our conversations, we observe that our **ILLUSIONS** have decomposed over the months, that they have transformed into a vacuum filled with **DECEPTIONS** and pessimistic statements from our surroundings, generating within dark thoughts and gloomy prospects. After the summer, when the so-called "second wave" inundated Europe, we were less concerned about the immediate constraints during our daily local life. Stay home, again. Used to it. That's how it is. **ACCEPTANCE.**

At this point we realized: this will not be over any time soon. The implications for our professional and personal aspirations and plans started to trickle down to our consciousness. And the steadily high and even growing requirements in the broader research group generated fear

and anxieties: Why aren't "they" a little more understanding and flexible? Am I able to live up to others' expectations and to my own aspirations? **PRESSURE.** Every day felt the same.

[...] like going around in a circle.

Weekend or weekday, no idea, I am working, no matter what day or what time.

Work is everything that is left. At least I am productive.

I start hating the word 'deadline'. I swear to myself that from now on I will only call the defined latest date of delivery 'due date' – who dies when I miss it?

As everything around us started feeling like "the end of the world" or at least like **the end of *our* world**, the world of international moves, global mobility and transnational belonging—the purpose of our work, and the foundations of our life modes had abruptly vanished. The threat of the virus was less perceived as a threat for our lives or the lives of significant others than in the early months. But towards the end of 2020 we realized that the pandemic and its implications has become a **threat for our ways of living, for our worldviews, aspirations and our sense of purpose.** These **FEARS** are vague and diffuse and the more we discuss our sorrows, the more all domains and parts of our lives seem to be affected. There is just nothing positive left saying, barely any optimism left. **Chronic moodiness. GLOOMINESS.**

We situate our contribution in the field of transnational evolutions of society at large (Vertovec, 2009; Pries, 2010), such as transnational care (Merla et al., 2020) and trans-locational belonging (Anthias, 2018; Davis et al., 2018) in the field of migration studies. As Ozkazanc-Pan (2020) states, in reference to Levitt and Schiller (2004), a transnational approach allows consideration for "the ways in which people create a sense of *belonging* in different contexts beyond a sense of being or simply existing in a place." (Ozkazanc-Pan (2020: page 17) Not only are we, the research subjects and interacting protagonists of this collective autoethnographic narrative, from various geographic and cultural origins, but in addition, each of us has a distinct approach to professional and relationship building and bonding across national or locational boundaries, a distinct sense of belongingness. All of us have been experiencing life and work abroad for many years, and we have somehow intuitively developed the need to understand ourselves better, whilst reflecting on the processes linked to our transnational, mobile lives. This seemingly naturally occurring reflexivity and "new formations, ways of understanding oneself, the world and others emergent in a transnational mode has been a growing subset of research in migration studies," as Ozkazanc-Pan and Pullen (2020: page 17) states.

What we have been experiencing since the beginning of the pandemic, is tightly linked to our professional activity as mobility researchers working and building relationality across borders. Our joint research interests and field work in various places were a common denominator, but only recent external events of crisis have affected us and our work in such a negative way, that they have seemingly reinforced our sense of belonging to this group of "C-crisis buddies." ("C" stands for the two worn-off terms that we have become acutely tired of.) Previously, "before the pandemic," we tended to keep our reflections regarding personal situations rather to

ourselves, except for a few informal occasions where some of us discussed personal or professional concerns with close colleagues. Sharing experiences and feelings in addition to thoughts, allowed to go beyond "information sharing" on specific topics, such as the "sanitary safety of flights." The *intuitive triangulation* of the latest news not only from various national media in countries we have ties to and in our 10+ languages, but as well observations from our direct local environments, appeared to be reassuring for many of us, giving us a cognitive sense of control over the situation. By crossing various pieces of contradictory information and news about the pandemic, the *virus*, the illness and resulting restrictions, we had the impression to get closer to the truth. Our distinct and complementary knowledge and interpretations of news from international media, led apparently to nuanced opinions and judgments of risks, threats and possibilities. Our conversations and exchange of different layers of understanding triggered acts of decentring, of stepping back and repeatedly detaching oneself from our narrow viewpoints and from evens that affected us.

We realized when identifying outbursts of affect during data revisions that our professional situation as "immobilized mobility researchers on limited working contracts living abroad," what Gill and Pratt call the "precariousness of neo-liberal workplaces" (Gill & Pratt, 2008), especially as we were entering the last year of our contracts. Being "stuck" physically and geographically, cognitively and affectively, has led over the months to the impression of being "stuck" professionally. The expressed restlessness along with frustrations, deceptions, anger, and anxieties indicate that the fragile balance of our life plans got disrupted. Here we can refer to Sullivan and Arthur (2006), who distinguish between physical and psychological mobility: the physical mobility dimension refers to actual career movements and transitions across physical boundaries (reallocations among countries, companies and jobs), whereas psychological mobility ("boundaryless mindset") refers to

one's psychological orientation towards making those movements. The pandemic interfered with physical mobility, whereas psychological mobility was not supposed to be impacted, but in this case, we can state that it was.... Listening to, analysing, and reflecting on our conversations together in small teams has been a reminder and eye-opener: by sharing how we were affected, we were forced to confront ourselves with the obvious connection that exists between our research interest, our personal journeys, and the very purpose of our course of action. Realizing how vulnerable we had become during the pandemic due to our transnational life modes and work-life entanglements generated anger for some, sadness for others, despair for most of us.

For the first time, most of us apprehended through the magnifying lens of the pandemic that we did not have any significant social ties or friendships in our current "countries of residence." After all, we had only spent a little more than 1 year at our destinations. We had been traveling a lot for work and private life during this first year, which was not beneficial for participating in local life, except at university. During the initial year we had to learn about a new professional environment, experiencing academia as "early stage researchers" in different national settings, institutions and within a multidisciplinary project environment. Several scholars have observed the general complexity of inter- national Ph.D. journeys and transnational academic careers in the past (Acker & Haque, 2015; Elliot et al., 2016) and most recently Schaer and colleagues (Schaer et al., 2021) investigated transnational ties and networks in this context. As Elliot et al. (2016) underline in reference to Walsh (2010), already in non-pandemic times "the nature of the Ph.D. necessitates the cultivation of a critical, analytical and reflective way of thinking and research orientation, during this conventionally long and often isolated endeavoir." Preparing a Ph.D. is pictured as a "solo journey" (Brydon & Flemming, 2011: 1008) that necessitates a continuous adjustment to unexpected events. It appears that the "usual" isolation that can be

expected when preparing a Ph.D. dissertation, has been overly intensified in the illustrated case:

(1) Due to local restrictions of the pandemic that forced individuals to work from home, to reduce social contacts and to practice physical distancing:

How really, you can be judged for being cautious?! I saw those friends, they were really like making fun of me for staying a bit far away, etc. And then this friend called me again yesterday, and he was like: "seriously, do you think what you're doing is normal? You should start going back to normal." (May 25, 2020)

Meeting an acquaintance in London: "He wanted to hug me. And I'm like, what the hell? So I pushed him kind of, you know, I yelled at him and I'm like, no, no, I'm not hugging anyone!". [...] (May 25, 2020)

That, yes, we live by ourselves and it's a very, very different feeling when you choose to be by yourself and when you are obliged to be by yourself, because I do enjoy having my whole apartment, but because I spend my day among people and I love socialising. So it's a choice and now it's not a choice. And this is really messing with my head. And so I'm trying to find the coping mechanisms, which is the video chat, OK, which is sometimes having a drink and loosen up and it helps to sleep. But I miss touching people and it comes from the inside. But it's it's it's so strange... because I'm not hugging you. (June, 2020)

(2) Due to a sudden travel stop that resulted in the cancellation of all planned data collection in the field, network development with other researchers, research stays at partner institutions and in person conference and workshops were cancelled for the rest of the funding period:

I thought about one thing, which is that when you were in the middle of your Ph.D. and you cannot go to conferences, you cannot do any networking, you cannot identify journals and editors you would like to work with and this and that... you lose the whole year, actually! And that's something universal... It's also you cannot travel, and you cannot meet people, you cannot network ... but that's an essential part of the job as well, especially if you have to prepare for the job market. (May 25, 2020)

(3) Due to settlement in a relatively new city and country of residence, with only little local contacts outside the work environment and often scarce local language skills and unfamiliar patterns of interaction at work and in an aca- demic environment in general: facing role changes.

It has been a shock to the situation itself, but the Covid-19 increases this complexity, as people have less time and patience, and they are not at the office. I need to learn quantitative analysis now and I do not find help. My perception: the Covid-19 amplified my challenges. I need to be more flexible in my learning process and to adapt to the local context. It has been a bit more stressful for me. So, less help, more challenges, less time and support. But the deadlines are all the same. (November, 2020)

I was considering that my corporate life is over that I would be a student again. I stayed 1.5 years in a student home – in university A. I am staff, not a student, but I do not have access to staff meetings. At university B. I participated in Erasmus excursions etc. [like other students] I am registered as a student, [...] I never felt part of staff. The only corporate event I attended, I felt like a complete stranger, none of the professors was there... my department does not do any social gatherings... (other departments act more like a team. (December, 2020)

(4) Due to the impossibility to travel and to take responsibilities for family members and friends abroad as we used to do:

I have been around and faced different kinds of problems. My international experiences help me to develop competencies and increase resilience, but now, Covid-19 put me in a situation that all my competencies developed so far seem not to help. My family is in danger in Rio, especially my mom, and I feel useless. In any other situation, I would go to Rio now to help her, but I cannot do it. This feeling, like I lost freedom, is horrible, and it undermines my work now. (November, 2020)

Overall we can state that multiple factors reinforced pre-existent isolation and that extreme environmental hostility (a pandemic) led to *alienation* and a *loss of personal freedom*: formerly available resources that we leveraged before to cope with isolation and professional pressure were not accessible anymore (hedonist lifestyle, receiving visitors, partying, mingling with colleagues, developing transnational networks and opportunities through professional travel and events, leveraging multiple languages, connecting with people in multiple settings and places). Realizing how vulnerable we had become during the pandemic due to our transnational life modes and work-life entanglements generated anger for some, sadness for others, despair for most of us. Throughout the first round of analysis of our conversations we quickly grasped that the external constraints linked to the pandemic had brought us closer together. We had created a safe space, a comfortable environment with people who cared. We could easily share some of our concerns related to perceived work pressure, chronic fatigue and deception about lacking support, because we were affected in similar ways, with only slight variations in degree and timing. And these ways of experiencing, of interconnected embodied feeling and affect are what this autho-ethnographic work helps exploring.

Our positions, the concurring affect and *moods* are multidimensional and complex, dense and intense. At times, our conversations appear taking

place in the "researchers life-world," when we are discussing research content, when debriefing on events after meetings, or exchanging on potential conference participations. At other times, we are chatting amongst "friends," about insomnia, family issues, travel dreams or the wish to move houses. And again, at other times we find ourselves discussing political decisions in our countries of residence, as a community of destiny, as "foreigners" in the society we are living in. When sharing news and insights about the pandemic from our so called "home countries," we find ourselves in the same positions as other migrants, as expats who connect with other "non-locals," occasionally mistaking ourselves for experts of epidemiology, pandemic evolutions or political conspiracy. Entanglements of overlapping roles and contradictory narratives, external expectations and internal psychological forces constitute a vicious plot, where layers of affect and fluctuations of *moods* are perceptible, but diffuse, root causes are situational, but blurred. There is little, in terms of negative emotions, that we missed out on during all these months. Nonetheless, ephemeral instances of collective support and attention left traces of mutual esteem and the assurance of not being alone, even during passages of loneliness. Our bodies seemingly have incorporated what we tried to erase from our memories—fear, insecurity, sadness, anger—as multiple cases of insomnia, migraines, chills, and panic attacks demonstrate.

We had to consciously put the academic/expert view aside at times to observe more clearly what was happening with us as a group, as a person. Crossing and discussing our interpretations led to additional insights. Yes, indeed, we certainly "deploy coping strategies," which is what HR or psychologically informed literature states, but what does this really mean? We observe that such processes are not necessarily conscious and certainly not merely cognitively supported but influenced by instances of affect and rapport. When looking into the literature you learn that there are coping mechanisms and coping strategies, that individuals are

developing resilience during and after traumatic experiences. But what are the events and circumstances that have made a difference for us? What were significant moments when our personal *moods*, well-being and motivations shifted throughout the pandemic? There is nothing such as a true or unique response to it. With our weekly video conversations, we gave comfort to each other, by listening, by speaking out loud many of the things that have been circling around in our hyper-active, hyper-reflective, restless minds. Pausing, taking a deep breath, relaxing, laughing out loud, dreaming. Complaining, grumbling, moaning, grousing...

What we will remember, after all, are the good moments of cheering each other up, of laughing and joking. The moments where someone else cared for me and my momentous state. As the implications of pandemic related constraints on individuals and societies are slowly becoming visible and tangible through social science research, we encourage fellow researchers to continue looking out for the tone of voice, the atmosphere and the vibe that constitute *moods*: those of their research subjects, their own, and their writings. We realized that geographic mobility and mobility of thought are interlinked, that geographical mobility is constitutive for our way of being and becoming, our sense of purpose. This underlines the remaining need for a mobilities turn in social sciences, as initiated by Sheller and Urry (2006), and speaks for mobility as an ontology in diversity studies and organizational research, as suggested by Ozkazanc-Pan (2019). We have become aware that our transnational life modes depend upon the privilege of free movement across borders, that the outcome of our academic journey will depend on us, our resilience and our ability to adapt to new circumstances. We are amazed that the *freedom* and lightness that we lost whilst being physically stuck, could find a new emanation through this collective work and writing.

With every closed border and shut-down airport, with every economic collapse, the penalties for cross-border mobility and free movement have become increasingly perceptible. The prominence of **global vagabonding** and travel, our *modus vivendi* in "former times," have reversed into a distant dream and desperate hopefulness. **GRIEF.** With every shut-down boutique, coiffeur and fitness club, our hedonist habits freeze deeper, and our self-indulging customs of care get condensed to a warm shower, a walk in the park and a glass of gin tonic in front of the screen. **SUBSTITU- TION.** With every new lockdown, every closed bar and restaurant, our social insouciance vanishes, and our bodies start missing the **physical closeness**. Our souls are, still today, craving for hugs and kisses and a warm, unveiled smile. Cruising through time and space with nonchalance and joy seems to belong to another era. Nowadays such *freedom* is reserved to our fiction heroes. **ALIENATION.** We do not know where we are heading. **CONFUSION.**

When listening to our conversations, it is striking how our **DESIRE** to meet, chat, laugh and cheer each other up has carried us collectively through many months. We were in a **GOOD MOOD**: when lockdowns were easing, when project deliverables were accomplished, when bright summer days were around the corner and whenever we got together to speak our minds and hearts. **Nine months** have passed, since it all started in March 2020. Coincidentally this is just the time it needs for a human being to mature in mama's tummy. Have we **matured?** Are we more complete, better equipped in order to face the world out there, than we were 3, 6, or 9 months go? Possibly. Certainly. Although we feel more **drained** than in the beginning. **EXHAUSTION.** The newness of the situation has faded away and staying informed about the latest pandemic related recommendations and restrictions has become a sad **routine.** Maybe it happened when we fell into fall? The start of the **dark winter**

season was certainly not helping. When we passed Au- gust, we realized: **only 12 months** left out of 36. We just want some **REST,** we urgently need a distraction, some **LIGHT** and **DELIGHT**... **LIGHTNESS**. But the clock is ticking... Let us get together on another video call tomorrow. **JOY.**

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P4 - Making moves meaningful:
Towards an ontology of intensity across 'mille plateaux'

Kerstin Martel

ABSTRACT

In management and organisation studies, the understanding and theorising of contemporary human mobilities across geographies, professions and social fields more broadly is often constraint by functionalist reasoning and subjected to labour market demands and employers' expectations. Accordingly, and in line with the *mobility turn,* scholars state the need to renew our ways of comprehending mobilities and to consider the very *materiality* that mobility entails. All whilst supporting this position, the present paper argues that it requires more than an epistemological shift to detach our thinking from sedentary metaphysics. By approaching empirical accounts (mobility narratives) of 'extreme' movers through *nomadic ethics* and principles of *rhizomatic becoming*, as per Deleuze and Guattari (1980), the author attempts to exceed re-presentation when exposing significant events as *moments of grace* and *moments of turbulence.* The discussion is stimulated by the initial question of how occupational becoming is composed in cases of *intersecting multiple mobilities* – beyond concerns of employability and career capital accumulation – and it expands on ontological underpinnings. Hence, it becomes palpable that within the *conjunctions* of everchanging locations, social connections and occupations, within the continuous *oscillation* between movement and rest, *intensities* emerge and enmesh with choices of mobility and non-mobility. Ultimately, the author suggests that an *ontology of intensity* allows to reconcile analytical dichotomies between movers and settlers, the local and the non-local,

between the mobile and the sedentary. Overall, this paper provides a theoretical opening with regards to the contemporary understanding of human mobilities and contributes to earlier efforts in organisation studies of dissolving established assumptions on identity and identification.

'I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out;
and I thought how it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in.'
— Virginia Woolf (1929, p. 18)

Introduction

Human mobilities in contemporary globalised societies exceed local and regional settings and *movers* are not only facing national border regimes but as well distinct labour market conditions and a variety of socio-cultural and political contexts. Thus, comprehending *intersecting and simultaneous mobilities*, i.e., across a multitude of geographies, workplaces and occupations at the same time, requires to think beyond the boundaries of nation states, of employing organisations or professional qualifications, calls for an approach that recognizes the limitations of sedentarist metaphysics (Cresswell, 2006; Braidotti, 2011) and that appreciates the constraints of representation in social analysis (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008; Fouweather, & Bosma, 2021; Fox, & Alldred, 2022). Lived experiences and ways of belonging of highly qualified individuals who move recurrently across various social fields [and whom I suggest designating as *movers*], cannot be merely understood as a sequence of time periods spent in different settings or as a series of attachments and detachments. Geographic mobilities and their imaginative implications compose new social configurations, as Salazar (2018) demonstrates, and they change the mover's world view, providing a *horizontal* sense of being on the move *(*Urry, 2007). Whereas these and other scholars who support the *mobilities turn* in the social sciences, advance mobile epistemologies to embrace a specific, mobility-centred lens, ontological implications remain unclear. Is there a need for a *mobile ontology*, an ontology of the *mobile self*?

Transnational scholarship confirms that *trans-locational ties* across a multitude of geographies and across *social fields* are constitutive for specific *ways of being and belonging* (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Anthias, 2018) and in this vein, management and organisation scholars encourage to further explore the ontology of the 'mobile self' in the context of transmigrations (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Calas, Ou & Smircich, 2013). Meanwhile, migration policies as well as organisational expatriation frameworks claim that movers have to 'adjust' and to 'integrate' into local settings, and scholars speak of 'identity threat', 'identity loss' and 'identity conflict' in the context of organisational expatriation and global work (McNulty & Moeller, 2017; Gibson, Dunlop & Raghav 2021). This reveals an essentializing, culturalist and reification of identities and an individualist, liberal construal of the self as 'owner of identity', i.e., as per Butler and Athanasiou (2013) a self that is 'the ground and cause of its own experience' (2013, p. 14). Indeed, within the nation-state, individual identity has been *rooted* for more than two centuries in national societal structures and home-grown employment relations, where class and profession constitute social identity categories and determine social hierarchies (Lahire, 1998). As understood by Linstead and Thanem (2007) in line with Deleuze, they are part of the 'abstract machine' of social sorting, of the segregation of lifestyles and of different strata and are constitutive of the regulation of social mobility. Consequently, with regards to professional mobility, organisational sociologists present states of being in liminality as intimidating, as a source for precariousness and social '*anomie*', even when economic security is ensured (Sainsaulieu, 1977; Abbott, 1993; Kalleberg, 2009). It appears that sedentarist and nation-state centred perspectives tend to implicitly promote non-mobility and lack grasping the process of *ongoing and superposing, multiple mobilities* across space and social fields, thereby missing to account for *multiplicities* that occur and interrelate in movers' lives. Instead, in Fouweather's and Bosma's (2021) words, they are "fixing the subject within existing monolithic

relations of power', whereas a Deleuzian perspective concedes that 'every social formation is constituted in, and through, acts of resistance AND compliance driven by desires.' (Fouweather & Bosma, 2021, p. 1810).

Even if conceptualisations of non-traditional, boundaryless and protean careers have largely contributed to the understanding of *career mobility* in management and organisation studies (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Crowley-Henry, 2007; Baruch & Reis, 2016), individualist perspectives of growing a 'new working identity' (Ibarra, 2003) defend functionalist paradigms. Khapova and colleagues (2008) advocate multidisciplinary conceptualisation of careers, but scholars often apply a human capital lens when analysing 'career performance', 'career capital' or the achievement of 'career success' of a global workforce (Shaffer et al. 2012; Mello, Suutari & Dickmann, 2023). This leaves room for fostering a *mobility-centred lens,* as recently discussed by Guttormsen and Lauring (2022). But how does occupational becoming play out for movers? How do occupational changes occur in cases of intersecting multiple mobilities beyond functionalist concerns of employability and career capital accumulation? What does provide the impetus for moving-on in a context of permanent change, when monolithic professional identities dissolve?

I propose that *geo-professional meandering* and *becoming on the move* become graspable in *extreme cases* of human mobility, as Patton (2002) underlines that *extremes* allow for dense data and for rich insights to emerge. Hence, this paper draws on cases of *multi-dimensional intersecting mobilities* in order to apprehend processes of *becoming on the move* more broadly. Becoming, in this context, shall be understood as continuous, irreversible process, that is 'changing at the level of being, irrevocably, rather than simply changing state, reversibly.' (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1289). When changes of profession go along and are closely intertwined with geographical mobility, *transient movers* do not only see their ascribed administrative 'status' or titles as

employees, as entrepreneurs or as full-time voluntary workers evolve. In contrast to exterior, externally observable changes of location, occupation and social categorisation, the here exposed *emic* perspective suggests that movers' experiences are lived as *internally consistent*, as *flowing* and *leaping* across places, professions and social settings. Whereas earlier empirical studies, such as Costa's (2013) exploration of consultants' spatial mobility, were not centred around *mobility* during data collection, the present study deliberately positions *mobility as main theme* of conversations with movers. These 'mobility conversations' illustrate how occupational choices are interconnected with past and future moves, with 'serendipitous' encounters, with 'divine moments' and 'rock bottom' experiences. During the abductive research process Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) *process philosophy* and *nomadic ethics* have manifested as prolific underpinnings for approaching *multiplicities* that compose *becomings on the move*.

Whilst consciously de-centring mobility conversations away from organisational settings and by avoiding scripts tied to traditional, sedentary ideas of 'careers', seemingly sudden professional shifts can be comprehended as *'leaps'* as *rhizomatic offshoots*, rather than as individualist means for self-development or identity formation. Instead of focussing on representations of the 'mobile self,' the here demonstrated approach is non-representational, and goes beyond individualist conceptualisations. The analysis exceeds the transcribed text and emphasises the *intensities* that mobilities constitute and of which they are constituted: intersections of *lines of flight* and conjunctions of people, places, objects and occupations, which actualise in *moments of grace or turbulence*. This allows for conceiving of mobility as practice that is *embodied* by transient movers and *engrained* in their occupational choices. Hence, I propose understanding *multiple intersecting mobilities* and geographic and professional dispersion not as *errance*, but as *multiplicity* and through an *ontology of intensity*.

As follows, section one reviews scholarly work that addresses 'mobility' in a professional and careers context, followed by a broader social sciences perspective on human mobilities and non-sedentary ways of being and becoming. Encountered limitations with regards to structuralist categorisations reveal the need to firmly position the phenomenon of 'mobility' within the centre of the present study and subsequent reflections. On this basis section two develops a research approach that is suitable to support a process of de-familiarization from sedentary representations. As such, the analysis in section three draws on philosophical underpinnings of *nomadic ethics* and *rhizomatic thinking* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980; Braidotti, 2011) when paying particular attention to 'events' (Deleuze, 1968). The discussion finally underlines the need to further nurture a scholarly understanding of mobilities beyond sedentary metaphysics and within an *ontology of intensity,* and it thereby supports earlier affirmations (Fouweather, & Bosma, 2021; Gehman, Sharma & Beveridge, 2022; Linstead & Thanem 2007) about the importance of Deleuze's process philosophy of multiplicities for organisation studies more broadly.

1 | Human mobilities in organisation studies and the social sciences

Geo-occupational mobilities and identity: limitations of functionalist perspectives

Traditionally, numerous scholars promoted stable work situations as a prerequisite for a balanced identity. Organisational sociologists like Abbott (1993), Kalleberg (2009) insist on the importance of longer-term work stability and security for individual identities, pointing out the risks associated with precarious, ever changing work situations. Sainsaulieu (1977) similarly accentuates negative aspects of mobility for those who leave their social and professional group of origin for less familiar social environments. In his large-scale socio-psychological study Sainsaulieu

(2019; 1977) observes identity disjunctions and unstable states of in-betweenness and affirms a disconnect between individual professional experiences, the organisational working environment and the original background of social class. With regards to occupational mobility more specifically, Coghlan (2023) recently pointed to the lack of appropriateness of linear socio-psychological models of identity change and identity learning, such as initially formulated by Schein, regarding self-identity in relation to career changes, 'unfreezing' and 'freezing'. He points out that Schein and Schein (2019) themselves formulate the need to reconsider more dynamic conceptualisations, given that today's highly volatile context 'has made staged linear models of planned change obsolete and irrelevant' (2019: 95). Scholars who explore *identity* from a processual, constructivist perspective speak of *identity work*, stating for example that people are 'engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1164). Here identity work is objectified and comprehended as a dialogue with social expectations. Even if organisation scholars support a dynamic and processual perspective of individual identities and identity work, *identity* continues to be *reified*, for example as 'a foundation of human resource development' (Black, Warhurst, & Corlett, 2018).

When Ibarra (2003) in 'Working identities' takes a socio-psychological, individualist approach towards narrative inquiry in order to illustrate how mid-career professionals change their career path through transitions towards alternative 'possible selves', she focusses on conscious processes of knowing and transforming individual professional identity. By analyzing the actual process of transitioning *from* one professional orientation *to* another, she describes how professionals conduct occupational mobilities. She shows how external guides, such as conventional schemes of work positions or organisational career planning are fading, whilst internal, so-called 'self-generated guides' come to the forefront when individuals 'create their own' career

path and start *self-organizing* their professional orientations. Ibarra suggests that the continuous *revision of possibilities* enables professionals 'to grow in contour and detail until a fully-grown new working identity emerges.' (Ibarra, 2003, Appendix, section 5). Ibarra discerns 'unconventional strategies', which are seen as the result of an iterative process of assessing options, learning about the social self and interacting with others, in a conscious and rationally driven manner. Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) adjust this view by arguing that individuals who durably experience situations of *liminality*, fostered by ambivalent emotions and under-institutionalized situations, respond with 'identity play' rather than 'identity work': a parallel, playful process, which provides the ground for 'identity growth', as they suggest. Similarly, and in continuity to Sainsaulieu's work, other scholars apprehend situations of *liminality and in-betweenness,* as well as *marginal social positions* as *intrinsic resource* for achieving professional and entrepreneurial success (Alter, 2012), which might as well apply in situations of extreme mobilities. Still, these conceptualisations foster an idea of occupational identities as constructed through *individually driven* and *consciously controllable* processes, where present situations stand in causal relation with past experiences, acquired competencies and actions.

With regards to non-traditional careers overall, scholars recognize undeniably the conceptual limitations of structuralist epistemologies, calling for further exploration of boundaryless professional experiences, beyond organisational settings (Baruch & Reis, 2016). Alternative figures such as the 'portable selves' (Petriglieri, Petriglieri & Wood, 2018) and conceptual personas like the 'wanderer', the 'hired hand' or the 'protean career architect' (Brisco and Hall, 2006), attempt regrouping the ungrouped, ordering the intrinsically order-less. Patchy professional endeavours are reflected in a growing set of definitions of various 'career types' and scholarly debates are trying to grasp *volatile behaviours* as a characteristic trait of 'protean', 'value-based', and 'boundaryless' careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Nonetheless, as

Briscoe and Hall (2006) warn, the classification of career types along prototypes according to agency, individualism and opportunity are not universally applicable, given that they neglect cultural values, *processual perspectives* and the broader socio-economic context. The phenomenon of combined *geographical and non-organisational mobility* has led management and organisation scholars to define various typologies (Dickmann, Suutari, & Wurtz, 2018), and speak of 'self-directed' or 'self-initiated' expatriation (Inkson et al. 1997; Suutari & Brewster 2000), which are claimed having become the norm for highly qualified labour migrants (Inkson, McNulty and Thorn, 2013).

The *entanglement of recurrent, intersecting occupational and geographical moves,* however, makes it vain to hold on patterns, motives or identifications through a structuralist approach, i.e., on the mere basis of job roles, organisational attachments and frequency of moves. With regards to recurring onward mobility or 'transmigration', our scholarly understanding is distorted or incomplete if solely approached as temporal sequence of professional activities. Instead, *mobile ways of becoming* need to be accounted for as dynamic and multidirectional *processes* beyond individual entities and ascribed identity categories (Martel, 2022). Despite calls from organisation scholars to change our paradigmatic understanding and to 'move from inclusion to belonging', in order to respond to 'a world-on-the-move' (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019: 481), ever more fine-grained scales and categorisations of the 'globally mobile' individual attempt to account for numerous constellations. Guttormsen (2018) documents that the increasing diversity of international movers saw emerge new analytical categories, which attempt to designate and grasp non-normative typologies of geographical movers. He demonstrates that classifications such as 'non-traditional expatriate' are conceptually misleading and epistemologically not flawless. Even if several ethnographic and narrative studies on internationally mobile professionals contribute most relevant insights to the question of complex identities and belongingness in situations of

international mobility, the focus remains on populations from a specific 'country of origin' or 'nationality', within a specific 'sector' of activity or profession, or is limited to those who are living in a given city or 'destination country' (Kohonen, 2008; Scurry, Rodriguez and Bailouni 2013; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014). Exceptions are, for example, Pierre (2003) or Takeuchi and Chen (2013) who account for socio-anthropological distinctions amongst individuals, such as ethnicity, professional cultures or personal ties as well as individual resources, whilst accounting at the same time for *intersubjectivities and relationalities* across several locations and social spheres, beyond the classical home-country / host-country binary. Moreover, Calas and colleagues (2013), support in alignment with human geographers and anthropologists that 'new articulations of subjectivity and the creation of new social fields […] are produced through the actor's movement as she or he relates to others throughout time space' (Calas et al., 2013: 711). They maintain an individualist perspective when positioning *geographical mobility* as catalyst for the development of the *'mobile self'*, but they allow for approaching mobility as central phenomenon. Overall, as Guttormsen and Lauring (2022) summarize, contributions in management and organisation studies regarding global mobility are often limited to job performance and intercultural adjustment, whilst disregarding the very *materiality* of mobility. Nonetheless, a *spatial turn* accounts for the materiality of space and explores states of physical liminality and ambiguity of mobile workers, such as consultants (Costas, 2013; Muhr, 2012), however, without accounting for simultaneous occupational or organisational changes.

Functionalist typologies of movers are closely tied to the frequency of physical moves and to human capital logics, which assume that professional identities can be 'developed' and 'grown' towards a specific goal. They are further reified around the nation state as determinant societal units. Problematising these assumptions goes along with appreciating that the boundaries of the 'mobile self' can be blurred

and fluid and that the comprehension of mobilities exceeds what Cresswell (2006) designates as *sedentarist metaphysics*. Regarding recurring intersecting mobilities, scholarly understanding is distorted or incomplete if solely approached as temporal sequence of professional activities. Instead, *mobile ways of becoming* need to be accounted for as dynamic and multidirectional *processes*, in order to engrain the phenomenon of mobility into the way we think of the phenomenon.

Accounting for materiality: mobilities and meaningful embodied movement

The question of how movers experience and *relate* to recurrent intersecting mobilities beyond or in parallel to sedentarist logics, is addressed in the field of transnational studies. Scholars suggest that when individuals move geographically, their *ways of being* in the world as well as their *ways of belonging* are affected (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Urry's 'sociology beyond societies' (2000), and Levitt and Glick Schillers' (2004) 'social fields', demand for paradigmatic shifts, in order to reflect on *relationalities* and social ties beyond a society that is limited by national borders or other socially constructed boundaries. Erlinghagen (2012) suggests, for example, to combine transnational boundary crossings with individual life course considerations, as 'spatial mobility across legal or administrative borders is embedded in cultural spaces as well as in social networks' (Erlinghagen, 2021, p. 1338). When referring to transmigrants, he emphasises the *processual, ongoing nature* of migration, and reminds us that this ongoing, fluid process is merely 'artificially separated by the event of border crossing' (2021, p. 1341). As Cresswell confirms, the very phenomenon of mobility leads many scholars "to question more rooted and bounded notions of place as the locus of identity" (Cresswell, 2011, p. 551), and thereby encourages alternative ontologies. The *mobilities turn* more broadly (Bauman, 1996; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Salazar, Elliot & Norum, 2017) inspires to problematise and to rethink notions such as 'migration' or 'global

mobility' in the context of management and organisation studies. Notably, scholars in human geography distinguish mobility from movement, suggesting that 'mobility' shall be understood as "meaningful movement, as opposed to movement-in-itself" (Cresswell, 2006).

Anthropological traditions qualify mobility as a 'complex assemblage of movement, social imaginaries and experiences', which is 'infused with both, attributed and self-ascribed meanings.' (Salazar et al., 2017, p. 2). Indeed, the meanings attributed to physical moves, as well as to occupational mobility, mirrors the *standpoint of the observer in context*: for employers the meaning of hiring international workers or relocating local staff, derives from the allocation of resources and competencies to achieve business goals. Likewise, from the perspective of a nation state, a variety of economic, political and climatic conditions determine the meaning of migrations and mobilities at a macro scale. For individual movers, however, mobilities constitute the *choice to move or to stay* and imply changes across multiple life spheres: repeated moves encompass acts of leaving, travelling and arriving; periods of staying, exploring and disremembering. D'Andrea and colleagues state that investigations, which embrace the perspective of movers themselves have been significantly fostered through anthropological methods (d'Andrea, Ciolfi & Gray, 2011) and Salazar and colleagues re-affirm that anthropological approaches have the potential to catalyse novel perspectives on global mobilities and migrations, suggesting that *'non-representational approaches'* towards mobility have the capacity 'to transform social scientific thought' (Salazar, Elliot and Norum, 2017, p. 7). The choice of non-representational theory as underlying framework, entails, however, distinct philosophical underpinnings, as will be developed in section two.

Positioning *mobility as central phenomenon* that affects life modes in globalized, hypermodern societies, shifts scholarly understanding of a variety of concepts such as place (Augé, 2008), time (Rosa, 2005), communities (Maffesoli, 2016), identities (Baumann,

2005) and meanings of life (Shin, 2014). Scholars characterize mobile life modes as 'cosmopolitan' (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1990), and attributes such as *neo-nomadic* or *translocational* resonate across the social sciences (Anthias 2018; d'Andrea, 2006). However, when individuals are made responsible in late modernity for building their career capital, social capital etc., the charge of self-formation is put onto their shoulders, as Bauman (1996) suggests and as illustrated in statements such as 'global knowledge workers strive towards broadening their portfolio of career capitals' (Lamb and Sutherland, 2010, p. 309). Bauman (2005, 1996) emphasises that the conceptual persona of the *pilgrim* who seeks to reduce uncertainty and strives towards a defined goal has become untimely insufficient in contemporary society, as 'postmodern life is too messy and too incoherent to be grasped by any one cohesive model' (Bauman, 1996, p. 26). He introduces different types of postmodern personas, the *flaneur*, the *vagabond*, the *tourist* and the *player* as compared to the pilgrim, he emphasises that as stand-alone they convey only a part of the story, they 'never integrate into a totality' (1996, p. 26). He suggests that solely the *coexistence* of different ways of being in the world allows to conceptually apprehend the *postmodern human*. The challenge of non-representational theory in mobility studies requires a shift. A shift away from describing and thereby fixating observable social realities from the outside towards exposing and performing multi-layered lived realities beyond representation. Bauman (1996) and Law and Urry (2004) speak of *messy methods*.

The observation that mobility engenders a 'horizontal sense of being on the move' (Urry, 2007, p. 8) encourages the idea that the way in which *mobility affects* movers, their perception of the world and their (occupational) *choices* require a shift in our way of approaching it. Expressions such as 'breaking the glass ceiling' or 'climbing the career ladder' reveal the predominant *vertical sense* of professional evolution in organisations. As such, simultaneous 'side stepping' across locations, workplaces, professions and other social fields stands in contrast to

traditional, sedentarily conceived imaginaries of vertical 'career advancement'. When Deleuze and Guattari (1980) distinguish between the metaphor of the tree with its branches and roots and the metaphor of the rhizome as a composition of multiplicities, heterogeneities and offshoots, they introduce distinct ways of thinking. Whereas arborescent identities and decision making are caught in verticality and traces, rhizomatic thinking and becoming allow for horizontality and leaps. As Linstead and Pullen (2006) call out, the metaphor of the branch evokes that identity 'depends upon a determining and dominating origin or ontology' (2006: 1295), whereas the rhizome or 'meshwork' has no centre.

2 | Research approach and framework of analysis

Mobility conversations and poststructuralist analysis

Based on the previous section, I suggest that the commonly applied *human capital* lens imposes a level of abstraction, which disconnects our thinking from the very materiality of movement. Therefore, I deliberately decentred the empirical inquiry from functionalist, career logics and from sedentary rationales that promote social status and career success. Mobility is positioned as central phenomenon of investigation, and it is assumed that multiple mobilities are particularly tangible in cases of *extreme* mobilities, that is, when moves across places intersect with significant changes in professions, occupations or sectors of activity. As movers live in continuous change, they face ever new environments, people, possibilities and limitations over time. Thereby, the idea of working 'towards' a specific occupational or professional identity seems to be inconsistent with the fluid messiness of mobile lives. Moreover, given the *multiplicity* of environments and professional settings that research participants experience, a constructivist-structuralist approach would contradict the very 'ontological relationality' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 243) of *mobility and nomadism*: movers are moving and circulating

across social fields, instead of embedding themselves into them. Repeat mobilities as such are a phenomenon that composes and is composed of *multiplicities*.

This means that the *purposively sampled* population of *highly educated transnational repeat movers* is characterized by *extreme mobility constellations*. As suggested by Patton (2002), *extreme cases* that are identified through purposive sampling augment the chances of retrieving information-rich data and unexpected insights. Indeed, the sampled cases are *extreme* in the sense that several mobility phenomena intertwine and superpose over time: geographic moves succeed, go along with or precede occupational changes. In contrast to culture-specific sociological research that investigates "integration" or "coping" of individuals and social groups from a specific background (national, migratory status, educational, professional, etc.) 'into' a given new environment (an organisation, a subsidiary, a nation state or a local community), the suggested *purposive sampling* allows to step back from monolithic social identifiers thereby recognizing changing salience of ascribed identities for movers.

The empirical support for the present discussion was generated through a broader study of 40 *mobility conversations* conducted between 2020 and 2022 with international, interprofessional repeat movers, without explicitly mentioning any specific focus or theme, other than how they experience and reflect on global mobility their lives on the move. Most participants were between 35 and 45 years old at the time of the conversation, were born, have grown up and lived in various places across all continents. Thus, all of them have repeatedly moved across socio-cultural contexts and beyond national borders – some already as children and youngsters with their parents, others later in life and they are geographically spread across a multitude of places of residence and workplaces. All are at least bi-lingual, many are multilingual, and they hold at least one, often two advanced degrees in different subject matters, such as engineering, law, education, linguistics or business

administration and changed occupations and professions several times. Only few conversations were conducted in the participants native languages (English, French or German), the majority of participants spoke in English without being native speakers and due to the pandemic context only few were conducted in person, the remaining through video calls. At the time of the study some interlocutors hold positions across different functions in a major multinational corporation (MNC), others are entrepreneurs and again others are pursuing educational degrees. Despite their highly diverse national and educational backgrounds, the *mobility compositions* of all movers appear to be *multi-layered* in terms of underlying motivations and *multidirectional* in terms of destinations and professional orientation.

The theme that was openly conveyed to all interlocutors was the suggestion to 'have a conversation about moving and mobility'. 'Mobility' and 'moves' were not only keywords used as conversation starters, but the *mobilities lens* served as guiding principle for the researcher throughout the inductive field work. The researcher's academic and experiential pre-understanding of geographical and professional mobilities constitute a methodological resource as per Alvesson and Sandberg (2022) and, in reference to Gadamer, as facilitator of a 'dialogic conversation with the other'. During conversations, the researcher who entails an insider position, gives impulses to express, narrate, recollect and reflect on lived experiences and *events* in an open, non-structured manner. To prevent scripted responses, the overarching, broader research theme of becoming, belonging and identifications was never explicitly mentioned to the participants of the study, instead the stated goal was to hear *how they live mobility, how they relate to it, what they think is important to be shared about mobility in general.* A further prerequisite for the broader study from which the content in section three is derived, was to refrain from imposing normative notions and concepts, such as 'career success', 'global mindset' or 'adjustment' and 'integration' onto the interlocutors.

These and other concepts that are part of the dominant discourse on global careers and transmigration would have been suggestive and might have triggered preconceived scripts.

Within the boundaries of this paper, it is adequate to observe how *significant events* and *moments* unfold within the rhizomatic composition of mobilities beyond the very moment and beyond the narration and its transcription. The findings reveal how movers in general *relate* to significant events as 'divine moments' or 'moments of turbulence' in various ways and through multiple voices in a 'discourse pragmatist fashion' (Alvesson, 2002, p. 103). Overall, the empirical accounts expose *multiple voices*, i.e., they do not only consider the grand diversity within the overall sample, but they allow to further reflect on variations within a conversation with an individual subject, allowing to understand it as 'temporary and fluid, not fixed and integrated' (Alvesson, 2002: 103). The *inductive-abductive* approach along the sensitizing concept of *rhizomatic compositions*[11] (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) that has supported the iterative process of de-familiarization during the analysis will be elaborated as follows.

Rhizomatic becoming as sensitizing concept

As argued earlier, it is crucial *not* to simply assume 'career success' or 'career capital accumulation' as central drivers for movers in general and for those who simultaneously move across distinct geographies, workplaces and professions. In turn, it would be fatalistic to simply disqualify non-linear, non-sedentary live and work modes as 'random' or 'unsuccessful'. To de-centre from these a-priori theoretical themes, the focus on *mobility* as phenomenon was an initial step taken during data collection, as described earlier. In addition, for the stake of analysis I suggest using rhizomatic compositions as *sensitizing concept* and the

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[11] I chose to translate the French term 'agencement' with *composition*. NB: it can also be translated as *assemblage* by certain authors.

broader frame of *nomadic ethics* as philosophical underpinning (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Braidotti, 2011). As opposed to definite concepts that provide descriptions of what to see, *sensitizing concepts* provide social researchers according to Blumer (1969) with *directions along which to look*. As Flemmen (2017) emphasises in reference to Sohlberg and Sohlberg (2013), there is a certain vagueness and openness to sensitizing concepts, that prevents *'locking us into'* a specific, pre-defined comprehension of a phenomenon. Flemmen states that *sensitizing concepts* work in close dialogue with the data, 'similar to Peirce's view on abduction', and they provide a general sense of reference.

During analysis it became obvious that approaching repeated intersecting mobilities as multiplicities, as rhizomatic compositions, rather than as cause-effect relationships, would open up for an understanding that is more closely tied to the very phenomenon of mobility. Moreover, ephemeral *moments* of rest that are described as 'liberating' or 'decisive' appear to be composed by mobilities. This fostered the insight that understanding human mobilities calls for conceiving of *movement and rest together*, as proposed by Bergson (1911) and developed by Deleuze (1968), that is to apprehend mobilities as *oscillations* between *movement and rest,* where movement entails rest and rest entails movement. Instead of tracing starting points, progressions, achievements and final destinations over a life course, I identified *directions* and *leaps:* first geographical, then occupational. Moreover, what movers related to as '*significant events'* towards the second half of the conversation was surprising. Against expectations, recalled events are disconnected from daily occupations and operational struggles to adapt to a new context. Instead, movers share *intense moments* of *joy* and *moments of turbulence* that stand out, that resonate up to the present moment. It seems crucial to note that listening to recollections of these moments across multiple conversations affected me in my role as researcher in the very instant of listening to what was shared and during analysis. Shared moments felt intimate, and I sensed the

intensities and the force they contained for movers. *Mimics* and *excited voices* accentuated the singularity of narrated instants and made them singular compared to other narrations.

Adopting *nomadic ethics* as philosophic underpinning throughout the process of data analysis eventually allowed apprehending moves as *actualisations* of the *desire to become* and movers' relationalities as part of *rhizomatic compositions* or a *composition of multiplicities*, as conveyed by Deleuze (1968) and Deleuze and Guattari (1980). The principles of rhizomatic compositions that seem particularly relevant to the present problem of *intersecting and superposing repeat mobilities* are principles of *connection* and *heterogeneity*, where "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 7). For the presented empirical study this means, amongst others, that even if different professional choices or geographical relocations of an individual seem contradictory or inconsistent when perceived on the "plane of organisation", they are nonetheless all interconnected through various other planes in an unperceivable manner. When, as researcher, jumping in-between planes of consistency, when *sensing movers' intuitive understandings* of mobility and at the same time recalling *intensities* that occurred in other mobility conversations and lived experiences, distinct realities become approachable, without ever being fully graspable:

> A method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyse language only by de-centring it onto other dimensions and other registers. An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 8)

Thus, when comprehending moves between places, professions or other 'social fields', I propose thinking of these as '*leaps'* ('sauts'), as inspired by Deleuze's "Difference and repetition" (1968) stating that 'leaps indicate the kind of shocking troubles that nomadic movements introduce into *sedentary structures of representations'* (1968, pp. 54-55 [own translation[12]; emphasis added]). Imagining geographic *and* organisational *and* professional moves as *'leaps'*, shall bring the reader closer to how intersecting mobilities are experienced, how they are embodied by the mover and how leap-moves *compose* an entirety that cannot be decomposed into career steps or career success. This relates to another of the rhizome's principles, which is that of *multiple entryways*. Like a cartography, a rhizomatic composition 'has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 25). Hence, compared to the tree, *the rhizome is alliance, not filiation*. The rhizome is *conjunction* and therefore it does not impose the word *to be*, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest:

> 'and…and…and...' This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic...). (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 25)

Therefore, questions related to *being situated* at places and in organisations or *being part* of a profession are non-sense when thought

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[12] « Le saut témoigne ici des troubles bouleversants que les mouvements nomades introduisent dans les structures sédentaires des représentations. » Deleuze, Différence et Répétition, 1968: 54

of in rhizomatic fashion. Interrogations such as 'for how long will you be in this country?' or 'what is your next career step?' do not necessarily resonate with the mover, the neo-nomad, with those whose existence is rhizomatically composed. The difference between *here* and *there* seems to be erased, is inexistent. *Nomadic ethics* and *nomadology*, as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) and discussed by Braidotti (2011) enrich our understanding of an *ontology of relationality*. Nomadology supports the movement of de-centring and detaching one's thought from structure and stratification, from social hierarchies and categorisations and from history, in order to apprehend multiplicities and immanence.

During the research process, the very movement from thinking in scripts and concepts to distancing myself from them, from listening to sensing, from conviction to doubt, compose a continuous oscillation that is forceful, creates intensities, and the desire to comprehend. Rhizomatic thinking, as Braidiotti suggests 'empowers subjectivity as a multiplicity' (2011, p. 283). The methodological difficulty of sharing multiplicities without representing, without falling back to sedentary representations of mobility and movement, however, remains the scholar's liability. Accordingly, section three of this paper exposes movers' attempts of overcoming monolithic representations linked to professional or societal positions and it exposes a myriad of excerpts in conjunction, which gives a glimpse into the *desire to become* and the multiplicities of becomings *on the move*.

3 | Insights - rhizomatic mobilities and lived intensities

Movers who participated in the described 'mobility conversations' convey a life mode where occupational becoming takes place in an assemblage of geographic, organisational and professional mobilities. Within an entanglement of places with friendships, kinship and love, the quest for purpose sees new possibilities emerge. In their current professional position in multinational corporations (MNCs), in local

organisations or as founders of their own businesses, numerous movers convey on several occasions self-confident narratives about growth, a global mindset and international career prospects, which suggest an ambitious thriving. However, contrasting voices of doubt and insecurities appear in just the same conversations. Statements about lived mobility as enriching, stimulating and formative experience alternate with reflections about conscious distancing or inadvertent drifting away from traditional, sedentary life modes, from local communities and places. Multiple voices are heard within the same conversation, when one memory sparks the next, in a rhizomatic way, along with contemplations about a life on the move. It appears that lived mobilities come along with *intensities*, that manifest most obviously in the plurality of locations and in the diversity of workplaces encountered.

> *'Yeah, I changed school 8 times […] After education I moved maybe 15-16 times in my career by now. I have not even counted them, I should do that someday.' (Somesh)*

When movers recite places, countries and cities, they spontaneously recollect human encounters. The closeness, the intensity of connection and friendship with other movers, despite geographical distance, are a recurrent theme that is not easy to be 'put into words'.

> *'And because it's quite a transient place, the bonds that you form are formed often very quickly, and they're often very intense. So, the group that we had, although we were physically together for only two and a half years, it was as if we've been together our entire lives.' (Steve)*

> *'I also see there's maybe a division… people who have lived abroad and people who have not. And this is a very subtle thing to talk about for myself. I find energy in interacting with people*

> *who understand this and maybe find myself a little more*
> *distanced from people who cannot relate to this.' (Ina)*

The multiplicity and heterogeneity of connections and entry points into new occupations indicate rhizomatic organizing. Professional opportunities and new positions are often narratively tied to *serendipity*. Movers recall how they "got lucky" or that a job "just came up".

> *'At the time I approached them if they wanted to be a case for*
> *my thesis, but they didn't have time. But then three months later,*
> *a manager called me and asked me if I wanted to work for them*
> *instead. […]That was just luck, yeah'. (Ina)*

> *'Then I was back to square zero, uhm. … my visa was going to*
> *expire. So, uhm and then in this Facebook group … I met two*
> *girls from Australia. And one of them was like, "they contacted*
> *me for a job in headhunting, but I gave them your name" and I*
> *said, "yeah OK, whatever, it's never gonna happen". …And it*
> *was very strange because I had never done any headhunting.*
> *My background is not even in HR or anything at all. I went into*
> *a complete full day of interviews, and they said, "you know*
> *what, we will give you the job. Here's the job." I couldn't believe*
> *it! I was very lucky, I just couldn't believe it was so easy.'*
> *(Grecia)*

The variety of occupations movers take on constitutes further *intensities,* when movers face new workplaces and completely new professions. Narratively, activities coherently integrate into a flow, as vignettes illustrate. A *flow* that embraces multiple activities, life modes and locations, even if the outside observer does not necessarily suspect any coherence. It seems that places, people and professional activities of the past are still part of the assemblage. Past occupations, no matter how different and 'far out' they might appear compared to current activities,

are smoothly interconnected with the contemporary context and with future possibilities. *Lines of flight* that intersect.

> 'The pupils in my class back in China were at the age of seven. So, of course, it's different managing students and managing people, like managing adults today in the organisation. But still, you can see some similarity between these two different managing systems, I would say. Yeah. Like with students, you have to be open and honest, … they learn from your behaviours, learn from everything, because as a teacher you are kind of a model." (Regina)

> "After having built our own house here in [African country] I realized that I enjoined architectural work on a smaller scale. Finally, I could mix my newly discovered joy for construction work with my experience international development and cooperation. Even though it seemed very different, even though I am not an expert, I worked with energy, with water infrastructures and so forth. But nonetheless with my current [entrepreneurial] project I have proven that I found a method to find solutions to problems in a domain that was rather foreign to me, which is urbanism. (Paolo)

Current positions and earlier professional choices have rarely been part of a long-term plan and sudden *leaps* to new places and into new professions at current locations are often tied to 'multiple other things', such as friendship and love, that cannot be planned. *Leaps* certainly relate to 'what needed to be done' to sustain a family for some, to flee a political regime, or to be with a partner who moved. But moves are as well connected to earlier affinities with a place or a language, with preferences for an activity or with a suddenly emerging calling.

'Yeah, I mean, here… it's not like I planned this. This is how it's going to go. And, of course, like yeah [this country] was not … sort in the plan, right? So that's something that … that came up because of certain other things. And then you sort of build your life accordingly, like based on the choices you make, … I guess.' (Divia)

'Let me call it like that, I think I just took the opportunity, did well and kept moving. I did want to go back to advertising, but you know, I kept getting something interesting. And I said, you know what? This is also very nice. It's like phenomenal. Keep moving ahead. So, I didn't look back, but I think timing was also an important factor as I graduated in 2001. I was looking for a job then and a different year, my whole career when I went would have been very different...' (Somesh)

Professional and geographical moves of many transient movers seem to be rarely planned in a strategic way. They resemble rather to an *addiction* of moving-on, of not staying, of leaving a seemingly comfortable local setting or well-paid professional position behind. The *intensities* that emerge when repeatedly being in distinct and unknown places and confronted with unfamiliar situations, prompt further mobilities. Something, a certain *force* incites the mover to move on, beyond rational reasoning, provides the *élan* to change again and to 'try something new', instead of committing to the status quo, instead of 'remaining permanent' within a setting, instead of submitting oneself to a tradition, a norm or to fixed sedentary lifestyle … instead of being locked-in.

"I think it's probably more a reflection of me personally than it is professionally of wanting to …, to move around. And, I think I have, uhm, …maybe quite a short attention span. I've always been quite curious. I've always been quite restless. So I've

always moved uhm.. […] it was never… there was never a sense of permanency to it. So.. that, that commitment was always a little bit undermined. […] It was always undermined by a sense of wanting to experience something else. You know, there would always be something else to experience and to push myself into. Ah, so I think, yeah, for me, the difference was that I never uhm... maybe allowed myself to remain, you know, permanent within that. (Steve)

The repeated acts of *'moving on'* and leaving in order to prevent getting stuck appear as voluntary acts of *disruption.* Movers disrupt *trajectories* and deliberately *disconnect* from situations, locations or societal settings, but their goal is not necessarily clearly defined. According to rhizomatics disruptions let presume an ongoing process of *becoming. Becoming* that exceed notions of 'having a career' or of 'being' a lawyer / a manager / a teacher. Not becoming somebody somewhere. Just becoming.

I was very determined, always wanting to live outside of [my home town] and I didn't want to become that: I didn't want to just get married and have a kid and then take care of the kid and play cards and Wednesdays. And, that was, I grew up with that lifestyle but maybe it was also the determination that I didn't want to have that myself." (Grecia)

Individuals act in dealignment with or even in opposition to common representations, shaking up sedentary convictions and societal norms. However, when conceiving of mobilities as rhizomatic, these *disruptions are fruitful*: 'a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 9). Thus, as summarized by Linstead and Pullen (2006), 'the rhizome enables us to concentrate on a mobile, disjunctive

relational self which evades oppression in avoiding 'being' in any static and essentialist sense' (2006, p. 1295).

> *'I already had the permanent position, so in that sense, in my culture is already good 'for a girl'. … Because yeah, it is it's a cultural thing, I would say…. they think, you know, as a girl, when you have a permanent position and you like your work that probably you want to have your family soon. It's just like having your life step by step: work and then family and then…. But to me, I don't have these things for my life, I don't think I have to do this work so that I can have family or I can't have my career because of my family. I don't have this fixed mindset. I just want to… do the things I want, have my own life by myself. I don't want others to just say or decide how my life should be.'* (Regina)

Movers' intentions are volatile and certainly neither monolithic, nor simply cognitive or social constructions. They are *organic*, living stories, in Boje's (2015) sense. They are marked by dispersion and *disruption*s, that open the possibilities for *emancipatory modes of becoming* (Braidotti, 1994, p. 160). Recollections of *decisive moments* during their lives reveal excitement and *joy*, but as well instants of *anger* and *despair*. Memories of significant *events*, counter and complement the global careerists' rational voices of just wanting to 'add a string to the bow' with personal accounts of sensitivity, shock and wonder. Long forgotten frustrations resurface, not forgotten, rather too embedded into the compositions of lives and bodies and moves and changes … and too enclosed within the mobile self. The sharing of *moments of turbulence* and *moments of grace* is touching and intimate. It brings the *intensities* of being and becoming on the move to the surface.

'Back in France after India I applied and only got endless rejections, found myself in front of closed doors, again and again. Nobody wanted to hire me, and I clearly remember how I thought 'this is impossible, there is a big problem here of not recognizing capacities that one develops when being abroad'. I spoke English, French, Chinese, I had a degree, but that did not help much. I was very upset. And my business idea actually developed from this anger. I thought I am going to prove that me, whom they do not want, well, that I am capable of many things and they will regret one day that they did not hire me.'
(Aurore)

'But coming to the US and you can say it's the most developed and the most powerful country, I've, I've felt the most turbulent, and that also meant that I have felt …. every day it occurs to me that maybe there's another purpose that in just making more dollars in the bank! I don't know. How much shall I, what more do I need? I don't know how else to say it.'
(Somesh)

Coherent narratives of how occupations align and intertwine does not mean that movers have not encountered any struggles or doubts whilst on the move, to the contrary. Difficult situations and 'really hard times' stand out, are part of the assemblage. Periods of uncertainty, of job search and of professional transitions are experienced multiple times in different places. It seems, however, that deeper, maybe unadmitted *desires* have been *actualising all along*. One can sense a *rhythm* composed by movement and rest, moments of anger and joy, a rhythm that is picked-up in some of the conversations and the prosody of many different voices. A rhythm that is there to tie critical moments together, in Deleuze's words (Deleuze, 1968). Compositions of movement and rest are *intense*

in terms of rhythm and they actualise in astounding tonalities and singular harmonies.

> *'And that was kind of the decisive moment. I was like "I want the job, but I don't want to stay! I want to leave! What am I gonna do ?!?" [gestures, mimics: panicking]. I really wanted to go to Asia, I wanted to go to Japan. […] My parents did not understand "what do you want to do in Japan…?" That was too much… - I was 27 by then, but that is the mentality, I guess: your kids stay kids until they get married! It was like telling them that I wanted to move to Mars. They said I should take the [local] job offer at the consulate, said it was a good opportunity to move from there into another place and so on: 'try it, try it, try it …!!!' My first thought was 'if I do this, I know I will be stuck here forever. Like I won't get out anymore!' (Grecia)*

Intensities in nomadic ethics are connected multiplicities of *affects,* as per Deleuze and Guattari (1980). They are not easily shareable, 'you have to experience it to understand it', but they suddenly become palpable to the researcher when joining the prosody of memorable *moments of turbulence* and *moments of grace.*

> *'There I was sitting at a cafe working on stuff. And then I left. And then I put my bag on the back of my bike, and then I… Next thing I know, my bag is gone. The back of my bike. … and then I was already feeling pretty low. So, then the bag being gone, I was like, oh my God, what could be next? […] Actually, that ended up being like my transformative moment because I thought to myself, okay, there's nothing I can do. And I just rode my bike and I felt like this feeling of like freedom, like I got a taste of what freedom was. Absolutely nothing I could do. So it was like this desperation turned*

into … full acceptance and like, what else can I do? […] It was like this like rock bottom thing, I was like, okay, rock bottom. Like, I don't have anything. I can't do anything anymore. So, I have to let go of all this… fear […] So everything just had to go because there was no space. Just a little bit of like a divine moment.' (Lia)

Movers recall 'divine moments', instants where 'everything suddenly felt right', where one feels 'very centred' or 'liberated'. Moments of 'freedom' resonate up into the present: 'this stayed with me'. Recollections of moments of wonder lighten their faces and the joy of recalling a 'revelation' or 'calling' is intense.

'I remember when I was going to work one day in the city, early morning taking the subway and going to work. That I really liked …. And what is interesting because, you know, I have been on the way to work [back home] too, many times. But for some reason, you know, I just I really enjoyed the independence of the fact that, I was on my own, I'm just doing my own thing. And, you know, the office was placed in one of like, the top districts of Tokyo. I was … feeling sort of free, you know, very centered in terms of what I was doing. So that's when I thought "OK, I can do this" in terms of what I have to do. […] Yeah, basically, "if I find like a project, if I find my passion project, basically, that I can follow and I can make it work." This sort of gave me the confidence to think that …that… that's it's fine. I can, I can take care of it. So that's not going to be a problem.' (Divia)

Mimics and gestures of excitement, a changed tonality, moments of silence or stumbling often introduce the sharing of such a moment. Moments of grace, of freedom and confidence are recalled as "sparking" a sudden awareness, strength or spiritual connection. The specific *atmosphere* of the very moment seems to be still very close to the mover.

The intensity that the moment once sparked is *embodied*, even years and decades later.

> *'I remember that when I got back from China it sparked something in me… The fact that I had learnt Chinese and that I adored this language made me realize that I was in fact capable of learning thoroughly if I really liked something. I said to myself, wow, this is really cool, I will continue, I love it. And this is how I decided to enrol at university. This was truly a trigger moment, a positive twinkling for my future. Beforehand I always thought that I was not capable… not made to study. In my head, well, one always had told me actually that… well, anyways, this was how I was raised…'(Aurore)*

Doubts and wonders, together with insecurities and despair *compose an assemblage in which intensities actualise.* Continuous moves compose with an energy that actualises in a 'calling', a 'passion project', providing the *élan vital* for the mobile self.

> *'And eh, when I first graduated, I had options in Istanbul, business opportunities, but I didn't dare, to go there. […] I didn't have the connections. So then after working in Germany, with the solitude (laughing) I said, OK, I will go back to Turkey and we had three locations in Turkey, but I told my ex-boss, I want to be relocated to Istanbul. I want to live in Istanbul, now I dare. […] And, I felt very, uh, uhm … how to say, liberated. I felt like everything was possible, you know, if I ever wanted, I could go back [abroad] one day. […]-So I had in mind that, OK, if one day I would like to go, I would have options and I felt free!" (Sonita)*

> *'Yeah, I think it's caught traction also with the people getting interested in the whole vision of [my start-up business]. And I*

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cannot say it was very specific, but I just increasingly got the feeling that I cannot do anything else. I have to pursue this, see this through, because it can help so many people.' (Ina)

Rhizomatic recollections reveal not only singular moments of mobility and rest, but they are shared through energetic, vibrant voices and intense facial expressions. They show a fissure in which the virtual actualises, beyond the boundaries of place and time, actualisations *in* the mobile self and *of* the mobile self on a plane of immanence.

"But definitely I became stronger this year…. In America, I truly feel privileged. What I had said. I truly feel privileged, even during my growing up in India or Africa I didn't feel privileged, in the true sense of it, I was very equal, that society was equal for me. - I'm not preaching, but I truly feel it deep, because I believe if somebody was to say, you know, you can go and run a hospital in rural Ohio, and we would pay you half your salary, I would do it tomorrow morning!" (Somesh)

Movers share their callings, *intensities* during conversations that make us grasp futile instants that last and that actualise in choices, no matter how insignificant they might appear at first. In that mobility exceeds the sedentary representation of a mere succession of moves from one place to the next – or from one profession to the next. The generated insights embrace a fluctuating perspective where individuation, i.e. one's desire beyond normative constraints, as per Jung, exceeds individualist perspectives of career success. They demonstrate the premise that *mobility is an embodied practice*, a practice that is composed of and composes with *relationalities* and *intensities*.

The *event*, as understood by Deleuze (1968), exceeds the lived moment and involves multiple manifestations of life as a unity. Thereby, an event is not just the end of one moment that marks the beginning of the next, but in rhizomatic fashion *it resonates beyond the lived moment* of a person's reality. As such, *moments of strong intensity* – described for example as 'divine moments' or 'turbulence' – are embedded in the very experience of multiple, intersecting mobilities and they *expand* the perceived *freedom* to move or to stay, to engage in local work settings or to disengage, to keep on seeking for a welcoming space. Geographical moves are enthused in various manners, often superposing with personal and relational aspects, as well as political and economic macro conditions. Given the *multiplicities* in play, the analysis of empirical accounts deliberately *de-centres* from social identity categories such as nationality, ethnicity, gender or social class of origin, as well as from classifications commonly used at destination, such as 'migrant', 'expatriate', or 'highly qualified foreign worker'. *Representations and representational narratives* "establish how to interpret the world", as Fouweather and Bosma (2021, p. 1805) emphasise in line with Deleuze. They are performative. Thereby, exceeding individual narratives and transcripts in the analysis via the sensitizing concept of *rhizomatic becoming* opens a plane of thinking that is smooth rather than striated. It gives room to think *beyond formal organisation* and beyond individuals as entities.

Indeed, analytical and administratively *ascribed categories* change according to employment status and local legislations, and the interpretation of social identifiers requires an in-depth analysis of socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, case by case. In contrast to representational, constructivist hermeneutics, which would for example consider how the country 'of origin', history, class contexts of birth and upbringing or initial education *construct* professional aspirations, the presented analysis takes into account the *vital forces* that constitute and

are constituted by geographical and occupational mobilities. Institutional lenses of analysis would focus on 'actorhood' and interactions within formal organisational settings (Gehman et al., 2022), whereas the chosen approach is deliberately detached from formal structures, in an attempt to grasp the ungraspable. As Linstead and Thanem (2007) point out, there is a dual sense of organisation: a formal one, that of institutions and organisations to which actors are subjected and the other: 'the engagement of life, driven by desire, with other life and its environment' (2007, p. 1497). The findings in section three exemplify how multiple intersecting human mobilities organize in the latter way. They give a glimpse on how movers resist *and* comply at the same time (Fouweather & Bosma, 2021). Rather than conceiving of mobility as linear, as sequenced and subjected to a striated, stratified space of national territories and borders, organisational entities or professional guilds, I propose that human intersecting mobilities can be approached as *lived experience* in their entirety: unbound and smooth, absolute but infinitely fragmented and multiple. Individual movers are *interconnected* as they share the dimension of movement with those who experience similar, yet different, *multiplicities*. Overall, the findings suggest that permanent alternations of movement *and* rest are *neither an escape, nor 'errance'*, but a commitment to societal participation without being permanent within a sole social field.

Undeniably, the very *phenomenon of mobility* can be approached as *experiential force* that operates a *dynamic of desire,* inspired by Bergson's *ethics of joy (*Bergson, 1911). Desire that actualises in individual lives as *intensity*. Desire that is not understood as lack, but as force and dispersion (Deleuze, 1968; Bergson, 1911). Accordingly, temporality is imagined as flow, a movement of time, which characterizes the force of life (*élan vital*): *intensive* and *creative*. In 'Difference and Repetition' Deleuze suggests based on Bergson's philosophy that there is *a creative dimension in change*, in that the *élan vital* and *difference* are affirmed through *change*.

Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 25)

Thus, a mix of *affects*, the conjunction of multiple affects, produce change and engender transformation in and through an affected body: *affects are intensities*. Occurring intensities or affects, in a Deleuzian sense, indicate *processes of becoming* through compositions of superposing *multiple mobilities*: 'affects are becomings' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 256). Oscillations between doubt *and* serendipity *and* joy *and* despair, and… and… and… are *conjunctions* that emulate the *mutual embeddedness of movement and rest*. *Affects*, that is *intensities*, are *becomings*, that are composed by and compose with moving, with move-leaps and resting. Intensities, even if embraced by movers, remain *exterior,* nonetheless. They actualise in *moments of grace or moments of turbulence*. They are nods on *lines of flights*. Neo-nomadic live modes, occupational shifts and moves of despair or joy can be understood beyond individual substances as *multiplicities* where time *and* place *and* activities *and* objects *and* living beings intertwine, are interrelated and stand in *conjunction*. Each single element might 'disappear' from an individual life and resurface across a-synchronous and a-historical planes of immanence. This gives space for a *Nomadology* to emerge:

History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 23)

Conceiving of mobilities as rhizomatic compositions without fixed boundaries and without definite destinations, allows for *conversations* between researchers and participants to be *embodied experimentations* in contact with the real. The *mover* is neither positioned as unique entry point to mobility experiences nor as psychological entity or actor, but as 'just another nod' in a rhizomatic composition. This neither induces that a mover is subjected to the constraints of mobility in general or to neo-liberal powers or modes of organizing labour mobility, nor that movers' choices are always deliberate ones. Instead, *Nomadology* reconciles dichotomies and opens up a plane of thinking and sensing beyond and in addition to individualist and institutional conceptualisations of human mobilities and so-called 'self-directed' global careers. Attempting to explain movers' mobility decisions, be it for geographical or occupational moves, with a rationale of 'identity work' (Black et al., 2018; Sveningsson &Alvesson, 2003) or 'identity play' (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), with a striving for objective or subjective 'career success' or with the ambition to accumulate 'career capital' (Shaffer et al. 2012; Mello et al. 2023) is helpful but limits our thinking within the boundaries of sedentary logics. Instead, when conceiving of *human mobilities* as *rhizomatic ways of organizing*, as *embedded* into choices and *embodied* by movers the notion of 'career' dissolves on a plane of consistency.

As various cases of repeat movers show, current positions in MNCs are not contradictory to non-linear professional pathways or rhizomatic becoming. However, even if one can concede that arborescent ways of being and rhizomatic ways of becoming co-exist, that they may superpose at times and constitute 'hybrid' assemblages, it is debatable if it is consistent to speak of 'rhizomatic actorhood' as Gehman and colleagues (2022) recently suggested, or if the reduction of human beings to 'actorhood' in institutional settings does not impose a formal, arborescent sense of organisation onto our thinking, thereby limiting the possibility to grasp *Nomadology*. I suggest that an ontological distinction

between person and actor, as proposed by Patriotta (2020) in general terms, is even more important when engaging with Deleuzian thought and with Deleuze's and Guattari's 'Mille Plateaux' (1980) more specifically. I suggest that approaching *human mobilities* in organisation studies through *Nomadology* contributes to the apprehension of rhizomatic thinking in management and organisation studies more broadly.

Epistemologically, the cohabitation of and the oscillation between *sedentary metaphysics* and *nomadic ethics* creates movement in the researcher's thinking process, an oscillation across different registers of knowledge, between thinking and sensing, observing and experiencing. De-centring in an attempt to distinguish the contours of a Nomadology in movers' experiences and choices, in their enthusiastic multiple voices and reflexively grateful faces calls for a continuous struggle. A struggle that consists in shifting grounds all whilst realizing that one is repeatedly captured by the habitual forces of objectivity of the 'royal sciences' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980) and the intensities of one's own lived experiences, and pre-understandings (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2022). Nomadic ethics and rhizomatic compositions as sensitizing concepts make us aware of worldviews beyond sedentary reasoning and they constitute a smooth plane for the *mobile self* to exist.

Nonetheless, even when conceiving of the lived experience of extreme mobilities across social fields as *distinct* from the experience of sedentariness, I defend that there is no ontological determination tied to it. There are distinct ways of living and *becoming*, but I argue that they are *not opposed* and *not exclusive*. Instead, by referring to *nomadic ethics* and post-structuralist underpinnings, one can conceive of *movement and rest* together as initially proposed by Bergson (1911), instead of following the call of developing a distinct 'mobile ontology'. Moves – be it geographical, organisational or professional - are not exclusively

accessible to the repeat mover and resting is not reserved to the settler: both can access to both. Even the most rooted life can allow for expanding the plane of immanence and for experiencing *intensities* when lines of flight intersect, whilst a geographically hypermobile person might never dare to 'leap' outside the striated field of an institution. Thus, I suggest that there are no differences *per se* between movers and non-movers, between the volatile professional and the sedentary one. I rather propose that *human mobility* – be it physical, occupational or the mobility of thought – when understood as an oscillation between *movement and rest and intensities* constitutes a common plane of *transforming* and *becoming*. *Nomadology* as per Deleuze and Guattari, is an ontology of intensity, which is not contradictory to, but complementary to History. Accounting for nomadic ethics in management and organisation studies and for the materiality of what mobility entails opens a space for theorising *becomings* as continuous oscillations between movement and rest.

Conclusion

With this study and with the here elaborated non-representational research approach I propose that *rhizomatic compositions* guide us towards an ontology of intensity in management organisation studies. Thinking in and of *rhizomatic compositions* when studying empirical material prevents us from falling back into common themes, such as the romanticised grand narrative of global mobility as a blessing or the accusation of mobility as identity threat. It allows for an understanding of human mobility that is not tied to individual entities or identities, such as assumed in sedentarist metaphysics. It appears that during moves across various real and imaginary places, during stays and settlements, professional and other life spheres are closely intertwined. Narrative compositions and shared moments see *intensities* emerge, which resonate with movers up into the present moment. The alternation

of movement and rest, the oscillations between affects appear from the outside like a perpetual quest for purpose across space – *perpetuum mobile*? A space that happens to be striated by national borders and time-limited visa for many, by societal or self-ascribed boundaries for most. When boundary crossing and boundaryless movements are recollected as *intense ways of being,* the imagined space of possibilities *expands*. Intersecting repeat mobilities provide stability through *change* and convey a sense of purpose when movers are *creatively* composing with uncertainties. The in-betweenness, the tension that manifests in separations of bodies across physical distances becomes a resource, rather than merely being a signifier of being apart. The *intensity* of superposing affects assembles future events, actualises past moves and resonates across a thousand plateaus. *L'élan vital* makes mobilities meaningful.

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4 / Contributions & concluding remarks

After having situated and problematised the notions of '*identity*' and '*the self*' alongside the phenomenon of *mobility* via a threefold literature review in the first section, section two elucidated underlying research assumptions, introduced the overarching post-structuralist approach and positioned the mobility-research process as *contemplative*, *intersubjective* and *reflexive* practice. The preceding section three contains the *four academic paper contributions*, which compose the core of this thesis. The findings and contributions of each paper are discussed in detail in the context of each paper. Therefore, this fourth section merely summarizes the research questions and related contributions, paper by paper and provides an overview (table 2), before outlining the overarching contributions of this PhD thesis.

Paper overviews

Contributions and insights <u>paper one</u>

'Exploring the mobile self: Shifting from monolithic categorisation to dynamic identifications'

Research Question:

> Do the established categories of analysis that are prevalent in global mobility studies retain their validity and explanatory capacity despite the multiplicities involved in contemporary human mobilities? What are specificities to be considered when exploring identities and ways of belonging of 'movers'?

Contribution:

Paper one emphasises the importance of distinguishing between ascribed identity categories and analytical categorisation in management and organisation studies in general and in global mobility studies more specifically. It suggests modes of inquiry shall allow to apprehend 'the mobile self' in a closer rapport to the phenomenon of mobility and to lived mobility experience, instead of exclusively referring to functionalist, instrumentalist rationale. Due to the limitations of etic categories, I argue for the necessity of an *epistemological shift from etic to emic* research approaches and for a paradigmatic shift from *explaining mobility patterns* to *understanding the mobile self*, in order to advance identity research in global mobility studies. Overall, this paper fosters awareness about the normative effects of categorisations in management and organisation studies and its different subfields that address workforce mobilities and migration.

Conceptual insights & implications:

As problematised in the literature review and in paper one, academic studies on 'expatriate adjustment', for example, construct and ascribe

analytical categories, as if they represented a homogeneous social group. The generalizing and a-sociological nature of categories such as 'labour migrant', 'expatriate' or 'local' contributes to the objectivation of humans who are designated by these labels. This is consistent with the neo-liberal logics that refer to 'human resources' or 'labour force'. In addition, it corresponds to etic research approaches, which deliberately create a distance, an instrumental rationality, between the researcher and the research interlocutor. Such organisation of seemingly unorganized complexity through categorisation can be understood, according to Luhman (1998), as a typical characteristic of modern rationality: the *operation by distinction*. It is precisely the mechanism of distinction that operates when we claim one culture to be different from another, or 'expatriates' being different from 'migrants'.

Similarly, opposing the notions of 'home' and 'host' is most ambiguous. The meaning that is attributed to abstract concepts such as home go far beyond organisational or IHRM functionalist jargon of 'home country' or 'host country'. They are not only perceived differently in different contexts, but also depend on situatedness. In Stoetzler's and Yuval-Davis' (2011) words, 'whether it is "border", "home", "oppression" or "liberation", the particular meanings that we hold of these concepts are embedded in our situated imaginations.' (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2011: 327). The situated imagination of the employer, for example, is certainly different from that of the researcher or the mover. This is to re-emphasise that categorisations used to designate professional movers in management studies are often functionalist and instrumental, and the reference to 'host country' versus 'home country' identities, for example, is caught in nation-state logics that determine *motility*, i.e., the possibility to move. Functionalist paradigms can be legitimate in the context of applied sciences. However, when not accounting for *relationalities* and *intersubjectivities*, they flatten differences, erase non-conformist life course specificities and neglect the dense insights that could be drawn from lived experience and

categories of practice. This approach allows for *explanations* and *measurability*, along with positivist paradigmatic assumptions, but it inhibits a deeper understanding of identity complexities and processes of belonging and becoming. This might explain why many of the cited studies are still based on culturalist assumptions and reified monolithic identity categories (cf. literature review, section two).

Moreover, together with other management scholars mentioned in the literature review (e.g., Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Crowley-Henry et al. 2018; Guttormsen, 2018), I support that migrant categorisations in management and organisation studies tend to be inconsistent and biased. Some of the deployed categories pre-suppose a normative understanding of, for example, 'expatriates' vs. 'skilled migrants', without clarifying underlying assumptions and without questioning stigmatising distortions that this may entail. I argue that academic acts of labelling and categorising are not only historically constructed, but strongly influenced by categories that are deployed by policymakers and in employing organisations, that is, in a macro and meso context of practice. They are performative in that they discursively attribute 'symbolic capital' and social status to those types of 'movers'/ 'transmigrants' who are 'wanted' on the local labour market whilst rejecting to attribute this privilege to others (likewise supported by findings in *paper two*). Under these circumstances, I suggest that the conceptual integrity and analytical benefits of ascribed categories are lowered with increasing identity multiplicity and with recurrent and superposing mobilities.

Given the discussed limitations of culturalist and essentializing approaches towards 'identity' and 'the self', paper one is an attempt to resist the reification of identities and to account for processual and post-structuralist conceptualisations instead. I propose that a multi-layered, dynamic comprehension of contemporary mobile life modes and of 'the mobile self' in management and organisation studies contributes not only in terms of 'methodologies of mobility' and epistemology, but also to an ontological understanding that accounts for onward mobilities.

Not accepting the dominant system of representation entails for scholars in the mobilities and migration nexus to detach investigations from existing instrumental classifications and taxonomies, from normative phenomena in institutions, organisations and its functions. This is what Weber names 'axiological rationality' when he explains that one cannot account for normative phenomena by exclusively drawing upon instrumental rationality (Boudon, 1999). This means, instead of searching for patterns and classifying sample populations around terms such as 'expatriate', 'repatriate' or 'trailing spouse', I defend that it is crucial to explore mobile passages inductively and beyond the boundaries of organisational assignments and relocation. Overall, paper one contributes to raising awareness by addressing the normative effects of categorisation in management and organisation studies and its different subfields that address workforce mobilities and migration.

Contributions and insights paper two

'Global talent or labour migrant? - exploring the discursive organisation of difference in the competition state'

Research Question:
> How do the large variety of ascribed migrant categorisations in public discourse and the fragmentation of labels contribute to the organisation of social difference in 'destination societies'?

Contribution:
Paper two exemplifies empirically how the high demand for and the presence of 'foreign workers' in the 'competition state' nurtures the creation and ascription of externally ascribed categories in various economic and political discursive spheres. The recent emergence and omnipresence of the notion 'global talent' in public and political spheres exemplifies the intertwinement of state affairs with the economic affairs of public discourse with management studies discourse regarding

workforce mobility. Conceptualised as *'discursive noise'*, fragmented acts of labelling contribute to the *discursive organisation of difference* amongst migrants in a local setting. The repetition of labels across discursive spheres attributes *symbolic capital* and *privilege* selectively and in a discriminatory manner.

Conceptual insights & implications:

Supranational economic integration, such as practised in the European Union, promotes free movement and *labour mobility* for its citizens, whilst *nation-states regulate the attraction and rejection of foreign workers* through ever more granular and discriminatory migration regimes. Contributionist state ideologies normalize the favouritism of individuals who *produce high economic output* to the benefit of the nation-state, or, like in the Danish example in this paper, for the 'maintenance of the welfare state'. This is, amongst others, reflected in national 'positive lists' that determine advantageous immigration schemes and working-visa criteria for those whose qualifications are suited to fill-in 'skill shortages' in specified professions and sectors. A major insight is that the *intertwinement of migration policies with economic needs*, i.e., labour market demand, becomes tangible through the analysis of narrative fragments. As exemplified, not only public speech acts in commercials or political speech are performative, but so are terminologies that are coined in academia, such as 'macro talent management'. Subsequent research and practitioner activities that pursue the 'mission' to attract 'global talent' to the 'competition state' contribute to the production of 'economy effects' within the state apparatus. Indeed, some speech acts that appear 'naturally', for example, in housing adverts that address 'expats only', are tactical and possibly unintentional; this does not abrase their performativity though. To the contrary, by affirming the attribution of up-scale housing to some residents, whilst explicitly excluding others, discursively deployed categorisations contribute to the segregation of

urban spaces, to the division of all residents in that society and the creation of inequalities.

Most importantly, public speech acts and acts of *discursively categorising migrants* into more or less *prestigious*, more or less *productive*, more or less *wanted* sub-groups, are intentional acts of creating and establishing difference. Hence, this paper contributes to raising awareness regarding the discursive organisation of difference in 'destination countries', and it suggests that *'Discursive Noise'* envelopes citizens, 'locals' as well as 'foreigners', who might choose to adopt, adapt or reject these categorisations. As shall be illustrated with Figure 2, 'discursive noise' is multi-layered and diffuse. Despite the impossibility of establishing cause-effect relationships between acts of labelling and the organisation of difference in the competition state, our scholarly responsibility cannot be denied (see also paper one). Thus, I propose that future advancement depends on the capacity to understand, to question and, if necessary, to reject migrant categorisations that distort and recreate sociological realities across macro and meso levels of society that support the 'political economy of knowledge production'. This means that the intertwined economic and political interests of the neoliberal nation state to attract 'global talent', for example, shall spark scholarly reflexivity and deconstruction of strategically employed categories instead of reproduction.

please see following page for

Figure 2 – Conceptualisation of 'discursive noise' and multi-level spill-overs of categorisations in the mobilities and migration nexus. 'Discursive noise' constitutes and is constituted by the grand narrative of 'sedentariness as normal life mode' and 'mobility as interest driven life mode' (own illustration)

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« GLOBAL MOBILITY »

intended duration of stay

		indefinite		long-term		short to medium term	
		get away	move-on	move	move	rotate	circulate
		uprooting	unsettlement	resettlement / relocation		assignment / mission	assignment / mission

performativity — Master narratives / Public discourse / Private narratives

Phenomena — Analytical categories — **Categories of practice**

GRAND NARRATIVE?

perspective:
- nomadism
- sedentariness
- administrative — asylum seeker / **MIGRANT** / immigrant / **EXPATRIATE** / assigned / secondment
- legal — refugee/ foreign national + resident / qualified migrant / local hire / local+ / self-initt. expat / permanent transfer / self-initt. expat. / foreign national / non-national citizen + resident
- transactional (HRM) — qualified refugee
- human capital — skilled refugee / (highly) skilled migrant / (highly) qualified labour / workforce / (highly) qualified international labour / global workforce / mobile employees / GLOBAL TALENT pool / temporary labour migrant
- political & industrial — refugee foreigner / foreign citizen (economic) migrant / foreign citizen (economic migrant) labour migrant / foreign citizen foreign worker labour migrant / foreign worker international labour
- commercial / branding — **INTERNATIONAL / EXPATRIATE / GLOBAL TALENT**
- community — refugee exiled foreigner / transnational / international / immigrant/ exiled / expat / foreigner ...
- individual — exiled refugee foreigner / international /foreigner / exiled / immigrant/ expat / global citizen / cosmopolitan / nomad / mover /... +++

Figure 1, which is based on a qualitative, non-exhaustive review of different discursive spheres, allows to apprehend processes of movers' *self-labelling* and narrative boundary setting regarding other movers. It broadens the understanding of ascribed and self-assigned migrant identifications by exceeding the local/migrant dichotomy, which is said to be predominant in migration and global mobility studies (Collins et al., 2020; Oltram, Bonache and Brewster, 2013). Instead, it follows these authors' call to explore how difference within the category of migrants is organised. It suggests, in line with Lyotard (1984), that individual movers or 'transmigrants' are necessarily situated at the 'nodal points' of communication circuits and thereby exposed to narrative fragments. Small *narrative fragments* occur everywhere, locally (Lyotard, 1984), i.e., in various social fields and societies. In contrast to Habermas ideal of a 'noise-free' communication in contemporary societies, the presented post-structuralist perspective suggests that discursive utterances and speech acts are too complex, too entangled and too fragmented to be directly traced back to an emitter or source; they are 'noisy'.

The local appearance of 'small narrative units' (Lyotard, 1984), of shattered 'speech acts' cannot be contained within a specific life sphere, within a social milieu or organisation. No matter the interlocutor's intention, narrative fragments, such as ascribed identity categories are performative, either in the intended way or in unexpected ways. One could say that seemingly random and disintegrated utterances 'live their own live', composing an interwoven fabric, a meshwork of ascribed categories and of diverse underlying meanings and interpretations. Movers' *translocational belongingness* and their *ongoing circulation* across different places, virtual spaces, societies and social fields *expose them* to a grand variety of distinct or contradictory or inconsistent labels and small narrative fragments that designate them. Discursive acts of labelling that might make sense within a given national, political setting, and that seem coherent and are audible for the interlocutor of for long-term residents, are inconsistent and confusing for

'newcomers', for those who just moved in from the 'outside' or for those who are just passing.

Over time, these fragments become part of the discursive landscape, without consciously being perceived or questioned by the designated mover, they are like 'white noise'. This is what I suggest calling *'white noise'*: a constant background noise composed of small narrative fragments, which are assembled, i.e., not distinguishable anymore in their singularity or meaning, not audible anymore. Deliberately or unconsciously, individual movers and groups might adopt or repurpose some of the discursively circulated labels to self-identify or to identify others. In this case, they would thereby nurture the noise and reproduce the system that designates them. I propose that future research could further contribute with *a systematic plotting of discursive fragments*. A more exhaustive and systematic, qualitative or quantitative, investigation would allow to further demonstrate the *multiplicity*, *density and inconsistency of ascribed categorisations*, similar to figure 1. It would allow the exploration of spill-overs between spheres and overlaps or disconnects with individual and collective narratives, i.e. 'categories of practice'. Overall, the insight that categorisations and ascribed migrant identities are *discursively circulated across multiple scales* and *multiple spheres of society*, including academic disciplines, economic and political discourse, is a major contribution of this thesis.

Contributions and insights paper three

'Isn't it ironic...!?!' Mobility researchers go sedentary: a group auto-ethnography on collective coping and care in pandemic times'

Research Question:

How do events of crisis, that is, the radical rupture of geographic mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic, affect highly

qualified trans-locational professionals in their ways of being and belonging?

Contribution:

This collective auto-ethnography is a non-conventional piece of research, conveyed through evocative writing. It therewith contributes to the epistemological turn of 'writing differently' in management and organisation studies. It demonstrates how the act of writing and of making lived experiences public transforms the striated, gridded space of organisational, academic hierarchies and disciplines into a horizontal, smooth space: academic writing as a '*line of flight'*. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel constraints allow to unveil otherwise implicit ways of movers' ways of belonging. It is suggested that the pandemic shock leads the s*hared imaginary of 'mobility'* to collapse. At the same time, it illustrates how 'virtual spaces' help to restore a collective narrative and purpose in times of non-mobility. The multiplicity of spaces that is invested by the group allows for intimate conversations, affective belonging and mutual care. Thus, these insights complement other studies on ethnographic pandemic experiences.

Conceptual insights & implications:

When conceptualising ways of being and belonging around the very *phenomenon of mobility*, one needs to consider the very *materiality* of travelled spaces, of spaces of settlement and left-behind spaces. The question of how movement across space affects the 'mobile self' and the body that moves in space can be answered in manifold ways. It depends on the mode of transportation, the speed, the space, the light, of course. But it also depends on the circumstances and the overall *mood*: Sometimes, you pack your things, take an aeroplane and just leave. Sometimes, you can feel the raindrops running down your face, sense the wind browsing through your hair and hear the birds singing whilst cycling to the office. At other times, you just get wet, feel cold and get

upset about the sound of a horn. – And then, there were these times where you were not cycling to the office, where you could not just jump onto an airplane and leave; instead, you travelled with your imagination and lingered around in virtual spaces; you saw the plants grow and felt the storm… This very special atmosphere was the underlying theme of the auto-ethnographic research process.

Weekly 'pandemic chats' during these times were not limited to what was discussed, felt or resolved within the boundaries of the *virtual space*, but everyone brought impressions, observations, reflections, frustrations and everyday joys from their homes into the common virtual space. The authors attribute different non-material meanings to the term '*space*', when relating to their collective experience in pandemic times: 'social space', 'safe space', or 'workspace'. This stands in contrast to their habitual, though disrupted, physical spatial crossing, their movements across material space. Some of the described 'spaces' are often prevalent in an organisational setting, where individuals (in this case, researchers of a joint project) are not physically sharing spatial materialities but where the common space consists of common research interests, of common imagined 'fields', *res cogitans*. Thus, it goes against the 'often-expressed but under-acknowledged assumption that organisation refers to a thing in an external environment' (Beyes and Holt: 2020: 3). The researcher-mover-research participants organize their encounters, their work and collective care in intersecting spaces.

The collective auto-ethnographic study further exemplifies, how the authors consciously *transgress* the 'space' of academic 'doxa' with regards to the chosen tone of voice and writing style, all whilst respecting methodological and epistemological rigor throughout the research process. The sharing and analysis of pandemic experiences in an academic paper made the *collective space permeable* and *vulnerable* to the outside world, thereby reproducing or imitating in a sense the openness and exposure that mobility entails. As such, this auto-ethnographic study contributes by conveying the *ephemeral and*

boundaryless nature of spaces of encounter and exchange for movers who multiply encounters and interconnections with other movers over a lifetime. The researchers' / participants' pre-understanding of 'mobility and migrations' from a professional, cognitive stance, in combination with the fact that they are living and working across several places, is a constellation that allows for intense *intersubjectivities* and *hyper-reflexivity* to emerge. The sudden disruption of mobility affects them threefold, due to their translocational ways of belonging, their similar, habitual 'mobile life modes' and, above all because of the purpose of their work ('global mobility') being heavily abrased. This fosters ephemeral group belongingness and collective ways of identifying. Thus, this collaborative auto-ethnography sheds light on mobile ways of belonging in general and in times of crisis.

It is shown how the virtual space gradually transforms through the mediation of trust and affective intensities into a *shelter*, an *intimate space*, a *space of social ties* and *resistance*. This transformation occurs through the participation, intersubjectivities and interaction of the collective and is enabled through attentive listening that grounds the researchers/movers in their world (Westerkamp, 2015). Even though these spaces can neither be betamed, nor fully be represented, the presented academic paper is *an expression of the researchers' belongingness* to these spaces and to the collective. Conceptually, I propose, according to *nomadic ethics* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), which are in detail addressed in paper four, that the virtual space of *pandemic socialising* and auto-ethnographic research could either be depicted as an inside, that is, as the contour of lived experience, or as an outside, that is, as line of flight and zone of experience. The 'thrown-togetherness' into this space (Massey, 2005) may have been sparked by the collective desire for *deterritorialization*… Non-mobility and the sudden collapse of the habit of 'being on the move' saw emerge this contribution. Thus, the accidental advent of the pandemic forced mobility researchers to *think differently* about mobility and about its meaning in their respective lives.

On the basis of Castioradis' (1987) 'creative imagination', Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis emphasise the importance of *socially constitutive imaginary* for the attribution of meaning to experiences, in addition to purely intellectual interpretation: 'Imaginings build on and are informed by cognitive processes as much as the latter depend on and are shaped by the imagination' (2011: 326). In this vein, the insights of this study allow to further explore how collective social imaginaries are constituted in mover-communities, for example, in times of crisis or when arriving and settling-in in new places.

Contributions and insights paper four

'Making moves meaningful: towards an ontology of intensity across "a thousand plateaus"'

Research Question:

> How does the lived experience of 'extreme mobilities', that is, where occupational, organisational and geographical mobilities superpose and intersect, affect movers? How does the multiplicity of mobile lives compose processes of becoming?

Contribution:

Paper four suggests detaching the interpretation of mobility narratives from representation by conceptualising movers' *becoming* as rhizomatic compositions and processes of *intensification*. The sample of 'extreme movers', i.e., those who repeatedly and in a superposing manner moved places, professions and organisations, is on purpose highly heterogeneous. This facilitates the non-representational analysis and shifts the hermeneutic focus to commonalities, rather than differences. In this way the analysis proposes to advance the understanding of the 'mobile self' through a post-structuralist approach on the basis of Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) *nomadic ethics*, all whilst contributing to mobile methodology and epistemology. It opens the horizon of theorising

movers' live modes and motivations beyond identity and belonging, by apprehending mobility narratives as *creative imagination of interconnection, rather than illusion of identity and unity*.

Conceptual insights & implications:

The method of 'mobility conversations' creates a certain closeness between the researcher and the interlocutor, allows for joint reflexivity and constitutes joint imaginaries during the conversation, where lived mobility experiences and significant moments resonate beyond the subject who experienced it, that is, with the researcher. To my surprise the 'significant events' that stood out for movers were disconnected from the material realities of daily lives. They refer to unique, memorable instants that seemingly affected them strongly, that brought up a 'revelation', a 'calling' or a feeling of 'freedom', 'liberation' or 'independence'. These moments have stayed with them since, and they resonate up into the presence. The shared *intensities* resonated with me, the researcher, and stayed with me since.

Intensities were tied to the experience of mobility, of moving. Initially, I started thinking about these moments as manifestations of 'emancipation' or as 'escape' from a social environment or family background or a job or a partner that maybe was too oppressive, too indifferent or just meaningless to them... But this interpretation seemed not to do justice to what movers had conveyed; it was not what I had seen in their facial expressions or heard in the prosody of their voices during our conversations. I could have listed the various 'push factors' that, according to social theory, make people leave a place, or the 'pull factors' such as job opportunities or family obligations that made them move to yet another place. But I would have dissected and disconnected what belonged together, what was part of a bigger assemblage, of pure experience, composed by *moves*. Instead, I got the sense that the narrated significant 'moments' exceeded their narratives, the representations of their social lives, touching on metaphysical, spiritual realizations, '*actualisations of the virtual*'… *Actualisations* of professional shifts and

revelations about *purposeful activities* or *vocational callings* were narratively tied back to a conjunction of human encounters, places and sensations.

Overall, this paper contributes to *epistemological debates within the mobilities-migration nexus*, where social anthropologists understand 'mobility' as a phenomenon that shifts socio-anthropological constellations and thought. By adopting a *mobilities lens*, rather than a functionalist, means-end perspective, individual narratives open the door for broader interpretations beyond 'career success' or human capital reasoning. When detaching the interpretation of intersecting and superposing 'extreme mobilities', from the individual subject and when de-centring from individual history, socialisation and life stories, 'events' (in a Deleuzian sense), and 'moments' can be comprehended as manifestations of complex mobility compositions. This shows that processes of *'intensification', rather than 'identification',* constitute becoming.

Energetic oscillations, the perpetual alternation between movement and rest combined with descends and elevations constitute tourbillon-like intensities, which allow for *creativeness*, allow to identify lines of flight across striated spaces and structures. Given the diverse sample of 'extreme movers', the *intensities* that actualise in bodies and manifest in significant moments create similar world views and shared social imaginaries amongst movers. Their way of narrating mobility experience is a Nomadology not a 'story'. This confirms the relevance of nomadic ethics (Deleuze and Guattari's, 1980) for apprehending becoming 'on the move'.

1/2	paper 1	paper 2	paper 3	paper 4
purpose	**exploring the 'mobile self'**	**investigating the reification of difference**	**experiencing belongingness from the inside**	**dissolving identity and allowing for becoming**
phenomenon	inconsistent and study-field centric use of analytical, administrative and common-sense categories in global mobility research	a plurality of labels designate and/or address labour migrants / foreign workers in the public sphere	pandemic shock disrupts cross-border mobility & research projects; mobility at the intersection of and a prerequisite for professional purpose and personal lifestyle	movers live recurrent and superposing mobilities across locations, occupations and organisations
scale	epistemology	macro-level discourse	micro-level interactions	nomadic ethics & cosmic philosophy
ways of knowing	evaluating etic and emic ways of investigating identity and 'self' in transnational mobility	exploring the external ascription of categories to foreign workers in the competition state	sharing and analysing collective and individual lived experiences and affective ways of belonging in times of non-mobility	interpreting narrated singular 'moments' in the light of multidirectional, mobile becoming;
methodology and approach	literature review & problematisation (thematic)	pragmatist discourse analysis (inductive)	collective auto-ethnography (inductive; emic)	purposive sampling 'extreme' mobility experience (inductive/ abductive)
methods	thematic review	visual and word stock analysis	crisis conversation analysis; analysis of affects; evocative writing	open mobility conversations; interpretivist analysis of multiplicities

	paper 1	paper 2	paper 3	paper 4
sensitizing frameworks	*mobilities turn*	*discursive turn*	*ethics of care affective turn*	*nomadic ethics nomadology*
contribution to epistemology - mobility and migration nexus	emic vs. etic mobile epistemology; role of functionalist categorisation vs. dynamic mobility experience	post-structuralist analysis of economy/state entanglements that manifest discursively	conceptualisation of mobility researchers' positionalities; writing differently: emancipatory academic writing	apprehending mobility narratives as creative imagination of interconnection, rather than illusion of identity and unity
theoretical insights on the mobile-self	affirmation of dynamic, iterative and emic modes of investigating the 'mobile self'	'discursive noise' as multi-scalar manifestation and circulation of performative narrative fragments that construct migrant difference	collapse of the shared imaginary of 'mobility' through forced non-mobility; intimate ways of being and affective ways of belonging constitute and are constituted by mutual care and shared vulnerabilities	multiplicity and non-linearity of mobile life and work construed as multidirectional, rhizomatic becoming, rather than arborescent rationale choices of being and identifying
implications for practice - people, culture & diversity	awareness of normative and stigmatising effects of administrative categories and jargon; appreciate complexity of lived mobility experience beyond organisations	resident and citizen perspective vs. 'wanted human resource' perspective in communication and place branding initiatives such as 'talent attraction campaigns', temporary, relocation housing ads	considering the close entanglements of movers' life modes and professional purpose with mobilities; understanding how mobility is constitutive for and constituted by their sense of purpose	accounting for 'the wild card' in the recruiting pool: multiplicity of mobilities and non-linearity are non-conformist, but as well open for multidirectional moves

TABLE 2 – Paper overview (2/2): research approaches, insights and theoretical implications

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Thesis contributions

Even though each of the papers can stand on its own, together with the entire framing of this dissertation, they allow to provide answers to the overarching research questions:

> What constitutes ways of belonging and identifying of highly qualified 'geographic movers' in relation to macro discourse and lived experience? What are ontological underpinnings of the 'mobile self'?

Before articulating the overarching contribution that resonates with these questions, let me summarize the major contributions as follows. The present PhD dissertation

- is opening doors and building bridges between two study fields that are concerned with humans who move: migration studies and management and organisation studies
- nurtures the ongoing process of problematisation of 'identity' as analytical device in the social sciences
- demonstrates the value of phenomenon-sparked, pragmatist research
- allows for critical performativity by embracing multidisciplinarity
- elucidates limitations, performativity and political risks of ascribing identity categories
- proposes and conceptualises the term 'movers'
- illustrates that movers' ways of belonging involve multi-scalar relationalities
- exemplifies the elusive, fragile, fragmented nature of the mobile self, therewith confirming the difficulty involved in grasping or representing mobile assemblages of becoming

- theorises mobile ways of being, belonging and becoming as a function of mobility complexity and multiplicity

In sum, this thesis is a Nomadology.

Connecting the separate

As shown in the four papers, the implications of transnational human mobilities manifest in lived experience on an *individual* and *micro-sociological* level, as well as in *discourse on a macro scale*. In addition, acts of analytically categorising and administratively classifying *'movers'* occur in different societal spheres and across social fields, but ascribed categorisations are often incongruent with movers' multiple self-identifications. In their totality, the four contributions demonstrate and confirm the importance of adopting *multi-scalar perspectives* in global mobility research. This responds to various scholarly calls to consider multi-level relationalities in mobility and migration studies (e.g. Dahinden, 2016; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Syed, 2008), and it nurtures the problematisation of identity as analytical category in reflexive migration studies (e.g. Dahinden et al., 2021; Brubaker, 2013; Löhr & Reinecke, 2020), as well as in reflexive human resource management and DEI (Bevort et al. 2018; Mahadevan & Kilian-Yasin, 2017; Janssens & Steyaert; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). Overall, it contributes therewith to critical management studies and is, as I am going to elaborate, an example of 'critical performativity': 'active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices', that support 'affirmation, ethics of care, pragmatism, focus on potentialities and a normative stance' (Spicer et al., 2015: 228).

It is crucial to recall that I deliberately chose the overarching, universalizing term *mover* throughout this thesis, in order to detach the inquiry from analytically reified and politically or economically coined sub-categories. The notion 'mover' conveys a certain sociological

neutrality, and it allows, as I propose, to bridge inconsistent taxonomies and jargon across study-fields and levels of analysis, between academia and praxis, between categories of analysis and common-sense categories. Furthermore, the term *'mover'* emphasises the *phenomenon* of mobility and human movement, of repeated locational and occupational moves as common characteristics of all research subjects. Hence, it nurtures a mobilities perspective, constantly reminding the researcher and the reader of the *materiality* and the *bodily experience* of mobility. In addition, I propose that the term 'mover' is a term which, if repeatedly deployed across research fields, in society and in public discourse, is '*positively performative'*. With this I mean that it would *discursively dissolve difference* amongst types of 'migrants' that are currently labelled in an unreflexive fashion, e.g., as 'expatriates', 'internationals' or 'economic migrants'. However, according to Butler and as underlined by critical management scholars 'performativity cannot be exceeded' (2016: 201). Thus, to avoid theoretical contradictions, let me rather state that deploying the category 'mover' in knowledge production, e.g., mobility research, is *'anti-performative'*, which means in Lyotard's understanding, that it stands in 'opposition to forms of knowledge exclusively serving economic efficiency' (Lyotard, 1979: 5), or serving nation state interests, one could add. Thus, in the light of the *political economy of knowledge production*, I argue that the term mover can be deployed as emancipatory term and supported by reflexive migration scholars and reflexive management scholars to start with.   The *de-stigmatising effect* of replacing the label 'migrant' by 'mover' and the *de-privileging effect* of replacing the label 'expatriate' by mover might in sum equalise the discursive attribution of symbolic capital. The goal is to resist the operation by distinction (Luhman, 1998), to weaken the social sorting and strata building of the 'abstract machine' (Linstead and Thanem, 2007; Deleuze, & Guattari, 1980), to reduce the social organisation of difference (Vertovec, 2021). Easing migrant distinctions discursively via the term *mover*, would lower the *'discursive noise' level*

and possibly reduce *perceived difference*. There is a public concern for the diminishing social inequalities, to which the 'mover' label could respond. In addition, when recollecting Sen's 'Identity and Violence' (2006) and observing contemporary hostilities and wars, the promotion of the simple term 'movers' could be an (utopian) attempt to 'resist the purposeful exploitation of the divisiveness' (Sen, 2006: 165). - And how about the indulging term '*global talent*'? – Shouldn't we also spell out the existence of uncountable 'local talents' in our societies, by the way? – For many ears 'global talent' is certainly more attractive sounding and flattering than 'labour migrant', as the omnipresence of the term shows.

There are a few alternative overarching categories that I reiterated throughout the dissertation, as I consider them neither to be stigmatising or discipline-centric, nor in favour of an economic interest or political project. I refer to 'the mobile-self' (Calás et al., 2013; Özkazanc-Pan & Calás, 2015), when suggesting a self that embodies mobility practice, where intersubjectivities and relationalities are composed by mobilities, and to '*transmigrants*' (Glick-Schiller 2003; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Waldinger, 2008), a term fostered in transnational scholarship, which emphasises that *belongingness* arises from multiple locational, cultural and historical influences. The term 'transmigrants' implies moreover a sense of *passage, ongoingness, openness and non-determination,* which is well expressed in Simmel's essay 'The Stranger', when he states that even the one who settles remains a *'potential wanderer'*. He describes the wanderer as someone 'who comes today and goes tomorrow'. But even the 'stranger' who stays in the local setting 'is, so to speak, the potential wanderer: although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going' (1908: 509, 2). In line with Simmel's observation, I suggest that the term transmigrant creates a *unity* between the characteristics of *wandering* and *fixation*. – Quite like Einstein's theory and Bergson's earlier cited philosophy that conceive *movement and rest together*. It is to be noted, however, that the here proposed term is not only a-sociological, but as

well a-psychological: the term 'mover' can help to foster interdisciplinary conversations and it eases the shift to post-structuralist non-representationality.

Moreover, the discussion in paper one on the distinction between 'categories of practice' or 'emic categories' (Bourdieu, 1984; Dahinden, 2016) on the one hand and 'categories of analysis' or 'etic categories' on the other (Bourdieu, 1984; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) ensured an epistemological and terminological awareness throughout the *emic* research process. Overall, I argue that the *terminological consistency* that I problematise on many occasions is crucial for comprehending constitutive elements of the 'movers' and the 'mobile self'. It is crucial when further theorising processes of belonging, identification and becoming on the move. I believe that practicing and demonstrating the possibility of terminological consistency in the presented thesis is a major contribution to *interdisciplinary mobility and migration research*.

The barriers for researchers to enter a neighbouring discipline or study field seem prohibitive, even when investigating on the same phenomena, that is, 'mobility'. What can increase the possibilities for more permanent interchange, beyond positive intentions? Simmel states in the essay 'Bridge and Door' that 'it is absolutely essential for humanity that it sets itself a boundary, but with freedom, that is, in such a way that it can also remove this boundary again, that it can place itself outside it' (Simmel, 1923 / 1994: 7). Why is it so difficult to open the door and move towards neighbouring study fields, to move freely? Certainly taxonomies, jargon, underlying theoretical assumptions, intertwined epistemologies and distinct streams of literature increase the difficulty for 'outsiders' to join a debate. Academic institutions and hierarchies, siloed publication and conference outlets may play their part, may nurture intra-disciplinary vanity by maintaining scattered, bordered spaces of knowledge. Writing styles are as diverse as the academic and disciplinary cultures into which researchers are embedded: from wordy

essays to telegram styles, from flowery to pale. Even if we do respect, admire or identify with a colleague's work in a neighbouring field, even if we happen to sympathise and empathise with 'the other', rare are the chances for publishing together one day ...

What if we could pause our instrumentalist, return-on-investment-reasoning for a minute: can't we think of other ways of engaging and thinking together? Understanding 'their' work, inviting 'them' to challenge 'our' work: uncomfortable? – maybe. Tiring? – possibly. 'Time consuming', I hear you say? – Well, you shall always remember: 'Denken braucht Zeit' (Thouard, 2022). Thinking needs time. Listening, apprehending otherness, comprehending. Not 'useful' in the short run, but possibly elevating, inspiring, educational. Expand your horizon, revisit what it means to be a 'scholar': 'one engaged in the pursuits of learning; one versed in any branch, or in many branches, of knowledge' states the Oxford Dictionary. Simmel gives us a clue that shall make us more confident: 'In the immediate as well as in the symbolic sense, in the physical as well as in the intellectual sense, we are at any moment those who separate the connected or connect the separate.' (Simmel, 1923 / 1994: 10). Simmel was a thinker of movement, a defender of the mobility of thought. In the early days of Sociology, the increasing movement of things and humans led him to develop processual perspectives on society. As Thouard (2022) states, Simmel developed a perspective that is by no means objectivist, realist or merely formal, but which allows to appreciate the general agility and mobility of social relations.

Exploring movers

When categorisations and comparatist approaches are insufficient, *whom* do transnationally mobile individuals identify *with,* or what do they identify *as*, *where* do they belong, *where* are they heading? These questions reveal some *stationary reasoning*: they expose that we

expect 'them' to identify *with* others or at least *as* something we are familiar with, it shows that *we* want them to belong *somewhere*, to have a *goal* and a *destination.* – Not necessarily *we* as persons, as researchers, but *we*, society, employing organisations, cities, local communities. Frequently, questions that are addressed to 'movers' when they are 'newcomers' in a given setting, reveal *normatively established expectations*. 'Where are you from? For how long are you going to stay? What are you here for?' – We often expect a singular point of *convergence*, a main *anchor* or some kind of *societal structure or culture of reference*; a central place of settlement, a single community or an institutional attachment, as we have been bathed in nation state narrations for so long (Bhabha, 1990; Sen, 2006).

In this vein, physical mobility is not only the phenomenon under investigation in the different papers of this thesis, but it manifests at various instances, as earlier reflections on the research process have shown. Mobility as guiding principle of investigation. Mobility is *interconnection*, is *intensity*, is *becoming*. All four papers are interconnected, even if the empirical data that is leveraged was collected in distinct, though superposing, national, organisational and professional contexts. Paper two, three and four illustrate how an iterative consideration of *organisational*, *sociological*, and *philosophical* ways of apprehending 'the self' and 'identity' in conditions of mobility and late modernity compose a meshwork of comprehension. The limitations are evident: one can explore and make an attempt to understand, but without ever completely seizing a school of thought or theoretical presumption. There will never be enough time in a lifetime to know it all, to understand it all, to debate on ideas in more and more depth, to reconvene with everyone, to resume all of it. Too curious about what else is out there, craving for newness and interconnectedness.

Restlessness. Never allowing oneself to become permanent within a field, to settle in a discipline, in a profession, an organisation or a city means to renounce to the depth, the density and consolidation that

roots and bricks and mortar provide. There are those who seemingly never doubted that their home is where they are and where they have been. Lacking 'community feel' as limitation of vagabonding, of intersecting, recurrent and superposing mobility. Limitations of the mobile self. The 'strength of connection' and 'level of knowledge' do 'sound really nice'. One can be quite envious, as Steve, a research interlocutor, admits:

> *'So I think, the community feel, you know, that they feel because they have always, you know, born and bred in the same environment. That community is very strong, ahm. What's happening in their local council, you know, local areas, they're always very aware of, they're very opinionated on because that's theirs. They feel very attached to it, ahm. I'm almost to some degree, maybe quite envious of that they have that, you know, that strength of connection to that area and that level of knowledge, you know, what's going on around them, ahm. ... it sounds great. I don't necessarily ever had it myself when I was there. But the idea of it does sounds really nice….*
>
> *I think the closest I've maybe come to it myself was when I was in Bahrein and the group of friends that my wife and I had, became very, very close-knit. And it was very much a community. And because it's quite a transient place, the bonds that you form are formed often very quickly, and they're often very intense. So, the group that we had, although we were physically together for only two and a half years, it was as if we've been together our entire lives. And to this day I speak most regularly to and remain closer to, that group, even though we haven't physically seen each other now for two and a half years than I do with people who I now see or work close to, uh, in the Netherlands, ahm.. So, ahm. So, yes, I am quite envious. I do miss that idea of community.'*

<div align="right">

(Steve, verbatims mobility conversations, 2021).

</div>

Transient places, as he says allow for the bonds to form quickly, allow for very intense connections, 'as if we've been together our entire lives'. I suggest that this is what happens in cross-disciplinary research processes. Seemingly coincident encounters in transient places, together with data analysis and literature reviews, with everyday observations and conversations, paired with many discussions with seemingly random readings and unprecedented macro conditions build a composition that allows for intensities. An *assemblage* where insights actualise in rhizomatic 'offshoots'. *Multidirectional*. The destination remains indefinite, even now as the actual 'fabric', a doctoral dissertation, stands here as a result. Isn't this thesis rather an actualisation of the virtual? A mobile ontology that cannot be grasped in its entirety? When it started is impossible to say, it has always been ongoing, the process. Several readings were revelatory, but only in interconnection with everything else that is, they resonated. Everything was coming together, falling in place, somehow. Abductively, cosmicly. The '*écart'*, or void, in Jullien's (2016) sense between academia and the different 'worlds' of work that I have experienced before, felt most real, at times confusing, but part of the assemblage of the 'mobile self'. My resistance to lock myself into a specific study field, recurrent sidesteps into other academic communities was 'errance', difficult to apprehend from outside the process. Prolific errance, constitutive for the *élan vital* that kept me moving, beyond doubt and gloom. As demonstrated with this thesis, the 'écart' between schools of thought and across planes of consistency allows for multi-directional movements of thought, for elevations and descends, for vertical and horizontal expansion. Contrary forces, compose *openings*, create an increasingly *open space for thought*, for academic debate to take place, for emancipation to actualise. Quite like the practice of writing differently, interdisciplinary research is a '*line of flight'*, in the Deleuzian sense, a conjunction that enables to resist *and* to comply *and* to bond *and* to reason *and* to sense *and* to embody. Overall, I the empirical studies paired with a mobile epistemology demonstrate how *mobility* as

phenomenon can empower, can be a catalyst for *critique* and *comprehension*, how nomadic ethics are an adequate philosophical underpinning for mobility research. For *pausing sedentary metaphysics* and *composing* with pure experience and entireness.

It is to be noted that the 'complete etiological explanation of the whole of nature [that] can never be more than an enumeration of forces which cannot be explained…' (Schopenhauer, 1928: 61). Thus, I refrained from explaining and attempted to *understand and sense* instead: what is the ontology of the mobile self? The mobile self does not aspire to be somebody, somewhere precise. Being on the move, sparks an optimistic *desire* for perpetual mobility. A desire for the continuity of change, for being affected, for intensity. The mobile-self is multiple, not fragmented, endlessly interconnected and optimistic. Life and work are multi-directional possibilities. Always alert, suspecting the appeal of solid structures and striated spaces, whilst intimately knowing that there will always be a line of flight. Not becoming permanent, just becoming.

Sensing Nomadology

As a synthesis of the separate paper contributions, I propose that the *value and applicability of 'identity categories' as analytical device diminishes with increasing mobility complexity*, that is, with the recurrence and superposition of locational, occupational and social mobilities (see figure 3). In homogeneous and predominantly sedentary societal settings, the clustering of populations based on their professional guild or social class can be well aligned with individual and collective self-identifications and attachments. However, as social psychologists like Roccas and Brewer (2002) demonstrate, an increasing identity complexity constitutes a multiplicity of different ways of belonging to various social groups, a process that I suggest calling 'idensification'. Even when simply increasing social mobility, for example, between social or professional milieus and communities, processes of identification become denser,

more dynamic and less easy to grasp empirically. Monolithic identities might dissolve in these situations, may lose their primacy, or can be strategically deployed, as Sainsaulieu (1977) and scholars who follow his tradition show. Virtual, i.e., online interactions with geographically far away people, paired with increased boundary crossing mobilities and trans-locational life modes, complexify and densify these processes even further.

please see following page for

Figure 3 - Theoretical contribution: The effect of 'mobility complexity' on the adequateness of analytical and paradigmatic presumptions; "indensity" as intermediate device in complex mobility constellations; "discursive noise" as contemporary disturbance of processes of identification, densification and intensification (own illustration based on thesis contribution)

MOBILITY COMPLEXITY

- - -   + + +

being — identity — entity

belonging — « indensity » — density

becoming — intensity — tension

identification

densification

intensification

« DISCURSIVE NOISE »

analytical devices

anthropological expressions

conceptual devices

roots, history, etc.

difference / similarity
social identity categories
'habitus' (Bourdieu)

arborescence, story, etc.

interaction
narratives (e.g. Ricoeur)
'thick descriptions' (Geertz)

multiplicity, moments, etc.

'pure experience' (Nishita)
'ritournelle' (Deleuze)
'distribution nomade' (D&G)

structuralism   constructivism   post-structuralism

ontology   nomadology

Kerstin Martel - 2023

When multiple 'extreme mobilities' occur or are provoked, and when they intertwine with late modern life modes and fragmented, ephemeral belongings, traditional sociological modes of inquiry reach their limitations: the *multiplicity* and *dynamics* that constitute mobile life modes cannot be captured, categorised or simply observed from the outside. Static and structuralist conceptualisations, sedenarist or 'human capital' rationales impede our capacity to understand what a 'mobile ontology' could be like. Instead, as demonstrated in different ways in each of the four paper contributions, we need to shift our ways of apprehending the observed phenomenon: *mobility*. Rather than exploring 'identity constructions', 'contextual factors' or systemic 'constraints' around the mobile subject, I suggest conceding to the fact that there are manifold, *multidirectional forces* in play, which cannot be grasped or represented in their entirety. Our ontological condition does not enable us to *think* 'what exactly' a 'mobile self' *is*. But movement, that is, the materiality of a body that moves and is moved through space can be experienced, lived and sensed. Movement *affects* us in our entirety, the alternation of movement and rest and the multiple forces involved affect us, something 'happens' *with us.* Movement and rest, and, thus, mobile life modes, are *generative of energy*. They are *creational* of reflexivity, creativeness and sensations. Mobility is generative of difference, of repetitions across a multiplicity of spaces.

Mobile life modes contribute to the *heterogenization* of world views and of ways of living. Thus, it cannot be 'similarity' or 'identity' that makes movers interact and bond. Their life and mobility constellations, paired with their various social, historical and cultural backgrounds are *too different*, to be a catalyst for social bonds and belongingness. Still, as the studies in papers three and four show, there *is* a shared sense of belonging that densifies and crystallizes according to situations (e.g., crisis), and there *are* shared social imaginaries amongst movers. Therefore, I argue that mobile ways of being, belonging and becoming *exceed the observable social, human world*. What a nomadic

ontology *is*, cannot be defined, cannot be expressed in words alone, cannot be represented. We cannot conceptualise an ontology of the 'mobile self', *because* it is a *Nomadology*, in the vein of Deleuze and Guattari and Braidotti. Nomadology, unlike ontology, is elusive and impermanent, cannot be fixated. Nomadology is not about the 'self', the 'individual', the 'mover', not about ways of being in the world. It is *not* identity. Nomadology is a multiplicity of multidirectional forces that *carries* humans, but not only, it *carries and moves everything that is.* It makes life courses intersect, people interconnect and provides a 'vibe' to a place.

Nomadology is not constituting 'the self', but it *composes with* bodies and objects and space and time. One can sense it, but not know it in a sedentarist way of knowing. Only when embracing the smooth, non-structured spaces, when crossing planes of consistency nomadic knowledge actualises. Nomadic knowledge is discontinuous and fragmented, it is *elusive* and, thus, cannot be accumulated. Nomadic knowledge can be composed with, but it cannot be told. Not knowing does not mean uncertainty. Not knowing what to do next, where to go and when, is not uncertainty, but *possibility*. 'Knowing' in Nomadology, means knowing that multiplicity entails possibility, openness, passages. Always. Nomadology *actualises* in singular, intense, memorable *moments* during a life on the move – no matter what type of movement. Through these instants the entirety, pure experience can be sensed by the mover and can thus be shared through language with others, e.g., researchers. Whenever we leave bounded spaces, and chartered territory, whenever we transcend rigid categorisations, dare or are forced to open doors and cross bridges; whenever we open-up to what else there is, *other* than ourselves, intensities will occur. We will be *affected*. The *void* of the very moment makes all the forces that surround us *collapse* into an eternal spark. Ephemeral and endlessly resonating throughout time and in us. Identity is illusion, but intensities are felt, sensed, memorized. *Intensity* perpetuates the *desire to become*.

Concluding remarks

People who move are not merely movers, foreigners, migrants, refugees, or however we might label them. Movers are humans who have lived and worked in different places, in different cultural and linguistic settings and under various economic and political conditions. They might still have ties to these other places and people. However, they are where they are, in a workplace, a city, a country, a region. They are not just seeking 'the best deal' for their careers elsewhere; their goal is not necessarily to accumulate 'career capital'. Movers are humans who interact, socialise, laugh and cry and love. In that, they are not different from 'locals'. They are residents in a location, like all the other residents; they are citizens who want to participate in society, who want to create, animate, cultivate and improve their local environments. In order to make life liveable, to render local societies more lively, it is not sufficient to attract labour force. Instead, there is a need to allow for encounters, interactions and co-creation to happen: between 'newcomers' and 'oldies', 'foreigners' and 'locals'. The 'Other' might be from elsewhere but is a neighbour, a colleague, a citizen, a resident who certainly has many things to share, like locals have many things to share. Transcending and dissolving categorisation and the concept of 'identity' allows boundaries to be ephemeral and permeable, allows for social interactions and political action to take place. Beyond their value as 'human capital for organisations, no matter how unconventional their pathways may seem: movers' variety of lived experiences is not an 'accumulation', but an 'opening'. Mobile life modes are just one out of many manifestations of human life modes in late modernity. Maybe they are extreme manifestations. Thereby, studying mobility allows to be at the pulse of the fragmentedness, the liquidity and impermanence of contemporary society.

EPILOGUE - a walk in the park

And here is how the story goes. Once upon a time the opportunity to join an EU funded research group 'just came up' … And ever since, I have the impression that everything is somehow in everything, it is all entwined. I don't know ... 'You have to experience it to understand it' as a research participant once it pointed out. Agreed. Nonetheless, let me try to explain, let me make an attempt to take you with me on a voyage into the world of academic research and the coming about of this doctoral thesis.

The overarching research topic was love on first sight. It was about moving and wandering and about the wonders of a world on the move: 'Global Mobility of Employees'. For me and some colleagues this theme was more than just a topic of 'interest', it rather resonated on a very personal level and has become a central focal point of curiosity. For the funding organism, the European Commission, mobility has been a strategic endeavour for some time; making people move for work, to the European Union (EU) and across the region:

> "Promoting labour mobility across Europe is a central aim of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Launched in 2012 by the European Commission, it aims to tackle increasing labour and skill shortages in the EU, and to foster European integration." (GLOMO grant agreement, 2017: 6)

Late 2018 the research project 'GLOMO – Global Mobility of Employees' was launched at 7 universities and research institutions, and it federated 15 researcher-mover-wonderers, 15 international career-shifters, 15 border-lifters, 15 curious seekers. The researcher is the mover, is the wanderer, is the wonderer. Always, of course. Always. But on this particular funding scheme, the EU research agency requires

researchers to move their place of residence, in order to be eligible, as stipulated (Horizon2020 Programme Guide, 2017: 16; 4.2 Mobility [emphasis added]):

> The European Commission considers mobility between organisations as *an asset for the personal and career development of researchers*. It allows the enhancement of collaboration, and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge which contribute to increased creativity, efficacy and performance.
>
> *Mobility of the researcher to another country is an eligibility criterion* for receiving MSCA funding, while mobility between the academic and non-academic sector is also encouraged, as this would further advance research or innovation. […] The two determining elements are the actual physical place of residence and place of main activity. (4.2. Mobility)

Hence, the EU Horizon programme incites researchers to move to an EU country that is distinct from their present country of residence. Mobility as criterion for eligibility. Mobility to advance innovation. Mobility as travel to project meetings, to conferences, to field work and research stays. Mobility as constraint or as means to an end? In the case of this project, 15 researchers from around the globe moved voluntarily and enthusiastically for their three-year employment contracts to 'new' countries and partner universities. Mobility as an asset for career development? Mobility as life mode for 15 repeat-movers. Mobility as lifestyle. Mobility: a privilege.

'Horizon 2020' was the name of the funding scheme. And as one might remember, as one tries to disremember, 2020 hazed the horizon. The year when the pandemic starts. The year that blurs our senses, that unsettles,

that makes future prospects collapse. 2020 disrupts; disrupts human movements, confines people into homes, fixates them onto a single place. The pandemic, via medical and sanitary risks, separates. The pandemic, via administrative and travel rules, segregates. The advent of a boundaryless virus that moves fast, that moves through us and with us, leads to the re-bordering of formerly smooth and open spaces. Checkpoints at every landborder in the EU. Our all ability to move and to act is inhibited, is restricted. Twentytwenty and beyond re-borders the world, the region and our minds. Literally. I cannot think beyond the next day, I am unable to plan, uncapable to imagine the next step. First thought each morning: is this real? 'when will it ease, lighten, brighten-up?' Unable to travel. Upset. The desire to move grows with confinement. Trips are cancelled. A minimum distance to other bodies is prescribed, physical mobility circumscribed. Surreal circumstances turn lives upside-down. My life turns into something very bodily and very immediate: arranging the next meal, waiting for the next video call, waiting for the coffee to brew and to cool down, reading the latest news, again and again. Craving for the evening walk in the park. Watching the plants grow, caressing baby leaves. Feeling the rain, feeling the sun, taking a deep breath when being outside and fearing the air inside. 'One feels free in so far as the imagination is not greater than one's actual desires, while neither of the two reaches beyond the ability to act', says Bauman (2000: 17) … The interruption of mobilities, of the human flux across space has transformed the researcher-wanderer even more into a wonderer, at least in my personal case. Go and encounter movers and find out about their lives and their work and how it all works, go and find out who they really are – but don't move. Go and study mobility all whilst unexpectedly living with non-mobility. Is this the irony of our destiny, is this doom or serendipity? At the time, I was not quite sure:

Can one write about mobility when being stuck?

Can one rest and settle when wanting to move?

Who or what or how is the 'mobile self'? Is the self mobile? Is mobility selfish?

The researchers were the movers, were the wanderers, were the wonderers. They became stayers, became permanent for once. And maybe, this exactly allowed to understand, eventually, what this is all about.

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APPENDIX
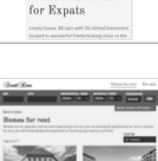
thematic literature review: mobility & nomadism as theoretical
intersection (own illustration)
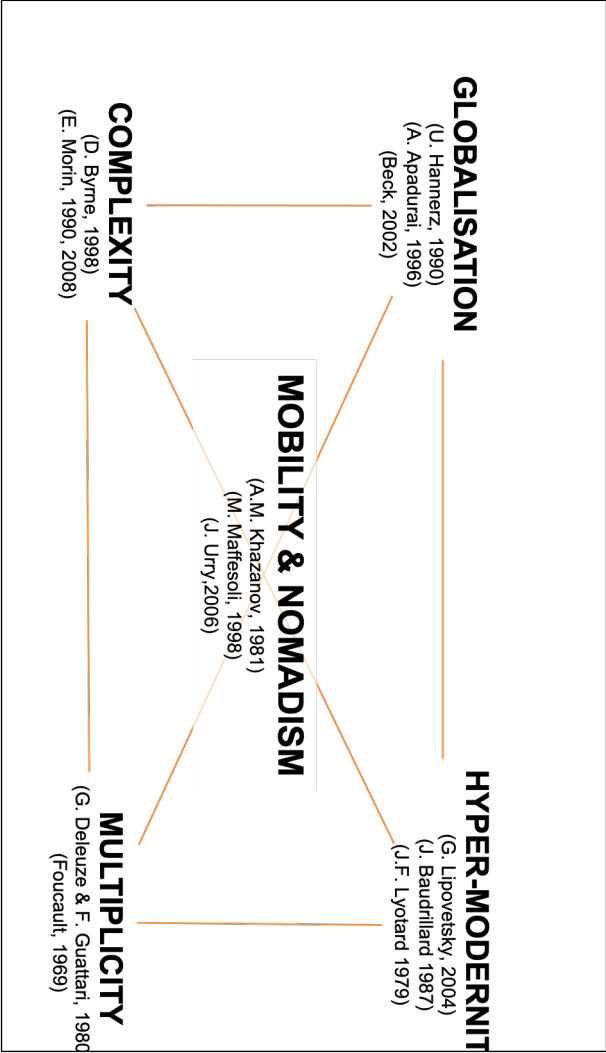
APPENDIX II. – ad PAPER 2 (1)
(appendix 1.a. in submitted paper)
Exclusive housing adverts in English 'for expats' (Copenhagen 2018-2020; danishhomes.dk)

"NICE VILLA IN GENTHOFE – FOR EXPATS"		24-36 months 09/2018	"EXPATS OR COMPANIES ONLY"	36 months 01/2020
"THE BEST VIEW IN COPEHNHAGEN – ONLY FOR EXPATS"		24 months 09/2018	"EXPATS OR COMPANIES ONLY"	36 months 01/2020
"WONDERFUL HOUSE FOR EXPATS"		09/2018	"EXPATS OR COMPANIES ONLY"	36 months 01/2020
"EXPATS ONLY"		18-36 months 01/2020	"ONLY FOR EXPATS"	24-36 months 06/2020
"EXPATS ONLY"		24 months 01/2020	"EXPATS ONLY – WITH NO RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT"	36-60 months 09/2020
"CITY – TOTALLY RENOVATED – EXPATS ONLY"		36 months 01/2020	"EXPATS OR COMPANIES ONLY"	36 months 01/2020

APPENDIX II. – ad PAPER 2 (2)

(appendix 1.b. in submitted paper)
Acts of labelling in visual and discursive context

	a.		b.
	Denmark plans to isolate *"unwanted" migrants* on remote island Denmark's government has struck a deal to move *"unwanted"migrant*s to a remote uninhabited island once used for contagious animals (CNN, Dec 6, 2018)		*Global Talent* – A stronger Denmark with *Highly Skilled International Employees* (Nov. 2018)
	c. **EXPATS ONLY** – WITH NO RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT (danishhomes.dk Sept. 2020)		d. WELCOME TO COPENHAGEN – A SAFE AND FRIENDLY CITY "First I would like to thank you for making the decision to relocate to our beautiful city of Copenhagen... *We need you!* As Danish society and Copenhagen return to normal following the Coronavirus crisis, they need *eligible international labour* to fill the vacant positions in many of our companies." (Mayor of employment and integration, Copenhagen, June 2020)
	e. THE BEST VIEW IN COPEHNHAGEN – ONLY FOR *EXPATS* (danishhomes.dk, Sept. 2018)		f. *INTERNATIONAL TOP TALENT* – A Key Ingredient in a leading Science and Engineering region (Danish Academy of Technical Sciences, May, 2019)
	g. WONDERFUL HOUSE FOR *EXPATS* (capitalhomes.dk, 2018)		h. InterNations Copenhagen We Make *Expat Life* a Great Experience

APPENDIX II. – ad PAPER 2 (3)

(appendix 2. in submitted paper)

Vignettes that convey labels attributed to foreign residents in Copenhagen (detailed accounts of table 1)

please see following pages

A.1. Political announcement 1	
	(CNN, Dec 6th 2018) 'Denmark plans to isolate *"unwanted" migrants* on remote island – Denmark's government has struck a deal to move *"unwanted" migrants* to a remote uninhabited island once used for contagious animals';
	(TV2 Denmark, 30th of November, 2018) 'expelled criminal aliens/foreigners ('udlaendige/ indvandrere') to be send to an island'
A.2. Political announcement 2	
	(EuroNews, October 11th, 2022) Denmark election: Parties on left and right back controversial plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda 'It has been revealed that under this deal, around 1,000 asylum seekers may be sent to Rwanda each year.'
A.3. Press: Politiken	
	(Politiken, 2018)
	MIGRANTS ("MIGRANTERNE") – associated with African origin countries? 'walking' barefoot towards Europe?
B.1. Real estate agencies / housing websites: capitalhomes.dk ; danishhomes.dk	
	The best view in Copenhagen, *only for expats* (danishhomes.dk, 2020)
	Expats only with no residence requirement (danishhomes.dk, 2018)
	Wonderful house *for expats* (capitalhomes.dk, 2018)
	For *international customers only* (danishhomes.dk 2023)
	(ff. screenshots in figure 1)
B.2. Real estate agencies: homeconnector.dk "advise when renting to foreigners"	
https://homeconnector.dk/udlejning-af-bolig-til-udlaendinge/ (March, 2022) [orig. danish, emphasis added]	
	'Maintenance of the home
	If you are considering renting out your home to *expats*, you must first and foremost be aware of the cultural difference that can be found. If the cultural difference is very large, it can have an impact on the maintenance of the home. This can be expressed in; cleaning (means and methods), ventilation, furnishing and maintenance of floors.'
	'Cooking with strong aromas
	Cooking differs from culture to culture. In some cultures, mild foods are cooked, while in others, strong spices are used. Here one must be a little aware of the latter. Food with strong spices also smells of more, and this can settle in curtains, walls, ceilings and annoy the neighbours.'
	'Moving again
	Many consider *foreigners* as good tenants, as they often move to Denmark for a shorter period due to work, and therefore move back home. We typically experience that an *expat* stays in Denmark between 12 months and 3 years. After this, we experience that they move home again, or choose to stay in Denmark and invest in their own home.'

C.1. City of Copenhagen [orig. engl., emphasis added]
International Citizen Service,
https://lifeindenmark.borger.dk/citizenship/ics-international-citizen-service
International House,
https://ihcph.kk.dk
International Citizen Days,
https://www.icdays.dk

C.2. Mayor of employment and integration, Copenhagen Post, November 2019 [orig. engl., emphasis added]
'Copenhagen City Hall speaks up: we need you to stay! In short supply and high demand the Copenhagen Career Program is fighting to retain *foreign talent.* - Danish companies are facing a skill shortage and that is especially true for companies in the Copenhagen region. [...] For Denmark at large, ensuring that companies have access to the right skills means that they will be able to sustain society as we know it today, thus providing for the welfare that all Danes recognize and appreciate today.'

Source: Copenhagen Post, Vol. 22 Issue 16, 15-28 November 2019, p. 4

C.3. Mayor of employment and integration, Copenhagen Post, September 2020 [orig. engl., emphasis added]
'Welcome to Copenhagen, a safe and friendly city'
'We need you! As Danish society and Copenhagen return to normal following the Coronavirus Crisis they need *eligible international labour* to fill the vacant positions in many of our companies' *international labour* creates growth and more jobs, and we cannot afford to lose the progress and development in which *foreign labour* plays such an important part. As mayor of employment and integration, I wish to thank you for your future contribution to the Danish welfare state in which you are about to live. Without you we would be a poorer society.'

Source: Copenhagen Post, Vol 23 Issue 09, 12-23 June, 2020, Relocation Summer Guide (print)

D.1. Confederation of Danish Industry, DI Global Talent [orig. engl., emphasis added]
'*International labour* - The shortage of qualified labour is a reality for many companies in Denmark today. In the future it will continue to be one of the biggest challenges for Danish businesses. Today there is an increasing number of *international employees* coming to Denmark to work. *Global talents* bring value, knowledge and growth to Danish companies. On this page, we will advise you on international recruitment and provide useful links and information.'
Source : https://www.danskindustri.dk/vi-radgiver-dig/personale/udenlandsk-arbejdskraft/tiltrakning-af-internationale-medarbejdere/branding-af-danmark-som-karrieredestination/ last accessed on February 23rd, 2023
'*Global Talent* - A stronger Denmark with *highly skilled international employees*'
'Close to four out of ten Danish companies seek in vain for new employees and the shortage of labour is expected to increase over the coming years. *Highly qualified foreign employees* can

help to ease the shortage of labour, but Denmark is in global competition when it comes to attracting and retaining *global talents*. *DI Global Talent's* mission is to ensure that companies have access to *highly qualified foreign* labour, and that Denmark is an attractive country *for highly qualified foreign employees* to live, work and study in.'

DI website, www.di.dk accessed on July 27th, 2019

D.2. Danish Academy of Technical Sciences, December 2019 [orig. engl., emphasis added]
     '*International Top Talent* – A key ingredient in a leading Science and Engineering region'
'In this report we understand *international talent* to be *highly qualified employees* who are typically eligible for a residence permit in Denmark on the Pay Limit scheme, [i.e.] persons who have been offered job in Denmark with a high salary (around at least 400,000 DKK / 54,000 EUR per year). Additionally, we define top talent as *highly qualified labour* composed of *top executives* and/or those eligible for the 'forskerskatteordningen' tax scheme. […] Note that in the presented statistics *we understand qualification level according to salary instead of education.* This is due to salary being measured more reliably whereas self-reported educational information can lead to unreliable data.' (p. 6)

Source: International Top Talent, ATV Report, December 2019 (print)

E. Private talent rankings

   E.1. *Global Talent* Competitiveness Index' (INSEAD, emphasis added)

   https://www.insead.edu/newsroom/2022-global-talent-competitiveness-index-global-talent-inequalities-hinder-progress-sustainable-development-goals

   E.2. *Global Talent* Ranking (IMD, emphasis added)

   https://www.imd.org/centers/wcc/world-competitiveness-center/rankings/world-talent-ranking/

F. Supranational institutions (emphasis added)

   F.1. EU Bluecard Directive for third country nationals (2021)
   'EU blue card – entry and residence of *highly qualified workers'*
     – 'The directive updates previous blue card rules. It gives the EU a targeted legal migration scheme that   can respond to skill shortages and makes it easier for *highly skilled professionals* to join the workforce.
     – The directive provides an EU framework for attracting *talent*, while individual Member States decide how many people to admit to their labour market.'

Source: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:4559508 , last accessed on March 16th, 2023

     F.2. OECD policy report
     'Indicators for *Talent* Attractiveness'
     https://www.oecd.org/migration/talent-attractiveness/

(ad Table 2.1 – row 2.D.1: Confederation of Danish Industry – example screenshot, July 2019)

APPENDIX II. – ad PAPER 2 (4)
(appendix 3 in submitted paper)
Links to access background information

City of Copenhagen, International Citizen Service, https://lifeindenmark.borger.dk/citizenship/ics-international-citizen-service Last accessed on February 20th, 2023.

City of Copenhagen, International House, https://ihcph.kk.dk
Last accessed on February 20th, 2023.

City of Copenhagen, International Citizen Days, https://www.icdays.dk
Last accessed on February 20th, 2023.

Confederation of Danish Industry, Dansk Industri (DI), Branding Denmark as career destination, https://www.danskindustri.dk/vi-radgiver-dig/personale/udenlandsk-arbejdskraft/tiltrakning-af-internationale-medarbejdere/branding-af-danmark-som-karrieredestination/, last accesssed on February 20th, 2023.

European Commission, 2021, Technical Support Instrument, Supporting Denmark to integrate and attract global talent, https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/labour-market-social-protection-and-migration/supporting-denmark-integrate-and-attract-global-talent_en
Last accessed on February 20th, 2023.

European Talent Mobility Forum, Whitepaper: The Future of Investment Promotion, 2021 https://www.europeantalentmobilityforum.com/
https://placeleadershipacademy.com/toolboxes/white-paper-the-future-of-investment-promotion/

EU Bluecard Directive (2021). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:4559508, last accessed on March 16th, 2023.

Future Place Leadership, Whitepaper: Nordic Place Branding Report, https://futureplaceleadership.com/toolboxes/white-paper-nordic-place-branding-report-2022/

Global Detention Project
https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/denmark

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). International Migration Report, https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/international-migration-report-2017.html

https://undocs.org/A/CONF.231/3

http://www.unesco.org/new/fr/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant/

SpAIn Talent Hub; https://espanadigital.gob.es/en/lines-action/spain-talent-hub

APPENDIX II. – ad PAPER 2 (5)

IMD report 2019

ad PAPER 3 (2/4)

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ad PAPER 3 (3/4)

FINDINGS – **Entanglements of life situations, life modes and career purpose amplify anxieties over time and lead to major disruptions**

Amplification of pandemic's impact for the group as major "pillars" disappear:

- **Travel** as means to connect with significant others at distant places
- **Research** as means to **connect** internationally, to build relationships
- Global **mobility** as career purpose
- **Boundaryless movement** as life mode

Amplification of perceived **precariousness** over time:

- Limited employment contract
- Preparing a PhD as "isolated endeavour" a "solo journey" (Elliot et al. 2016; Brydon & Flemming, 2011)

APPENDIX III. – ad PAPER 4 (1)

memos and doodles: early data analysis after conversations: representational interpretation

rhythms of recurrent 'moves' based on places they lived; attempt to regroup individuals, according to rhythm / 'constellations of geographical mobility' "sauts" / leaps / jumps ("countries as dots", <u>BUT:</u> connections between dots *are not* nomadic compositions…)

please see following pages

(go to online version for colour nuances)

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Cross-continental embodied mobilities
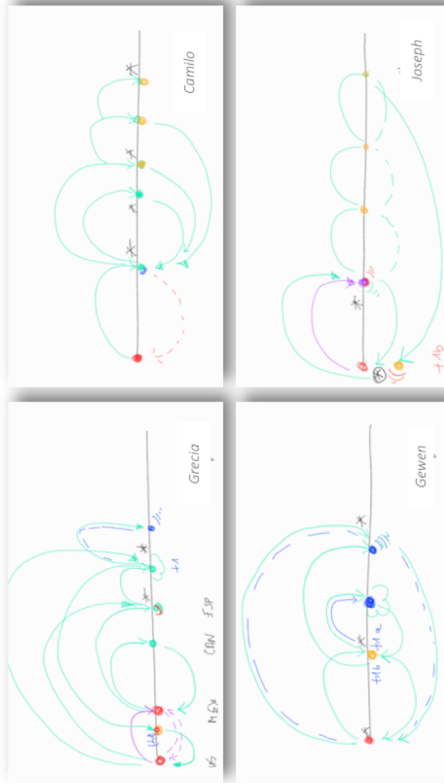
Red dot: place of birth
Green line: single / lead / joint move
Green dot: temporary settlement
Violet line: follow (childhood)
Blue line: follow
Blue dot: partners country of birth
Dotted lines: commute
Stars: change in profession

Nomadic Loops

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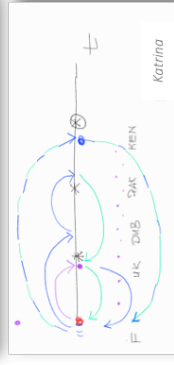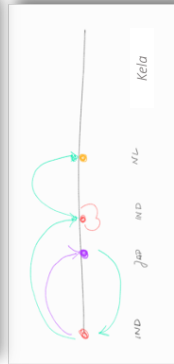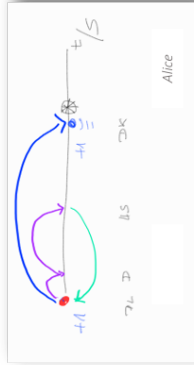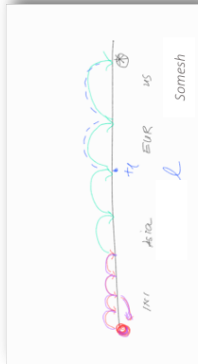
Being sent, called back and circulated

364
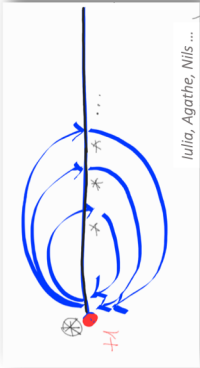
Cross-continental work – love – change

365
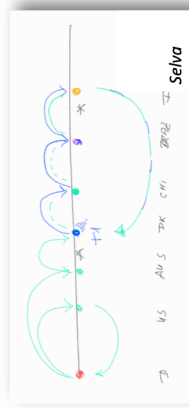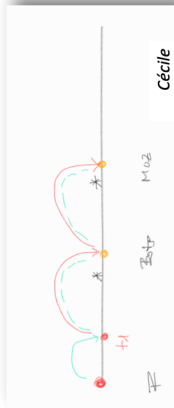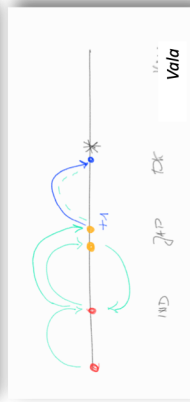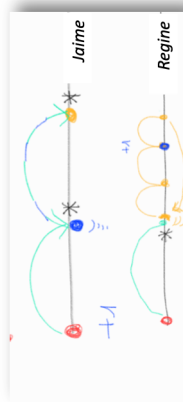
APPENDIX III. – ad PAPER 4 (3)

memo – during conceptualisation phase: 'oscillation' between 'affetcs';
multidirectional oscillations between movement and rest and
serendipity and doubt and despair and confidence and serendipity …on
a plane of immanence. Moments of grace (in colour); own illustration.
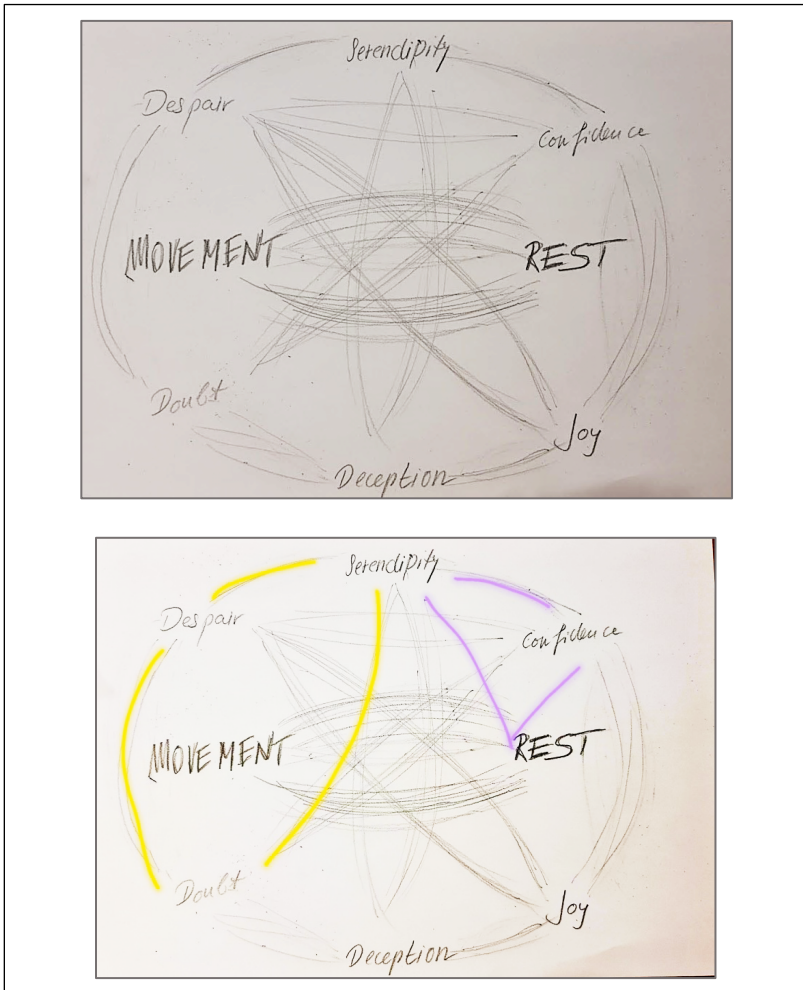
attempts during data analysis to achieve 'non-representationality', to exceed transcriptions: how to detach narratives from 'subjects'??

After isolating some major shifts and movements for *eight exemplary cases* as follows I summarized and anonymized two major 'turns' for each individual in two sub-sentences (coloured headings in bold). These excerpts allow to distinguish individual life courses, events. However, the individual as entity might lead us overlook rhizomatic compositions, even if somehow perceptible, and to focus instead on social or national backgrounds, gender etc. Therefore ….. (browse to the end of these individual excerpts =>)

(STEVE)
… a friend of a family friend speaks about a job *opportunity* on another continent to this trained lawyer who accepts and decides to leave together with his partner and try it out and Brexit brings him back …

And the opportunity arose, and region X was somewhere that I really didn't know much about, uhm other than what you hear about in the media. **And I wanted to kind of see for myself.**

I worked for a small consultancy in London. And then I got the opportunity through a friend of a family friend. So… a completely different company in countryx. **They were just looking for somebody who did what I did.** *So ehm, I went across ehm, and then after two and a half years of that role, I wanted to move to the EU and so what I looked for was…, were opportunities in big consultancy firms, which I thought*

*would give me a better chance of finding a role.[…] At the time I thought the worst-case scenario would be that, **if Brexit was to be as hard as possible with its first two years, then my opportunity to live in the EU, would diminish**. So I chose actively to move to, ehm, to the continent, instead of the UK and got to the countryY*

*So I worked at W. [global consulting firm] in the coutryY and **that was really a stepping stone**, if you will. It was what got me back into the EU again. And then after two years I realized that W. it wasn't the company for me… So now I work for X [MNC] in the global communications team.*

*   [I think it's probably more a reflection of me personally than it is professionally of wanting to …, to move around. And, I think I have, uhm, quite ahhh, **maybe quite a short attention span. I've always been quite curious. I've always been quite restless.** So I've always moved uhm… So whilst in London, I, you know, loved every moment, I only have fond, fond, amazing memories and the people that I met there, the connections were very, very strong. Ahm. […] But as I say**, it was always undermined by a sense, or wanting to experience something else. You know, there'll always be something else to experience and to push myself into**. Ah. So I think, yeah, for me, the difference was that there was a community**, but I never uhm... maybe allowed myself to remain, you know, permanent within that**.]*

… but something changed in his approach to his professional activity until a recent revelation when he got cynical about consulting, where he felt he was on the outside and was not able to connect to a bigger purpose …

*it's ehm, it's quite a recent revelation for me, if I'm completely honest about it. And previously in my career, I think I'd always been much more selfish in my orientation or I wanted to express or expand myself. **I wanted to, you know, boost my horizons. I wanted to experience new***

things for me, ehm… and I was willing to do that in different companies, in different roles that spoke to me.

…

*ahm, I think after experiencing consultancy for a prolonged amount of time **where I always felt like I was on the outside and** I became quite cynical to consultancy, which is, which isn't ideal. But also I think having been in the region for a prolonged period of time, where the way which is doing business and the **ethics and the morals, etc., I started to realize more and more. I didn't, I didn't agree with**. And then when I came into Europe and work for D. [multinational consultancy], D. was for all its greatness and its opportunities, it still has a huge element of, ahm.. **You know, the-the-the morals just didn't sit with me**, it's effectively a sales organization **and I struggled to be able to connect with what I was doing to a bigger purpose**. And so all of that kind of got me to a point where I felt like at this stage of my career, I actually wanted to be contributing back to something. I hadn't really experienced that before. So. So, yes, I'd say it is important to me now, ahm.*

…

*And, ahm, what X. [MNC] is doing speaks to me more than other areas. So, for example, our sustainability goals are incredible. And I am interested in sustainability, of course. And I think it's very important. But actually, what speaks to me more about X. is its history and its purpose and its constant drive for innovation and how it's choosing to take all that experience and do it in health care. I just think it's fantastic. And I think having joined during covid, I've really seen what X. does on the front line, yeah, I feel very, very lucky to be, to be a part of that. And I think, you know, **comparing that to any of my previous employment, which is not disparaging to them, it just is very, very different.***

(SOMESH)

… having moved across continents many times as a child he desired to work in Advertising, but then 9/11 happened and he gets into Financial Services and keeps on moving globally …

*Advertising was my passion at that time. You know what? I would have loved doing it. And also, maybe because I've seen so many cultures and cities while I was already twenty one, I said, you know what, **I can bring that all together and create communication stories. That'll be something that'll be super exciting.** I've seen ... you've seen so much of the world, I said to myself.* […]

*There was no hiring at that moment [in 2001] in India**. It was just a little limbo**. I mean, there's a lot of people that wouldn't have hired, I admitted that I needed to wait for a few months. Then I said, you know what? I'm not waiting, I got a job in Singapore, **in the Finance Company** at X [multinational corporation]. I said, you know what? I'll do it. There is no problem. - That is how I started.*

*Let me call it like that, I think **I just took the opportunity, did well and kept moving**. I did want to go back to advertising. And you know, I kept getting something interesting. And I said, you know what, this is also very nice. It's like phenomenal. **Keep moving ahead. So, I didn't look back**, but I think timing was also an important factor as I graduated in 2001. I was looking for a job then and a different year, my whole career would have been very different.*

*[I never felt that if I go to a new city, it's like I leave behind everything**. I feel that I carry that and I'm going to gain more from the next city**, i had ten friends out here and I'm now going to make another ten and now I have a docket of twenty friends, so I never felt, no I, ... I never had very strong attachments with friends.]*

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… he never consciously chose a position for many years, until he decides to do a MBA and only years later, his move to the US combined with the pandemic sparks this feeling of having found his calling …

*After eight years I decided doing an MBA at a business school. And that was the first conscious choice in my career that I truly made. I think I finally found my calling after a while, but if I was to look at my first half of my career **there was also a lot around being opportunistic, or opportunities that came by. I didn't go seeking them.** Sometimes they came by, **I was lucky** and you know, there were the global assignment or anything else like this one and then I said yes, I might be willing to do this. …*

*So that was I would say was … **opportunistic, but with a clear mind set personally to drive growth and change in that business**. It might have not had the purpose element of it, but it did have the growth and the change element in it. And I think **over the last five years, being in healthcare, I truly have added the purpose element to that growth engine**. So that had been quite unique. And I'm not preaching, but I truly feel it deep, because I believe if somebody was to say, you know, you can go and **run a hospital in rural Ohio, and we would pay you half your salary, I would do it tomorrow morning**.*

…

*I'm not saying it's whether it's Africa, parts of South East Asia and even America, it's right in my backyard. I think there's no access to care, so. In that I think it's a little bit of a more holistic or missionary, but **definitely I became stronger this year**. Almost every day, in Europe, when I was there working for so many years […] I never felt privileged. You almost had normal… right, you're part of it. Everybody is normal, everybody is the same. Yeah. **In America, I truly feel privileged. What I had said. I truly feel privileged, even my growing up in India or Africa.***

I didn't feel privileged, in the true sense of it, I was very equal, that society was equal for me. But coming to the US and you can say it's the most developed and the most powerful country, I've, I've felt the most turbulent, and that also meant that I have felt .... OK, you know what do you need to think about? Tell your brain, what do we need to do then? But every day it occurs to me that maybe there's another purpose that in just making more dollars in the bank. I don't know. How much shall I, what more do I need? I don't know how else to say it.

I think [during the MBA] we went all through the same experience, every day right, almost 300 plus days that we were there. Every one of us went through the same experience. Looking for jobs, doing exams, managing family, everything. So that I think made us very close, can't put it in words. I think it's, uh, you need to experience it to understand what it is, the most phenomenal.

…

You move for growth, so if I'm sure if I get an opportunity to grow, I would not say no, but you move for growth.

(GRECIA)

… having studied and worked in fashion retail on different continents she moved back to her parents and convinced her father to support her doing a second master's before searching for another job overseas …

I just didn't want to be in fashion anymore. I got super sick of it. The standards were just, you needed to do so much [exhales] and I just was done with it. So when I came back, my dad is like, OK, if you don't want to do that anymore, you really need to think hard, what are you gonna do that can fit into kind of your new … whatever it is that you want to do. So, uhm, yeah, and that's how I ended up in Spain […] I couldn't find any job in Spain after this. And I think that was a little bit of… a lot more…

just very frustrating to also stay there, because …. I applied and applied to jobs and as I said, in the end of the day, so the university was giving me a lot of opportunities, it was just ... **they would always choose somebody that didn't require paperwork, and I required all the paperwork.** *So, um, yeah, it came to a point where my visa was done. I, didn't have anything to fall on, uhm.*

I ended up going back to [home town] again and I applied to a consulate there. I applied, uh, in between, you know, whilst finding out what to do and I actually got a job offer there! And *that was kind of the decisive moment. I was like* **'I want the job, but I don't want to stay! I want to leave! What am I gonna do ?!?'** *[gestures, mimics: panicking]. I really wanted to go to Asia, I wanted to go to Japan. […] My parents did not understand 'what do you want to do in Japan…?***'** **That was too much… - I was 27 by then, but that is the [nationality] mentality, I guess: your kids stay kids until they get married!** *- It was like telling them that I wanted to move to Mars. They said I should take the [local] job offer, said it was a good opportunity to move from there into another place and so on: 'try it, try it, try it …!!!'* *My first thought was 'if I do this, I know I will be stuck here forever. Like I won't get out anymore!'*

My aunt recalled that a neighbour of my mum's sister worked at the embassy in Germany and I pushed my mum to call her and to find out if I could go there. She basically said, 'look, **have her come here, for three months**. *She can stay in the country, uhm, there's going to be a book fair of Frankfurt. So for sure, we will need people for that. And I can see how we can manage her papers'. I was like,* *'this is the best EVER, I don't know, where, what, what I'm going to find in Frankfurt, but doesn't matter because this is the best ever.'* *So, I arrived and, uhm, yeah, in order for me to do something, ...the consulate paid for my German classes. So, I was in German lessons, ah, then the book fair was happening and then ... she left! Her husband died. So, and also the*

*election term came and it was very political... So, yeah, **long story short, she in the end couldn't offer me anything, uhm.***

.. she did not really know what she wanted to do, what she could do, but she was determined not to stay in town, because she just did not want this life for herself and when her visa was done, once again, all of a sudden, a random Facebook friend got her into this new profession …

*Then I was back to square zero, uhm. Yeah and, I had met through this …, oh yeah, of course, all of this time from September I think it was to December **I was partially doing nothing, basically.** So, uhm, I went into this Facebook group of English-speaking people, ah. So, yeah, there would be girls from everywhere. And that's where I met two girls from Australia. And one of them was like, they contacted me for a job in headhunting, **she said 'I gave them your name' and** I said, 'yeah OK, whatever, never gonna happen'. And they called me. [...] And it was very strange because I had never done any headhunting. My background is not even in HR or anything at all, it was a recruitment agency [...]. I went into a complete full day of interview and then, em... Right. **And they said, 'you know what, we will give you the job. Here's the job.'** [...]*

*[Regarding the paper work] It was like, yes, sure, we'll do it for you. You need this paper, you need this paper, you need to go to the Arbeitsamt, you need to go here, the, the … the two offices**, the immigration offices and the Arbeitsamt are two separate things. So the arbeitsamt is going to check this. And this and this, this is the piece of paper you need to give.** And they said to the other, immigration office, they're going to do this. They only speak in German. So of course, three words that I knew was like, ...and they gave me my permit! And ... I was like 'how did I do*

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this so easily? Well, and *that's how I started, uh, proper working*, outside of the fashion industry, proper working in Europe, well in Germany at the time…. And now I, I have in the past, I guess more or less 10 years, I've been working in Europe and now I work in a corporate environment.

I think I-I-I was never really aware. I think I've lived a lot of, of, of, most of my life and throughout the years, looking back and now that I've spoken so much about it, thinking about it, ehm, **it was just whatever was coming my way, I was basically taking it and it was not really thinking much about it** *[…] and it's, it's, I also think that I never really was so focused and planning.* **I was more, this came up, I'll take it and I want to go there or I want to do this.** *And I was very determined, always wanting to live outside of [city] and* **I didn't want to become, that: I didn't want to just get married and have a kid and then take care of the kid and play cards and Wednesdays. And, that was, I grew up with that lifestyle but maybe it was also the determination that I didn't want to have that myself.** *That made me also say, okay,* **I'll take anything, and I'll do this and I'll go there and I'll work this little job or I can…. I never was focused on planning I only was determined to live outside of X [home town] I was just going with the flow. This came up - I took it."**

And then in the end, it was kind of, ah, yeah, I ... this move [to HR], now that I work in, in this, I-I-I have been five years working in this for [multinational corporation], I think I'm one of the very few people that have received, international relocation from the business, so from, from, from the team. So, *I'm the only one who has really experienced it* and I know exactly what really happens when I offer it, which **makes it more credible**. **But I never, in that moment, I never sought for help, I just was going with the flow, I guess.**

… with two bachelor degrees and having worked as school teacher in her country of origin for several years she seeks a more challenging profession and chooses to go for a master's degree overseas where she stays with relatives before starting to work for a MNC and moving across various countries …

After two or three years of working, I felt that I would like some more challenges. So, of course, **like working with children, it's very … I was very happy, so happy every day** *because they are very naive and creative and have different questions every day. So, it was very healthy.* **But to me, I also wanted to, like, challenge myself to deal with more complicated relationships.** *Yeah. So I thought maybe HR manager, doing employee relationships would be an idea. … It is hard to make this move in China so I thought where can I find this knowledge out of China*

… I had two bachelor degrees … And so after I think I would like to challenge myself to work in HR, then I thought I am still missing some of the knowledge, especially the theoretical knowledge. But in China, **it is quite hard to study that, to change your profession, if you don't have an appropriate education background.** *And also, if so, for me, in my case, I didn't study Human Resource in Bachelor then I couldn't study human resource as a master degrees.* **So it is hard to make this move.** *… And I talked to my aunt in [Europe] and also, other family members in Hong Kong to maybe just go abroad and find and learn more advanced knowledge. Yeah, so, yeah,* **and then I decided, OK, just go ahead, move abroad, study abroad.**

The pupils in my class back in China were at the age of seven. So, of course, **it's different from managing students and managing people,**

like managing adults today. But still, you can see a little bit similarity between these two different managing systems. I would say. Yeah. So like to, to students, you or you also have to be open and honest to them because they can they can actually understand what are you talking about or what they learn from you, learn from your behaviors, learn from everything, because as a teacher you are kind of a model to the students. So [my work]the corporation today […] in that sense is similar to the work my students and their parents in the past.

… she resists the expectations of settling into her initial job and into the tradition of having family when she decides to move, stating that she wants her own life by herself and that she does not want others to decide how her life should be, which is why she makes this decision that others take for very brave …

*eah, so I think I had this idea of going abroad, I mean, studying abroad when I was 20, so when I studied my bachelor, because I see some of my friends already study abroad and, and they shared that. Yeah, they said it was great to study abroad, to see the different cultures and know different people and things in the world. And also, I heard some sharing from my family members living abroad. So, **like in my mind I already have the kind of gene to say 'Ah what, how it will look like if I study and live abroad, what I will experience there, who I will meet'** like. So I'm already curious about life living abroad, but at that time [when I was 20] I didn't have the chance to really make this decision, I would say, so that's why I made this decision years later.*

*[My family] thinks it was a very brave decision. Yeah, very, very brave, because I already had the permanent position [as a school teacher], so in that sense**, in [national] culture is already good 'for a girl'.** … Because yeah, it is it's a cultural thing, I would say…. they think, **you know, as a girl, when you have a permanent position and you like your***

work that probably you want to have your family soon. It's just like having your life step by step: work and then family and then….. But to me, I don't have these things for my life, I don't think I have to do this work so that I can have family or I can't have my career because of my family. I don't have this fixed mindset. I just want to… do the things I want, have my own life by myself. I don't want others to just say or decide how my life should be. So I said to them, yeah, 'I really want to go abroad and experience a lot and also learn … to be a professional'.

(DIVIA)

… when working in another Asian country as a young lawyer she remembers the very specific moment where she felt independent and very centred, and she was suddenly certain that she would find her passion project…

*After my bachelor's and when I was **working for a law firm, they sent me to Japan** first because they had this agreement with the Japanese law firm. So, I had stayed in Tokyo for like six months. And then I came back to India to practice a little more, then got my masters scholarship [in Japan].*

*Yeah, one very specific feeling I remember is, when I was going to work one day in the capital city, early morning taking the subway and going to work. That I really liked …. And that's not… that's what is interesting because, you know, I have been to work [back home] too, many times. But for some reason …, you know, **I just I really enjoyed the independence of the fact that, you know, I was on my own, I'm just doing my own thing**. And, you know, the office was placed in one of like, the top districts in the capital of. I was, **… feeling sort of free, you know, very centered in terms of what I was doing.** So that's when I thought **'OK, I can do this,' in terms of what I have to do.** So and you know,*

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yeah, so I think that was…. that's one thing I really remember well in terms of how I felt [in the beginning].

*Yeah, this moment sort of **made me definitely more confident** of mobilities to yeah, to work. Yeah, basically, **'if I find like a project, if I find my passion project, basically, that I can follow and I can make it work.'** This sort of gave me the confidence to think that …that… that's it's fine. **I can, I can take care of it. So that's not going to be a problem**. And that was important to me because coming from […] i've lived a pretty sheltered life, even like when I was moving around within my country, because that's that's how we were raised and I am an only child.*

***so the idea that I would go out and do things on my own without any sort of extra support, that's been that's important**. And that was also a reason why I thought, OK, you know, I could that's one of the reasons why I wasn't that worried about making the move here, to Europe and make it work …*

*[I got to Y. because it has one of the best law schools in the country…. The reason for going there was the **quality of education, and secondly, the city is known for the safety of women**. So that was also a consideration because rather than Delhi, my parents were motivated to send me to a place like Y. Plus, **I had some family there, that I could stay with.**]*

… it is not like she planned for this, but together with her husband she moved to his home country, where she needs to change professions, as she cannot practice as a lawyer in this jurisdiction ….

The thing was, because of the two different jurisdictions, I could not really transfer, I could not start working in a civil law country as I was trained and practiced in India and Japan. And the deal was that …as we

*both come from two different [systems] … like the world has two legal systems and each of us are from the two legal systems. So **he's from a civil law country, I come from a common law country**. So that was one of the biggest obstacles where, you know, practicing law in the other person's country was already a challenge…*

*Yeah, I mean, here… **it's not like I planned this. This is how it's going to go.** And, of course, like yeah [this country] was not … sort in the plan, right? So that's **something that that came up because of certain other things. And then you sort of build your life accordingly**, like based on the choices you make,… I guess […] I would also have to get an extra license to practice foreign law in this jurisdiction [his home country]. So I didn't do that. So I kind of changed my career path. So that happened when I came here in December 2016. After that, I did my driving classes, started local language classes and I applied for a graduate program at the local university, so that was because it was being offered in English this class, but also because, you know, the **two subjects like law and being able to work in business, I was attracted to that**. It was like a mini MBA kind of thing, for executives, so it was easy to get into that …Which is how I moved into more a sort of business direction after that.*

*Well, I mean, **I had always planned to go abroad for sort of higher studies**, that was that was in my idea. My dad was also quite fund about that. So I was always keen that I would go abroad to work or study. **But this whole idea of getting married and moving, moving, moving was not something.** But it also was not something I had excluded from my plans. But I thought that, you know, I would see when I came to it and then I would make a make a decision.*

*Here I have had to do, he, **both of us have had to make these extra efforts for the fact that I now live here** so you know, for instance, integration procedures. So, me with like I've been proactive in that. I took the*

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*language and passed the language tests. But he has to deposit a large sum of money so I can be here. Oh yeah. So, so he's invested a lot in terms of, you know to, to make sure that I stay here. So but there's also always sort of ... **I haven't felt that before, having to, like, like you're not like this is sort of like, you know, you're … you're not independent…** this is not like ... it still takes time .... I mean, I have this job, so that is fine. But there is always a lot of paperwork… if there is a relationship status you always need to inform the state about everything and things like that.*

(SONITA)

… daring to settle in the capital city of her home country after years of international experience as an engineer felt very liberating, and she felt very free as she knew that she would have options if she decided to leave again …

*I was working as engineer in a, in a plant in Turkey, in my hometown, and then they, they made an internal announcement that there was a vacancy in, in our, head, headquarters for someone from manufacturing engineering to take over a role in design engineering. And, yeah, this person should be, of course, open-minded, english speaking, and should be willing to relocate. It wasn't more specific. **And as I find myself a very open-minded person and I relate to my identity as a global citizen** rather than, uh, me being Turkish or only Turkish in that sense. It is a personal driver. And I wanted to have an international experience. And yeah, **so I volunteered for it, and then, we were, in the interview and they told me it was going to be based in Germany**. [...] I was based in the German headquarters but assigned to different projects across Europe.*

*And eh, when I first graduated, I had options in Istanbul, business opportunities, but **I didn't dare, to go there**. I was simply too impressed, the, the payment is not good. It's very expensive the city, there. You have*

to been born there or study there. **But I didn't have the connections.** *And nothing at all, so then after Germany, with the solitude (laughing) ... I said, OK, I will go back to Turkey and we had three locations in Turkey, but I told my ex-boss, I want to be relocated to Istanbul. I want to live in Istanbul. [...] And,* *I felt very, uh, uhm ... how to say, liberated. I felt like everything was possible, you know, if I ever wanted, I could go back [to Germany] one day.* *That was the feeling that I had, because just before relocating back to Turkey, another colleague of mine, he offered me a job, when he learned that I was going back to Turkey. He said you are such a good employee, why should you have to go to Turkey? And he offered me one of my dream jobs. And if I had known this before, I wouldn't have accepted Turkey's offer, for example.* *So I had in mind that, OK, if one day I would like to go, I would have options and I felt free!*

… established in her job she travelled a lot internationally and had bright future prospects for her family in her home country until the military coup changed their life plans and made them seek for opportunities abroad …

We, we woke up in such a reality [after the military coop] and the, old, you know, exchange rates were gone... And, you know, we had good job, my husband was a manager. We were earning really good. And, eh, we bought our house when we got married. **So, we were one of those families, you know, with a bright future.** *But… on the other hand, you don't know about the country what's going to happen tomorrow. … And then, okay,* ***we made a plan, ehm, my husband would apply for jobs and I would not.*** *And then, once he finds a job and know where to go, then I would search for jobs. When we are there, but if we had done it, both, together…* ***our daughter was too young, we can't both work and apply for jobs****.” (Sonita)*

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So, it was an exhausting period, it took one-and-a-half years in total. There were some other opportunities, but, and we weren't, eh, targeting especially one country, we were firstly focusing on Germany because my husband also, eh, eh studied in Germany ... and we both speak German. So we thought it would be, the ideal option. But he's a salesperson and *sales is a difficult area when you want to go to another country. Because, yeah, it's a local more local thing. So, eh, yeah, till one-and-a-half year, he found a job in the Netherlands.*

I started working after seven months we came to the Netherlands. Normally, eh, I wasn't planning to rush... But my husband, after, eh, six months, my husband's company announced that they're going to go through a reorganisation. They announced that, we didn't know what to come out of it. And he didn't have a permanent contract. It was one-year contract that he had signed. *So then I thought I have to be an insurance for my family and I have to start working in case that .... something happens to his job.* So, uh, I started applying like crazy. *And then the first offer, I received I accepted.* So, I didn't eh, question it. I had to start working and I accepted it.

There *I had my second shock* because I was, *I was an engineer and she was a Dutch lady*, eh, a little bit older than me, in my team. And in my first month, she uh ... started an argument with me, how come I don't speak Dutch, why they hired me if I don't speak Dutch, if it was her she wouldn't hire me. And she said everyone in the team had to speak English just because of me. Which all doesn't make sense because our customer was the U.S. government and we were working in a role facing the customer everyone in the team was meeting regularly with the customer and in the Netherlands it's a joke like, everyone speaks English. Even the butcher in the shop speaks English.

[The MNC I am working for now] is different. They are international and diverse and inclusive. And *that's where I want to work, because otherwise I feel like I'm stepping down from my standards. So far, I*

worked internationally, I'm an open minded professional, and that's where I belong, I don't want to lose my energy on people, uh, you don't speak Dutch. It's-it's not that I don't speak Dutch, I learned German willingly. That, that wasn't the case with the mindset it was the problem**. I didn't want to deal with this because I am 40 (laughs). I don't want to go back to, you know, the standard that had, and going to fight**. Yeah, so that's why at [MNC], in that sense I'm very happy. You don't ask people to switch languages when they see your name there, they just do. All the emails and communication is in English. And there is very much emphasis on female, leadership and recruitment.

(Aurore)

… repeated stays in Asia for several years reveals to this trained waitress her unsuspected capacity to learn foreign languages and her passion for teaching …

I was happy to leave and to go live in China with him. I had worked as a waitress in top-class restaurants for six years in France and the UK and **I said to myself that this move is an opportunity to learn a language and maybe change professions, because in the restaurant business I had to work a lot, a lot, had no weekends** […], it is okay when you are young but at one point, I thought I had to change professions. I really thought it was a good timing for transitioning. […] **I learnt Chinese and taught French to some kids, but at the time I did not really take it seriously,** it was just a pass-time activity. Later, when we lived in India I had a real position in an international school where I was in charge of all French courses…

[When in India] **I really loved it** and I started saying to myself - me who had been formatted by the French education system - **that I enjoyed how much freedom I had to design language classes**, with classes taking part outside, with cooking classes and various games. I developed an

interactive, playful approach and it worked very well. [...] Personally, **I had always very been bored with language classes when I was young** *and I even failed by a-levels because of English classes because I hated it so much. This is how I got to a point where I said 'a language has to live, we have to have fun.'*

… when moving back she realized, in contrast to her instilled belief, that she was indeed capable of many things, such as obtaining a university degree and building a business …

I remember that when I got back from China it triggered something in me… The fact that I had learnt Chinese and that I adored this language sparked something: it made me realize that I was in fact capable of learning thoroughly if I liked something. I said to myself, wow, this is really cool, I will continue, I love it. **And this is how I decided to enroll at university.** *This was truly a trigger moment, a positive twinkling for my future, because* **beforehand I always thought that I was not capable, not made to study.** *In my head … one always had told me actually that… well, anyways,* **this was how I was raised**, *but despite that I realized that I was completely capable, and I was successful and I accomplished it. So, yes, departures are as well a means to question yourself…*

In Vietnam I wanted to enroll my kids at the local kindergarten, but they said "no, you cannot enroll them, because they do not speak Vietnamese." I wanted to explain that it would be interesting for local kids and for my kids, that everybody would learn and that it would be an interesting cultural exchange. But I could not speak Vietnamese neither **and I found it very hard not being able to communicate, not making myself understood**.

Back in France after India I applied and only got endless rejections, **found myself in front of closed doors, again and again**. *Nobody wanted to hire me, and* *I clearly remember how I thought* *'this is impossible, there is a big problem here of not recognizing capacities that one develops when being abroad'. I spoke English, French, Chinese, I had a degree, but that did not help much*. *I was very upset. And my business idea actually developed from this anger.* **I thought I am going to prove** *that me, whom they do not want, well, that* **I am capable of many things and they will regret one day that they did not hire me**.

==>Therefore, in another attempt I listed only the anonymized headings. In the initial accounts, one can identify gender, origin etc., which somehow distracts from the purpose of the analysis, which is to identify rhizomatic compositions, events and significant moments. The result (as follows) can be read as rhizomatic becomings of individual movers *or* as an en-suite of only one individual life *or* simply as a rhizomatic composition. The reading changes each time. I suggest that this type of analytical device allows to further de-center from the mover as agent / as separate entity and it allows to focus on *what the phenomenon of mobility is a driver for* and what it is constituted of. In that the rhizomatic development of professional orientations and geographical moves becomes even more perceptible: distancing from representational methods

… a friend of a family friend speaks about a job opportunity on another continent to this trained lawyer who accepts and decides to leave together with her/his partner and try it out and Brexit brings her/him back …

… but something changed in her/his approach to her/his professional activity until a recent revelation when s/he got cynical about consulting, where s/he felt he was on the outside and was not able to connect to a bigger purpose

…

… having moved across continents many times as a child s/he desired to work in Advertising, but then 9/11 happened and s/he gets into Financial Services and keeps on moving globally

…

… s/he never consciously chose a position for many years, until s/he decides to do a MBA and only years later, her/his move to the US combined with the pandemic sparks this feeling of having found her/his calling

…

… having studied and worked in fashion retail on different continents s/he moves back to her parents and convinces her father to support her/him doing a second master's before searching for another job overseas …

.. s/he did not really know what she wanted to do, what s/he could do, but s/he was determined not to stay in town, because s/he just did not want this life for her/himself and when her visa was done, once again, all of a sudden, a random Facebook friend got her into this new profession

…

… with two bachelor degrees and having worked as school teacher in her/his country of origin for several years s/he seeks a more challenging profession and chooses to go for a master's degree overseas where s/he stays with relatives before starting to work for a MNC and moving across various countries

…

… s/he resists the expectations of settling into her/his initial job and into the tradition of having family when s/he decides to move, stating that s/he wants her/his own life by her/himself and that s/he does not want others to decide how her/his life should be

…

… when working in another Asian country as a young lawyer s/he remembers the very specific moment where s/he felt independent and very centred, and s/he was suddenly certain that she would find her passion project

…

… together with her/his partner she moves to his/her home country, where s/he needs to change professions, as she cannot practice as a lawyer in this jurisdiction

….

… eventually daring to settle in the capital city of her/his home country after years of international experience as an engineer felt very liberating, and s/he felt very free, because s/he knew that s/he would have options if s/he decided to leave again

…

… established in her/his job s/he travelled a lot internationally and had bright future prospects for her/his family in her/his home country until the military coup changed their life plans and made them seek for opportunities abroad …

APPENDIX III. – ad PAPER 4 (6)

another attempt to distance from individual life stories consisted in cutting numerous initially coded themes into 'fragments:' *(cf. online version for colour nuances)*

END

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